



T H E I S L A N D O F

# HAWAII

Small Groups, Big Discoveries *by* Kate Bustillos



Black sand is formed when hot lava reaches water and solidifies, fragmenting into smaller cinders then eroding over time into fine particles.



THE BIG ISLAND OF HAWAII, THE LARGEST ISLAND in the Hawaiian archipelago, is a world-class destination for travelers seeking a tropical getaway. Famous for its beautiful beaches and dramatic coastlines, it's no wonder that Hawaii is considered the quintessential paradise.

But Hawaii is more than just a pretty face. Boasting a diverse landscape that includes over half of the world's climate zones and 1,500 years of cultural history, the island is a treasure of natural wonders and ancient tradition. Get to know Hawaii's rich legacy and vibrant ecology through these small-group tours and private experiences for a more personal and authentic island experience.

### **VANILLA FARM LUNCHEON**

Hawaii is famous for its farms, with coffee, macadamia nuts, and figs being some of the biggest cash crops on the Big Island. But tucked away on the Hamakua Coast is a unique, family-owned farm that specializes in vanilla orchids. The Hawaiian Vanilla Company is dedicated to cultivating the world's finest vanilla and vanilla-infused products.

You can book a luncheon and farm tour, which includes a walk through the idyllic property and mill, followed by a farm-fresh lunch prepared on-site. The vanilla-inspired menu includes items like vanilla bourbon marinated chicken and their signature "Jimmy Boy" — half vanilla lemonade, half vanilla ice tea, wholly delicious. Stop by both the sweet shop and the gift shop to stock up on delectable treats and aromatic souvenirs, like a jar of island vanilla pineapple chutney.

### **ISLAND-IN-A-DAY TOUR**

From volcanoes and waterfalls to historic landmarks and lava caves, there's so much to discover, your itinerary may be overflowing. But with Wasabi Tours, you can sample some of the island's most incredible sights and hidden gems in a single day.

Wasabi Tours specializes in small-group expeditions, taking you to the sky, the sea, and all the natural wonders in between. Each tour has a maximum of 12 passengers per vehicle, ensuring a spacious ride and additional interaction with your guide. This intimate setting also gives Wasabi Tours the ability to see more in less time and visit locations not accessible to larger groups. You can even book your own private or custom tour. Swim in one of the Big Island's tallest waterfalls on the Waipio Valley and Waterfalls Tour. Stroll rare black-sand beaches, stop by the famous Kona Coffee Farm, traverse the Thurston Lava Tube at Volcanoes National Park, and much more.



Accessible via a short day hike, the Thurston Lava Tube, also called Nāhuku, was created 500 years ago by a river of molten lava.





A Paradise helicopter tour lets you hover amid staggering 2,500-foot waterfalls and sheer cliff faces on the Kohala Coast.



### WHALE-WATCHING EXCURSION

December marks the arrival of Hawaii's beloved koholā, the North Pacific humpback whales, after their 3,000-mile journey from the Gulf of Alaska. Humpback whales, like most tourists, also enjoy a spring vacation frolicking in Hawaii's tropical waters.

For an up-close encounter with these awe-inspiring snowbirds of the sea, climb aboard a whale-watching tour with Captain Zodiac. Skim over sparkling waves in a 16-passenger Zodiac raft. Sitting just a few feet off the water, the Zodiac vessel brings you as close to the action as possible. Onboard hydrophones provide a rare opportunity to listen to the humpback whales' otherworldly songs. Your three-hour expedition includes sightings of sea caves and lava tubes, as well as a chance to spot additional wildlife, like acrobatic spinner dolphins and other marine animals.

### MANTA RAY NIGHT SNORKEL

Beneath the cerulean waters of Kona Coast live the ethereal hahalua, Hawaii's resident manta rays. With wingspans reaching beyond 14 feet, these reef manta rays are the second largest of their kind in the world. Despite their nickname "devil fish," manta rays are gentle giants and don't have barbed tails like their stingray relatives.

For a unique opportunity to encounter these graceful creatures in their natural habitat, book a nighttime snorkel session with Anelakai Adventures. With only six passengers per boat, you can enjoy plenty of time to meet the mantas. Locally owned Anelakai provides a noninvasive and eco-friendly tour, thanks to traditional paddle-power. Set out from Keauhou Bay in an outrigger canoe to Kona Coast's snorkel site. Then watch manta rays glide and somersault around you, illuminated in a blue glow from your double-hull canoe. Or, if you don't mind getting wet, dive in alongside them.

### TREE-PLANTING ACTIVITY

"Take care of the land and the land will take care of you." Part of a well-known Hawaiian proverb, this sentiment inspires efforts to further the education and preservation of Hawaiian ecosystems and culture. A number of local organizations offer immersive opportunities for visitors to engage in volunteer experiences like beach cleanups, reforestation, and historical restorations.

Take to the skies on a tree-planting adventure with Paradise Helicopters. Soar over Kohala's mist-covered valleys in a luxurious Bell helicopter for an exhilarating aerial tour of lush rainforest and tumbling waterfalls. Then disembark at a private landing site, where you will help the island's ecosystem flourish by planting a native tree.

### PRIVATE HELICOPTER RIDE

Sightsee like a VIP on a private flight with Mauna Loa Helicopter Tours. Each expedition gives you a front-row seat to Mother Nature's jaw-dropping displays on the Big Island. From a 30-minute jaunt to a two-hour excursion, each curated itinerary offers exclusive views of hidden locales only accessible by air.

Behold the towering waterfalls of Kohala's windward valleys on the Magical Waterfalls Tour. Take in an incredible island sunset and witness the "green flash" as you fly over Kona's golden coastline on the Kona Sunset Experience. During whale season, the Kona Coast Helicopter Tour gives you a bird's-eye view of migrating humpbacks and their calves. Or combine all of the tours in one, plus a flyover of an active volcano, with the Big Island Experience.

