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Six Getaway Ideas to the Island of Kauai



An island that basks in the middle of the sparkling blue waters of the Pacific Ocean, Kauai is a tropical paradise formed some six million years ago. Located about 20 minutes by air from Honolulu, the Kauai Island encompasses roughly 550 square miles, separated into five regions, each of which offers you one of the most memorable vacations you ever had.

The island is one of the oldest and northernmost of the main Hawaiian Islands. It is above all a showcase of stunning natural environment and amazing sights. Here you will find no high-rises, no four-lane highways, no residential developments creeping up the mountainsides, no sprawling urban centers, no enormous shopping malls, and no bright lights. It's all natural – nothing that gets in the way of the verdant, untamed landscape that spills uninhibited across the countryside.

To the north, the island features a glimpse of its rugged interior and the spectacular cliffs of the Na Pali Coast, which remain wild, uninhabited, and nearly inaccessible. Add to that Kauai's mountaintop bogs and rain forests, deep canyons, tangled valleys, coral reefs and golden sand beaches, all of which have been in the making since the island emerged five million years ago from a volcanic "hot spot" in the depths of the ocean.

The island boasts of only about 60,000 full-time residents and all of them live in any of the 18 small communities dotting various regions of the island. In addition, these communities are, in turn, divided by greenbelts, extending for miles along the highway and almost encircling the whole island.

The exquisite, uncut beauty of the place has all its visitors and all island residents alike enamored. So if you want to quickly lose yourself in the quiet splendor of the island's rich tropical setting and its extraordinary heritage, then come and discover the legendary aloha spirit of Kauai Island.

Start exploring Kauai with the following **six getaway ideas** in the island:

#1 -- Get Up Close and Personal With the Whales

One of the most spectacular wilderness areas in the Pacific has got to be the majestic Na Pali Coast of Kauai. Located in Kauai's remote North Shore, the Na Pali Coast has been converted into a state park – all 6,175 acres of it, and still remains as isolated from civilization as it was many centuries ago. Practically inaccessible to vehicular traffic, the place is ideal for hiking and camping. However, if you want an unmitigated view of the stunning cliffs for which it is famous, the best way to get a look is to travel by helicopter or boat.

If you take a cruise along the 15-mile stretch of rugged coastline on Kauai's northwest shore will provide you with an awesome view of the 4,000 foot cliffs, which by the way are where the Coast got its name ("Pali" means "cliffs" in Hawaiian). As you get closer, you will see these cliffs rising abruptly from the Pacific, occasionally showing gaps to reveal wide stretches of golden sand, deep, jungle valleys and mysterious sea caves in between.

The best time to go on a cruise up and down the Coast is during the winter (from December through April). That's because humpback whales frequent Kauai waters right about this time. The captain of your chartered ship may know exactly where these wonderful sea creatures can be seen and may stop so you can take pictures and get treated to a spectacular show by these playful dirigibles of the deep, along with dolphins, sea turtles, and other sea creatures as well.

The humpback whales can be anywhere around 40 feet long and can weigh up to 85,000 pounds - the fifth largest of the world's greatest whales. Seen only in Hawaii during the winter, they are protected by federal law so, as a result, their population is rising. When charter a boat tour during humpback season, you are guaranteed to fully expect sightings of these fantastic creatures.

A Na Pali boat tour may not only be restricted to the coastline. Both Hanakapiai and Kalalau Beach (named by the National Geographic Traveler as the one of America's Top 40 Beaches) are well-known Na Pali Coast State Park destinations. If not those, then you can also try Honopu, with its famous arch, Nualolo and Milolii with their fringing reefs.

Depending on your itinerary and how adventurous you feel, your choice of tours can be as wildly exciting as the Na Pali coastline itself. With regards to where you will start your journey, most boat companies launch from Westside harbors. However, if you've decided to charter some of the smaller companies, they are permitted from the quaint little town of Hanalei. There are also others that cruise to Ni'ihau where you can stop for a bit of snorkeling and/or scuba diving.

Tips to a Successful Kauai Whale Watching:

- Go with a professional boat company who knows where to find the whales and how to keep you and the whales safe.
- Choose from camatarans, zippy rubber zodiac rafts, cruise vessels, and sail boats.
- Don't forget to bring your camera. It's also a good idea choose waterproof disposable ones because you and the camera will get wet during the boat ride. This is especially true if you are standing in the bow area of the boat.
- Binoculars can help with closer observation of whale behavior. However, if the water is rough, be warned that binoculars can be tricky. For best results, choose binoculars with 8 x 40 or 7 x 50 dimensions.
- Choose your clothes properly. Dress for the beach, if you must, because you will get wet. Bringing a towel is a good idea. If you've decided to bring some extra dry clothes, make

sure you place them in a waterproof bag. Also, don't forget to bring sunscreen, a hat, and sunglasses.

- Whales are not the only spectacles you'll see. Look for other wildlife, like spinner dolphins, albatross, and boobies (of the bird variety).
- If you get motion sickness, be sure to take homeopathic or non-prescription motion sickness prevention medication at least 60 minutes before getting on a boat. Your trip will likely include the North Shore where the winter waves swells can be 10-30 feet high, so the ride can be very bumpy at higher speeds. Non-medicated alternatives include: crackers, dry bread, papaya, or ginger. Drink carbonated beverages, especially ginger ale, and avoid alcohol.

Interesting FACT: *Whales can be seen by land, too. If you're a land-lubber and wouldn't get on a boat for all the whales in the world, then choose a calm day to go whale watching from solid ground. An elevated spot on the shore can serve as your observation point for an unobstructed view of the creatures. Look for the white, v-shaped spouting from the whale's blowhole that often precedes a roll, a fin slap, or even breaching (jumping out of the water).*

Also another TIP: *When viewing whales from land, 10 x 50 wide angle binoculars are best.*

#2 -- An Island ATV Adventure

333 square miles of beautiful, unspoiled landscape, the whole land mass of Kauai is predominantly a vast, uninhabited wilderness just begging to be explored. And what better way to explore it than from the seat of an ATV?

Kauai All Terrain Vehicles have the means and the know-how to get you anywhere you want to be in this gem of an island. If you want to get a glimpse of the road less traveled, there's no better way to do it than on an ATV. Various ATV companies offer five daily off-road tours for the adventure in you, so what are you waiting for? Pack them bags and get on the road.

If it is your first time on an ATV, no need to worry. Companies usually provide you with instructors who will begin each ATV tour with a lesson on how to operate the easily-controlled, 4-wheeled, 250cc Yamaha ATVs.

There are various places you can explore. One of the most popular is the Koloa tour, which begins at the historic Koloa Sugar Mill on the island's south side and weaves through 15 miles of former sugar cane plantation roads. Here, you will cut through the heart of the Ha'upu Mountain Range where you can see a half-mile tunnel. Travel through that until you find an opening that reveals to you a bewitching view of Mt. Wai'ale'ale, considered one of the wettest spots on earth.

As you go through the tour, you will experience all of this unique island's variation – from different micro-climates and famous motion picture movie sites to rare island birds and wild pigs, and, of course, mud puddles too numerous to count.

If you want the ultimate in off-road expeditions, take the waterfall tour. Basically, the tour is a four-hour ride that takes you to the lush tropical terrain of the Kahlili Mountain Range. Here you will get to see two secluded cascades and have a refreshing time with a 30-minute dip at the base of a 15-foot waterfall. Most ATV tour companies provide lunch, but be sure to bring your own towels, sunblock, and water-friendly shoes.

ATVs are also fun for the whole family. Kauai ATVs dune buggy, appropriately called the Mud Hog, is fun and can seat up to six passengers. Kids ages 5 and up can get on one of these and have a grand time during the tour. And as an alternative, especially if the guests are aged 16 and older, there is also a fully automatic, two-seater dune buggy, this one called the Mud Bug.

Here's a little insider TIP: *You don't have to bring your cameras with you. The Kauai ATV guides will be taking digital photos throughout the tour. You can purchase these photos after your ride.*

Instructions for ATV Safety:

- Always read your Operator's Guide, Safety Handbook and all labels carefully and follow the operating procedures prescribed by the tour.
- Always follow age and passenger recommendation for your ATV.
- Always wear protective gear including an approved helmet that fits properly. You will be provided with these by your tour company.
- Never consume alcohol or drugs before or while operating an ATV.
- Inspect your ATV each time you use it to make sure it is in safe operating condition.
- Be alert to changing terrain conditions, check for obstacles before operating in a new area. Be cautious of excessive rough, slippery, or loose terrain. Never attempt to operate over large obstacles, such as large rocks or fallen trees.
- Always follow proper procedures for climbing, descending, and crossing hills. Check terrain before you start. Don't attempt a hill too steep for the ATV or your abilities.
- Never operate an ATV in fast flowing water or in water deeper than that specified in the Operator's Guide and the Safety Handbook. Remember that wet brakes may have reduced stopping ability.
- Always be sure there are no obstacles or people behind you when you operate in reverse. When it is safe to proceed in reverse, go slowly.

#3 -- Hike the Kalalau Trail

If you're a backpacker at heart, then your list of backpacking trips isn't consummated until you mention the 11-mile Kalalau Trail in it. Beginning where the paved road ends on Kauai's North Shore, this trail alternately challenges and rewards hikers with a mix of Cliffside promenades and views of wild sea, silent sky, deep forest, and stark cliffs. And at the end of it all, you get to see a white sand beach the length of which can be attributed to that of several football fields placed alongside each other. It is here, at the end of your journey, that you are left with nothing left to do but meditate, enjoy the sheer beauty of the place, or reflect on your own inestimably good fortune.

The end of the road for most hikers is the Hanakapiai Beach, which awaits you after the first two miles of the trail. However, for backpacking vets, Hanakapiai is only the overture to a much more complex and engaging symphony of jungles, seas, and skies.

If you are one of these committed backpackers, you can leave the beach at Hanakapiai and climb about 800 feet out of that valley to traverse the ridges of Hono O Na Pali Natural Area Reserve and cross the streams that bisect a series of valleys, which include Ho'olulu and Wai'ahuakua. Four miles later, you will arrive at Hanakoa Valley and it is there that the trip to Kalalau can be broken up with an overnight stay.

The final five-mile section of the hike is pretty steep. So steep in fact that many backpackers have been known to swear (and actually believing) that they would never do anything like it ever again. But that's before they emerge, most often at sunset, on the red-dirt slope that leads to an old Hawaiian heiau, a sacred place so beautiful you forget how to breathe for a minute. After that is the final stream crossing, followed by a spectacular glowing view of the white sand of Hauopo Valley, just past Kalalau Beach where, the adventure really begins.

Kalalau Trail FACTS: *Starting at the northwest end of Kuhio Highway, the Kalalau Trail begins at about 40 miles, equivalent to a 1-hour drive, from Lihu'e Airpot. You are allowed a maximum of five nights stay within the Na Pali State Park. Permits, issued by the State Parks Division, are \$10 per person, per night.*

Helpful Tips to Ensure a Great Time at the Kalalau Trail:

- Park rangers are strict about valid camping permits, so be sure you have one.
- For the best weather conditions, hike the trail between May and September to see 11 miles of the most beautiful tropical coastline you've ever seen.
- If you plan on hiking or camping beyond Hanakapiai, make sure to sign in at the start of the trail at the registration box.
- You can get camping permits for up to three nights in Lihue at the County building.
- Some boating companies will drop you off at Kalalau Beach Park and will pick you up at a pre-designed time.

#4 – Sail to Ni'ihau

Long called the forbidden island, Ni'ihau is an island that hangs in the hazy distance off the west coast of Kauai. It is privately owned and off limits to most outsiders. However, you can sail along its secluded coast aboard one of the motor-sailing chartered catamarans that depart from Port Allen. Depending on your charter, the tour can go up to seven hours, cruising along the stunning Na Pali Coast and across the foggy green of the island of Ni'ihau.

While you are anchored off the forbidden island of Ni'ihau, you can snorkel, scuba dive, slip into the ocean down the vessel's water slide, or just relax and enjoy the scenery with a mai tai close by. The catamaran has an observation deck where you can get spectacular views of majestic sea cliffs, lush waterfalls and the mysterious Na Pali sea caves.

Here, you can expect to get a good look at Kauai's teeming marine life. The waters off Ni'ihau are great for scuba diving. In addition, watch out for humpback whales during the winter season where they are known to make sightings.

Useful Sailing Tips:

- When you arrive on Kauai, call your sailing company for directions to their office and to reconfirm your reservation. Also, you may want to print out a map of Kauai.
- There may be age limits for children. Some charter companies set the limit at 3 and below.
- Departure time is usually one half hour from check-in time. Make sure you can get to the harbor about an hour before the boat leaves.
- Dress for the beach. You will get wet.
- Bring a waterproof beach bag with sunscreen, towel, a cover-up, camera, film and light footwear.
- Due to possibly bouncy conditions, boat tours are not suitable for pregnant women, those with bad backs, or serious health concerns.
- Tours may vary due to wind and sea conditions at the captain's discretion.

#5 – Time to Play Cowboy at the Princeville Ranch

Dating back to 1831, the Princeville Ranch is a working cattle ranch and cowboy adventure all rolled into one. Boasting 2,500 acres of nothing but expansive pastures and dense tropical rainforest crowned by idyllic waterfalls, the whole ranch actually runs from the edges of the dragon-backed mountains to the dramatic ocean bluffs.

The Princeville Ranch is family-owned and run by members of the same family who established it centuries ago. Now, for over 25 years, the ranch still continues to offer a variety of one-of-a-kind horseback adventures that you and the whole family will surely enjoy.

At the Princeville Ranch, you have two choices – the Waterfall Picnic Adventure and the Ocean Bluff Ride. The first one takes you across ranch lands with panoramic views. When you get there, just tie up your mount and take a short hike until you find an 80-foot waterfall rising up to meet you. Here, you can swim around and have a delectable picnic afterwards. Take as many pictures as you want, but be sure to save at least one shot, because on your way back to the horses, you'll pass the top of the falls and here you will pass another waterfall, perfect for one more photo.

The other choice you have is the Ocean Bluff Ride. If you like views of quaint little towns, then you'll love this ride. The Ocean Bluff Ride lets you enjoy the sights of the Hanalei Mountains, Bali Hai, Anini Reef, and the Kilauea Lighthouse. And for adrenaline-pumping dramatic ocean views, you'll be riding bluff's edge.

If you want a little more privacy, you are welcome to sign up for one of the ranch's private tours, too. Or if you want to get that real cowboy feeling, then join in a weekly cattle drive. Learn the skills of Hawaiian cowboys, called paniolos, as you help to move the herd to its next pasture.

Princeville Ranch Stables is located mauka or towards the mountains. It is right on Kapaka Road and Kuhio Highway, just minutes east of the entrance to the delightful Princeville Resort.

More direction TIPS: Look for the large horse sign and you'll know you're there.

#6 – Snorkel Salt Pond Beach Park

Located near Hanapepe on Kauai's Westside, Salt Pond Beach Park got its name from the traditional Hawaiian sea salt produced in pools located near the beach. For many generations during the summer months, Hawaiian families have dug out pans from the red soil here to evaporate seawater and produce natural sea salt. After the salt is produced, the salt is bagged and used not only for cooking, but also for use as an Epsom salt-like medicine and offered plain or mixed with red clay. Until now, Hawaiian salt is still available at some markets on the island.

When you get down to Salt Pond Beach Park, you may see some families at work in their salt pans. The rights of use are handed down from generation to generation and the art is practiced with pride. You can observe them as they work to get a real feel of the how families have lived here for centuries, but take care not to walk too close to the salt pans.

Aside from this charming glimpse of island living, Salt Pond Beach Park also offers gentle waves rolling in year-round, which makes the place a popular spot for family outings. Young body surfers will also love the gentle rolling waves, and snorkelers will find clear water at each end of the crescent beach.

Fronting the salt ponds are time pools worth exploring. At Salt Pond, it seldom rains so if it's pouring elsewhere, come down to this place and have a fantastic time on the beach. You don't have to be an accomplished swimmer to enjoy snorkeling on Kauai's Salt Pond Beach. With minimal instructions, even beginners can snorkel in no time. Even the non-swimmer can enjoy snorkeling, with proper flotation device.

Snorkeling Safety Tips:

- Always snorkel in areas where there are other swimmers and snorkelers.
- Do not snorkel near surfers and body surfers.
- Do not snorkel if the water is unclear, rough, or choppy.
- Look up out of the water periodically to keep your bearing. This easy precaution will keep you from drifting off course without knowing it.
- The best snorkeling is in calm clear water. Try mornings.
- Do not feed the fish under any circumstances. It fouls the water and sickens the fish, which makes them susceptible to predators.
- A good way to attract fish is to just bring a zip lock bag. Put a leaf or any other colorful object in the bag, fill it with water, and allow it to float near you. You'd be surprised at all the curious fish that will swim up to inspect the bag.
- Help protect Kauai's reefs. All coral reefs are marvelous ecosystems that take thousands of years to develop and only seconds to destroy. Float over shallow reefs, but do not walk on them. Paddle to a sandy spot to stand.

- Admire sea turtles and monk seals only from a distance. Both the Pacific green sea turtle and the monk seal are protected under the Endangered Species Act. It is against the law to harass them in any way, including touching. These laws are strictly enforced in Hawaii. If you are fortunate enough to see one of these rare creatures in the water, enjoy them from a respectful distance.
- Remember to always check local conditions for safety before entering the sea. High surf and storm surges can be very dangerous anywhere they are occurring. Listen to weather forecasts, talk to local people, and plan your snorkel location accordingly.

What makes Kauai truly unique is its splendiferous variation. You can tour the whole island and never have to do the same thing at one time. Opportunities are endless. Those we mentioned above are but a few of the most exciting ones, so don't limit yourself to them.

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