

A Perfect Weekend on Hawaii Island

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The perfect weekend begins when you wake up at the Kohala Coast's oceanfront [Hilton Waikoloa Village](#)[Opens external link to page that may not meet accessibility guidelines](#), a resort so idyllic that island residents use it as a playground and escape. Waikoloa averages 360 sunny days per year, so when you throw open your door, you'll find a deliciously warm morning and a blue sky. Hop on the resort's free monorail-style tram, which takes you past tropical gardens; tall coconut trees frame your view of the sea as you head toward a lavish breakfast buffet at [Water's Edge](#)[Opens external link to page that may not meet accessibility guidelines](#).

Hilton Waikoloa Village

Above: The Hilton Waikoloa Village is a tropical playground for visitors and locals alike. Photo credit: Hilton Waikoloa Village

Bellies full from an array of Island-style cuisine, board a mahogany boat (a trip in itself) and glide along the garden-lined canal to explore further. You end up at the resort's beautiful, four-acre, salt-water [lagoon](#)[Opens external link to page that may not meet accessibility guidelines](#) and sandy white sand beach where you swim and snorkel with the green sea turtles, known as honu, and rent pedal boats, paddle boards or kayaks. Move on to one of three gotta-see-'em-to-believe-'em [pools](#)[Opens external link to page that may not meet accessibility guidelines](#), where waterfalls cascade, a 175-foot twisting waterslide careens and Jacuzzis soothe. You become pleasantly weary and commandeer a poolside hammock to rest up —because soon you'll have a date with a dolphin.

Hilton Waikoloa Village

Above: Swim and snorkel in the Hilton Waikoloa Village's four-acre salt-water lagoon. Photo credit: Hilton Waikoloa Village

The resort's [Dolphin Quest](#)[Opens external link to page that may not meet accessibility guidelines](#), owned and operated by marine mammal veterinarians, is one of the largest and most natural dolphin habitats anywhere. If you aren't participating yourself, stand on the Grand Lanai and have a perfect view of others, in small groups of five or six, interacting with the resort's resident dolphins.

Some visits are shallow water encounters, and for others, you wear a mask and use underwater scooters to swim into the main lagoon's deeper water. Consider signing up to spend a day working alongside the professional dolphin trainers as "trainer for a day." Dolphin Quest supports marine mammal conservation, education and scientific research that finds solutions to the threats dolphins and whales face in the wild.

Dolphin Quest

Above: Getting up close and personal with a dolphin at the Hilton Waikoloa Village's Dolphin Quest. Photo credit: Dolphin Quest

Finally, emerge from the water and change into your warmest clothes and head out for a perfect end to a perfect day — viewing a vibrant sunset from 9,200-feet up the dormant volcano Mauna Kea. It's comfortable up there at the mountain's Visitor Information Station, above the clouds, because not only are there bathrooms and the First Light Bookstore, there's also a free evening program with some of the best [stargazing](#)[Opens external link to page that may not meet accessibility guidelines](#) on the whole planet (really). Informed staff and volunteers roll out portable

telescopes, set them up and show you what's visible in that night's sky. Stargazing is on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., weather permitting, and they can only accommodate 115 vehicles; after that, they turn cars away.

Mauna Kea

Above: Experience other-worldly beauty atop the dormant volcano, Mauna Kea. Photo credit: Jake Marote

Make sure you check the mountain's weather and driving conditions ahead of time by calling (808) 935-6268, and look at the Mauna Kea [webcamsOpens external link to page that may not meet accessibility guidelines](#). Warm clothes and closed shoes are a must because it's often near freezing up there and sometimes even snows (the First Light Bookstore sells warm logo clothing). And start out with a full tank of gas because there are no gas stations on the mountain or anywhere closer than Waikoloa or Waimea. Back down at the resort, sleep well knowing that tomorrow will be another great day.

Consider sleeping in the next morning and then head out for a delicious lunch at [Umeke's Fishmarket Bar and GrillOpens external link to page that may not meet accessibility guidelines](#), which you've seen on the Food Channel. It's Kona's go-to place for poke, as in the poke bowls currently trending on the U.S. mainland. The dish, with its chunks of the freshest, marinated raw fish served over hot rice, has long been a staple in Hawaii. Traditionally, Hawaiian poke is often served with Hawaiian sea salt, inamona (a chopped, roasted and salted kukui nut) and seaweed but there are many different kinds at Umeke's, all "fresh from boat to bowl."

Umeke's Fishmarket Bar and Grill

Above: Local-style fare is the order of the day at Umeke's Fishmarket Bar and Grill. Photo courtesy Umeke's Fishmarket Bar and Grill

After lunch double-check [lava conditionsOpens external link to page that may not meet accessibility guidelines](#) and then head out to Pahoehoe, in the district of Puna, to finish off your perfect weekend with another amazing sunset. This time it's on a boat trip that takes you to see something most never do — lava gushing into the ocean from Kilauea Volcano. [Hawaiian Lava Boat ToursOpens external link to page that may not meet accessibility guidelines](#) leave from Isaac Hale Beach Park in Pahoehoe, 808 345-9887, [HawaiianLavaBoatTours.comOpens external link to page that may not meet accessibility guidelines](#).

lava flowing into the sea

Above: View lava flowing into the sea on a lava boat tour. Photo credit: Ehitu Keeling

It's not a gentle boat trip, nor for the faint of heart. Some people take motion sickness pills before the extreme-adventure, 45-minute journey through sometimes-rough water and are very glad they did. It's worth it — you'll be soaked to the skin on the exhilarating ride and then overwhelmed to see powerful, brilliant orange waterfalls of molten lava spilling into the ocean. Feel the heat and steam on your face and hear the lava sizzling and popping. Further out, you may spot flying fish or more dolphins. This once-in-a-lifetime adventure is an unforgettable way to cap off your perfect Hawaii Island weekend.