



Play Mauna Kea's famous par 3 third hole early in the morning—the afternoon trade winds will have the surf crashing around the green.

Aloha Golf

Luxury Living on Hawaii's Kohala Coast

By Nina Africano

Arriving on the Big Island of Hawaii, first-time visitors are struck by the forbidding black lava rock landscape, a reminder that this island first formed by volcanic eruptions centuries ago, is home to Kilauea, the world's most active volcano. Though somewhat otherworldly in appearance the lava formations of Hawaii have proven to be the perfect groundwork for some truly spectacular golf courses, which make this island paradise one of the world's premier golf destinations.

In 1960 the governor of Hawaii invited Laurance Rockefeller to scout locations for a beach resort on the Big Island. Rockefeller saw the white sand crescent of Kauna'oa Beach with the dormant volcano Mauna

Kea towering in the distance and he knew he had found the spot. Rockefeller's concept for the resort esthetic of understated luxury and he wanted the hotel not to intrude but to harmonize with its glorious natural setting. When it was completed in 1965 at a cost of \$15 million, it was the costliest hotel ever built; in 2008, ten times that amount was spent to make the elegant retreat it is today.

In the open air lobby, sleek contemporary furnishings frame displays of blooming orchids and museum-quality sculptures from Rockefeller collection of Asian and Pacific art, giving the hotel a vibe that is at once laid back and sophisticated. In the meticulously appointed guest rooms, tropical print bedding in Mauna Kea's signature orange pops against clean, modern fittings, which includes a concealed flat screen TV. Completely tiled in small white marble squares, the bathroom is a bath-



Ocean, pool, or hot tub—at Mauna Kea Beach Hotel the water's always just right.

er's paradise, with a Japanese-style soaking tub, an open overhead shower, and its own private lanai.

Rockefeller believed in doing everything first-class and hired Robert Trent Jones to design the Mauna Kea Golf Course. At the site of the third hole where the black lava rock forms a natural dogleg, Trent Jones vowed, "Mr. Rockefeller, if you allow me to build a golf course here, this'll be the most beautiful hole in the world." Trent Jones delivered on his promise and the beauty and challenge of this par 3 across the breaking waves has kept golfers coming back for decades. The hole's five tees range from a land-locked 108 yards to a high perch 272 yards distant from the green and separated from said putting surface by a bit of open ocean and a sometimes feisty trade wind, not to mention a few white sand bunkers that frame the green.

Still considered the among the most difficult courses on the island, Mauna Kea set the standard for golf on Hawaii pretty high, and the competition from newer courses has only served to make the Kohala Coast a golf destination that makes fortunate travelers return year after year. Overnight rates at Mauna Kea range from \$345 to about \$900 a night, but fall golf packages of three nights or more start at \$516 a night



Lounge on the lanai at one of Lava Lava Beach Club's four private beach bungalows.

with play on Mauna Kea and on Hapuna Beach Golf Course. Though Hapuna Beach Resort is right next door, Mauna Kea retains amazing sense of privacy and tranquility that its founder surely envisioned. Call (888) 9-PRINCE and ask for the Stay & Play package.



When the sun sets on Waikoloa's Kings' Course, you are truly golfing in paradise.



Seven and fifteen are two spectacular oceanfront par threes that highlight any round on the South Course at Mauna Lani Resort.



Dolphin Quest at Hilton Waikoloa Village is just one of the many incredible experiences that await on Hawaii's Kohala Coast.

With its two well-known golf courses, Waikoloa Beach Resort is a must for any golfer's trip to the Big Island. Just down the coast from his father's famous layout, Robert Trent Jones, Jr. made his own mark on the black lava coastline with the Beach Course. Playable enough for off-season duffers, the Beach Course still offers plenty of risk/reward situations to tempt the serious golfer, and a setting of pure beauty, with palm trees rustling in the breeze, extravagant tropical flowers and emerald green fairways framed by the rough black lava and the pure blue of the sea and sky.

With a green that sits out on a lava peninsula, framed by coconut palms and crashing waves, the seventh hole is not only a photo-op, but a test of golf. The tee shot on this 502-yard par 5 is straight out to the Pacific—no joke when the surf's up. A sharp dogleg to the left makes it even more difficult to keep the ball out of the lava. Of course, it's hard to

worry about errant shots when you look up and spot humpback whales or dolphins playing offshore.

Hawaiians have several words to describe the different types of lava, the jagged black kind or brownish lava that dries in smooth swirls. From the Kings' Course you will see a lot of lava used to separate fairways and to create hazards. Left undisturbed within the layout of the Kings' Course are files of ancient petroglyphs, stick figures and symbols carved into the lava rock by travelers along the ancient Kings' Trail from Kohala to Kona. Wide undulating fairways and tall grasses bordering many hazards give the course something of a links feel, but outcroppings of black lava rock are pure Hawaii. Golfers often attribute a lucky bounce to the "Gods of golf," but here on the Kohala Coast, they would do better to appease Pele, the fiery spirit of the volcano, as any ball hit into the lava field can ricochet in any direction—back toward the fairway or out into no man's land.

The signature hole on the Kings' Course is the 327-yard fifth, a par 4 that doglegs to an elevated green. From the various tees, it's short enough to tempt long hitters to try to go for it and carry the sandy waste area that guards the left side. Two large lava rocks strategically placed in the waste area intimidate on any approach from the left side of the fairway. Once on the green, the surreal lava landscape that surrounds gives pause, as if you're playing golf on the moon. For tee times, go to waikoloabeachgolf.com.

With its many shops and restaurants at the Kings and Queens Marketplaces, two major hotels in the Hilton Waikoloa Village and the Waikoloa Beach Marriott Resort & Spa, the Waikoloa Beach Resort has everything a traveler could want, from scuba diving to luaus. The latest addition to everything is the wonderfully secluded Lava Lava Beach Club, a collection of four spacious bungalows built right on the beach, away from the condos and big hotels. Offering the comforts of a private home and the fun of a surf shack, Lava Lava lets you can roll out bed for an early morning swim or enjoy Kona coffee on the lanai. At the edge of the water sea turtles might be sunning themselves.

There is also a lively open air restaurant with a mellow sunset hula show that also brings room service to bungalow guests. Lava Lava offers the ultimate in Hawaiian luxury—you never have to leave your own lanai. Rates at Lava Lava start at \$450 a night with discounts available for longer stays. Go to lavalavabeachclub.com or call (808) 769-LAVA (5282) for information and reservations.



The ancient Hawaiians paddled their outrigger canoes across the open ocean to arrive at this island paradise; at the Fairmont Orchid you can paddle your own canoe to one of many great spots for snorkeling where you can swim among sea turtles, rays, and a rainbow of tropical fish in the crystal clear water.



The soft trade winds rustling through the palm trees and waves breaking upon the lava rocks create a sublime atmosphere for a massage in an oceanfront cabana at the Fairmont Orchid's Spa Without Walls.

Armchair golfers will remember the spectacular oceanfront holes at Mauna Lani Resort from its many years hosting the Senior Skins Game. Especially memorable is the 196-yard 15th hole on the South Course which plays across the ocean to a green that seems to be the point where sea, sky, and mountain meet. Built on an ancient bed of smooth brown lava, the North Course offers a contrast in topography from the South, with mesquite forests lining many fairways. The 132-yard 17th is the course's signature par 3, a striking hole whose green is nestled in a natural amphitheater of lava rock.

Travelers who want to enjoy Mauna Lani Resort in total luxury can find a home at the Fairmont Orchid (the former Ritz-Carlton). Not only are the rooms and public spaces sumptuous, but the hotel's programs are designed to put everything guests might want to do at their fingertips—starting with golf and tennis, but going on to an array of water sports, unique cultural activities, extraordinary spa services, and great restaurants. Known for fine dining at Brown's Beach House and Norio's Steakhouse and Sushi Bar, the Fairmont Orchid also offers gloriously fresh fish and great easy options like the beachfront Hale Kai restaurant.

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Overnight rates at the Fairmont Orchid range from \$329 a night to \$3900 for the Presidential Suites. Look for discount offers such as the Fairmont Savers 20% off or Fifth Night Free at fairmont.com. ■