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THE LUXURY TRAVEL CLUB FROM TRAVEL WEEKLY



HAWAII

Soak up the natural beauty and aloha spirit of the Garden Isle of Kaua'i

SAINT LUCIA

Enjoy front-row views of the Pitons from two of the island's premier properties

JAPAN

Sample powdery slopes and historic mountain culture in Snow Country

HAWAII



SPIRIT OF ALOHA

*Unique experiences, farm-to-table dining and island pride are woven through the ancient landscapes of Kaua'i, finds **India-Jayne Trainor***

The island of Kaua'i is defined by colours. Green is rich across the region, seen in its thickets of emerald jungle, and the colour of rust blankets its remote national parks. Aquamarine reefs fringe the coastline, and Hawaii's signature frangipani bursts in bouquets of pink and white down every street. This polychromatic display is putting on a full performance for us through the window of our Blue Hawaiian helicopter, which is flying between the jagged sea cliffs of the Nā Pali Coast State Wilderness Park.

The only way to reach Nā Pali, which translates as 'the cliffs', is by boat, helicopter or on foot, so it's unsurprising this remote destination is high on many people's bucket lists. We watch as the frothy white waves below crash onto golden sands, which rise into burnt-umber valleys and turn into razor-sharp cliffs – where waterfalls, created by the island's rain, roll like tears down the mountainside. This volcanic landscape is millions of years old and, as the *Jurassic Park* theme tune plays softly through our headphones, it's easy to imagine prehistoric creatures roaming the wilderness. With every dip of the helicopter, each ridge is thrown into stark relief, revealing a new stretch of coastline that takes my breath away.

The Garden Isle

Every Hawaiian island has a nickname, and Kaua'i is known as the Garden Isle. Its

tropical climate, dense jungle and waterfalls make it one of the wettest places on Earth, but Hawaii's monicker – the Rainbow State – hints that it's not all rain on these islands. We're here in September, the shoulder season, and our weather fears were allayed from the moment we landed at Lihue Airport, after a short, 50-minute flight from Maui, with clear blue skies guiding our journey.

Half of our time in Kaua'i is spent on the south coast in Po'ipū – a short drive from the airport and the location of most large resorts and hotels. Everywhere we go, we're greeted with a floral lei and an aloha, which we learn doesn't just mean 'hello', but is a philosophy of love, kindness and harmony. We while away our first evening at the beach, which is a nesting site for honu (Hawaiian green sea turtles). I watch as a local surfer riding a wave is silhouetted against a flaming sky and hope it's a sign of good weather to come.

On the western side of Kaua'i, the Nā Pali Coast isn't the only landscape that takes centre stage. The next day, we rise early as slate-grey storm clouds brew overhead in Waimea Canyon State Park. We skip the most well-known viewpoint, Waimea Canyon Lookout, and instead make a beeline for Pu'u Hinahina Lookout. As we reach the end of a short trail, the gods must be smiling on us, because the clouds part and shafts of sunshine illuminate the scene below: carved ➔



Hawaii is a Garden of Eden in terms of local produce, but its cuisine also takes influence from Japan and wider Polynesia

OPPOSITE: FIRST ROW: Nā Pali Coast; swimming with turtles SECOND ROW: UTV tour through the jungle; writer India-Jayne Trainor; Kalalau Lookout THIRD ROW: Poi'pū Beach, Kaua'i FOURTH ROW: Waimea Canyon Lookout; kayaking in north Kaua'i **PREVIOUS PAGE:** Helicopter flight over the Nā Pali Coast **Credits:** Hawaii Tourism Authority/Jakob Owens, Ben Ono, Tommy Lundberg, Tor Johnson





ABOVE: Kauaʻi's verdant Nā Pali Coast **Credit:** Hawaii Tourism Authority/Ben Ono

out of the earth as if by a giant, the green buttes and red gorges of the valley stretch for miles, and I can immediately see why this is known as the Grand Canyon of the Pacific.

A short drive takes us deeper, towards Kōkeʻe State Park's Kalalau Lookout. A blanket of white cloud obscures everything, but it quickly swirls away and the dramatic green ridges of the Kalalau Valley appear. The base of this gorge meets the Pacific Ocean, and my eyes are drawn past meandering rivers and diving birds towards three catamarans that are streaking through the water, so small they look like toys. I wonder what the view is like from down there and, having ticked off two out of three ways to explore the Nā Pali Coast, I make a mental promise to return to see this incredible spectacle of nature from the ocean.

Food of the gods

On the way to Kauaʻi's wilder, surf-centric North Shore, our driver, Gray, tells us that there's no better place on Earth to live off

the land, which is perhaps why celebrities such as Pierce Brosnan and Mark Zuckerberg have decided to call it home. Wild chickens roam the streets, the waters teem with fresh fish, and we pass mango and coffee orchards and avocados the size of small rugby balls. Hawaii is a Garden of Eden in terms of local produce, but its cuisine also takes influence from Okinawa, Japan and wider Polynesia. Up to this point, I've eaten my weight in *ahi* (yellowfin tuna), kalua pork, juicy pineapples, star fruits and *'uala* (purple sweet potato), so my taste buds are in overdrive for an upcoming chocolate tasting at Lydgate Farms, a fifth-generation family-owned business.

Groves of cacao trees await us at the farm, their hard-shelled red fruit hanging from every branch. We're on the three-hour tasting tour and our guide, Jess, begins by telling us about the farm, which produces vanilla, honey and chocolate, with the latter having been recognised as one of the world's top cacao beans. Tasting experiences often

hold back on sample servings, but Lydgate Farms is the opposite. During an informative demonstration, not only do we taste soft, sweet cacao pulp, its bitter but valuable bean and handfuls of Lydgate's 50% milk and 70% dark chocolate, we also try Hershey's, Valrhona, 100% dark chocolate and white chocolate coins to help us compare different flavours from around the world. After some extra servings and a honey tasting, our group leave laden with edible souvenirs, although I'll admit some of mine didn't make it home.

A lost world

Our final stop in Kaua'i is Hanelei Bay, a crescent moon of golden sand backed by the island's signature mountainous scenery, and overlooked in a prime location by our hotel, 1 Hotel Hanalei Bay (*Reviews, page 86*). Keen to explore, I'm awake just after dawn to rent out a paddleboard. I'm told I can paddle all the way out of our cove to the nearby Hanalei River, but the view over the beach, surfers, palm trees and soaring mountains is so stereotypically 'Hawaii' that I simply soak it up as the waves carry me along. On my return I spot a particularly large boulder under the water, except this 'boulder' suddenly raises its head – it's a turtle, drifting so close I can see the mottling of its shell. I suddenly wish I had time to take a snorkel out, like the many other guests I can see swimming face down around the bay.

Renting a complimentary electric car from the hotel, we drive to the small town of Hanalei, which feels like the Hawaii of old. Outside every colourfully painted beach house, surfboards are stacked 10 high alongside buckets of watersports gear and kayaks. The buildings, which house surf shops, local artisans and cafes, are frequented by locals with wet hair and flip-flops, and as our feet hit the hot sand on the beach, there's even a man who's come to practise his ukelele under a palm tree. As the sun dips, we chatter away over fresh cuisine at a local restaurant called Postcards. It's an apt name, for this 'postcard' will stay in my memory forever, a perfect snapshot of Hawaii's true spirit of aloha. ●

BOOK IT: *Carrier offers seven nights at 1 Hotel Hanalei Bay from £5,930 per person, based on two adults sharing a Mountain View King room on a room-only basis. The price includes return economy flights from Heathrow to Lihue via San Francisco with United Airlines, return private transfers, and airside departure service at Heathrow.*

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ASK THE *Expert*



Helen Tabois, product manager for North America and cruise, Carrier

"A Nā Pali Coast helicopter tour is a must-do on Kaua'i – book it in clients' itineraries early in case it needs to be rearranged, because it's something they won't want to miss.

"As someone who loves chocolate (but even for someone who doesn't), Lydgate Farms was amazing. The guide was so engaging and they certainly didn't skimp on the samples – but they also showed us how they work with the environment and harvest vanilla, and we had fruit and honey tastings, which topped other previous tasting experiences.

"My top tip, however, is about getting there. For clients coming from regional UK, having to travel down to Heathrow can eat into travel time. Consider routes that go direct to LA or San Francisco, where clients can overnight before connecting straight to the islands."



Artisanal honeys at Lydgate Farms