



HAWAII DRIVE GUIDE *Invites You to*
Explore Paradise
'Imi Loa

The following stories were researched and written by Jill Engledow, award-winning author of several Hawaii books and many articles about Hawaii, and presenter of the "Island Life 101" seminars, which introduce newcomers to the Hawaiian Islands. 'Imi loa is Hawaiian for "seek far," or "distant traveler."

Hawaii Island is a place of diversity and extremes, wide-open spaces and dramatic beauty. The youngest of the Hawaiian Islands, it is still growing as lava pours from the Earth's depths to create new land. Paradoxically, it is the oldest in human terms, the probable site of the original Polynesian landing and current home to well-preserved artifacts from the time of ancient Hawaiians. In modern times, high atop Mauna Kea, in space-age observatories, world-class telescopes peer through the thin, clear air at objects more than 12 billion light-years away.

Hawaii has earned its nickname, "The Big Island," being large enough at 4,038 square miles to encompass all seven of its sister islands with room to spare. Its weather is more diverse than any other comparably sized piece of land in the world, ranging from Puna's tropical rain forests and Kau's

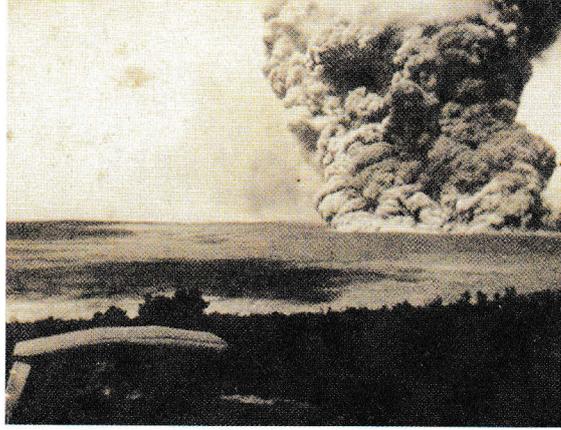
volcanic desert to the snowcapped peaks of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa.

Its population centers include the charming old town of Hilo on the east side, where as much as 165 inches of rain each year create lush greenery. The sunny coast of Kona is a visitor mecca, with warm, dry days and sparkling clear waters. In the Kohala district, Waimea's misty green pastures lie above exquisite resorts that have sprouted amid centuries-old lava flows.

Five volcanoes built this island. None of them is considered truly extinct, but only two have been active in recent decades. Mauna Loa last erupted in 1984. Kilauea has been going strong since 1983, destroying dozens of structures and some famous landmarks, while adding acres of land.

The most active volcano in the world, Ki-

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lauea is also relatively friendly. No Mount St. Helens or Krakatoa, this is a volcano you actually can walk up to and observe, if you are lucky enough to arrive at a time when it is erupting in an accessible location. There are few experiences more fantastic than to see fountains of brilliant lava shoot to the heavens or to stand near the ocean and watch glowing magma pour into the boiling sea while steam clouds rise from the land's new edge.

Perhaps it was the glow of an eruption against the northern horizon that alerted the Polynesian explorers to the presence of land as they sailed thousands of miles from the southern islands of their birth. The first of these intrepid seagoers landed at Ka Lae, or South Point, about 400 A.D.

To the Hawaiians, this island was the home of the fire goddess Pele, who, legend says, left her original home and traveled, with her brothers and sisters, to the northwest islands of Hawaii. Moving south, Pele attempted with her magic stick to dig a home at each island, but only when she reached Hawaii Island was she successful in digging deep without striking water, an element incompatible with her fiery nature. The fire pit of Halemaumau is now the legendary home of Pele and the centerpiece of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

As Hawaii's first king, Kamehameha I spent much time on the Kona Coast. And it was to the Big Island that British Capt. George Vancouver brought the Islands' first cattle in 1793. At Vancouver's suggestion, the king put a *kapu* (taboo)

on the animals, to allow them to multiply.

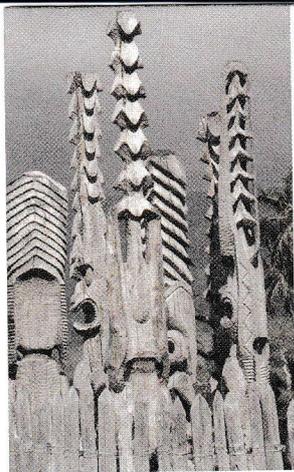
By 1832, the wild herd had grown so rapidly that Kamehameha III imported *vaqueros* from Spanish California to corral them. These cowboys taught the Hawaiians to herd and breed cattle, and to make their own equipment, which they promptly gave Hawaiian names. The Hawaiians also created a name for these Spanish-speaking visitors—*paniolo*—based on the word Español, which is how Hawaiian cowboys are known to this day. Hawaii's highly skilled roughriders also added their unique Island twist to cowboy attire, wearing custom-made lauhala hats with fresh flower lei hatbands.

Paniolo still work the rolling pastures of legendary Parker Ranch, whose founder, John Palmer Parker, jumped ship in 1809, at the age of 19. Parker proved himself useful to Kamehameha I, especially when he was able to shoot some of the maverick cattle that had been running loose because of the *kapu*. Soon Parker was producing salt beef for export, and, when he married a chief's daughter and acquired land, the great ranch was born.

While ranching provided a way of life in Wai-
mea, sugar growing long dominated life around

*The nene,
Hawaii's
state bird*





Brett Upprichard



Hilo, Hamakua, Puna and Kau. When the industry began to fade out in the 1990s, diversified agriculture filled empty fields with macadamia trees, bananas, ginger, guava and other plants that thrive on the island's lush east side. On the west side, Kona's sunny mountainsides of rich volcanic soil have produced the famous hand-picked Kona coffee for more than 150 years.

Today, in addition to these edible crops, the island, sometimes known as "the Orchid Isle," grows half the state's orchids and almost all its anthuriums, plus exotics such as heliconia and bird of paradise. It also has grown as a visitor destination, welcoming its guests to a unique variety of landscapes, climates and activities.

Peaceful Hilo is a serene place of quaint architecture and green parks, set against the backdrop of snow-topped Mauna Kea. On the mountain side is Mauna Loa, still alive with the potential for eruptions and the inexorable flow of molten lava. On the ocean side, Hilo Bay is protected by a manmade barrier to counteract possible tsunamis. Still, Hilo calmly goes about its business, with shops featuring exquisite arts, locally made crafts and a flower-filled farmers market. In recent years, Hilo has also added several fine-dining establishments to its stable of family favorites.

The town is so friendly it's hard to believe that Hilo is the state's second-largest community. It also is the home of the annual Merrie Monarch Hula Festival, the world cham-

ionship of dance for performers who come from near and far to celebrate the Islands' indigenous art.

On the west coast, Kona's fields of black lava contrast brilliantly with white foam edging the waves of a sapphire sea. Here, history seems close, with ancient fishponds, a historic *heiau* (temple), a royal summer palace and Hawaii's oldest surviving Christian church. The little town of Kailua-Kona bustles with activity, a modern oasis of shopping and activities, including deep-sea fishing cruises. Kailua is famous for the Ironman Triathlon, an annual event in which athletes swim 2.4 miles in the ocean, ride a bike over 112 miles of road cut through lava fields and top off the day with a 26.2-mile marathon.

All this life and action grows on a base created by the primeval force of the volcano. No visit to the island would be complete without a tour of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. The volcano spews steam and molten rock, native forests shelter rare birds, lava wastelands mark the paths of previous eruptions and Hawaiian petroglyphs record an ancient civilization.

The park is a setting unmatched for a glimpse of Mother Nature at her most primitive and exciting, a glimpse of Madame Pele in all her creative glory.

Recommended reading: *Exalted Sits the Chief, The Ancient History of Hawaii Island*, by Ross Cordy; *Hawaii, A History of the Big Island*, by Robert F. Oaks; *Beaches of the Big Island*, by John Clark; *Hawaii, the Big Island—A Visit to a Realm of Beauty, History and Fire*, by Glen Grant.

