

The Best Kid-Friendly Adventures On Hawai'i Island And Kaua'i

By [Brianna Randall](#), Contributor. © Brianna Randall writes about the intersecti... [Follow Author](#)

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Kauai and the island of Hawai'i offer plenty of family-friendly activities, including boat tours, bike trails and volcano viewing. BRIANNA RANDALL

- For families looking for an unforgettable adventure, a trip to Hawai'i Island and Kaua'i offer kid-friendly experiences that combine culture, nature, ease and fun.
- Hawai'i offers volcanoes and rainforests as well as sunny snorkeling and fascinating archeological sites.
- Kaua'i's waves and verdant shores provide endless fun for children, including bike trails, boat tours and bodyboarding.

My eight-year-old had three requests for our first mother-daughter vacation. "I want to see a volcano, go snorkeling and go down a waterslide," Lyra told me when we started planning a trip together. I smiled, landing instantly on the perfect destination to make her dreams come true: the Hawaiian islands.

We decided to visit the youngest and oldest of the eight main islands, Hawai'i and Kaua'i, for a week of kid-friendly outdoor adventures, cultural exploration and beachside relaxation.

Hawai'i Island's Fiery Volcanoes, Rainforests And Steam Vents

Although the volcanic archipelago includes 137 islands, most of the Hawaiian islands are tiny uninhabited atolls, reefs or islets. They formed as the Pacific Plate moved slowly over a stationary magma hotspot, where the island of Hawai'i (also known as the Big Island) currently sits. Islands to the northwest have weathered over millions of years, eroding back into the sea. The eight main islands to the southeast erupted most recently out of the Pacific, so they are larger and more rugged, with steep mountains and valleys.

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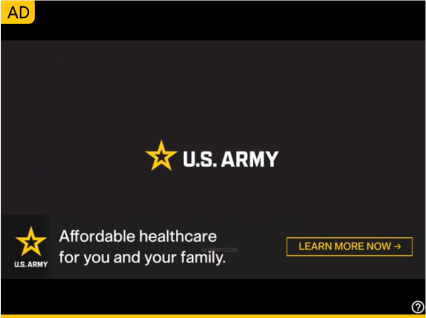
Hawai'i appeared less than 500,000 years ago, and volcanoes like Kilauea and Maunaloa still spew lava on the regular. Kaua'i, on the other hand, is more than 5 million years old and is shrinking in its old age. Kaua'i is eroding the second-fastest of any island on the planet at five inches per year.

We started our trip on the island of Hawai'i to fulfill Lyra's first request: visiting an

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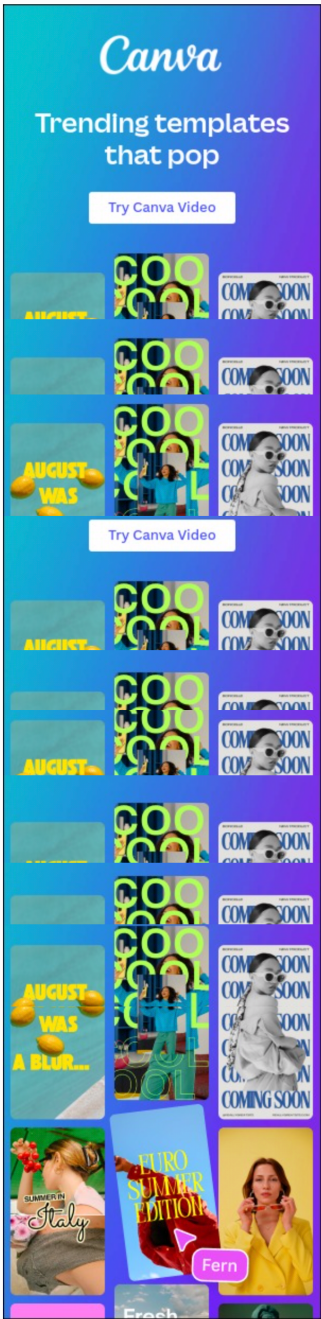


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active volcano. It's the largest and newest island in the chain and the only one that's still growing. As we drove from Hilo into [Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park](#), Lyra pointed out steam vents and black lava rocks along the road.

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People watch as Hawaii's Kilauea Volcano erupts on May 11, 2025. (Photo by Gary Miller/Getty Images)
GETTY IMAGES

Part of this national park’s allure for kids is short trails and scenic drives—no long slogs required to see the action. We parked at Kilauea Overlook, jaws dropping at the tall plumes of steam piling out of the caldera. We’d missed the lava fountaining by two days, but I wasn’t too sad. It was nice not to worry about falling ash or Pele’s hair (volcanic glass threads), both of which can pose health hazards.

From the overlook, we walked a half-mile through a rainforest of dripping ferns and mossy trees to the Nāhuku Lava Tube. Lyra posed for photos in the dim light of the six-foot-high, lava-carved tunnel. Next, we drove to the Sulphur Banks steam vents, enjoying the blasts of hot air that dried our rain-damp clothing.



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We walked along the Halema'uma'u crater, where Pele is believed to reside. Lyra tossed a coin in one of the steam vents as an offering to the Hawaiian goddess of fire, lightning, wind and volcanoes. I sent Pele a silent thank-you for the constant work of creation and destruction that shaped these beautiful isles.

After checking out local artisans in the Volcano Art Center, we headed to the quaint [Volcano Village Estates](#), located just one mile from the park entrance. Our cottage was serendipitously named Pele, much to Lyra’s delight. The adorable one-room bungalow included a private hot tub overlooking the verdant rainforest. Lyra and I shared pizza and ramen at the Lanikai Brewing Company, then were lulled to sleep by the steady whisper of rain on leaves.

Hawaiian Culture Meets Laid Back Luxury At Kona Village

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Resort

Ready for sun and sand, we drove to the leeward (west) side of Hawai'i Island in pursuit of my daughter's second goal: snorkeling. But first, I introduced her to Hawaiian culture at [Kona Village, A Rosewood Resort](#).

This iconic resort, located 16 miles north of Kailua-Kona at the site of an ancient fishing village leased from the Kamehameha Schools, first opened in the 1960s and was shut down after a tsunami devastated much of the coast in 2011. Kona Village re-opened in 2023 and is one of the most beautifully designed and culturally respectful luxury resorts in Hawai'i.

We grabbed a couple of the resort's free bikes—including a child-sized bike for Lyra—and rode the winding, flower-filled pathways to the cultural center. Strolling along a boardwalk, we perused petroglyphs on the black lava rocks that depicted stories of the Native Hawaiians who lived on these historic lands for centuries.

Lyra spent the rest of the afternoon at Rosewood Explorers Keiki Club, where she learned about local shells, crafted an orchid lei, and painted a coconut that we mailed to her friend back home.



Kona Village, a Rosewood Resort, offers a variety of kid activities everyday at their Keiki Club, including painting a coconut to mail to a friend.
BRIANNA RANDALL

I, meanwhile, took a tour of the property with Tyson Kahoonei, Assistant Director of Engineering. Kahoonei is a sixth-generation descendant of the last chief of the village that was at the site. His daughter, Kamanu Kahoonei, is the resort's cultural ambassador.

"We have a lot of archeological sites here on the grounds. It's a very, very special place," said Kahoonei. He pointed to one of the many ponds interlacing the resort's 81 acres. "This pond was a kitchen for washing dishes. That pond was for drinking water, and others were people's baths. Everything had its own purpose."

Kahoonei is proud of the sustainability initiatives at Kona Village, which has 150 stand-alone haies (rooms), each appointed with local flair and eco-friendly building materials. The main restaurant and pool-front building, the Moana, is LEED Gold certified, along with the Asaya Spa and the Employee Village.

Every rooftop we passed was adorned with solar panels. "We have 8,400 solar panels, enough to power the whole resort if needed," Kahoonei told me. He also pointed out the on-site water treatment facility and wastewater treatment plant. "We re-use two-thirds of all our water, either for the ponds or for irrigation."

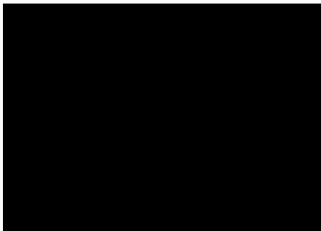
More than 70% of the food ingredients served at the resort come from the islands—including many from an on-site farm—and the majority of the landscaping plants are native to Hawai'i.

Snorkeling Made Easy In Hawai'i's Kealakekua Bay

We started slow for our first snorkeling adventure by simply walking into the warm Kahuwai Bay in front of Kona Village. Lyra donned her purple-and-pink mask, exclaiming at the colorful angelfish darting between her legs. The resort partnered with the local community to limit fishing along this reef. They also partnered with The Nature Conservancy to restore coral in Kahuwai Bay. The conservation payoff showed in the abundance and diversity of tropical fish.

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Dinner on the beach at Shipwreck Bar, a sailboat-turned-restaurant at Kona Village, provides a fun dining option for families. BRIANNA RANDALL

Primed for more adventurous snorkeling, the next day Lyra and I embarked on an early morning expedition aboard [Fair Wind Cruises](#) to Captain Cook National Monument in Kealahakua Bay. Lyra was thrilled to find a waterslide attached to our boat.

As we motored along Hawai'i's southwestern coast, Joey Hopgood, the first mate, described the marine life we might see, including moray eels, surgeon fish, jacks, turtles and pufferfish.

The crew asked us to lube up with reef-safe sunscreen, provided onboard, to protect the reef. They also used compostable dishes to serve the vegan breakfast and lunch we enjoyed aboard. "We went from nine bags of trash at the end of the day to one," Hopgood told me.

Once moored beneath the beautiful green cliffs near Captain Cook Monument, we geared up to greet the fish beneath the waves. Lyra braved the waterslide to enter, which had an exciting eight-foot drop into the sea.

Just before we left the bay, a pod of spinner dolphins came over to visit. "These spinners, called nai'a in the Hawaiian language, hunt at night for fish and squid, heading out in super-pods of a thousand or more. They come back to Kealahakua Bay in the morning to sleep and rest," Hopgood told the awed guests.

Back at Kona Village for our last night on the island of Hawai'i, Lyra and I frolicked in the Moana Pool, where we enjoyed shave ice and mango popsicles. We opted for in-room dining to enjoy our lanai. Kalua pork tacos hit the spot, along with a coconut-lime-ginger mocktail that Lyra declared "the best drink of all time".

Tropical Joy Found At Kaua'i Grand Hyatt Resort And Spa

From Kailua-Kona, we hopped a flight over to Kaua'i, the Garden Isle, with its lush greenery and white sand beaches.

From Lihu'e, we drove 10 miles north to ride bikes along the Ke Ala Hele Makālae Trail, an 8.5-mile paved oceanfront path that's perfect for children. We stopped at Lydgate Beach Park for a swim in the sea before driving along the coast to our resort.

We chose to stay at the [Grand Hyatt Kaua'i Resort & Spa](#) at Po'ipū Beach on Kaua'i's sunny south shore—in part because of its winding waterslide and many grotto-like pools.



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Lyra fed the koi each morning and learned the names of the four parrots that live in the Grand Hyatt’s open-air lobby. We watched hula and fire dancing at the lū’au. We also both went down the waterslide dozens of times. I watched guests ages 5 to 75 laugh with glee as they splashed out of the slide. Nothing like a wet ride to inspire joy.

One morning, we left at dawn to board a catamaran and sail along the Nā Pali Coast with [Holoholo Charters](#). Kaua’i’s northwest coast is one of the world’s most rapidly eroding shores. The constant wave energy from the vast Pacific, combined with upwards of 400 inches of annual rainfall, is wearing away the mountains.

The result is a network of gorgeous valleys and waterfalls. Green cathedral spires rise from a cobalt sea. Black lava rocks highlight bright white sands on hidden pocket beaches. It’s the stuff movies are made from—quite literally. The two Hawaiian-born guides aboard listed off films that used the Nā Pali as a backdrop, including Jurassic Park, King Kong and Pirates of the Caribbean.

We stopped in the shade of one steep mountain, mooring the boat for a snorkel in the clear shallows along the rocky shore. Lyra and I watched a green sea turtle swimming along the reef, as well as dozens of chubs cruising the rocks below. Once again, our boat had a waterslide. And once again, we made ample use of it before setting sail again.

As we headed back south, Lyra and I moved to the bow, holding tight as the catamaran bounced over cerulean swells. We kept our eyes peeled for more spinner dolphins—and were rewarded when four different pods came to surf the bow wave a few feet below our rapt eyes.

We stopped in Kōloa on the drive back to the South Shore, finding the perfect souvenirs at The Shops at Kukui’ula: bright Moana-themed t-shirts for my husband and son, and black pearl jewelry for Lyra and me.



Attending a lū’au, like this one at the Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort & Spa, gives children a fabulous introduction to traditional Hawaiian culture, including hula, fire dancing and ukulele music.
GRAND HYATT KAUAI RESORT & SPA

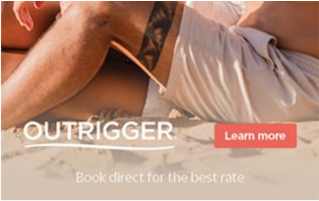
Kaua’i’s Waves Are The Best Entertainment Of All

Back at the resort, we hit the beach for the Hawaiian islands’ most time-honored children’s activity: playing in the waves. Lyra spent hours running and spinning through the surf, shrieking with joy when the waves caught her. I watched surfers and bodyboarders slide expertly through the big barrels.

The south shore of Kaua’i—like most Hawaiian islands—sees bigger swells during the summer months, while the north shore has bigger waves in the winter. I braved a dunk into the froth one morning when the surf calmed a bit. Both Lyra and I agreed that the thrill of the waves was greater than a ride down the waterslide.

Hawai’i’s stunning scenery and exciting outdoor excursions make traveling with kids a treat. But the best part of the islands is the way they encourage connection—to each other, to culture and to nature.

For families looking for an unforgettable adventure, Hawai’i Island and Kaua’i strike the perfect balance of [kid-friendly experiences](#) that combine awe, ease and fun. A trip to these two Hawaiian islands will create bonds and memories that last a child’s lifetime.



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