

HAWAII



PHOTOS BY KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

At Waimea Plantation Cottages visitors can explore the Oceanside property, which has a massive banyan tree. Below left, Secret Beach near Kilauea is an inviting spot for families.

Tot tested

Enjoying simple family pleasures on Kauai

BY KARI BODNARCHUK | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

POIPU — On Kauai activities can be scaled to match the size of the adventurer. The first time I visited the island, pre-parenthood and with a friend, we hiked deep into an exposed canyon and along a treacherous cliffside path, rounded up cattle by horseback on a sprawling ranch, and discovered secret beaches where we played in the big surf.

This time, with my husband and our 1- and 3-year-olds in tow, we hiked gentle trails along the lip of the canyon and wandered along beaches where we could fly a kite as we strolled. My daughter met her first horse at the ranch where I had played cowgirl, and we discovered beaches sheltered from the big surf by natural reefs. We also enjoyed the simple pleasures of eating shave ice, discovering community playgrounds, and finding cool kid-friendly places to eat.

Since our flight landed in Lihue, the island’s capital, at 9 p.m. (meaning midnight by our body clocks), we started our adventure in Poipu on the south shore. Our one-room condo at Castle Kiahuna Plantation was an hour from the airport and near some of the island’s best beaches.

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PHOTOS BY BONNIE TSUI FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

At Hualalai Spa, volcanic mud at the apothecary (left) and the outdoor pool.

Mom approved

Sinking into luxury at spas on the Big Island

BY BONNIE TSUI | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

KAILUA-KONA — Turbinado sugar and coconut for exfoliation, cocoa butter to moisturize, green tea to soothe and pick up free radicals, and a pinch of calendula and chamomile to calm.

As Kiyomi, my spa therapist at the Hualalai Spa, scooped and sifted among the glass jars, I leaned over the polished koa-wood counter and sniffed the air: A visit to the apothecary had never smelled so good. It was the start of what might be called a bespoke spa experience, with every ingredient chosen and hand-mixed with a stone mortar and pestle just for me.

I had come to the Big Island with my brother for a long weekend from San Francisco. He was burned out with work and wanting nothing but sleep and sun; I was six months pregnant and wanting nothing more than a little self-indulgence (my husband joked that I was taking a babymoon away from him and our 2-year-old son).

Because my expanding belly meant I couldn’t surf, it had been a little tough to throw my mind into vacation mode. But a few days of spa adventuring turned out

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Bountiful pleasures for even the youngest

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A local tipped us off to Baby Beach, where we spent hours searching for little critters in the tide pools, and watching giant breakers dissolve as soon as they hit the natural offshore reef, creating a calm and shallow swimming area that was ideal for wee ones. We found this unmarked beach tucked in a residential area off the road to the Spouting Horn blowhole. (From the Kukuīula Village shopping area, take Lawai Road south, turn left onto Hoonā Road and look for the narrow public-access beach path between 5152 and 5142 Hoonā Road.)

We had planned to go on a sunset cruise off the Poipu coast with Captain Andy’s, the only company that takes infants on the water (bring your own infant-size PFD), but the trip was canceled because of rough weather. Instead, we grabbed a \$3 burger from Bubba’s Burgers, an island favorite, and a shave ice from Uncle’s and wandered around the Wednesday-only “designer” farmers’ market. We sampled fresh papaya, tried lemon-coconut soup, and learned about local spices, all while listening to live Hawaiian music.

We spent one day exploring the Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort and Spa, which has a meandering river that links chlorine-free pools (they are purified using ozone) and runs near a saltwater lagoon with a man-made white sandy beach and real palm trees. We floated around the pools under towering palms, zipped down the 150-foot water slide, and checked out Camp Hyatt Kauai, which offers day and night sessions for anyone 3 to 12 who is potty trained.

Before heading west to Waimea, we swapped our full-size car for a Dodge Grand Caravan, a much-needed upgrade to better accommodate our stroller, suitcases, and rental gear. We had rented a baby gate for the week from Kauai Baby Rentals, which proved invaluable in one cottage, where we needed to keep curious little people out of their en suite bathroom.

You can rent anything from an exersaucer to a crib, backpack carrier, double stroller, or portable swing from Kauai Baby Rentals. The well-cared-for equipment gets delivered to the



KARI BODNARCHUK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

At Kee Beach on the island of Kauai’s northwestern-most point, spectacular sunsets entice young and older visitors to keep wading into the balmy evenings.

airport or your hotel room and then scooped up at the end of your stay, even if you change hotels as we did.

Halfway to Waimea, we made a quick stop at Brick Oven Pizza in Kalaheo, a popular family restaurant that serves an all-you-can-eat pizza, pasta, salad, and dessert buffet on Monday and Thursday nights. Another big draw: Children get a hunk of pizza dough to play with.

At Waimea Plantation Cottages, our century-old two-room cottage overlooked the ocean and a grassy area that proved perfect for barefoot kite flying or kicking around a beach ball. We ate meals on the sprawling front porch while geckos darted around us and we fell asleep to the sounds of ocean waves.

One day in Waimea, we grabbed a delicious take-away meal from Wrangler’s Steakhouse, called a kau kau tin lunch, with shrimp and veggie tempura, steamed rice, and beef teriyaki packaged in a three-tiered lunch tin. Then we left the 89-degree sticky weather behind and drove 3,500 feet up to Kokee State Park, where it was a refreshing 22 degrees cooler. Stop at the Kokee Museum Visitor and Activity Center to see a small exhibit on the area’s bird, animal, and plant life, and its geological history, and to find out about trails suitable for children.

A volunteer recommended the Pihea Trail at the very end of Kokee Road, just beyond the Kalalau Overlook, and it turned out to be my favorite of the many hikes I’ve done in this area. The red and lumpy dirt-packed trail followed a ridge with peekaboo views of the Alakai Swamp on our right and sweeping views of the Kalalau Valley with its lush fluted cliffs to our left — the best taste of the Na Pali coast you will get without doing the actual Kalalau Trail, or hopping in a helicopter or boat.

The Pihea Trail ranged from about 10 to 40 feet wide, but with no guardrails or fences and steep drops on either side, we put the baby in a backpack carrier and kept a firm grip on our daughter (strollers can’t maneuver the bumpy, uneven path). The trail descends for one-quarter mile and then gently climbs for three-quarters of a mile to a lookout.

Don’t leave the area without stopping at Waimea Canyon Lookout in nearby Waimea Canyon State Park. Follow the stroller-friendly path up to a platform from which you can see the expansive red-rock canyon, understandably dubbed the Grand Canyon of the Pacific by Mark Twain. Look for tall waterfalls plunging off the canyon’s steep walls.

A big hit with our daughter was the Kamalani Playground in Lydgate Park just south of

Kapaa on the east coast. The sprawling wooden structure, built by more than 7,000 local volunteers, has slides, a fireman’s pole, tires and rope netting to scramble across, and more nooks and crannies than a coral reef.

When the kids needed a break, we drove a few miles north to Coconut Coasters in Kapaa, where we rented cruiser bikes and a double bike trailer that came with a snugly padded insert for our baby. We then pedaled 3.5 miles north of town on a multipurpose paved trail that runs along the coast, called Ke Ala Hele Makalae. The trail took us by popular beaches and numerous “comfort stations,” which are covered picnic areas, and then led out of town along an elevated pathway that gave us supreme views.

One of our daughter’s favorite swimming holes was the keiki (“kids”) pool at the Westin Princeville Ocean Resort Villas, which had a mini slide, four giant squishy turtles that squirted water, and a depth of only 1.5 feet. We liked the toy library, where children can check out anything from Candy Land and checkers to DVDs, and the other family-friendly amenities. The hotel provided a real crib, a diaper genie, and a high chair for free, and it offered a complimentary luggage service upon arrival. The hotel also has a Keiki Club for potty-trained youngsters. Here, children can make

If you go . . .

Where to stay
Castle Kiahuna Plantation
Koloa
808-742-2200
kiahunaplantation.com
Rates from \$431, but as low \$183 with AAA/AARP discount.
Aston Waimea Plantation Cottages
866-774-2924
waimeaplantationcottages.com
Rates from \$315.
Westin Princeville
808-827-8700
westinprinceville.com
Rates from \$255 for a studio villa.
OHANA Honolulu Airport Hotel
866-956-4262
ohanahotelsoahu.com
Rates from \$119 per night.

Where to eat
Bubba’s Burgers
Poipu, Kapaa, and Hanalei
808-826-7839 (Hanalei)
bubbaburger.com
Wrangler’s Steakhouse
Waimea
808-338-1218
wranglersrestaurant.com
Kao kao tin \$11.95.
Brick Oven Pizza
Kalaheo
808-332-8561
brickovenpizzahi.com
A no-frills eatery with an all-

you-can-eat buffet Monday and Thursday nights: adults \$14.95, 5-10 \$9.95, 4 and under free.
Uncle’s Shave Ice
Koloa
808-742-2364
unclesKauai.com
What to do
Kokee Museum Visitor and Activity Center
808-335-9975
kokee.org
Coconut Coasters
Kapaa
808-822-7368
coconutcoasters.com
Rates: \$22/\$25 for half/full day on a Trek 3-speed cruiser; \$15/\$18 for half/full day for a kids’ bike trailer; kids and tandem bikes also available.
Princeville Ranch Kids’ Adventure Center
888-955-7669
princevilleranch.com
Adventure center: \$89 per child per day. Kids must be potty trained. Private/semiprivate horseback riding lesson \$40 for ½ hour, \$50 for 1 hour.
Na Aina Kai
Kilauea
808-828-0525
naainakai.org
Guided 2-hour tours: adults \$35, children under 13 \$20.

leis and sand art, go for nature walks, feed the fish, and dunk in the pool, among other adventures.

Princeville Ranch, just down the road, doesn’t run cattle drives anymore, but moms and dads can go for horseback riding tours while children attend a new Kids’ Adventure Center designed for those 4 years and 8 months to 11 years old. The program, which runs weekdays during school breaks, includes pony rides, a petting zoo, hikes in the “wild pig forest,” bug collecting, games such as hopscotch using Hawaiian numbers, and a chance to learn about horses. Children 4 and older can also take private or semiprivate horseback riding lessons.

Prearrange a tour at nearby Na Aina Kai Botanical Gardens and Sculpture Park, a lush wonderland. A guide leads families around the 12-acre formal gardens, where kids can feed koi in

a lagoon, wander through a hedge maze, see dozens of playful life-size bronze sculptures, and explore the children’s garden, which has everything from a Navajo settlement with a covered wagon to a tropical jungle gym with bridges, tunnels, and slides.

We spent our last couple of days watching sunsets at Kee Beach on the island’s northwestern-most point, hiking through forests to idyllic places like Secret Beach near Kilauea, and playing in the shallow waters of Hanalei Bay.

Our daughter still talks about the trip, and we have promised her more adventures that suit her size next time: taller waves, longer hikes, and a bigger shave ice. We heard there is even another giant playground on the island.

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