





ADVENTURE ISLANDS

Active pursuits abound in the Aloha State

 By Rob Dunton

When renowned sportsman Dave Kalama speaks of adventure in Hawai'i, I listen. A competitive skier as a youth, Kalama swapped the steps of a California ski town for the windswept shores of Maui's Ho'okipa Beach Park—a famous windsurfing spot—in 1985, while in his early twenties, to pursue his passion for the sport. He still lives in Hawai'i today. In the intervening 25 years, Kalama has become one of the world's top windsurfers and a famed big-wave surfer who appeared in the opening sequence of the James Bond movie *Die Another Day*. He and his friend Laird Hamilton helped pioneer big-wave tow-in surfing and popularize stand-up paddle surfing (aka SUP). A few years ago, the two biked and paddled their surfboards more than 450 miles, from one end of the Hawaiian Archipelago to the other, in only a week.

Opposite:
Secluded Kalalau Beach on Kauai's rugged Nāpali Coast is reachable via boat or the Kalalau Trail.

Top: A green sea turtle swims off Kailua-Kona on the Island of Hawai'i.

“The islands are probably one of the most diverse places for recreation,” Kalama says. “First and most obvious are all the water sports—stand-up paddling, canoeing, diving, surfing and wind-surfing—it’s all here. But there’s also a lot of other great things to do, like hiking, ziplines, kayaking and paragliding.”

The diverse topography, tropical climate and aloha spirit of the Hawaiian Islands have made them an alluring vacation destination for decades. While many visitors come to indulge themselves at one of Hawai‘i’s luxurious five-star resorts, others seek a connection with nature or the chance to cross an adventure off their bucket lists. My own “checks” have included surfing Waikīkī on O‘ahu, hiking the Kalalau Trail on Kaua‘i’s Nāpali Coast and watching lava flow into the sea at Hawai‘i Volcanoes National Park on the Island of Hawai‘i (aka the Big Island). Each island offers excellent opportunities for adventure, whether you are a beginner or a pro at a given activity.

Over the years, I’ve been fortunate to sample many adventurous excursions in Hawai‘i, and I share some of the most memorable here.

 **STAND-UP PADDLE SURFING**
After I jotted down Kalama’s recommendations for local adventure, he invited me to join him

for a session of SUP in the surf at Pāpalaua Beach Park, on Maui’s west side. I felt as if I’d been asked to tap dance alongside Fred Astaire—totally out of my league. But if I missed out on this opportunity, I knew I’d regret it for the rest of my days.

We carried the fat, buoyant boards across the sand, then paddled to an uncrowded section of the water to catch the summer’s mild 2- to 3-foot waves. Though I’d enjoyed wonderful experiences paddling SUP boards off Kona on the Big Island and off Waikīkī, I’d never been able to catch a wave on one. As a wave formed near me, I paddled hard, felt the wave catch and was stunned to find I was riding it. I wondered if my uncertainty had been misplaced as I shifted my feet and glided across the warm, clear water above visible reefs in what is still the best SUP wave ride of my life. Beginner’s luck. As Kalama watched me tumble and fall on the next three waves, he offered a few sage pointers—such as to calm my body and avoid flailing—that paid quick dividends.

After 90 minutes, my shoulders were spent. I’d caught nearly a dozen waves and enjoyed some modest rides, though none competed with my first. We paddled back to shore, said our goodbyes, and I headed back to the Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea, where my wife, Susan, was relaxing on the manicured beach with our infant son and enjoying

The gentle waves of Waikīkī, on O‘ahu, are ideal for learning to surf. Many outfitters in the area offer private and group surf lessons.



MARK A. JOHNSON / ALAMY

the five-star service the resort is famous for. I made a reservation to enjoy a beachfront massage for later in the day, and joined my family for some well-deserved R&R.

KAYAKING

When I first hiked the Kalalau Trail on Kaua'i's Nāpali Coast in 1986, no outfitter I knew of offered kayaking trips—I just stared out to sea and dreamed. More than 20 years later, my time to kayak the rugged coastline finally came.

The day started early—at 6 A.M., when veteran outfitter Kayak Kaua'i's van picked me up on the

The rest of us continued along the dramatic coastline, past lush peaks that morphed into sheer cliffs that plunged into the cerulean sea.

roadside in front of my beachfront lodging at Hanalei Colony Resort, a quiet retreat with a lovely spa and award-winning restaurant. The van was loaded with other water warriors who had signed on for the same ambitious trek as I had—a 17-mile paddle through open ocean, from Hā'ena County Beach Park to the broad beaches of Polihale State Park. Two miles down the road, the van stopped at a car-camping site, and we hauled our sturdy kayaks across the sand, got briefed, then launched in the golden light of dawn.

We paddled west, past the rugged peak of Mount



BILL BROOKS / ALAMY

Makana, toward Kalalau Beach at the end of the Kalalau Trail—the farthest up the coast I had ever gone, until now. A light wind soon arrived, and the surface of the water became choppier. Within a mile, one of our group had opted out, taking the last available exit at Kē'ē Beach. The rest of us continued along the dramatic coastline, past lush peaks that morphed into sheer cliffs that plunged into the cerulean sea.

A considerable tailwind picked up, and we rode the swells of the open ocean. Spinner dolphins passed by, and near the halfway point, we entered the mouth of a topless cave. After we passed through the large mouth of the cave, we found ourselves again in broad daylight, surrounded on all sides by sheer rock, with the ceiling open to the sky. I rolled off my kayak for a rejuvenating swim, then ate a snack before we continued.

At mile 12, we stopped to have lunch at Miloli'i Beach, and also enjoyed a short hike to a waterfall for

Above: The scenic Pīpīwai Trail in Maui's Haleakalā National Park leads to the 400-foot Waimoku Falls.

Left: O'ahu's Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve, a Marine Life Conservation District, is an excellent place to snorkel and see tropical fish.



BILL BACHMANN / ALAMY

a cooling back massage. Refreshed and recharged, we pushed through the last several miles to Polihale. Pulling my kayak onto the soft, white sand, I felt victorious, and thankful for the helpful tailwinds. As I surveyed the three miles of continuous sand—the longest and widest stretch I have seen in the Hawaiian Islands—I knew I had arrived at a beach worthy of the journey.

SURFING

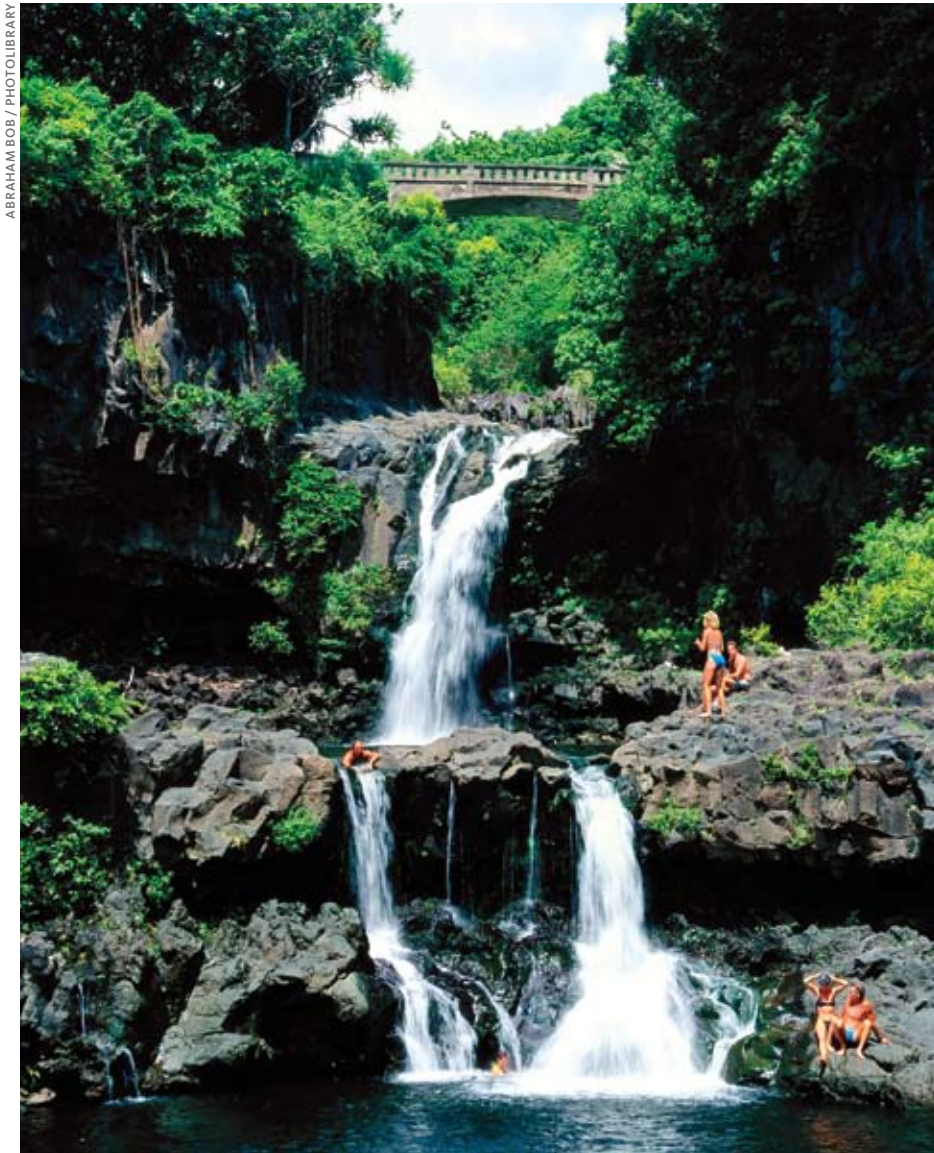
Susan learned how to surf on the gentle waves of Waikīkī—one of the best places on earth to learn—under the calm and patient tutelage of legendary surf champion Dane Kealoha. The winner of many prestigious events, including the World Cup of Surfing, the Pipeline Masters and the Duke Kahanamoku Classic, Kealoha is one of Hawai‘i’s most revered and influential surfers. We met him for a lesson at Waikīkī, where he went through the basics of



DEBRA BEHR / ALAMY

Above: The tranquil Hanalei River is a beautiful and peaceful place to kayak on Kaua‘i.

Below: The Seven Pools at ‘Ohe‘o Gulch are a popular swimming spot.



ABRAHAM BOB / PHOTOLIBRARY

Details

OUTFITTERS

Hawaiian Surfing Adventures

6250 Weke Road, Hanalei, Kaua‘i; 808-482-0749; www.hawaiiansurfing-adventures.com.

Kayak Kaua‘i 5-5070-a Kuhio Highway, Hanalei, Kaua‘i; 808-826-9844; www.kayakkauai.com.

Kona Diving Company 74-5615 Luhia Street, Kailua-Kona, Big Island; 808-331-1858; www.konadivingcompany.com.

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ROBDUNTON

Two SUP guides paddle their boards off the Big Island's Kona Coast.

surfing for Susan's benefit. After learning how to "pop" from belly to feet, we took our boards into the ocean. Susan quickly caught her first wave, while I practiced hanging five and ten—if only for a few moments. She and I enjoyed some of our longest rides together that day, and I experienced the friendliest surfers I'd ever encountered in the water.

On a later trip to Kaua'i, Susan was eager to go surfing again. Our room at the St. Regis Princeville Resort offered stellar views of Hanalei Bay and the mild summer waves peeling 500 yards from our room. We headed out for a closer look, booking a lesson at Hawaiian Surfing Adventures with two longtime friends.

The instructor took us to a spot where the surf was perfect for our group of mixed-level surfers, with 2- to 4-foot easy rollers over a sandy bottom. No rocks, reefs or crowds, and a verdant mountainous backdrop that was nothing short of inspirational. We paddled out in pairs to get personalized instruction, with each two who were awaiting their turn watching from a palm-thatched lean-to on the shore. The waves were well-spaced and surprisingly gentle, which made it relatively easy to paddle out. I got in a few good turns, riding the glass before the waves folded and

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Activities

Hawai'i offers sugary beaches, cobalt-blue water and frequent rainbows year-round, but some activities are better enjoyed at certain times of the year, so do your research when planning an active vacation here. For example, the calmest surf is found in summer, whale-watching generally occurs from January through March and the driest month for hiking is June.

STAND-UP PADDLE SURFING

SUP, a sport that's experiencing growing popularity, is a lot of fun. Longer, wider boards give you greater stability than traditional surfboards do. When starting out, look for calm beach breaks, bays or rivers, such as those at Kealahou Bay on the Big Island, Hanalei Bay and Hanalei River on Kaua'i, Kailua Bay and Waikiki on O'ahu, and Wailea on Maui.

KAYAKING

Kayaking adventures are available on all the islands. On the Big Island, one way to reach the excellent snorkeling at Kealahou Bay is by kayak. Kayakers can watch windsurfers and paddle to uninhabited islands from O'ahu's Kailua Beach Park. Great wildlife trips to see turtles, spinner dolphins and whales (in winter) leave from Makena and Honolua bays in Maui. Kaua'i offers guided kayaking trips not only at sea, but also up the Hanalei River and Wailua River.

SURFING

North-facing beaches generally deliver bigger surf, and the biggest waves come in winter. If you are a beginner or intermediate surfer, look for south- or west-facing breaks or plan your visit for the summer months. Novice surfers will enjoy Waikiki on O'ahu, Po'ipū Beach and Hanalei Bay on Kaua'i (in

summer), Pāpalaua Beach on Maui, and Kaha'u Beach Park on the Big Island. Many pro competitions are held on O'ahu's legendary North Shore, home to Pipeline, Waimea Bay and Sunset Beach.

HIKING

Hawai'i is home to eight areas managed by the National Park Service and more than 50 state parks. From short strolls along beaches to extraordinary day hikes and multiday treks, there is a lifetime of hiking opportunities on the islands. Recommended hiking areas include the moonscapish Haleakalā summit on Maui; Moku'āweoweo Caldera, Waipi'o Valley and Waimanu Valley on the Big Island; Mānoa Valley and Makiki Valley on O'ahu; and Waimea Canyon and the Kalalau Trail on Kaua'i. Some hikes, including the Kalalau Trail past a certain point, require permits.

SNORKELING

One of the simplest and most affordable pleasures on the islands is snorkeling. Simply pack (or rent) a mask, snorkel and fins, and hit the water. Watching the fish and (if you're lucky) green sea turtles is the thrill of a lifetime. Some of the most popular reefs are Kē'e Beach and Tunnels Beach on Kaua'i, Turtle Beach on Maui, Ka'awaloa Cove (accessible by kayak) on the Big

Island and Hanauma Bay on O'ahu.

SCUBA

Hawai'i offers year-round warm-water diving, and an array of reefs and lava-tube landscapes, as well as the chance to see green sea turtles and manta rays in the wild. Heralded dive sites, in addition to First Cathedral and Second Cathedral, include Molokini Crater on Maui, the amazing Yo-257 wreck and Shark's Cove on O'ahu, the Kona Coast on the Big Island and Sheraton's Caverns off Po'ipū on Kaua'i.

GOLF

Golf is another popular activity throughout the Hawaiian Islands, which are home to many stunning courses. To golf where the pros do, head to Maui's Kapalua Resort, where the SBS Championship will be played on the Plantation Course, January 3–9. The Kā'anapali Golf Courses, also on Maui, will host the Kā'anapali Champions Skins Game, January 29 and 30.

The possibilities for other adventures are nearly endless and include riding 4x4 quads, body-boarding, caving, fishing, hang gliding, helicopter rides, horseback riding, triathlon competitions, kite-boarding, mountain biking, outrigger canoeing, paddle-boarding, paragliding, whale-watching, windsurfing, sailing, skydiving and ziplines. Lonely Planet's *Hawaii* (ninth edition) has a new section devoted to adventure activities throughout the islands, or you can search online for any of these activities.

—R.D.

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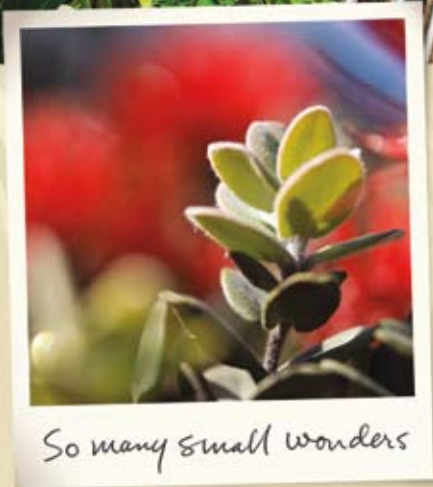
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turned to foam, and took in the idyllic scenery between sets.

The greatest thrill of the day came from watching Susan surf for the first time since the birth of our then-9-month-old son. After three or four tries, she paddled hard and caught a wave. She stood up, beaming, arms outstretched for balance, and rode the wave almost 75 yards to within a few feet of the beach. Hopping off, she gave me a jubilant wave and paddled back out to try again. The ride was the highlight of her trip. Later, after we

We lunched near the pool at the bottom of the falls, cooled by the moving water and mist, and drank in the beauty of this magnificent setting.

headed back to the St. Regis, I went out to surf the reefs offshore in pursuit of my own moment of glory.

HIKING

Getting the chance to watch the planet grow is an unusual thrill. I had a chance to do so south of Pāhoa on the Big Island, where a major lava flow is spilling into the sea. After hiking around the Kīlauea caldera and through the Thurston Lava Tube—a 600-foot-long tunnel formed by flowing lava—within Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, I drove to the end of Highway 130 and made the half-mile trek across rugged black lava to witness the flow. The recent lava had formed a large shelf along the shore—one that could break off at any time—and yellow security tape kept me and the other onlookers a ways back from the hissing glow. As night descended, the illumination grew, creating a stunning

sight beneath the stars that was well worth the short hike.

On Maui, one of my favorite hikes is the four-mile-round-trip Pīpīwai Trail in Haleakalā National Park. The trail is above 'Ohe'o Gulch, a spot popular for its natural swimming holes, known as The Seven Pools (although there are more than seven).

When Susan and I did the hike, we left our oceanfront cottage at the peaceful Hotel

Hāna–Maui early in the day to travel the short distance to the trail. We stopped briefly on the way to pick up a packable lunch, before setting off on foot.

The trail ascended steadily along the ridge of the gulch, past the 185-foot Makahiku Falls and an

array of other falls and swimming holes. After hiking for a while, we entered a towering bamboo forest that blanketed the mountainside. Except for the trail cutting through the dense forest, the trees grew together so tightly that they blocked out the sun and created impenetrable side walls. Trade

Graceful manta rays inhabit the warm Pacific waters of the Hawaiian Islands.



PHOTO RESOURCE HAWAII / ALAMY

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winds stirred the trees, making them sway and bump into each other, creating melodic tones.

The bamboo eventually gave way to less-dense forest, and soon we saw towering 400-foot Waimoku Falls spilling down the face of a sheer cliff ahead. We lunched near the pool at the bottom of the falls, cooled by the moving water and mist, and

Fiery lava flowing into the ocean is a dramatic sight on the Big Island.

drank in the beauty of this magnificent setting for some time before heading back.

SNORKELING

One of Hawai'i's most well-known snorkeling spots, and deservedly so, is O'ahu's Hanauma Bay Nature Preserve, a Marine Life Conservation District. The large basin of sparkling blue water, skirted by a broad reef, is known for its brilliantly colored tropical fish and abundance of green sea turtles, locally called *honu*. When Susan and I went snorkeling here, we were captivated by fish of many shapes and colors—particularly Susan, who grew up knowing only the Atlantic.

Two of my other favorite snorkeling spots in Hawai'i are Kealakekua Bay on the Big Island and the water off Kēē Beach on

Soon, another manta joined the first, then another. Eating has never been so elegant. The rays gracefully looped, swirled and weaved like aerobatic gliders.

Kaua'i. I recently visited Kēē Beach at sunset and found the area almost deserted. Earlier in the day, I had studied the beach's famed reef from the Kalalau Trail above, and heard snorkelers hiking the trail speak of spotting turtles. Now I strapped on my mask, snorkel and fins and kicked out.

Within two minutes, I was swimming above the reef's labyrinthine edges. Above the waterline, the jagged, verdant mountains the Nāpali Coast is famous for spilled into the sea, while below me swam a school of convict tangs and a large rectangular triggerfish (*humuhumunukunukuāpuā*). I also spotted a lone green sea turtle chewing algae off the reef. As the reef deepened and

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finger canyons descended into darker waters, I spotted more turtles—up to a dozen slow-moving, graceful animals feasting at day's end.

SCUBA
I've gone scuba diving every time I have visited Hawai'i, and two experiences stand out. The first was a night dive Susan and I took with Bottom Time Hawai'i (now the Kona Diving Company) to see giant Pacific manta rays off the Kona Coast on the Big Island. After the dive master turned on the numerous underwater flashlights filling a bin sitting on the ocean floor, 35 feet below the surface, to attract a swarm of plankton, Susan and I knelt nearby, as instructed, in hopes that the beams would attract some hungry manta



ROB DUNTON

rays. The plankton materialized on cue, and minutes passed, until out of the inky darkness soared a giant manta ray. The manta ray's wingspan must have been 10 feet across, and its vast maw was agape to take in as much plankton as possible. Soon,

A scuba diver swims through the tunnels and caverns of Second Cathedral off the coast of Lāna'i.



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another manta joined the first, then another. Eating has never been so elegant. The rays gracefully looped, swirled and weaved like aerobatic gliders. In the silence of the sea, I continued to kneel, in awe of the extraordinary animals and my proximity to them.

The second memorable excursion was to the Island of Lānaʻi and Second Cathedral, one of two popular dive spots (the other is First Cathedral) formed from massive underwater lava tubes. My passage there from Maui across the 'Auʻau Channel, aboard Maui Dive Shop's *Maka Koa*, was unusually calm, and soon we were skirting the shore of the Dole Plantation, once the largest pineapple plantation in the world, now open to the public as a visitor attraction.

After the expert crew hooked the vessel to a mooring on the island's south side, I geared up and strode into the warm, clear waters, over a reef visible 30 feet below. I dropped to the sandy bottom at 65 feet and entered one of Second Cathedral's many cave entrances. As if entering an actual cathedral from the street, the atmosphere darkened dramatically as I entered, but my eyes quickly adjusted. Numerous cracks and openings in the rock filtered celestial beams of light from the surface.

Our dive master shined a flashlight on the ceiling and illuminated an object that

resembled a Gothic chandelier but was in fact a sizable bush of black coral. Usually found below 150 feet, the coral was growing here at a much shallower depth. As we weaved in and out of the varied chambers, I watched schools of blue-striped snapper. I met a curious trumpetfish closer to the surface, and saw moray eels peering out from the cracks in the walls they call home. The setting was so magnificent, for a moment I wished I could stay.

It's a daydream I have every time I visit Hawai'i: I always wish I could stay. ▲

For more information about visiting the Hawaiian Islands, visit www.gohawaii.com.

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GETTING THERE



Alaska Airlines offers daily service to O'ahu, Maui, Kaua'i and the Big Island. To book an Alaska Airlines Vacations package to Hawai'i, go to alaskaair.com or call 800-468-2248.