

# WELCOME TO THE BIG ISLAND

By Amy Westervelt



## TOP 5 Reasons to Go

- Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park:** Catch the nighttime lava fireworks at the end of Chain of Craters Road.
- Waipi'o Valley:** Experience a real-life secret garden, the remote spot known as the Valley of the Kings.
- Kealahou Bay Double Feature:** Kayak past spinner dolphins to the Captain Cook Monument, then go snorkeling along the fabulous coral reef.
- The Heavens:** Star-gaze through gigantic telescopes on snow-topped Mauna Kea.
- Hidden Beaches:** Discover one of the Kohala Coast's lesser-known gems.

**TIP** → Directions on the island are often given as *mouka* (toward the mountains) and *makai* (toward the ocean).

## Getting Oriented

You could fit all of the other Hawaiian Islands onto the Big Island and still have a little room left over—hence the clever name. Locals refer to the island by side: Kona side to the west and Hilo side to the east. Most of the resorts, condos, and restaurants are crammed into 30 miles of the sunny Kona side, while the rainy, tropical Hilo side is much more local and residential.



The sparkling turquoise **Kohala Coast** is where all those long Hawaiian white sand beaches are found, and the expensive resorts that go with them.

Ranches sprawl across the cool, upland meadows surrounding **Waimea** (Kamuela). This is *paniolo* (cowboy) country.

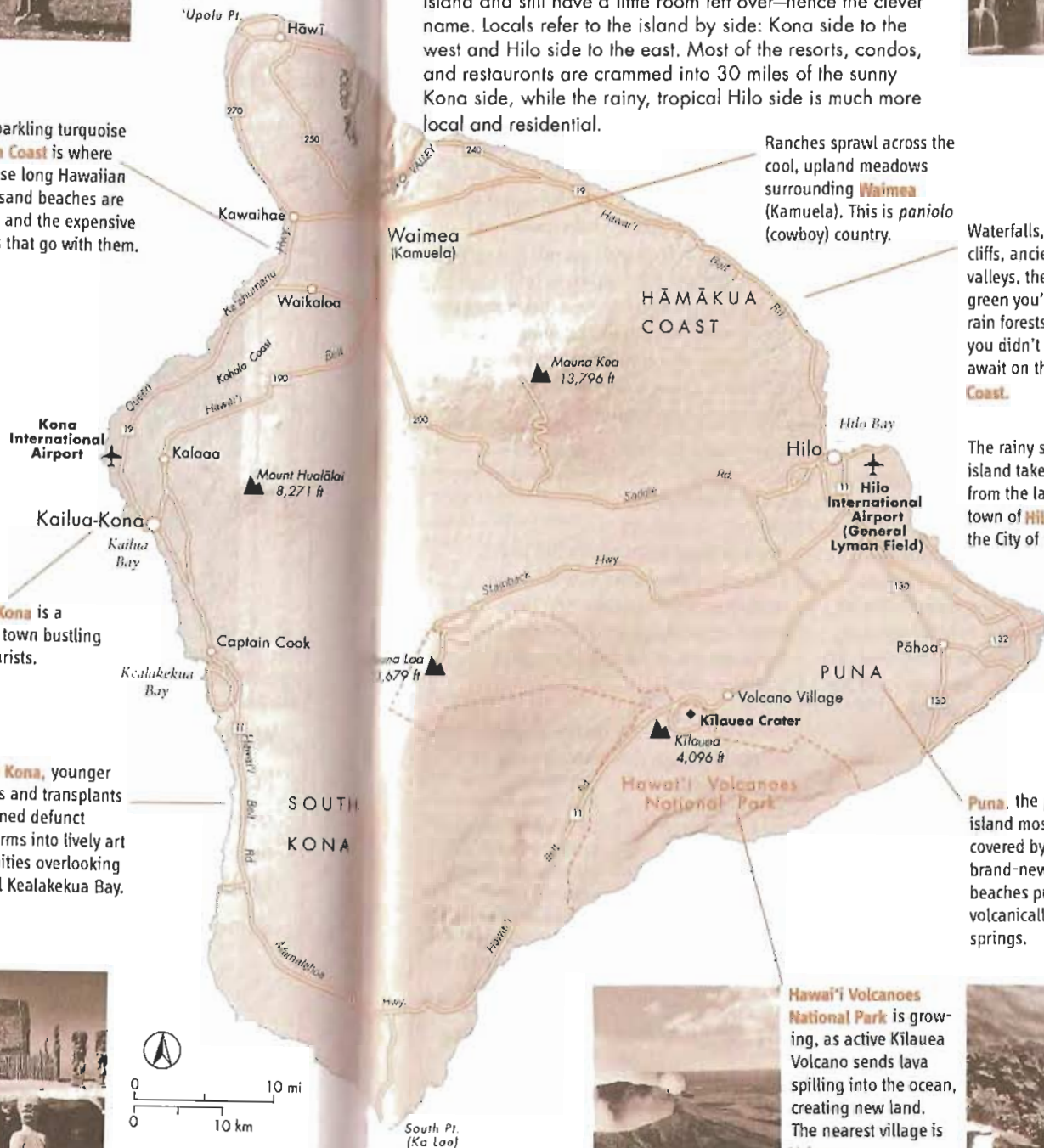
Waterfalls, dramatic cliffs, ancient hidden valleys, the greenest green you'll ever see, rain forests, and flowers you didn't know existed await on the **Hāmākua Coast**.

The rainy side of the island takes its name from the large fishing town of **Hilo**, nicknamed the City of Rainbows.

**Kailua-Kona** is a seaside town bustling with tourists.

In **South Kona**, younger residents and transplants have turned defunct coffee farms into lively art communities overlooking beautiful Kealahou Bay.

**Puna**, the part of the island most recently covered by lava, has brand-new, jet-black beaches punctuated with volcanically-heated hot springs.



**Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park** is growing, as active Kilauea Volcano sends lava spilling into the ocean, creating new land. The nearest village is **Volcano**.





these people know their stuff. They even have a trained Oriental Medicine staff who administer expert acupuncture treatments. They're also the best place for waxing in case you didn't have time before you left home. ☎ 62-100 Kauna'oa Dr., Kohala ☎ 808/880-1111 or 800/882-6060 ☉ [www.princeresortshawaii.com](http://www.princeresortshawaii.com). \$100, 50-min massage; \$85, 50-min facials; \$100-\$150 acupuncture ☇ Hair salon, sauna, steam room. Gym with: cardiovascular machines. Services: acupuncture, body wraps, facials, massage. Classes and programs: aerobics, yoga.

**Spa Without Walls at the Fairmont Orchid.** This is possibly the best massage on the island, partially due to having the best setting. Massages at the Spa without Walls are either oceanside or waterfall-side. Though most people will probably opt for oceanside, the waterfall experience is equally relaxing, and both settings are absolutely peaceful. There are other great treatments available as well, including facials, fragrant herbal wraps, and Hawaiian-coffee and vanilla scrubs, but the massages are the best thing going. ☎ The Fairmont Orchid, 1 N. Kanikū Dr., Kohala Coast ☎ 808/885-2000 ☉ [www.fairmont.com](http://www.fairmont.com). \$129, 50-min massage, \$150 facial, \$120 body treatment ☇ Sauna, steam room. Gym with: cardiovascular machines, free weights, weight-training equipment. Services: baths, body wraps, facials, massage, scrubs. Classes and programs: aquaerobics, guided walks, meditation, personal training, yoga.

**The Spa at Hualālai.** The Spa is for the exclusive use of hotel guests, so you can sign everything to your room, and you'll never have a problem booking a treatment. Though there are outdoor massage hales that afford somewhat of a "Hawaiian" experience, this is essentially a New York spa dropped in the middle of a tropical island. That said, the therapists are top-notch, and the spa menu does take advantage of local produce, incorporating kokui nuts, coconut, and Thai honey into their body scrubs and massage oils. Aesthetic treatments are under separate management, so facials and salon services take place in the neighboring building. ☎ 100 Ka'ūpūlehu Dr., Ka'ūpūlehu/Kona ☎ 808/325-8000 ☉ [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com). \$120, 50-min massage, \$145 body scrub, \$120 facials ☇ Hair salon, outdoor hot tubs, sauna, steam room. Gym with: cardiovascular machines. Services: body treatments, facials, massage. Classes and programs: personal training, Pilates, Spinning, tai chi, yoga.

## WHERE TO EAT

Hotels along the Kohala Coast invest in top chefs to match their opulent settings; diners are rarely disappointed. Cutting-edge chefs cook with the freshest local produce, fish, and herbs, creating intriguing blends of flavors that reflect the island's varied cultural backgrounds, and the unique training of each chef. Events such as the Great Waikoloa Food, Wine and Music Fest at the Hilton Waikoloa Village, and Cuisines of the Sun at Mauna Lani Bay Hotel draw hundreds of guests to starlighted open-air dinners celebrating the bounty of the isle's land and waters.

As the bulk of Big Island tourism is on the Kona-side, the majority of restaurants are here as well, and they tend to be a bit pricey. In addition to the resorts, there are also some great choices in Upcountry

Waimea, North Kohala (in Kawaihae and Hāwī—both a short drive from the resort area) as well as on the east side of the island in Hilo. Less populated areas like Ka'ū, the Hānākua Coast, and Puna offer limited choices for dinner, but usually at least one or two spots that do a decent plate lunch. A handful of excellent little eateries have recently cropped up in Kainaliu, near Kealakekua Bay. As more and more young people move into this area they are opening up their own businesses, from funky clothing boutiques to organic cafés.

### WHAT IT COSTS

	\$\$\$\$	\$\$\$	\$\$	\$	¢
RESTAURANTS	over \$30	\$20-\$30	\$12-\$20	\$7-\$12	under \$7

Restaurant prices are for one main course at dinner.

## Kohala

### American-Casual

**\$-\$\$\$** ✕ **Café Pesto.** Both branches of Café Pesto—in the quaint harbor town of Kawaihae and in Hilo—are equally popular. Fresh local seafood, exotic pizzas (with chili-grilled shrimp, shiitake mushrooms, and cilantro crème fraîche, for example), and Asian-inspired pastas and risottos reflect the ethnic diversity of the island. Local microbrews and a full-service bar make this a good place to end the evening. ☎ *Kawaihae Shopping Center, Kawaihae* ☎ 808/882-1071 ☉ [www.cafepesto.com](http://www.cafepesto.com) ☇ AE, D, DC, MC, V. \$10-\$29.

**\$-\$\$\$** ✕ **Kawaihae Harbor Grill and Seafood Bar.** This popular little restaurant is always packed—there's something about their crisp green and white, 1850s building that just catches the eye and draws people in. That and the fact that it smells way are too good to pass up if you're hungry. Food is not adventurous but very good; fresh island fish, chicken, and ribs are all in hearty portions. Inside, it's all vintage Hawaiiana—old records, a surfboard, and hula skirts. The Seafood Bar is upstairs in a separate structure that also dates from the 1850s, and it has been a "hot spot" since it opened in 2003. The bar is a good place to wait until your table is ready, or to feast from the all-pūpū (Hawaiian appetizers) menu. ☎ *Kawaihae Harbor, Hwy. 270, Kawaihae* ☎ 808/882-1368 ☇ MC, V. \$6-\$24.

### Chinese

**\$-\$\$\$\$** ✕ **Grand Palace Chinese Restaurant.** A reasonable alternative in a land of high-price hotel dining, this restaurant offers dishes from most regions, including such standards as egg foo yung, wonton soup, chicken with snow peas, and beef with broccoli. More adventurous dishes include sautéed local seafood, lobster, and sizzling shrimp with garlic sauce. Etched-glass panels are a nice embellishment. ☎ *King's Shops, Waikoloa Resort, 250 Waikoloa Beach Dr., Kohala Coast* ☎ 808/886-6668 ☇ AE, DC, MC, V. \$9-\$40.

### Contemporary-Hawaiian

**★ \$\$\$\$** ✕ **The Batik at Mauna Kea Beach Hotel.** For the hotel's elegant signature restaurant—with its glass-enclosed, split-level waterfront dining room—

Link to restaurants and see how readers rate them at [fodors.com](http://fodors.com)

## SIGHTSEEING TOURS

**GUIDED TOURS ON THE ISLAND** are great for specific things: seeing Mauna Kea, exploring Waipi'o Valley, maybe even touring Volcanoes National Park (especially if your time is short). Sticking to a guided tour the whole time, though, would not be a great idea. Half the fun of the island is in exploring it on your own. Plus, if you stick to a guided tour, you'll only see the major tourist attractions, none of the Big Island's many hidden treasures.

Local tour-bus operators conduct volcano tours and circle-island tours, with pickup at the major resorts.

Costs range from \$38 to \$68, depending on pickup location. The circle-island tour is a full 12-hour day, but Jock's and Polynesian Adventure Tours also offer half-day tours to the volcano, Mouno Kea observatory, and around Kailua-Kona.

**Jack's Tours.** ☎ 808/329-2555 in Kona, 808/961-6666 in Hilo, 800/442-5557  
🌐 [www.jackstours.com](http://www.jackstours.com).

**Polynesian Adventure Tours.** ☎ 808/329-8008 in Kona, 800/622-3011 🌐 [www.polyad.com](http://www.polyad.com).

**Roberts Hawaii.** ☎ 808/329-1688 in Kona, 808/966-5483 in Hilo, 800/831-5541  
🌐 [www.robertshawaii.com](http://www.robertshawaii.com).

## WHERE TO STAY

You'll almost always be able to find a room on the Big Island, but you might not get your first choice if you wait until the last minute. Make reservations six months to a year in advance if you're visiting during the winter season (December 15 through April 15). The week after Easter Sunday, when the Merrie Monarch Festival is in full swing, all of Hilo's rooms are taken. Kailua-Kona bursts at the seams in mid-October during the Ironman World Triathlon Championship. (Even tougher than trying to find a room at these times is trying to find a rental car.)

There are literally hundreds of vacation condo rentals in Kailua-Kona, and along the Kohala Coast, which is a good way to get more space at a lower cost and save some money by eating in (although it's easy to amass a huge bill at the grocery store, so you still have to be careful).

Hotel package deals are often available in all price categories and may include a rental car, meals, spa treatments, golf, and other activities. Children under 17 can sometimes stay for free. Check with a travel agent or visit the listed Web sites.

If you choose a B&B, inn, or an out-of-the-way hotel, explain your expectations fully and ask plenty of questions before booking. Be clear about your travel and location needs. Some places require stays of two or three days. When booking, ask about car-rental arrangements, as many B&B networks offer discounted rates. No matter where you stay, you'll want to rent a car—preferably one with four-wheel drive. This is imperative for getting to some of the best beaches and really seeing the island.

Members of the Big Island-based Hawai'i Island Bed and Breakfast Association are listed with phone numbers and rates in a comprehensive online brochure from the Hawai'i Island Bed and Breakfast umbrella

organization. Or you can go with several network booking agencies that try to meet your needs on an individual basis.

**Bed & Breakfast Honolulu (Statewide)** (☎ 800/288-4666 ☎ 808/595-7533 🌐 [www.hawaiibnb.com](http://www.hawaiibnb.com)). **Hawai'i Island Bed and Breakfast Association** (🌐 [www.stayhawaii.com](http://www.stayhawaii.com)). **Hawai'i's Best Bed and Breakfasts** (☎ 808/985-7488 or 800/262-9912 ☎ 808/967-8610 🌐 [www.bestbnb.com](http://www.bestbnb.com)).

For information on camping at county parks, including Spencer Beach Park, contact the **Department of Parks and Recreation** (☎ 25 Aupuni St., Hilo 96720 ☎ 808/961-8311 🌐 [www.hawaii-county.com](http://www.hawaii-county.com)).

### WHAT IT COSTS

	\$\$\$\$	\$\$\$	\$\$	\$	¢
HOTELS	over \$200	\$150-\$200	\$100-\$150	\$60-\$100	under \$60

Hotel prices are for two people in a standard double room in high season, including tax and service.

## Kohala Coast

### Hotels & Resorts

**\$\$\$** **✪** **The Fairmont Orchid Hawai'i.** The Fairmont is an elegant, old-school hotel—rooms are tasteful, the lobby is enormous with lots of marble and sweeping ocean views, service is impeccable, and the restaurants are all top-notch. The grounds are expansive, lush, and well-maintained. This is one of the largest resorts, and its romantic botanical gardens and waterfall ponds stretch along 32 beachfront acres. Though they used to charge a “resort fee” for things like the morning paper and yoga classes, they now offer a \$20 activity pass good for your entire stay that gets you access to all sorts of classes, equipment rentals, and various other amenities. The resort also offers 2½-hour voyages aboard an authentic Polynesian double-hull sailing canoe, the *Hahalua Lele*, or “Flying Manta Ray.” Their new “Gold Floor” includes free breakfast and a daily wine and hors d'oeuvres hour. This can be especially useful for breakfast as there's nearly always a wait for a table at their breakfast restaurant. ☎ 1 N. Kanikū Dr., Kohala Coast 96743 ☎ 808/885-2000 or 800/845-9905 ☎ 808/885-8886 🌐 [www.fairmont.com](http://www.fairmont.com) 🚗 486 rooms, 54 suites ☎ 4 restaurants, A/C, in-room broadband, in-room safes, minibars, cable TV with movies and video games, 2 18-hole golf courses, 10 tennis courts, pool, hair salon, health club, sauna, spa, beach, snorkeling, boating, basketball, volleyball, 4 bars, shop, children's programs (ages 5-12), business services; no smoking ☎ AE, D, DC, MC, V. \$309-\$559.

**★ \$\$\$\$** **✪** **Four Seasons Resort Hualālai.** Beautiful views everywhere, polished wood floors, warm earth and cool white tones, and Hawaiian artwork make Hualālai a peaceful retreat. Ground-level rooms have outdoor garden showers. Guest bungalows are large and cozy, with down comforters and spacious slate-floor bathrooms. One of the five pools, “King's Pond” is a brackish water pond housing loads of fish and two manta rays that guests have the opportunity to feed daily. The main infinity pool looks like something out of an ad for an expensive liquor—it's long and peace-



ful, surrounded by cabanas and palm trees with a clear view to the ocean beyond. The on-site Hawaiian Cultural Center honors the grounds' spiritual heritage, and the Sports Club and Spa offers top-rate health and fitness options. Hualālai's golf course hosts the Senior PGA Tournament of Champions. The resort is super kid-friendly, with a great activities program. The downside is this: despite their efforts to the contrary, the Four Seasons doesn't feel much like Hawai'i; add to that the number of guests who will be squawking on their cell phones next to you at the pool (despite the posted "no cell phones" sign), and the too-good-to-be-true cheeriness of the staff with their near-constant "Aloha" greetings, and you can see why some folks avoid this place. Still, it's beautiful, the restaurants are perfect, the rooms are more than comfortable, and the service is definitely of Four Seasons quality. ☎ 100 Ka'ūpūlehu Dr., Ka'ūpūlehu/Kona ☎ Box 1269, Kailua-Kona 96745 ☎ 808/325-8000, 800/819-5053, or 888/340-5662 ☎ 808/325-8200 🌐 [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com) ↗ 243 rooms, 31 suites ☰ 3 restaurants, A/C, in-room broadband, in-room safes, cable TV with movies, in-room DVDs, 18-hole golf course, 8 tennis courts, 5 pools, health club, spa, beach, 2 bars, recreation room, babysitting, children's programs (ages 5-11), laundry service, business services, airport shuttle, no-smoking rooms ☑ AE, DC, MC, V. \$560-\$775.

★★★★ **Hāpuna Beach Prince Hotel.** Locals love to hate the Hāpuna Prince—it's because of this hotel that you're no longer allowed to camp at Hāpuna Beach. The hotel's never done all that well, and most believe that its lack of success is karmic. Because of this, the Hāpuna Prince is often cheaper than its neighbors, though it's no less luxurious and happens to be sitting on a corner of the best beach on the island. Spacious, with marble bathrooms and private lānai, all rooms have at least a partial ocean view. Meandering pathways lead to restaurants, beach facilities, and a spectacular golf course. A hiking trail and a frequent shuttle connect Hāpuna with its partner, the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel. ☎ 62-100 Kauna'oa Dr., Kohala Coast 96743 ☎ 808/880-1111 or 800/882-6060 ☎ 808/880-3112 🌐 [www.princeresortshawaii.com](http://www.princeresortshawaii.com) ↗ 314 rooms, 36 suites ☰ 5 restaurants, A/C, refrigerators, cable TV with movies, 18-hole golf course, 13 tennis courts, pool, health club, hair salon, hot tub, spa, beach, 2 bars, children's programs (age 5-12), business services, no-smoking rooms ☑ AE, D, DC, MC, V. \$360-\$650.

★★★★ **Hilton Waikoloa Village.** Dolphins chirp in the lagoon; a pint-sized daredevil zooms down the 175-foot water slide; a bride poses on the grand staircase; a fire-bearing runner lights the torches along the seaside path at sunset—these are the scenes that greet you at this 62-acre playground of a resort. Shaded pathways lined with a multimillion-dollar Pacific Island art collection connect the three tall buildings; Swiss-made trams and Disney-engineered boats shuttle the weary (in another nod to engineering, employees access the various areas of the resort via underground tunnels, à la Disney World). The stars of Dolphin Quest (☎ 800/248-3316 🌐 [www.dolphinquest.org](http://www.dolphinquest.org)) are the resort's pride and joy; reserve in advance for an interactive learning session. Though there is no ocean beach, there's a seaside trail to 'Anacho'omalū Bay. A man-made sand beach borders the 4-acre resort lagoon. Large, modern rooms in neutral tones have private lānai. Be sure to leave your room with plenty of

time before any appointment, or you'll learn to appreciate the size of this place at top speed as you sprint past the tram. Brides-to-be take note: this is one-stop shopping; the resort has a wedding planning office, cakes, flowers, photography, and even fireworks and a "Just Married" boat ride. ☎ 425 Waikoloa Beach Dr., Waikoloa 96738 ☎ 808/886-1234 or 800/445-8667 ☎ 808/886-2900 🌐 [www.hiltonwaikoloavillage.com](http://www.hiltonwaikoloavillage.com) ↗ 1,240 rooms, 57 suites ☰ 10 restaurants, room service, A/C, in-room broadband, in-room safes, minibars, cable TV with movies, 2 18-hole golf courses, putting green, 8 tennis courts, 3 pools, health club, spa, beach, bike rentals, racquetball, snorkeling, volleyball, 9 bars, shops, babysitting, children's programs (ages 5-12), laundry service, laundry facilities, business services, car rental, no-smoking rooms ☑ AE, D, DC, MC, V. \$199-\$649.

★★★★ **Kona Village Resort.** Without phones, TVs, or radios, the Kona Village is a time warp—the perfect place to completely get away from it all in your own thatch-roof *hale* (house) near the resort's sandy beach. Built on the grounds of an ancient Hawaiian village, the modern bungalows reflect styles of South Seas cultures—Tahitian, Samoan, Maori, Fijian, or Hawaiian. The extra large Royal rooms have private hot tubs. Rates include meals, an authentic Polynesian Friday-night lū'au, ground tours, tennis, sports activities, and rides in the resort's glass-bottom boat. ☎ Queen Ka'ahumanu Hwy., Box 1299, Kailua-Kona 96745 ☎ 808/325-5555 or 800/367-5290 ☎ 808/325-5124 🌐 [www.konavillage.com](http://www.konavillage.com) ↗ 125 bungalows ☰ 2 restaurants, fans, 3 tennis courts, 2 pools, health club, hot tub, beach, boating, 3 bars, children's programs (ages 6-17; not available in May or Sept.), meeting room, airport shuttle; no A/C, no room phones, no room TVs ☑ AE, DC, MC, V. \$530-\$940.

★★★★ **Mauna Kea Beach Hotel.** The Mauna Kea Beach Hotel is the grande dame of Kohala Coast hotels. Opened in 1965, it has long been regarded as one of the world's premier vacation resort hotels. It borders one of the islands' finest white-sand beaches, Kauna'oa. Rare works of art, such as a 7th-century Buddha, enhance walkways and open spaces. The rooms have a natural look with pastel tones and natural woods. Shuttles operate between the Mauna Kea and the adjacent Hāpuna Beach Prince Hotel, allowing guests to use the facilities at both hotels. ☎ 62-100 Mauna Kea Beach Dr., Kohala Coast 96743 ☎ 808/882-7222 or 800/882-6060 ☎ 808/880-3112 🌐 [www.princeresortshawaii.com](http://www.princeresortshawaii.com) ↗ 300 rooms, 10 suites ☰ 5 restaurants, A/C, in-room safes, refrigerators, cable TV, 2 18-hole golf courses, 13 tennis courts, pool, health club, hair salon, spa, beach, children's programs (age 5-12), business services, no-smoking rooms ☑ AE, D, DC, MC, V. \$370-\$650.

★★★★ **Mauna Lani Bay Hotel and Bungalows.** This is one of the oldest, and still one of the most beautiful, resorts on the island. The lobby is open-air with astronomically high ceilings and an old-money feel. Ninety percent of the spacious rooms have ocean views, and all have a large lānai; comfortable furnishings grace rooms with natural fabrics and teak. The resort is known for its two spectacular golf courses and their award-winning spa. The only downside here is the food—none of the restaurants would qualify as phenomenal (though the Canoe House is beautiful and has won awards at various points in its existence) and all are a bit