



Melanie Haiken, Contributor

I'm insatiably curious about how to stay healthy & where to go next.

[+ Follow](#)

LIFESTYLE | 11/28/2011 @ 4:47AM | 473 views

7 Reasons Kaua'i Is the Best Hawaiian Island

[+ Comment now](#)



Kaua'i Still Feels Like the Iconic Hawaii of an Island Fantasy (photo: Melanie Haiken)

I've just returned from a week in Kaua'i, and this visit — my first — confirmed what I'd always suspected. The Garden Isle steals people away from the other Hawaiian islands. As a lifelong Californian, I've listened to Hawaii aficionados rave about each island in turn. Some people swear there's nothing like Maui, whether it's the laid-back surfing vibe of Paia or the rugged Hana coast that hooks them. Others promise that once you visit

the Big Island with its variable geography, you'll never want to vacation anywhere else. But over the years I'd noticed something odd: Once people visit Kaua'i, they keep going back. And if they'd previously been loyal to another island, suddenly they never mention it again. So how is it that Kaua'i steals hearts? Here, in no particular order are 7 reasons Kaua'i is the best Hawaiian island.

1. **Kaua'i has the most spectacular sunsets.** From the west-facing sandy beaches of Poipu where you can watch the sun plunge directly into the Pacific, to the more easterly Hanalei Bay where you can watch the sunset rays reflected off the spectacular cliffs of the Na Pali coast, Kaua'i's sunsets are unparalleled. Is it any wonder that Kaua'i has become the wedding capital of Hawaii? Who wouldn't want to say their vows at sunset against a backdrop of surfers framed against salmon-colored clouds?



Technicolor Sunsets Are an Everyday Occurrence in Poipu (photo: Melanie Haiken)

2. **The watersports are second to none.** Whether it's a beach where you can surf world-class waves with not a competitor in sight, or a vine-draped river where your boat cuts through glassy water with no sound but the screech of an osprey, or a sheltered cove where you can challenge your stand-up paddleboard skills without fear, it's all here. And if you want to use your vacation to try a new sport, Kaua'i's mellow outfitters are only too happy to help out. The Kaua'i vibe is one of utter acceptance, so it's the perfect place for those of us whose nerves aren't made of steel to tippy-toe out of our comfort zone. Sure, native Hawaiians look like they were born with surfboards glued to their feet, but you can flop around in the waves all day and no one would dream of making you feel self-conscious.

3. **The food is delectable.** When it comes to where to eat in Kaua'i, it's hard to know where to start. There are world-class restaurants like [RedSalt](#) at the Koa Kea Resort, Jean-Marie Josselin's new [Tapas Bar and Grill](#) and the brandnew and unbelievably good [Rum Fire](#) at the Sheraton, and there are also roadside stands like the Hanalie Taro Truck with poke locals travel all the way around the island for. In between there's a long list of favorites frequented by repeat visitors like the Shrimp Station in Waimea and Hamura Saimin in Lihue.



Authentic Hawaii: The Roadside Taro Truck In Hanalei (photo: Melanie Haiken)

4. **The wildlife is exactly that – wild.** Take one of the popular boat trips around the Na Pali coast, and you're almost guaranteed to see dolphins and, at certain times of the year, whales. Take a snorkel and some fins and visit the reef just out from your hotel, and you may find yourself swimming with sea turtles or playing tag with a giant school of fish. Happily, Kaua'i was a quiet sugar plantation island until 30 years ago and the island hasn't been visited to death yet, so wildlife is still abundant and easy to see.

5. **The hiking is super spectacular.** The crazy Kalalau trail that skirts the cliffs of the Na Pali coast is one of the the most popular hikes in all of Hawaii, certainly winning a spot on most avid hikers' brag lists. Then there's Waimea canyon, with numerous jungle-shrouded hikes descending the canyon walls to arrive at waterfalls that crash into swimmable pools. But pretty much any trail in Kaua'i will take you somewhere you won't regret going – and there's almost always a beach or river along the way to keep you cool.

6. **The gardens of the Garden Isle are a botanist's dream.**

There are not one, not two, but four official botanical gardens on the island of Kaua'i, and if that's not enough there are lush private parks and sculpture gardens as well. Must-sees for plant lovers include the [National Tropical Botanical Garden](#) on the north shore and the [Allerton Garden](#) on the south shore between Poipu and Waimea.



Kaua'i's Spinner Dolphins Ride the Boat's Wake (photo: Melanie Haiken)

7. **More movies are filmed in Kauai – and you can still visit**

the shooting locations. Want to see the rope swing Harrison Ford dangled from in the first *Indiana Jones* movie? Check. Want to see the trees shredded by the gargantuan claws of Tyrannosaurus Rex in *Jurassic Park*? Check. Want to go backfurther in film history and see the real Bali Hai that inspired Bloody Mary's song in *South Pacific*? Check. How about a swim in the rock-walled lagoon where Johnny Dep took a dip in *Pirates of the Caribbean*? You can do that too. The Kaua'i film commission books movies all year long. Tours are available that take you to all the most popular sites, or you can look them up and visit them on your own.

Do you have a favorite Hawaiian island? Then argue with me! Leave a comment with your reasons and we'll take a poll and choose the next island to cover based on your responses.