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TRAVEL / JULY 13, 2016

## Visiting Hawai'i Island



The Family Vacation, a term that conjures images of Disney characters, road trips with bickering in the back seat and boring kid-centered activities that parents suffer through. I want to perfect the Family Vacation, a holiday that embraces all the needs and desires of all members of the family, not only the young ones. On a recent family trip to Hawai'i Island (aka The Big Island) we found many points of interest for both adults and for our four-year old son.

We chose the Big Island to see the volcanoes. My husband wanted to see the handy work of the island's three great beauties of Mauna Loa, Mauna Kea and Kilauea. We also sampled three

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types of accommodations: a condominium rental, an old school 1970's hotel and a resort. Each had their charms and served a specific purpose allowing us to sample the bounty of the Island and drink in her rugged beauty.



Starting out in the tourist haven of Kona, we rented a condo at Kanaloa at Kona by Outrigger. We loved having ample space in the two-bedroom to spread out and watch the canoes paddle by in the morning and the sunset in the evenings from our lanai. The grounds featured three pools, many barbeques and a ping-pong table that became the destination of choice for our kid. The condos also offered a very helpful staffed guide desk like a concierge where we had all our questioned answered from where is the best place to get poke (Hawaiian fresh ahi) to where are the best beaches for the keiki (child) as well as suggestions for special points of interest along the driving route to Hilo.

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Black Sand Beach

The condominium rental allowed us to make many of our meals while in Kona. We started the days off with Kona coffee and fresh fruit from the Farmer's Market. After long days of snorkeling and surfing at Kahalu'u Beach and the über kid-friendly Kikaua Beach we all needed easy, lazy evenings in the condo with home-cooked meals to continue our decent into total relaxation.

We had one great lunch out in Kona at a hole-in-the-wall place called, Da Poke Shack. The take-out only menu features eight different styles of poke, from spicy Pele's Kiss to traditional Hawaiian seasoned only with salt and seaweed. A plate comes with three different pokes, rice and two sides. We loved

the quinoa and seaweed side dish, just the right amount of chewiness and tangy enough to balance out the savory poke.

After four nights in Kona, we ventured across the island to Hilo, specifically to hike and marvel at the wonders of Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. We took the longer drive along the southern section of Route 11 enjoying stops at the Punalu'u Bake Shop for lunch with every tour bus on the Island and the Punalu'u Black Sand Beach. The Bake Shop served delicious sandwiches and pastries, which we ate while being serenaded by an older guitarist playing Hawaiianized Classic Rock. After lunch, we ventured to the Black Sand Beach that was created by an a'a lava flow that ages ago reached the beach, causing the lava to shatter into sand upon contact with the water. The chunky black sand was very satisfying to touch and walk on, the novelty of the color and texture did not wear off. We played in the sand and watched the sea turtles take a rest on the rocks. Punalu'u Black Sand Beach was a perfect place to stop to break up the two-hour + drive from Kona to Hilo.

When we arrived at our hotel in Hilo, my husband and I tried to guess when the formidable Hilo Hawaiian Hotel was built. Based on the curvature of the building wrapping itself around Hilo Bay and the curved lanais for every one of the 286 rooms, I thought for sure it was a

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classic 1960's Brady Bunch goes to Hawaii vintage hotel. I was wrong. The Hilo Hawaiian was built in 1973 and with recent updates our room was spacious and comfortable. Our 7<sup>th</sup> floor room looked out over the Bay and more than one beer was enjoyed on the lanai while taking in our unique vantage point.

The best meal of our vacation was a short walk from the hotel, along the waterfront at the Hilo Bay Café. Tasty Hawaiian locavore cuisine satisfied all members of our family as we ate on the covered lanai, a necessity in rainy Hilo. The adults enjoyed Island Elixir cocktails of rum, pineapple, liliko'i and coconut cream. We feasted on fresh fish and the Hamakua mushroom curry pot pie.

Our main goal for our rainy side adventure was a daylong visit to Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. The park did not disappoint. A short drive from Hilo, Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park is a stunning mix of dry, safe lava beds, lush rain forests and some of the best hiking on the island. Many visitors make the trip to the National Park from the Kona side of the island, but that necessitates long drives on either end of a long day and we opted to just stay in Hilo for two nights. Upon arriving at the park, I was happy to note the lack of corporate take over like other National Parks we have visited (I'm looking at you Grand Canyon). The rangers at Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park were incredibly helpful in guiding us into the right hike for our family and other points of interest. The ranger got very excited when my husband mentioned that he is a science teacher and beckoned us over to the many educational displays. Later in the day when we returned to the visitor center, this same ranger bestowed our son with a Junior Ranger badge and made an announcement over the loudspeaker for everyone to recognize his new status. He proudly wore his Junior Ranger badge for the rest of the day and told anyone who would listen about his achievement.

The Junior Ranger badge didn't come easily. We hiked the four-mile round trip Kilauea Iki trail, rounding the crater through a cool dense rainforest where we could see Kilauea smoking in the distance. Eventually, we clamored down to the dry lava bed, walking through the other worldly landscape of the jagged, rough a'a lava flows and the billowy, smooth Pahoehoe flows that seemed to overlap each other throughout the walk at the bottom of the cater. The three of us climbed over the rock and we all three struck by the great magical beauty of the cooled volcanic landscape. Our Junior Ranger completed the longest hike of his life, at four miles without (much) complaining. His excitement about the adventure and pride at his

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accomplishment will encourage us to take him on longer and longer hikes both at home and on future vacations.

We wrapped up our ten-day Island getaway with four-nights at the luxurious Hapuna Beach Prince Resort. Nestled into the hillside, the resort offered the ultimate family vacation indulgences. Our room was steps away from the soft white sand Hapuna Beach and perhaps more importantly, steps away from the kid favorite whale shaped swimming pool. We ate well at the various resort restaurants, swam our hearts out both in the gentle ocean and the pool, enjoyed the complementary snorkel equipment and we all three had epic naps everyday since all that relaxation is exhausting.

One night we attended a luau put on by Prince Resort sister property, the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel. The enormous Hawaiian buffet featured Kalua pork, teriyaki steak, potatoes in at least five different forms, shrimp, poke and an outrageous array of island inspired desserts. While the food was delicious, the traditional dance performance captured our son's attention to such a degree that he barely touched his meal. He stood on his chair to get the best view of the performers. We were treated to various hula dances, Samoan fire dances and traditional Hawaiian songs. The location of the luau, overlooking the sea presented one of the finest sunsets during our time in Hawaiian. All the tourists



Hawaii Volcanoes National Park



Hawaii Volcanoes National Park



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whipped out their phones to freeze the moment in time. I tried to just enjoy the moment in real time and snapped only one or two shots for Facebook posterity.

Hawai'i Island gave each member of our family just what we needed: a little adventure, great food, wonderful views, plenty of pool ninja games, hiking and ample time for naps. Sign me up for this type of vacation anytime; I'm already planning our next trip.

### Details

Kanaloa at Kona Condominiums

78-6831 Alii Drive #165, Kailua-Kona, HI 96740

(808) 322-7222

<http://www.outrigger.com/hotels-resorts/hawaii/hawaii-island/kanaloa-at-kona-by-outrigger>

Hilo Hawaiian Hotel

71 Banyan Dr, Hilo, HI 96720

(808) 935-9361

<http://www.castleresorts.com/Home/accommodations/hilo-hawaiian-hotel>

Hapuna Beach Prince Resort

62-100 Kauna'Oa Dr, Kohala Coast, HI 96743

(888) 977-4623

<http://www.princeresortshawaii.com/hapuna-beach-prince-hotel/index.php>

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

<https://www.nps.gov/havo/index.htm>

Da Poke Shack

76-6246 Ali'i Dr #101, Kailua-Kona, HI 96740

(808) 329-7653

<http://dapokeshack.com>

Punalu'u Bake Shop

Route 11 Na`alehu (Big Island)Hawaii 96772

(808) 929-7343

<http://www.bakeshophawaii.com>

Hilo Bay Café



123 Lihwai Street, Hilo, HI 96720

808.935.4939

<http://hilobaycafe.com>

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### Ariel Frager



Ariel Frager is a school counselor and has a private therapy practice that specializes in treating children, adolescents and families. She lives in Portland with her husband, son, dog and kitty cat.

