

Fun in the Surf & Sun

This is why you've come to Hawaii—the sun, the sand, and the surf. In this chapter, we'll tell you about the best beaches, from where to soak up the rays to where to plunge beneath the waves for a fish's-eye view of the underwater world. We've covered a range of ocean activities on the Big Island, as well as our favorite places and outfitters for these marine adventures. Also in this chapter are things to do on dry land, including the best spots for hiking and camping and the greatest golf courses.

1 Beaches

THE KONA COAST

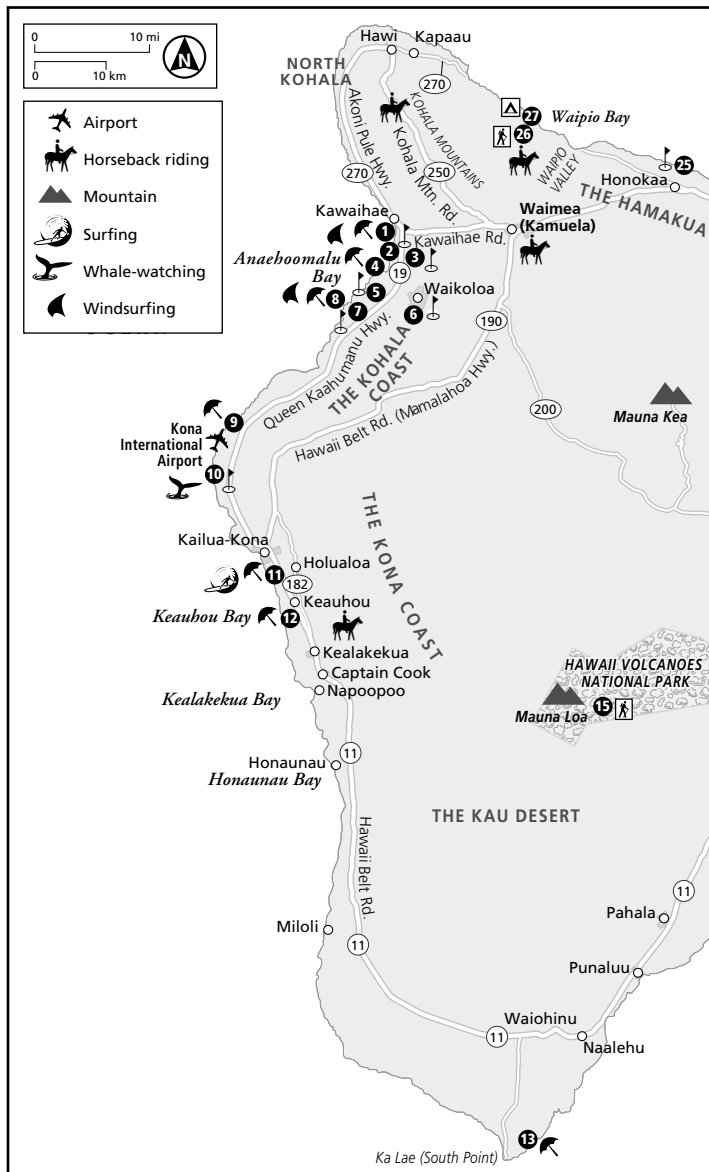
KAHALUU BEACH PARK ★★

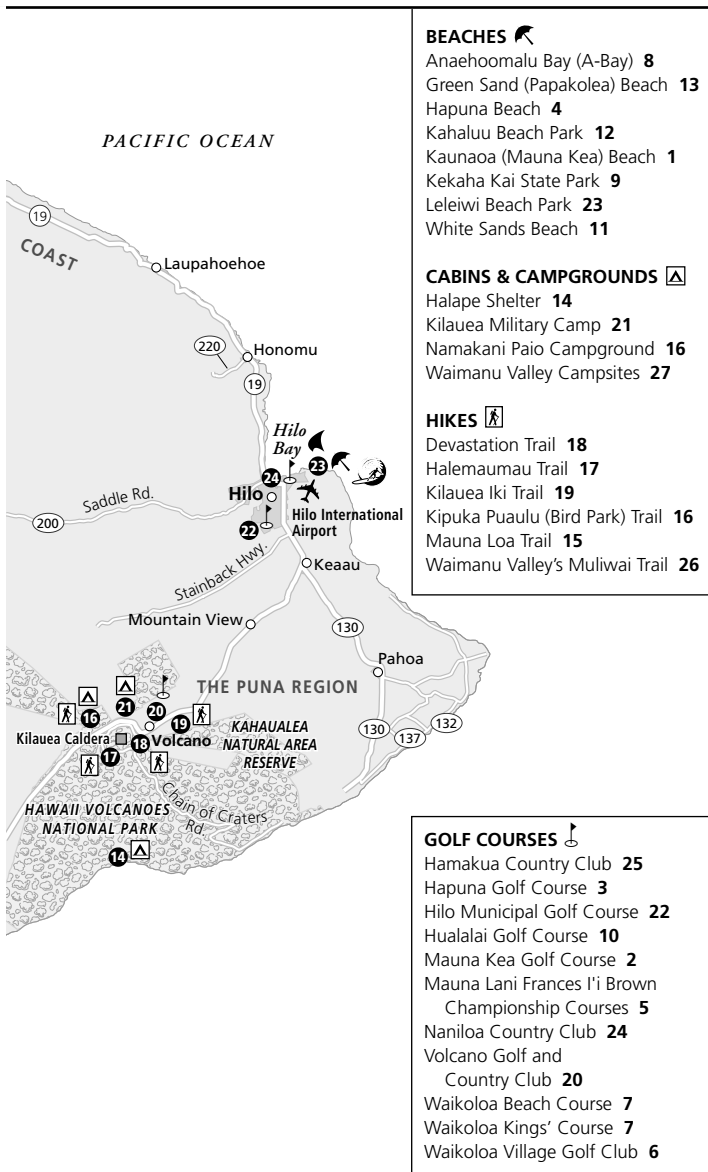
This is the most popular beach on the Kona Coast; these reef-protected lagoons attract 1,000 people a day almost year-round. Kahaluu is the best all-around beach on Alii Drive, with coconut trees lining a narrow salt-and-pepper sand shore that gently slopes to turquoise pools. The schools of brilliantly colored tropical fish that weave in and out of the reef make this a great place to snorkel. In summer, it's also an ideal spot for children and beginning snorkelers; the water is so shallow that you can just stand up if you feel uncomfortable. But in winter, there's a rip current when high surf rolls in; look for the lifeguard warnings.

KEKAHA KAI STATE PARK (KONA COAST STATE PARK) ★

This beach is about 2 miles north of the airport on Queen Kaahumanu Highway; turn left at a sign pointing improbably down a bumpy road. You won't need a four-wheel-drive vehicle to make it down here—just drive slowly and watch out for potholes. At the end you'll find 5 miles of shoreline with a half-dozen long, curving beaches and a big cove on Mahaiula Bay, as well as archaeological and historical sites. The series of well-protected coves is excellent for swimming, and there's great snorkeling and diving offshore; the big winter waves attract surfers.

Beaches & Outdoor Activities on the Big Island





PACIFIC OCEAN

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Facilities include restrooms, picnic tables, and barbecue pits; you'll have to bring your own drinking water. The beach is open daily from 8am to 8pm (the closing is strictly enforced, and there's no overnight camping).

WHITE SANDS BEACH ☼

Don't blink as you cruise Alii Drive, or you'll miss White Sands Beach. This small, white-sand pocket beach about 4½ miles south of Kailua-Kona is sometimes called Disappearing Beach because it does just that, especially at high tide or during storms. It vanished completely when Hurricane Iniki hit in 1991, but it's now back in place. (At least it was the last time I looked.) On calm days the water is perfect for swimming and snorkeling. Locals use the elementary waves to teach their children how to surf and boogie-board. In winter the waves swell to expert levels, attracting surfers and spectators. Facilities include restrooms, showers, lifeguards, and a small parking lot.

THE KOHALA COAST

ANAHOOMALU BAY (A-BAY) ★★☼

The Big Island makes up for its dearth of beaches with a few spectacular ones, like Anaehoomalu, or A-Bay, as the locals call it. This popular gold-sand beach, fringed by a grove of palms and backed by royal fish ponds still full of mullet, is one of Hawaii's most beautiful. It fronts the Marriott Waikoloa Beach Resort and is enjoyed by guests and locals alike (it's busier in summer, but doesn't ever get truly crowded). The beach slopes gently from shallow to deep water; swimming, snorkeling, diving, kayaking, and windsurfing are all excellent here. Equipment rental and snorkeling, scuba, and windsurfing instruction are available at the north end of the beach. At the far edge of the bay, snorkelers and divers can watch endangered green sea turtles line up and wait their turn to have small fish clean them. Facilities include restrooms, showers, picnic tables, and plenty of parking.

HAPUNA BEACH ★★☼

Just off Queen Kaahumanu Highway, south of the Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel, lies this crescent of gold sand—big, wide, and ½ mile long. In summer, when the beach is widest, the ocean calmest, and the crowds biggest, this is the island's best beach for swimming, snorkeling, and bodysurfing. But beware of Hapuna in winter, when its thundering waves, strong rip currents, and lack of lifeguards can be dangerous. Facilities include A-frame cabins for camping, pavilions, restrooms, showers, and plenty of parking.

KAUNAOA BEACH (MAUNA KEA BEACH) ★★

Everyone calls this gold-sand beach Mauna Kea Beach (it's at the foot of Mauna Kea Beach Hotel), but its real name is Hawaiian for "native dodder," a lacy, yellow-orange vine that once thrived on the shore. A coconut grove sweeps around this golden crescent, where the water is calm and protected by two black-lava points. The sandy bottom slopes gently into the bay, which often fills with tropical fish, sea turtles, and manta rays, especially at night, when the hotel lights flood the shore. Swimming is excellent year-round, except in rare winter storms. Snorkelers prefer the rocky points, where fish thrive in the surge. Facilities include restrooms, showers, and ample parking, but there are no lifeguards.

HILO**LELEIWI BEACH PARK ★**

Hilo's beaches may be few, but Leleiwi is one of Hawaii's most beautiful. This unusual cove of palm-fringed black-lava tide pools fed by freshwater springs and rippled by gentle waves is a photographer's delight—and the perfect place to take a plunge. In winter, big waves can splash these ponds, but the shallow pools are generally free of currents and ideal for families with children, especially in the protected inlets at the center of the park. Leleiwi often attracts endangered sea turtles, making this one of Hawaii's most popular snorkeling spots. The beach is 4 miles out of town on Kalaniana'ole Avenue. Facilities include restrooms, showers, lifeguards, picnic pavilions, and paved walkways. There's also a marine-life exhibit here.

SOUTH POINT**GREEN SAND BEACH (PAPAKOLEA BEACH) ★**

Hawaii's famous green-sand beach is located at the base of Puu o Mahana, an old cinder cone spilling into the sea. The place has its problems: It's difficult to reach; the open bay is often rough; there are no facilities, fresh water, or shade from the relentless sun; and howling winds scour the point. Nevertheless, each year the unusual green sands attract thousands of oglers, who follow a well-worn four-wheel-drive-only road for 2½ miles to the top of a cliff, which you have to climb down to reach the beach. The sand is crushed olivine, a green semiprecious mineral found in eruptive rocks and meteorites. If the surf's up, check out the beach from the cliff's edge; if the water's calm, it's generally safe to swim.

To get to Green Sand Beach from the boat ramp at South Point, follow the four-wheel-drive trail; even if you have a four-wheel-drive

vehicle, you may want to walk, because the trail is very, very bad in parts. Make sure you have appropriate closed-toed footwear: tennis shoes or hiking boots. The trail is relatively flat, but you're usually walking into the wind as you head toward the beach. The beginning of the trail is lava. After the first 10 to 15 minutes of walking, the lava disappears and the trail begins to cross pastureland. After about 30 to 40 minutes more, you'll see an eroded cinder cone by the water; continue to the edge, and there lie the green sands below.

The best way to reach the beach is to go over the edge from the cinder cone. (It looks like walking around the south side of the cone would be easier, but it's not.) From the cinder cone, go over the overhang of the rock, and you'll see a trail.

Going down to the beach is very difficult and treacherous, as you'll be able to see from the top. You'll have to make it over and around big lava boulders, dropping down 4 to 5 feet from boulder to boulder in certain spots. And don't forget that you'll have to climb back up. Look before you start; if you have any hesitation, don't go down (you get a pretty good view from the top, anyway).

Warning: When you get to the beach, watch the waves for about 15 minutes and make sure they don't break over the entire beach. If you walk on the beach, always keep one eye on the ocean and stick close to the rock wall. There can be strong rip currents here, and it's imperative to avoid them.

2 Watersports

If you want to rent beach toys, like snorkel gear or boogie boards, the beach concessions at all the big resorts, as well as tour desks and dive shops, offer equipment rentals and sometimes lessons for beginners. The cheapest place to get great rental equipment is **Snorkel Bob's**, in the parking lot of Huggo's Restaurant at 75-5831 Kahakai Rd., at Alii Drive, Kailua-Kona (☎ 808/329-0770; www.snorkelbob.com).

BOATING

For fishing charters, see "Sportfishing: The Hunt for Granders," later in this chapter.

Body Glove Cruises ⚓ The *Body Glove*, a 55-foot trimaran that carries up to 100 passengers, runs an adventurous sail-snorkel-dive cruise at a reasonable price. You'll be greeted with fresh Kona coffee, fruit, and breakfast pastries; you'll then sail north of Kailua to Pawai Bay, a marine preserve where you can snorkel, scuba dive, swim, or

just hang out on the deck for a couple of hours. After a buffet deli lunch spread, you might want to take the plunge off the boat's waterslide or diving board before heading back to Kailua Pier. The boat departs daily from the pier at 9am and returns at 1:30pm. The only thing you need to bring is a towel; snorkeling equipment (and scuba equipment, if you choose to dive) is provided. **Money-saving tip:** The afternoon trip is \$35 cheaper for adults.

Kailua Pier. ☎ 800/551-8911 or 808/326-7122. www.bodyglovehawaii.com. Morning cruise \$94 adults, \$54 children 6–12, free for children under 6; afternoon cruise \$59 adults, \$39 children 6–12, free for children under 6; additional \$43 for certified scuba divers with own equipment (\$53 without own equipment) and \$63 additional for introductory scuba; whale-watching with Greenpeace Hawaii (Dec–Apr) \$59 adults, \$37 children 6–12, free for children under 6.

Captain Beans' Cruises Captain Beans' runs Kona's most popular dinner cruise on a 150-foot catamaran, which can accommodate about 290 passengers. The 2-hour cruise includes dinner, cocktails, dancing, and Hawaiian entertainment.

Kailua Pier. ☎ 800/831-5541 or 808/329-2955. www.robertshawaii.com. \$61 adults, \$34 children ages 4–11.

Captain Dan McSweeney's Year-Round Whale-Watching Adventures ★★ Hawaii's most impressive visitors—45-foot humpback whales—return to the waters off Kona every winter. Captain Dan McSweeney, a whale researcher for more than 25 years, works daily with the whales, so he has no problem finding them. Frequently, he drops an underwater microphone into the water so you can listen to their songs, or uses an underwater video camera to show you what's going on. In humpback season—roughly December to April—Dan makes two 3-hour trips daily. From July 1 to December 20, he schedules one morning trip on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday to look for pilot, sperm, false killer, melon-headed, pygmy killer, and beaked whales. Captain Dan guarantees a sighting, or he'll take you out again for free. No cruises in May and June.

Honokohau Harbor. ☎ 888/WHALE6 or 808/322-0028. www.ilovewhales.com. \$60 adults, \$40 children under 11.

Captain Zodiac If you'd prefer to take a **snorkel cruise to Kealakekua Bay** in a small boat, go in Captain Zodiac's 16-passenger, 24-foot inflatable rubber life raft. The boat takes you on a wild ride 14 miles down the Kona Coast to Kealakekua, where you'll spend about an hour snorkeling in the bay and then enjoy snacks and beverages at the picnic snorkel site. Trips are twice daily, from 8am to 12:15pm and from 12:45 to 5pm. **Warning:** Pregnant

women and those with bad backs should avoid this often-bumpy ride.

Gentry's Marina, Honokohau Harbor. ☎ 808/329-3199. www.captainzodiac.com. \$82 adults, \$67 children 3–12.

Fair Wind Snorkeling and Diving Adventures ★★ ★ (Kids)

One of the best ways to snorkel Kealakekua Bay, the marine-life preserve that's one of the best snorkel spots in Hawaii, is on Fair Wind's half-day **sail-and-snorkel cruise to Kealakekua**. The company's 60-foot catamaran holds up to 100 passengers. The morning cruise leaves from Keauhou Bay at 9am and returns at 1:30pm, and includes breakfast, lunch, snorkel gear, and lessons; it goes for \$99 for adults. The afternoon cruise is a little shorter and a little cheaper: It runs from 2 to 5:30pm and includes snacks, sailing, and snorkeling, at a cost of \$65 for adults.

The deluxe afternoon cruise trip, from 2 to 6pm, with lunch of cheeseburgers, garden burgers, hot dogs, pasta salad, fruit, and cookies, plus the same great snorkeling/sailing, is \$93 adults.

78-7130 Kaleiopapa St., Kailua-Kona. ☎ 800/677-9461 or 808/322-2788. www.fair-wind.com. \$65–\$99 adults, \$39–\$59 children 4–12 (prices vary depending on cruise).

Kamanu Charters ★★ This sleek catamaran, 36 feet long and 22 feet wide, provides a laid-back sail-snorkel cruise from Honokohau Harbor to Pawai Bay. The 3½-hour trip includes a tropical lunch (deli sandwiches, chips, fresh island fruit, and beverages), snorkeling gear, and personalized instruction for first-time snorkelers. The *Kamanu* sails Monday through Saturday (weather permitting) at 9am and 1:30pm; it can hold up to 24 people.

Honokohau Harbor. ☎ 800/348-3091 or 808/329-2021. www.kamanu.com. \$75 adults, \$45 children under 12.

BODY BOARDING (BOOGIE BOARDING) & BODYSURFING

On the Kona side of the island, the best beaches for body boarding and bodysurfing are **Hapuna Beach**, **White Sands Beach**, and **Kekaha Kai State Park**. On the east side, try **Leleiwi Beach**.

KAYAKING

OCEAN KAYAKING Imagine sitting at sea level, eye-to-eye with a turtle, a dolphin, even a whale—it's possible in an oceangoing kayak. Anyone can kayak in calm waters: Just get in, find your balance, and paddle. After a few minutes of instruction and a little

practice in a calm area (like the lagoon in front of the **King Kamehameha's Kona Beach Hotel**), you'll be ready to explore. Beginners can practice their skills in **Kailua** and **Kealakekua bays**; intermediates might try paddling from **Honokohau Harbor** to **Kekaha Kai Beach Park**; the **Hamakua Coast** is a challenge for experienced kayakers.

You can rent one- and two-person kayaks (and other ocean toys) from **Aloha Kayak** ★★ (☎ 877/322-1441 or 808/322-2868; www.alohakayak.com) for \$20 for a half-day single and \$30 double (\$25 for a full-day single and \$40 for a full-day double). They also have a unique tour from Keauhou Bay and the Captain Cook Monument, with Hawaiian guides showing you sea caves and snorkeling areas full of fish and turtles. The tours are either 4 hours (\$65 adults, \$33 for children ages 12 and under) or 2½ hours (\$50 adults, \$25 children 12 and under) and include all equipment, beverages, snorkeling gear, and snacks.

FRESHWATER FLUMING Years ago, the best thing to do on a hot summer day was to grab an old inner tube and go “fluming” down the Kohala Sugar Plantation irrigation system. There were only two problems: You had to trespass to get to the elaborate ditch system, and the water was cold. But the opportunity to float past a pristine rainforest, over ravines, and under waterfalls was worth the risk of getting caught (and a numb rear end). You no longer have to worry about either problem. **Flumin' da Ditch** (☎ 877/449-6922 or 808/889-6922; www.flumindaditch.com) offers legal access to this North Kohala area by way of guided tours in high-tech, double-hulled inflatable kayaks, with knowledgeable guides talking story about the history, culture, and legends of the area. The tour includes snacks. When the operation first started years ago, it was fabulous, but on my last trip I was somewhat disappointed. To ensure a good trip, tell them you want to be in the kayak with the guide (otherwise you will miss out on all the history, culture, and so on). Wear a swimsuit or bring a change of clothing, because the kayaks pass under waterfalls and through water pouring in from the intake systems. The 2½-hour cruises are \$99 for adults, \$68 for kids 5 to 18. No experience is necessary, but children must be at least 5.

PARASAILING

Get a bird's-eye view of Hawaii's pristine waters with **UFO Parasail** (☎ 800/FLY-4UFO or 808/325-5836; www.ufoparasail.net). UFO offers parasail rides daily from 8am to 2pm from Kailua Pier. The cost is \$52 for the standard flight of 7 minutes of air time at 400

Frommer's Favorite Big Island Experiences

Creeping Up to the Ooze. Since Kilauea's ongoing eruption began in 1983, lava has been bubbling and oozing in a mild-mannered way that lets you walk right up to the creeping flow for an up-close encounter.

Going Underwater at Kealakekua Bay. The islands have lots of extraordinary snorkel and dive sites, but none is so easily accessible as mile-wide Kealakekua Bay, an uncrowded marine preserve on the South Kona Coast. Here, you can swim with dolphins, sea turtles, octopuses, and every species of tropical fish that calls Hawaii's waters home.

Discovering Old Hawaii at Puuhonua O Honaunau National Historical Park. Protected by a huge rock wall, this sacred Honaunau site was once a refuge for ancient Hawaiian warriors. Today you can walk the consecrated grounds and glimpse a former way of life in a partially restored 16th-century village, complete with thatched huts, canoes, forbidding idols, and a temple that holds the bones of 23 Hawaiian chiefs.

Stargazing from Mauna Kea. A jacket, beach mat, and binoculars are all you need to see every star and planet in this ultra-clean atmosphere, where the visibility is so keen that 11 nations have set up telescopes (two of them the biggest in the world) to probe deep space.

Watching for Whales. Humpback whales pass through waters off the Kona Coast every December through April. To spot them from shore, head down to the Keahole National Energy Lab, just south of Kona Airport, and keep your eyes peeled as you walk the shoreline. To get here, follow Queen Kaahumanu Highway (Hwy. 19) toward the Keahole airport; 6 miles outside of town, look for the sign NATURAL ENERGY LAB, and turn left. Just after the road takes a sharp turn to the right, there's a small paved parking area with restrooms; a beach trail is on the ocean side of the lot.

Savoring a Cup of Kona Coffee. It's just one of those things you have to do while you're on the Big Island. For a truly authentic cup of java, head upcountry to **Holuakoa Cafe**, on

Mamalaho Highway (Hwy. 180) in Holualoa (☎ 808/322-2233), where owner Meggi Worbach buys green coffee beans from local farmers, roasts and grinds them, and pours you the freshest cup of coffee you've ever had.

Hanging Out in Waipio Valley. Pack a picnic and head for this gorgeously lush valley that time forgot. Delve deep into the jungle on foot, comb the black-sand beach, or just laze the day away by a babbling stream, the tail end of a 1,000-foot waterfall.

Chasing Rainbows at Akaka Falls. When the light is right, a perfect prism is formed and a rainbow leaps out of this spectacular 442-foot waterfall, about 11 miles north of Hilo. Take time to roam through the surrounding rainforest, where you're sure to have close encounters with exotic birds, aromatic plumeria trees, and shocking red-torch ginger.

Gawking at the Day's Catch in Honokohau Harbor. Every afternoon between 4 and 5pm, local fishermen pull into the fuel dock to weigh in their big-game fish: 1,000-pound blue marlins, 150-pound yellowfin tunas, and plenty of scale-tipping mahimahi, *ono* (also known as wahoo), and others. Sit in the bleachers and check out these magnificent creatures.

Hunting for Petroglyphs. The majority of Hawaii's ancient rock carvings are found in the 233-acre Puako Petroglyph Archaeological District, near Mauna Lani Resort. The best time to go looking is in the cool early morning or late afternoon. There are more than 3,000 petroglyphs in this area alone—see how many you can spot!

Shopping at the Hilo Farmers Market. For a handful of dollars, you can buy a pound of rambutan (a sweet Indonesian fruit), a bouquet of tropical orchids, and a couple of tasty foot-long Hawaiian *lulau* (pork, chicken, or fish steamed in ti leaves). But be sure to arrive early—the market opens at sunrise—because many of the 60 or so vendors quickly sell out.

feet, and \$62 for a deluxe 10-minute ride at 800 feet. You can go up alone or with a friend; no experience is necessary. **Tip:** Take the early-bird special (when the light is fantastic and the price is right) at 8am for just \$47 (for 400 ft.) and \$57 (for 800 ft.).

SCUBA DIVING

The Big Island's leeward coast offers some of the best diving in the world; the water is calm, warm, and clear. Want to swim with fast-moving game fish? Try **Ulua Cave** at the north end of the Kohala Coast. There are nearly two dozen dive operators on the west side of the Big Island, plus a couple in Hilo. They offer everything from scuba certification courses to guided boat dives.

"This is not your mother or father's dive shop," says Jeff Kirschner, of the newly opened **BottomTime**, 74-5590 Luhia St. (☎ **866/GO-DIVEN** or 808/331-1858; www.bottomtimehawaii.com). "This is a dive shop for today's diver." Kirschner claims what sets BottomTime apart is their willingness to take their 34-foot catamaran (complete with showers, TV, and restrooms) to unusual dive sites, and "not those sites just 2 minutes from the mouth of the harbor." BottomTime also offers free introductory dives in enriched air (Nitrox) for \$130 and two-tank dives for \$110.

One of Kona's oldest dive shops, **Jack's Diving Locker**, 75-5819 Alii Dr. (☎ **800/345-4807** or 808/329-7585; www.jacksdivinglocker.com), has recently expanded their former 600-square-foot retail store into an 8,000-square-foot dive center with swimming pool (with underwater viewing windows), retail store, classrooms, full-service rentals, and a full-service sports diving and technical diving facility. They offer two-tank morning or sunset dives starting at \$95 per person for morning or \$115 for sunset dive with your own gear. Jack's also offers shore dives for those who tend to get seasick on a boat; the cost is \$55 per person for one tank, including gear. Plus they have the most extensive kids' program in the state, which ranges from swimming lessons (from infants 6 months old and up) to bubble-maker parties to kids' sea camps during school vacations.

HOT-LAVA DIVES Hilo's **Nautilus Dive Center**, 382 Kamehameha Ave., between Open Market and the Shell Gas Station (☎ **808/935-6939**; www.nautilusdivehilo.com), offers a very unusual opportunity for advanced divers: diving where the lava flows into the ocean. "Sometimes you can feel the pressure from the sound waves as the lava explodes," owner Bill De Rooy says. "Sometimes you have perfect visibility to the color show of your life." As we went to press, these hot lava dives were on hold (an unstable

collapse of a recent lava field sent 20 acres of lava into the ocean; fortunately, no one was injured). Call to see if the dives have resumed (\$150–\$200 for a two-tank dive).

NIGHT DIVING WITH MANTA RAYS ★★ A little less risky—but still something you’ll never forget—is swimming with manta rays on a night dive. These giant, harmless creatures, with wingspans that reach up to 14 feet, glide gracefully through the water to feed on plankton. **Kona Coast Divers**, Honokahau Harbor (☎ 800/KOA-DIVE or 808/329-8802; www.konacoastdivers.com) offers a “Manta Ray Madness” dive that takes place about 5 minutes north of Honokahau Harbor (just a 20-min. boat ride) at a depth of 30 to 50 feet. Everyone from beginners through experts will love this dive. They do not guarantee that these wild creatures will show up every night, but they do boast a more than 90% sightings record. The cost for this one-tank dive is \$99. If they are booked, try **Sandwich Isle Divers**, 75–5729 Alii Dr., in the back of the Kona Market Place (☎ 888/743-3483 or 808/329-9188; www.sandwichisledivers.com). They also offer one-tank nighttime manta dives for \$75, including equipment (\$65 if you have your own gear).

WEEKLONG DIVES If you’re looking for an all-diving vacation, you might think about spending a week on the 80-foot **Kona Aggressor II** ★ (☎ 800/344-5662 or 808/329-8182; http://pac-aggressor.com), a live-aboard dive boat that promises to provide you with unlimited underwater exploration, including day and night dives, along 85 miles of the Big Island’s coastline. Ten divers are accommodated in five staterooms. Guided dives are available, but as long as you’re certified, just log in with the dive master and you’re free to follow the limits of your dive computer. It’s \$2,195 for 7 days (without gear), which includes excellent accommodations and all meals. Rental gear, from cameras (starting at \$175 a week) to dive gear (\$120) to computers (\$100), is available.

SNORKELING

If you come to Hawaii and don’t snorkel, you’ll miss half the fun. The year-round calm waters along the Kona and Kohala coasts are home to spectacular marine life. Some of the best snorkeling areas on the Kona-Kohala coasts include **Hapuna Beach Cove**, at the foot of the Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel, a secluded little cove where you can snorkel with schools of yellow tangs, needlefish, and green sea turtles. But if you’ve never snorkeled in your life, **Kahaluu Beach Park** is the best place to start. Just wade in and look down at the schools of fish in the bay’s black-lava tide pools. Another “hidden” snorkeling spot is

off the rocks north of the boat launch ramp at **Honaunau Bay**. Other great snorkel sites include **White Sands Beach, Kekaha Kai State Park**, and **Ho'okena, Honaunau, Puako**, and **Spencer** beach parks.

In addition to **Snorkel Bob's**, mentioned in the intro to this section, you can also rent gear from **Kona Coast Divers** (🌿), Honokohau Marina, Kailua-Kona (☎ 808/329-8802; www.konacoastdivers.com).

SNORKELING CRUISES TO KEALAKEKUA BAY (★★★)

Probably the best snorkeling for all levels can be found in **Kealakekua Bay**. The calm waters of this underwater preserve teem with a wealth of marine life. Coral heads, lava tubes, and underwater caves all provide an excellent habitat for Hawaii's vast array of tropical fish, making mile-wide Kealakekua the Big Island's best accessible spot for snorkeling and diving. Kealakekua is reachable only by boat; in addition to **Fair Wind** (p. 106) and **Captain Zodiac** (p. 105), check out **Sea Quest Snorkeling and Rafting Adventures** (☎ 808/329-RAFT; www.seaquesthawaii.com), which offers unique coastal adventures through sea caves and lava tubes on the Kona Coast, as well as snorkeling plunges into the ocean at the Historic Place of Refuge in Honaunau and at the Captain Cook Monument at Kealakekua. The six-passenger, rigid-hull, inflatable rafts can go where larger boats can't. The 4-hour morning tour is \$85 adults and \$72 children, while the 3-hour afternoon tour goes for \$64 adults and \$54 children. During whale season they have a 3-hour whale-watching cruise for \$53 adults and children. They do not allow children under 6 years old, pregnant women, or people with bad backs.

SNUBA

If you're not quite ready to make the commitment to scuba but you want more time underwater than snorkeling allows, **Big Island Snuba** (☎ 808/326-7446; www.snubabigisland.com) may be the answer. Just like in scuba, the diver wears a regulator and mask; however, the tank floats on the surface on a raft, and is connected to the diver's regulator by a hose that allows the diver to go 20 to 25 feet down, and you only need 15 minutes of instruction. It costs \$69 for a 1½-hour dive from the beach, \$110 for 1 dive from a boat, and \$135 for two dives from a boat; children must be at least 8 years old.

SPORTFISHING: THE HUNT FOR GRANDERS (★★)

If you want to catch fish, it doesn't get any better than the Kona Coast, known internationally as the marlin capital of the world.

Big-game fish, including gigantic blue marlin and other Pacific billfish, tuna, mahimahi, sailfish, swordfish, *ono* (also known as wahoo), and giant trevallies (*ulua*) roam the waters here. When anglers here catch marlin that weigh 1,000 pounds or more, they call them *granders*; there's even a "wall of fame" on Kailua-Kona's Waterfront Row, honoring 40 anglers who've nailed more than 20 tons of fighting fish.

Nearly 100 charter boats with professional captains and crew offer fishing charters out of **Keauhou, Kawaihae, Honokohau, and Kailua Bay harbors**. If you're not an expert angler, the best way to arrange a charter is through a booking agency like the **Charter Desk at Honokohau Marina** (☎ 888/KONA-4-US or 808/329-5735; www.charterdesk.com) or **Charter Services Hawaii** (☎ 800/567-2650 or 808/334-1881; www.konazone.com). Either one will sort through the more than 40 different types of vessels, fishing specialties, and personalities to match you with the right boat. Prices range from \$375 to \$850 or so for a full-day exclusive charter (you and up to five of your friends have the entire boat to yourselves) and about \$225 to \$550 for a half-day charter on a six-passenger boat.

Serious sportfishers should call the boats directly. They include *Anxious* (☎ 808/326-1229; www.alohazone.com), *Marlin Magic* (☎ 808/325-7138; www.marlinmagic.com), and *Ihu Nui* (☎ 808/325-1513; www.charterdesk.com/ihunui.html). If you aren't into hooking a 1,000-pound marlin or 200-pound tuna and just want to go out to catch some smaller fish and have fun, I recommend **Reel Action Light Tackle Sportfishing** ★★ (☎ 808/325-6811; www.charternet.com/flyfish/hawaii.html). Light-tackle anglers and salt-water fly fisherman should contact *Sea Genie II* ★★ (☎ 808/325-5355; www.seageniesportfishing.com), which has helped several anglers set world records. All of the above outfitters operate out of Honokohau Harbor.

SUBMARINE DIVES

This is the stuff movies are made of: venturing 100 feet below the sea in a high-tech, 65-foot submarine. On a 1-hour trip, you'll be able to explore a 25-acre coral reef that's teeming with schools of colorful tropical fish. You might catch glimpses of moray eels—or even a shark. On selected trips, you'll watch as divers swim among these creatures, luring them to the view ports for face-to-face observation. Call **Atlantis Submarines** ★, 75-5669 Alii Dr. (across the street from Kailua Pier, underneath Flashback's Restaurant), Kailua-Kona (☎ 800/548-6262; www.atlantisadventures.com). Trips leave

daily between 10am and 3pm. The cost is \$78 for adults and \$38 for children under 12. **Note:** The ride is safe for everyone, but skip it if you suffer from claustrophobia.

SURFING

Most surfing off the Big Island is for the experienced only. As a general rule, the beaches on the north and west shores of the island get northern swells in winter, while those on the south and east shores get southern swells in summer. Experienced surfers should check out the waves at **Pine Trees** (north of Kailua-Kona), **Lyman's** (off Alii Dr. in Kailua-Kona), and **Banyan's** (also off Alii Dr.); reliable spots on the east side of the island include **Honolii Point** (outside Hilo), **Hilo Bay Front Park**, and **Keaukaha Beach Park**. But there are a few sites where beginners can catch a wave, too: You might want to try **Kahuluu Beach**, where the waves are manageable most of the year; other surfers are around to give you pointers, and there's a lifeguard on shore.

Ocean Eco Tours (☎ 808/324-SURF; www.oceanecotours.com), owned and operated by veteran surfers, is one of the few companies on the Big Island that teaches surfing. Private lessons cost \$150 per person (including all equipment) and usually last a minimum of 2 hours; 2- to 3-hour group lessons go for \$95 (also including all equipment), with a maximum of four students. Both teachers love this ancient Hawaiian sport, and their enthusiasm is contagious. The minimum age is 8, and you must be a fairly good swimmer. As we went to press, Hawaii County was in the process of regulating private operators teaching surfing. Ocean Eco Tours assured us that they have fully cooperated with the county on all levels and if permits are given, they should be the first in line to obtain one.

Your only Big Island choice for surfboard rentals is **Pacific Vibrations**, 75-5702 Likana Lane (just off Alii Dr., across from the pier), Kailua-Kona (☎ 808/329-4140; www.laguerdobros.com/pacvib/pacificv.html), where they rent short boards for \$10 for 24 hours and long boards for \$10 to \$20.

WINDSURFING

The constant 5- to 25-knot winds blowing toward the beach make **Anaehoomalu Bay (A-Bay)**, on the Kohala Coast, one of the best beaches for windsurfing. If you get into trouble, the wind brings you back to shore, instead of taking you out to sea. **Ocean Sports**, at the Outrigger Waikoloa Beach Hotel (☎ 808/885-5555; www.hawaii oceansports.com), starts beginners on a land simulator to teach them how to handle the sail and “come about” (turn around

and come back). Instruction is \$60 an hour; after a half-hour or so of instruction on land, you're ready to hit the water. If you already know how to windsurf, equipment rental is \$30 an hour. Advanced windsurfers should head to **Puako** and **Hilo Bay**.

3 Hiking & Camping

For information on camping and hiking, contact **Hawaii Volcanoes National Park**, P.O. Box 52, Hawaii National Park, HI 96718 (☎ 808/985-6000; www.nps.gov/havo); **Puuhonua O Honaunau National Historic Park**, Honaunau, HI 96726 (☎ 808/328-2288; www.nps.gov/puho); the **State Division of Forestry and Wildlife**, P.O. Box 4849, Hilo, HI 96720 (☎ 808/947-4221; www.hawaii.gov); the **State Division of Parks**, P.O. Box 936, Hilo, HI 96721 (☎ 808/974-6200; www.hawaii.gov); the **County Department of Parks and Recreation**, 25 Aupuni St., Hilo, HI 96720 (☎ 808/961-8311; www.hawaii-county.com); or the **Hawaii Sierra Club** (☎ 808/959-0452; www.hi.sierraclub.org).

GUIDED DAY HIKES A guided day hike is a great way to discover natural Hawaii without having to sleep under a tree to do it. Call the following outfitters ahead of time (before you arrive) for a schedule of trips; they fill up quickly.

A longtime resident of Hawaii, Dr. Hugh Montgomery of **Hawaiian Walkways** ★, Honokaa (☎ **800/457-7759** or 808/775-0372; www.hawaiianwalkways.com), once named the “Tour Operator of the Year” by the Hawaii Ecotourism Association of Hawaii, offers a variety of options ranging from excursions that skirt the rim of immense valleys to hikes through the clouds on the volcano. Hikes are \$95 to \$135. Custom hikes are available for \$95 each for six hikers. Prices include food, beverages, and equipment.

Naturalist and educator Rob Pacheco of **Hawaii Forest & Trail** ★★, 74-5035-B Queen Kaahumanu Hwy. (behind the Chevron Station), Kailua-Kona (☎ **800/464-1993** or 808/331-8505; www.hawaii-forest.com), offers day trips to some of the island's most remote, pristine, natural areas, some of which he has exclusive access to. Rob's fully trained staff narrates the entire trip, offering extensive natural, geological, and cultural commentary (and more than a little humor). Tours are limited to 10 people, and are highly personalized to meet the group's interests and abilities. Options include waterfall adventures, rainforest discovery hikes, birding tours, volcanoes, and even a mule ride on the rim of Pololu Valley (see the box “Riding a Mule on the Big Island” on p. 123).

Each tour involves 2 to 4 hours of easy-to-moderate walking, over terrain manageable by anyone in average physical condition. Half-day trips, including snacks, beverages, water, and gear, start at \$95 for adults, \$75 for children ages 8 to 12.

GUIDED NIGHT HIKES For an off-the-beaten-track experience, **Arnott's Lodge**, 98 Apapane Rd., Hilo (☎ 808/969-7097; www.arnottslodge.com), offers a daylong tour of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, followed by a night lava hike right up to the fiery flow. The 9½-hour tour leaves the lodge at noon and spends most of the afternoon in the park. The lava hike (a 4-hr., somewhat strenuous round-trip hike) takes place as the sun is setting, so you can see the glow of the flow both during and after sunset. The cost is \$80.

HAWAII VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK ★★

This national park is a wilderness wonderland. Miles of trails not only lace the lava but also cross deserts, rainforests, beaches, and, in winter, snow at 13,650 feet. Trail maps (highly recommended) are sold at park headquarters. Check conditions before you head out. Come prepared for sun, rain, and hard wind any time of year. Always wear sunscreen and bring plenty of drinking water.

Warning: If you have heart or respiratory problems or if you're pregnant, don't attempt any hike in the park; the fumes will bother you.

TRAILS IN THE PARK

KILAUEA IKI TRAIL You'll experience the work of the volcano goddess, Pele, firsthand on this hike. The 4-mile trail begins at the visitor center, descends through a forest of ferns into still-fuming Kilauea Iki Crater, and then crosses the crater floor past the vent where a 1959 lava blast shot a fountain of fire 1,900 feet into the air for 36 days. Allow 2 hours for this fair-to-moderate hike.

HALEMAUMAU TRAIL This moderate 3.5-mile hike starts at the visitor center, goes down 500 feet to the floor of Kilauea Crater, crosses the crater, and ends at Halemaumau Overlook.

DEVASTATION TRAIL Up on the rim of Kilauea Iki Crater, you can see what an erupting volcano did to a once-flourishing ohia forest. The scorched earth with its ghostly tree skeletons stands in sharp contrast to the rest of the lush forest. Everyone can take this .5-mile hike on a paved path across the eerie bed of black cinders. The trail head is on Crater Rim Road at Puu Puai Overlook.

KIPUKA PUAULU (BIRD PARK) TRAIL This easy, 1.5-mile, hour-long hike lets you see native Hawaiian flora and fauna in a

little oasis of living nature in a field of lava. For some reason, the once red-hot lava skirted this miniforest and let it survive. At the trail head on Mauna Loa Road is a display of plants and birds you'll see on the walk. Go early in the morning or in the evening (or even better, just after a rain) to see native birds like the *apapane* (a small, bright-red bird with black wings and tail) and the *iiwi* (larger and orange-vermillion colored, with a curved orange bill). Native trees along the trail include giant ohia, koa, soapberry, kolea, and mamani.

MAUNA LOA TRAIL Probably the most challenging hike in Hawaii, this trail goes 7.5 miles from the lookout to a cabin at 10,035 feet, then 12 more miles up to the primitive Mauna Loa summit cabin at 13,250 feet, where the climate is subarctic, and overnight temperatures are below freezing year-round. This 4-day round-trip requires advance planning, great physical condition, and registration at the visitor center. Call ☎ **808/985-6000** for maps and details. The trail head begins where Mauna Loa Road ends, 14 miles north of Highway 11.

CAMPGROUNDS & WILDERNESS CABINS IN THE PARK

The only park campground accessible by car is **Namakani Paio**, which has a pavilion with picnic tables and a fireplace (no wood is provided). Tent camping is free; no reservations are required. Stays are limited to 7 days per year. Backpack camping at hiker shelters and cabins is available on a first-come, shared basis, but you must register at the visitor center.

Kilauea Military Camp, a mile from the visitor center, is a rest-and-recreation camp for active and retired military personnel. Facilities include 75 one- to three-bedroom cabins with fireplaces (some with a Jacuzzi), cafeteria, bowling alley, bar, general store, weight room, and tennis and basketball courts. Rates are based on rank, ranging from \$52 to \$133 a night. Call ☎ **808/967-8333** or visit www.kmc-volcano.com for more information.

The following cabins and campgrounds are the best of what the park and surrounding area have to offer:

HALAPE SHELTER This backcountry site, about 7 miles from the nearest road, is the place for those who want to get away from it all and enjoy their own private white-sand beach. The small, three-sided stone shelter, with a roof but no floor, can accommodate two people comfortably, but four's a crowd. You could pitch a tent inside, but if the weather is nice, you're better off setting up outside. There's a catchment water tank, but check with rangers on the water

situation before hiking in (sometimes they don't have accurate information on the water level; bring extra water just in case). The only other facility is a pit toilet. Go on weekdays if you're really looking for an escape. It's free to stay here, but you're limited to 3 nights. Permits are available at the visitor center on a first-come, first-served basis, no earlier than noon on the day before your trip. For more information, call ☎ **808/985-6000**.

NAMAKANI PAIO CAMPGROUNDS & CABINS Just 5 miles west of the park entrance is a tall eucalyptus forest where you can pitch a tent in an open grassy field. The trail to Kilauea Crater is just ½ mile away. No permit is needed, but stays are limited to 7 days. Facilities include pavilions with barbecues and a fireplace, picnic tables, outdoor dish-washing areas, restrooms, and drinking water. There are also 10 cabins that accommodate up to four people each. Each cabin has a covered picnic table at the entrance and a fireplace with a grill. Toilets, sinks, and hot showers are available in a separate building. You can get groceries and gas in the town of Volcano, 4 miles away. Make cabin reservations through **Volcano House**, P.O. Box 53, Hawaii National Park, HI 96718 (☎ **808/967-7321**); the cost is \$40 per night for two adults (and two children), \$48 for three adults, and \$56 for four adults.

WAIMANU VALLEY'S MULIWAI TRAIL

This difficult 2- to 3-day backpacking adventure—only for the hardy—takes you to a hidden valley some call Eden, with virgin waterfalls and pools and spectacular views. The trail, which goes from sea level to 1,350 feet and down to the sea again, takes more than 9 hours to hike in and more than 10 hours to hike out. Be prepared for clouds of bloodthirsty mosquitoes, and look out for wild pigs. If it's raining, forget it: You'll have 13 streams to cross before you reach the rim of Waimanu Valley, and rain means flash floods.

You must get permission to camp in Waimanu Valley from the **Division of Forestry and Wildlife**, P.O. Box 4849, Hilo, HI 96720-0849 (☎ **808/974-4221**). Permits to the nine designated campsites are assigned by number. They're free, but you're limited to a 7-day stay. Facilities are limited to two composting pit toilets. The best water in the valley is from the stream on the western wall, a 15-minute walk up a trail from the beach. All water must be treated before drinking. The water from the Waimanu Stream drains from a swamp, so skip it. Be sure to pack out what you take in.

To get to the trail head, take Highway 19 to the turnoff for Honoka'a; drive 9½ miles to the Waipio Valley Lookout. Unless you have

four-wheel-drive, this is where your hike begins. Walk down the road and wade the Wailoa Stream; then cross the beach and go to the northwest wall. The trail starts here and goes up the valley floor, past a swamp, and into a forest before beginning a series of switchbacks that parallel the coastline. These switchbacks go up and down about 14 gulches. At the ninth gulch, about two-thirds of the way along the trail, is a shelter. After the shelter, the trail descends into Waimanu Valley, which looks like a smaller version of Waipio Valley but without a sign of human intrusion.

4 Golf & Other Outdoor Activities

The not-for-profit group **Friends for Fitness**, P.O. Box 1671, Kailua-Kona, HI 96745 (☎ 808/322-0033), offers a free brochure on physical activities (from aerobics to yoga) in West Hawaii; they will gladly mail it to you upon request.

GOLF

For last-minute and discount tee times, call **Stand-by Golf** (☎ 888/645-BOOK or 808/322-BOOK) between 7am and 11pm. Stand-by Golf offers discounted (10%–40%), guaranteed tee times for same-day or next-day golfing.

If your game's a little rusty, head for the **Swing Zone**, 74–5562 Makala Blvd. (corner of Kuikuni Hwy., by the Old Airport Park), Kailua-Kona (☎ 808/329-6909). The driving range has 27 mats and 10 grass tee spaces; the practice putting green and chipping area is free with a bucket of balls (60 balls for \$6); and the pro shop sells limited supplies (rental clubs are available, too, for just \$2). For \$6, including a putter and a ball, you can play a round on the 18-hole, all-grass putting course built in the shape of the Big Island.

In addition to the courses below, I love the fabulous **Hualalai Golf Course** ★★ at Four Seasons Resort Hualalai (p. 34). Unfortunately, it's open only to resort guests—but for committed golfers, this Jack Nicklaus–designed championship course is reason enough to pay the sky-high rates.

THE KOHALA COAST

Hapuna Golf Course ★★ Since its opening in 1992, this 18-hole championship course has been named the most environmentally sensitive course by *Golf* magazine, as well as “Course of the Future” by the U.S. Golf Association. Designed by Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay, this 6,027-yard, links-style course extends from the shoreline to 700 feet above sea level, with views of the pastoral

Kohala Mountains and the Kohala coastline. The elevation changes on the course keep it challenging (and windy at the higher elevations). There are a few elevated tee boxes and only 40 bunkers. Facilities include putting greens, driving ranges, lockers, showers, a pro shop, and restaurants.

Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel, off Hwy. 19 (near mile marker 69). ☎ 808/880-3000. www.hapunabeachprincehotel.com. Greens fees: \$145 (\$110 for resort guests).

Mauna Kea Golf Course ★★☆☆ This breathtakingly beautiful, par-72, 7,114-yard championship course, designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., is consistently rated one of the top golf courses in the United States. The signature 3rd hole is 175 yards long; the Pacific Ocean and shoreline cliffs stand between the tee and the green, giving every golfer, from beginner to pro, a real challenge. Another par-3 that confounds duffers is the 11th hole, which drops 100 feet from tee to green and plays down to the ocean, into the steady trade winds. When the trades are blowing, 181 yards might as well be 1,000 yards. Facilities include putting greens, a driving range, lockers and showers, a pro shop, and a restaurant. Book ahead; the course is very popular, especially for early weekend tee times.

Mauna Kea Beach Resort, Hwy. 19 (near mile marker 68). ☎ 808/882-5400. www.maunakeabeachhotel.com. Greens fees: \$195 (\$135 for resort guests); twilight rates \$110.

Mauna Lani Frances I'i Brown Championship Courses ★★☆☆

The **Mauna Lani South Course**, a 7,029-yard, par-72, has an unforgettable ocean hole: the downhill, 221-yard, par-3 7th, which is bordered by the sea, a salt-and-pepper sand dune, and lush kiawe trees. The **North Course** may not have the drama of the oceanfront holes, but because it was built on older lava flows, the more extensive indigenous vegetation gives the course a Scottish feel. The hole that's cursed the most is the 140-yard, par-3 17th: It's absolutely beautiful but plays right into the surrounding lava field. Facilities include two driving ranges, a golf shop (with teaching pros), a restaurant, and putting greens.

Mauna Lani Dr., off Hwy. 19 (20 miles north of Kona Airport). ☎ 808/885-6655. www.maunalani.com. Greens fees: \$195 (\$130 for resort guests); twilight rates \$75.

Waikoloa Beach Course ★☆☆☆ This pristine 18-hole, par-70 course certainly reflects designer Robert Trent Jones, Jr.'s, motto: "Hard par, easy bogey." Most golfers remember the par-5, 505-yard 12th hole, a sharp dogleg left with bunkers in the corner and an elevated

tee surrounded by lava. Facilities include a golf shop, restaurant, and driving range.

1020 Keana Place (adjacent to the Outrigger Waikoloa and Hilton Waikoloa Village), Waikoloa. ☎ 877/WAIKOLOA or 808/886-6060. www.waikoloagolf.com. Greens fees: \$175 (\$125 for resort guests); twilight rates \$75.

Waikoloa Kings' Course ⚡ This sister course to the Waikoloa Beach Course is about 500 yards longer. Designed by Tom Weiskopf and Jay Morrish, the 18-hole links-style tract features a double green at the 3rd and 6th holes and several carefully placed bunkers that often come into play due to the ever-present trade winds. Facilities include a pro shop and showers.

600 Waikoloa Beach Dr. (adjacent to the Outrigger Waikoloa and Hilton Waikoloa Village), Waikoloa. ☎ 877/WAIKOLOA or 808/886-7888. www.waikoloagolf.com. Greens fees: \$175 (\$125 for resort guests); twilight rates \$75.

Waikoloa Village Golf Club This semiprivate 18-hole course, with a par-72 for each of the three sets of tees, is hidden in the town of Waikoloa and usually overshadowed by the glamour resort courses along the Kohala Coast. Not only is it a beautiful course with great views, but it also offers some great golfing. The wind can play havoc with your game here (like most Hawaii golf courses). Robert Trent Jones, Jr., designed this challenging course, inserting his trademark sand traps, slick greens, and great fairways. I'm particularly fond of the 18th hole: This par-5, 490-yard thriller doglegs to the left, and the last 75 yards up to the green are water, water, water. Enjoy the fabulous views of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa, and—on a very clear day—Maui's Haleakala in the distance.

Waikoloa Rd., Waikoloa Village, off Hwy. 19 (18 miles north of Kona Airport). ☎ 808/883-9621. www.waikoloa.org. Greens fees: \$75; \$40 after 4pm. Turn left at the Waikoloa sign; it's about 6 miles up, on your left.

THE HAMAKUA COAST

Hamakua Country Club *Value* As you approach the sugar town of Honokaa, you can't miss this funky 9-hole course, built in the 1920s on a very steep hill overlooking the ocean. It's a par-33, 2,520-yard course. Architect Frank Anderson managed to squeeze in 9 holes by crisscrossing holes across fairways—you may never see a layout like this again. But the best part about Hamakua is the price—just \$15. The course is open to nonmembers on weekdays only; you don't need a tee time. Just show up, and if no one's around, drop your \$15 in the box and head out. Carts aren't allowed because of the steep hills.

On the ocean side of Hwy. 19 (41 miles from Hilo), Honokaa. ☎ 808/775-7244. Greens fees: \$15 for 18 holes.

HILO

Hilo Municipal Golf Course This is a great course for the casual golfer: It's flat, scenic, and often fun. **Warning:** Don't go after a heavy rain (especially in winter), when the fairways can get really soggy and play can slow way down. The rain does keep the course green and beautiful, though. Wonderful trees (monkeypods, coconuts, eucalyptus, banyans) dot the grounds, and the views—of Mauna Kea on one side and Hilo Bay on the other—are breathtaking. There are four sets of tees, with a par-71 from all; the back tees give you 6,325 yards of play. Getting a tee time can be a challenge; weekdays are your best bet.

340 Haihai St. (between Kinoole and Iwalani sts.), Hilo. ☎ 808/959-7711. Greens fees: \$29 weekdays; \$34 Sat–Sun and holidays. From Hilo, take Hwy. 11 toward Volcano; turn right at Puainako St. (at Prince Kuhio Shopping Center), left on Kinoole, then right on Haihai St.

Naniloa Country Club At first glance, this semiprivate, 9-hole course looks pretty flat and short, but once you get beyond the 1st hole—a wide, straightforward 330-yard par-4—things get challenging. The tree-lined fairways require straight drives, and the huge lake on the 2nd and 5th holes is sure to haunt you. This course is very popular with locals and visitors alike. Rental clubs are available.

120 Banyan Dr. (at the intersection of Hwy. 11 and Hwy. 19). ☎ 808/935-3000. Greens fees: \$25 (\$15 Naniloa Hotel guests) Mon–Fri; \$35 (\$25 Naniloa Hotel guests) Sat–Sun (if you can get a tee time); twilight rates are \$10 less.

VOLCANO VILLAGE

Volcano Golf and Country Club Located at an altitude of 4,200 feet, this public course got its start in 1922, when the Blackshear family put in a green, using old tomato cans for the holes. It now has three sets of tees to choose from, all with a par of 72. The course is unusually landscaped, making use of the pine and ohia trees scattered throughout. It's considered challenging by locals.

Hwy. 11, on the right side, just after the entrance to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. ☎ 808/967-7331. www.volcanogolfshop.com. Greens fees: \$63.

BICYCLING & MOUNTAIN BIKING

For mountain-bike and cross-training bike rentals in Kona, go to **Dave's Bike and Triathlon Shop**, 75–5669 Alii Dr., across from the Kailua Pier, behind Atlantis Submarine (☎ 808/329-4522). Dave rents brand-name mountain bikes (with full-suspension) for

Kids **Riding a Mule on the Big Island**

Hawaii Forest & Trail Guided Nature Adventures (★★), 74-5035-B Queen Kaahumanu Hwy. (behind the Chevron), Kailua-Kona (☎ 808/464-1993 or 808/322-8881; www.hawaii-forest.com), runs the **Kohala Mule Trail Adventure**, a unique tour on the rim of historic Pololu Valley, where teams of mules were once used as transportation. The trip begins at the historic Kohala Ditch Company Mule Station. From there, riders head out to the rim of Pololu Valley, wander through a native ohia-lehua forest, discover three waterfalls, meander across gentle streams, and stop at a section of the historic Kohala Ditch trail. Tours depart twice a day (except Sun) at 8:30am and 12:30pm. The cost is \$95 for adults, \$75 for children ages 8 to 12.

\$15 a day or \$60 a week (including helmet and water bottle). Feel free to ask Dave for route advice and local weather reports. You can also rent a bike rack for your car (\$10 a week).

Hawaiian Pedals (★), Kona Inn Shopping Village, Alii Drive, Kailua-Kona (☎ 808/329-2294), and **Hawaiian Pedals Bike Works**, Hale Hana Centre, 74-5583 Luhia St., Kailua-Kona (☎ 808/326-2453; www.hawaiianpedals.com), have a huge selection of bikes, from mountain bikes and hybrids (\$35 a day) to racing bikes and front-suspension mountain bikes (\$45 a day). Bike racks go for \$5 a day, and you pay only for the days you actually use it (the honor system): If you have the rack for a week but only use it for 2 days, you'll be charged just \$10. The folks at the shops are friendly and knowledgeable about cycling routes all over the Big Island.

GUIDED TOURS **Mauna Kea Mountain Bikes, Inc.** (☎ 888/MTB-TOUR or 808/883-0130, or cell 808/936-TOUR; www.bikehawaii.com) offers everything from 3-hour downhill cruises in the historic Kohala Mountains to advanced rides down monstrous Mauna Kea. Prices range from \$75 to \$115.

Contact the **Big Island Mountain Bike Association**, P.O. Box 6819, Hilo, HI 96720 (☎ 808/961-4452; www.interpac.net/~mtbike), for its free brochure, *Big Island Mountain Biking*, which has useful safety tips on biking as well as great off-road trails for both beginner and advanced riders. Check out www.bikehawaii.com for information on trails and access. Another good contact for biking information and maps is **PATH** (☎ 808/326-9495).

BIRDING

Native Hawaiian birds are few—and dwindling. But Hawaii still offers extraordinary birding for anyone nimble enough to traverse tough, mucky landscape. And the best birding is on the Big Island; birders the world over come here hoping to see three Hawaiian birds in particular: akiapolau, a woodpecker wannabe with a war club-like head; nukupuu, an elusive little yellow bird with a curved beak, one of the crown jewels of Hawaiian birding; and alala, the critically endangered Hawaiian crow that's now almost impossible to see in the wild.

Good spots to see native Hawaiian and other birds include the following:

HAWAII VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK The best places for accomplished birders to go on their own are the ohia forests of this national park, usually at sunrise or sunset, when the little forest birds seem to be most active. The Hawaiian nene goose can be spotted at the park's Kipuka Nene Campground, a favorite nesting habitat. Geese and pheasants sometimes appear on the Volcano Golf Course in the afternoon. The white-tailed tropical bird often rides the thermals caused by steam inside Halemaumau Crater.

HAKALAU FOREST NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE The first national wildlife refuge established solely for forest bird management is on the eastern slope of Mauna Kea above the Hamakua Coast. It's open for birding on Saturday, Sunday, and state holidays, using the public access road only. You must call ahead of time to get the gate combinations of the locked gates and to register. Contact Refuge Manager Richard Wass, Hakalau Forest, 154 Waianuenue Ave., Room 219, Hilo, HI 96720 (☎ **808/933-6915**; Richard_Wass@mail.fws.gov).

HILO PONDS Ducks, coots, herons (night and great blue), cattle egrets, and even Canada and snow geese fly into these popular coastal wetlands in Hilo, near the airport. Take Kalaniana'ole Highway about 3 miles east, past the industrial port facilities to Loko Waka Pond and Waiakea Pond.

BIRDING TOURS

If you don't know an apapane from a nukupuu, go with someone who does. Contact **Hawaii Forest & Trail**, 74-5035-B Queen Kaahumanu Hwy. (behind the Chevron Station), Kailua-Kona (☎ **800/464-1993** or 808/331-8505; www.hawaii-forest.com), to sign up for the **Rainforest and Dry Forest Adventure tour** (★ ★).

led by naturalist Rob Pacheco. On this tour you'll venture into pristine rainforest to see rare and endangered Hawaiian birds. This full-day tour costs \$155 for adults (\$115 kids 12–18), and includes pickup, midmorning snack with coffee, lunch, beverages, daypacks, binoculars, walking sticks, and rain gear.

HORSEBACK RIDING

Kohala Na'alapa ★, on Kohala Mountain Road (Hwy. 250) at mile marker 11 (ask for directions to the stables at the security-guard station; ☎ 808/889-0022; www.naalapastables.com), offers unforgettable journeys into the rolling hills of Kahua and Kohala ranches, past ancient Hawaiian ruins, through lush pastures with grazing sheep and cows, and along mountaintops with panoramic coastal views. The horses and various riding areas are suited to everyone from first-timers to experienced equestrians. There are two trips a day: a 2½-hour tour at 9am for \$89 and a 1½-hour tour at 1:30pm for \$68.

Experienced riders should sign up for a trip with **King's Trail Rides, Tack, and Gift Shop** ★★, Highway 11 at mile marker 111, Kealahou (☎ 808/323-2388; www.konacowboy.com). These 4-hour trips, with 2 hours of riding, are limited to four people. The trip heads down the mountain along Monument Trail to the Captain Cook Monument in Kealahou Bay, where you'll stop for lunch and an hour of snorkeling. The \$135 weekday (\$150 weekends) price tag includes lunch and gear.

To see Waipio Valley on horseback, call **Waipio Na'alapa Trail Rides** ★ (☎ 808/775-0419; www.naalapastables.com). The 2½-hour tours of this gorgeous tropical valley depart Monday through Saturday at 9:30am and 1pm (don't forget your camera). The guides are well versed in Hawaiian history and provide running commentary as you move through this historic place. The cost is \$89 for adults. No kids under 8, pregnant riders, or riders over 230 pounds.

RIDING PARKER RANCH Visitors can explore **Parker Ranch** (☎ 808/885-7655; www.parkerranch.com/horseback.html) and its vast 175,000-acre, working cattle ranch. You'll learn first-hand about Parker Ranch, its history and variety of plant life, and you may even catch glimpses of pheasant, francolins, or wild pigs. Rides (suitable for beginners) are available three times daily at 8:15am, 12:15pm, and a sunset ride at 4pm for \$79 per person. The rides all begin at the Blacksmith Shop on Pukalani Road.