

# Circling the Big Island

## Kona to Waimea to Hilo

### EDITOR'S PICKS

- **Parker Ranch**  
HI 190 at Lindsey Rd.  
Waimea, HI  
(808) 885-7655  
www.parkerranch.com
- **Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park**  
Ke Ala O Keawe Rd.  
(HI 160)  
Hōnaunau, HI  
(808) 328-2288  
www.nps.gov/puho
- **Hawai'i Forest and Trail**  
74-5035B Queen Kaahumanu Hwy.  
Kailua Kona, HI  
(800) 464-1993  
www.hawaii-forest.com
- **Pacific Tsunami Museum**  
130 Kamehameha Ave.  
Hilo, HI  
(808) 935-0926  
www.tsunami.org
- **Ueshima Coffee Company**  
82-5810 Napoopoo Rd.  
Captain Cook, HI  
(888) 822-5662  
www.ucc-hawaii.com



**H**ere on the Big Island of Hawai'i, history has always been carved out of nature. A loop drive around the island beginning at the Kona airport encircles natural and historical sites.



*Parker Ranch*

Watch for wild donkeys crossing the road on the drive north of the airport. The donkeys once were used to carry heavy coffee beans down mountain slopes, but when tractors became prevalent, the donkeys were set free to roam. At the end of the lava fields, turn inland, on HI 19 to Waimea. Once a cowboy town and center of the huge **Parker Ranch**, Waimea is becoming

gentrified, with expensive and expansive homes. Visitors can still ride horses, tour by ATV, or take a wagon ride at Parker Ranch, which was founded in 1847 and still is one of the largest cattle ranches in the U.S.

From Waimea, HI 250 heads 27 miles along a volcanic ridge that climbs to 6,000 feet. It passes a few horse ranches, then descends to Hawi, known as the birthplace of King Kamehameha. Kamehameha united the islands into one kingdom. It's been a quiet village since the sugar mill that dominated business closed in 1970. A few artists' shops and stores sell koa wood creations, pottery, and clothing.

Head east toward Kapaau. The original King Kamehameha statue, recovered from the ocean, fully restored, and painted in the local tradition, stands proudly on the lawn of the Civic Center. Folks like to hang leis on the statue and pose for pictures with the king.

On the drive back, follow the scenic coastal route, HI 270, then head east through Waimea on HI 19, on toward Hilo. This side of the island gets more rain, and thus is lush with vegetation. The ocean beckons just beyond former sugar cane fields. A sign directs motorists to turn toward the ocean at Laupāhoehoe. The winding narrow road leads to a spectacular beach state park, where waves crash on rocks surrounded by pines. In 1946, a tsunami overcame a small school here and the first busload of children arriving for the day's studies. A memorial marks the passing of 16 students, five teachers, and three other victims of the disaster.



*Cliffs on the "Big Island"*

Back on HI 19, head into Hilo. Downtown, stop at the **Pacific Tsunami Museum**, housed in a former bank building. Donna Saiki, museum director, says the museum is really a homegrown affair, sprouting in 1994. "It started with survivors telling their stories. We're not scientists. We're importing the history of Hilo and its transformation," she says. Displays memorialize the testimony of tsunami survivors, who share their stories through video kiosks.

If you visit Hilo on Saturday, harvest lunch from the bounty at the farmer's market at the edge of downtown. You'll mix with the locals and get a taste of Hawai'ian treats. Vendors hawk the exotic and mundane—papayas and mangoes, bananas and lettuce. Orchids sell for \$5, sarongs just \$10. A 30-minute massage can be had for \$20.



**F**rom Hilo, most visitors head straight for Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. It's certainly worth a day's exploration to see the still-erupting volcano and learn about how nature molds the landscape. It's possible to drive through the park, down to the tip of the island, 'round the bend, and north toward the Kona district; an easier route is back through Hilo to the western side. Learn about original Hawai'ian history at **Pu'uhonua**

**o Hōnaunau**, the place of refuge. In earlier days, the people were ruled by a myriad of laws, and the punishment often was death. But there was an alternative—if the transgressor could make it to the place of refuge, no one could pursue him or her inside. This place of refuge, perhaps created as early as the late 1300s, has been reconstructed from records and old sketches.



*Kona Coffee Fest*

It's an easy drive from Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau to

Kailua Kona, where coffee farms crop up by the dozens and you can stop to sample coffee and macadamia nuts. The Big Island is blessed with perfect growing conditions: volcanic soil that drains well on the mountain slopes, morning sun, and afternoon rain, as well as warm ocean breezes that meet the cool mountain air. All those factors make for a longer growing season, which helps mature the beans. The bigger the beans, the better the coffee.

Many of the farms are off HI 11, or on HI 180 near Hōlualoa. In spring the trees flower and produce a heady, sweet scent. The coffee cherries begin to ripen in August, and harvesting is from September to

January, the best time to visit. A few farms to check out: Holualoa Kona Coffee Company, Kona Blue Sky Coffee Company, and the **Ueshima Coffee Company**. At Ueshima's retail store and roastery in Captain Cook, customers can learn to roast their own custom blend, which is then packaged complete with a private label. A driving tour with a list of coffee farms to visit can be found at [www.konacoffeefest.com](http://www.konacoffeefest.com).

A star adventure with **Hawai'i Forest and Trail** helps visitors see firsthand how this volcanic island came to be. Although there is a road up to the top of Mauna Kea, it is so bumpy that most rental cars are not permitted. On a tour, guests stop for dinner at 7,000 feet to get acclimated to the altitude, then ride straight to the nearly 14,000-foot summit. Hawai'ians claim the mountaintop as the most sacred place on the islands—eyes fixed on the sunset, it is easy to believe. Driving back down, lights are kept to a minimum so as not to disturb telescope viewing. Guides stop and set up telescopes at the visitor's center at 9,000 feet. With so little ambient light, stars pop out of the blackness. For most, it is enough to just sit back and contemplate the bejeweled sky.



*Observatories on Mauna Kea*