

WINTER GETAWAYS

HAWAII

Low-key Kauai gets you to your feet, though not with baubles but with nature’s variety and an urge to preserve

BEYOND THE BEACH

By Kari Bodnarchuk
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

KAUAI — Winter had taken its toll. Before my friend Sarah or I had a meltdown, we decided to escape to Hawaii’s Garden Island to recharge. It took no time to adjust our internal clocks to the rhythm and pace of island life. But after a couple of days of swimming and tuning out everything except what time we needed to flip over, the allure of Kauai’s scenery wooed us off our beach blankets.

Few places on earth offer the visual splendor and natural diversity of this Pacific oasis. In an area half the size of Rhode Island, Kauai has lush, fluted sea cliffs that rise 3,000 feet above the ocean, the largest tropical reef in Hawaii, a natural wonder dubbed the “Grand Canyon of the Pacific” by Mark Twain, and



43 white-sand beaches that are open to the public, whether they are located in front of a chichi resort or at the end of a dirt lane.

Although it’s fourth among the eight biggest Hawaiian islands, Kauai has maintained a cozy, intimate feel. Only about 3 percent of the land has been developed, mostly within earshot of ocean waves, and no building can rise higher than a palm tree, or four stories. Locals have also ensured that the charming one-lane bridges won’t be widened to make way for tour buses or construction trucks.

It’s possible to drive around the island in a few hours, not counting stops, but you’ll need a week to explore all the towns and scenery along the way. This year, visitors can find dynamite

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PHOTOS BY KARI BODNARCHUK/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

The often rugged Kalalau Trail on Kauai’s Na Pali coast is a 22-mile round trip over volcanic rock, beside the Pacific Ocean, and amid greenery and flora like this bloom.

GRENADA

An island with lots to do, including reinvent itself

By Nectee Regis
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

ST. GEORGE’S — “Watch out! Get back!”

It took a moment to register that the warnings were directed at me, as I blissfully paddled through the crystalline pool at the base of Annandale Falls. I ducked beneath a rocky ledge just in time to avoid being hit by a human torpedo, one of a group of local young men called Annandale Jumpers who leap from a cliff above the 50-foot-high falls to entertain visitors and make money.

There are a half-dozen of so waterfalls on the tropical West Indian island of Grenada, which lies 100 miles north of Venezuela at the southern end of the Grena-

dines. With only three days to explore its many charms, I had chosen to visit the most easily accessible waterfall, not far off a winding road in the 3,800-acre Grand Etang National Park. I was rethinking my decision to visit this popular site when the jumper broke the surface of the water.

“How can I stay in touch with a beautiful woman like you?” he asked.

It was then I decided that even the most popular parts of

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A jumper at Annandale Falls, about 50 feet high; Bel Aire Plantation’s villas and cottages overlook the bay; and the fishing village of Gouyave.



PHOTOS BY NECEE REGIS/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

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Cattle, kayaks, and a coastal trail of thrills

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deals on everything from surfing lessons and catamaran trips to lodging at some of the island's best beach hotels and cottages. (Avoid deals that seem too good. We rented a jalopy from a no-name shop and soon realized the cars were of questionable road-worthiness and legal status.)

► **GARDEN SPOTS**
A gallery of Kauai vantage points at boston.com/travel.

When planning your route, keep in mind that the "ring road" doesn't completely encircle the island, due to the impenetrable cliffs and the canyon on the west coast. Waimea Canyon, which is accessible from the southwestern side of the island, is well worth exploring, whether you hike into this gaping, red-rock wonder or drive up the magnificent, winding road to Waimea Canyon Lookout. From here, you can peer into gorges carved by the Waimea River 3,567 feet below.

Since it was March, westerly swells prevented us from kayaking along the Na Pali Coast. Instead, we drove to the east coast, rented a two-person kayak, and spent a day exploring the placid Wailua River, an ideal outing even for families with small children. The most popular round-trip route includes an easy 4-mile paddle and 2-mile hike through a wonderful, jungle-like forest that makes it clear why scenes for "Raiders of the Lost Ark" and "Jurassic Park" were shot on this island.

After launching within sight of the pounding Pacific, we followed the mango-lined river upstream, passing Kamokila Hawaiian Village, a re-created village that's open for tours, several excellent rope swings, and a path leading to the Fern Grotto, an impressive lava rock cave. The riverside embankments here are so dense you probably won't be able to spot the wild roosters scurrying through the bush, but you will definitely hear them.

Turn right heading up a small tributary (the kayak shop sup-

plies maps) and look for a trailhead on your left. From here, a path leads through a thick forest of tangled roots and vines to a U-shaped gully with a 120-foot waterfall, Wailele Mea Huna, or "Secret Falls." Soak in the small man-made pools, which are formed by rings of volcanic rocks, or go for a swim in the larger pool.

"The power of it is intense!" Sarah said after swimming beneath the falls. "It takes your breath away."

We spent the next few days exploring the north coast, poking around shops in laid-back Hanalei, taking a surf lesson from a 21-year-old who had been riding waves since he was 2, and visiting the Hanalei Farmers' Market just west of town. While Sarah took a Hatha class at Yoga Hanalei one afternoon, I drove out to the Kilauea Point National Wildlife Reserve and Lighthouse, the westernmost lighthouse in the United States, 10 miles east of town.

From a viewpoint 295 feet above the Pacific, I could see humpbacks feeding offshore after their annual migration from Alaska. Dozens of red-footed boobies, albatross, and great frigate birds hovered overhead, catching air currents or looking for a good landing spot along the cliffs.

Wanting to do something completely atypical for a Hawaiian vacation, we signed up for a cattle drive at Princeville Ranch Stables on the hilly north-central coast. This historic ranch, dating from 1831, has 500 head of cattle which are moved to different pastures every week or two. Riders of all abilities can pretend they are paniolos, or Hawaiian cowboys, and help round them up.

"Each new pasture is like a fresh buffet," said Sue Reghi, our trail guide, who also leads horseback tours to a nearby waterfall and ocean bluff.

We spent more than an hour searching for the elusive cattle, which graze in large pastures on the 2,500-acre ranch.

"Hep, hep, hep," yelled Reghi, using a traditional round-'em-up call. "Heeep, hep, hep."



PHOTOS BY KARI BODNARCHUK/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Residents collect salt from ocean water at Salt Pond Beach on Kauai's south side. Princeville Ranch offers cattle drives and an hour's meander along an ocean bluff.

We trotted through rolling fields of fountain grass, past fences where deep-purple jet berries grew, and spotted rainbow eucalyptus trees that were brought here from Australia — but no cows. Reghi gave us riding tips along the way and pointed out the mountains, identifying them like constellations.

We eventually found the herd at the far end of a tree-dotted meadow. We spread out and walked our horses around the cows and their newborn calves, rounding them up and gently guiding them into a neighboring pasture.

"We don't want the calves to get trampled or separated, so we want them all walking, not running," Reghi explained.

The cattle drive wasn't quite the dust-kicking, high-octane activity we had envisioned, but it was a great day to be out riding in the tropical sun.

Where we did find high adventure was along the Na Pali Coast. This rugged, windswept area is a must-see and the only way to explore it is by boat, helicopter, or on foot. You can get a



taste of it by doing the 2-mile round-trip hike from Ke'e Beach, where the Kuhio Highway dead-ends on the island's northwestern tip, to the rocky cove at Hanakapi'ai. This option involves a 500-foot climb and descent in either direction along a wide and well-maintained trail that's often muddy and covered with palm leaves for traction.

With camping gear and an overnight permit in hand, we chose the long route, a 22-mile round-trip hike that would take us past Hanakapi'ai to one of the island's most secluded beaches, Kalalau Beach. To get there, we followed the Kalalau Trail through dense tropical forests where the trees had leaves the size of refrigerators and often drooped over the trail. We passed a mango tree that measured 23 feet in circumference and crossed open fields with purple orchids and pink starburst flow-

ers that looked like fuzzy, electric disco balls.

Although it's undoubtedly one of the world's most spectacular coastal hikes, the Kalalau Trail is also one of the trickiest. The narrow, single-track trail winds along precarious ledges perched hundreds of feet above the ocean, where every step counts. One section, "Crawler's Way," is so eroded there's no way you could cross it on hands and knees. There isn't even enough room to plant a hiking pole. Sure footing and nerves of steel are a must.

"It's a very empowering experience," a local hiker said. "Just be faithful in each step and trust. If you want to look at the view, stop and look."

We inched our way across this quarter-mile stretch in silence, focusing on the sliver of earth beneath our feet and blocking out the 400-foot drop a few inches to our right. The sense of relief and

If you go . . .

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rqkawaii.com
From \$116 if booked by Feb. 28.
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800-628-3004
hcr.com
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Where to eat
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808-826-9875
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Entrees \$19-\$35.
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What to do
Wailua Kayak and Canoe
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Self-guided: \$45 single kayak, \$75 double for 5-hour rentals, includes map, dry bag, and river orientation. Guided: \$55-\$90 per person for 4-hour trip.
Princeville Ranch Stables
54430 Kuhio Highway, Hanalei
808-826-6777
www.princevillerranch.com

accomplishment when we made it across was beyond measure.

A sprawling beach and magnificent views greeted us as we dropped down into the Kalalau Valley, a giant amphitheater flanked by cliffs and hanging valleys on one side and miles of open ocean on the other. Only one other person walked along the beach, collecting wood for an evening bonfire, and a lone surfer sliced across the waves off in the distance, having carried his board 11 miles for a solitary ride.

We pitched our tent near a sea cave and cooled off under a waterfall. Then we flopped on the beach and listened to the waves crashing along the shore, happy that the only white we could see around us was a mile of sun-baked sand, rather than the snow and fog we had left back home.

Kari Bodnarchuk can be reached at travelwriter@karib.us.

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