

Travel [hawaii]
in Style



Exclusive Excursions:

Private, Personal and Posh

Specialized Hawaiian tours cater to those in search of the extraordinary

By Andrea Kahn
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There's Hawaii for the masses, and then there's Hawaii for a select, privileged few. It's a distinction that you won't read about in the tour books, and it's not necessarily based on how much money you spend, but on how you spend it.

"It's all about access," said John Clifford, president of the luxury travel consulting firm International Travel Management, which customizes over-the-top private excursions in Hawaii and elsewhere. "Once you have access, you are able to have really unique experiences, seeing parts of the land and the culture others only dream about — and don't even know exist."

Native Hawaiians, or *kanaka maolis*, treasure their land. To them, the islands aren't just spectacularly beautiful, they're alive — and they're sacred. When Hawaiians share their revered land and their culture with visitors, it's considered an honor and a gift to those on the receiving end. Those fortunate few are experiencing the true unadulterated splendor of Hawaii.

"Hawaii is not like Italy, which people visit for the wine, food and architecture," said Howard Green, CEO of MoonRings, a concierge-level travel service. "Hawaii is all about natural beauty. And to the extent that there's an upscale way to



Above: In search of that rarest Hawaiian treasure — solitude.
Inset: The Kopohokine Adventures waterfall tour on the Big Island.

experience Hawaii, it's by going to those pristine, inaccessible places and doing so in the most posh of conditions."

>> High Flying

Yes, anyone can book a run-of-the-mill 45-minute helicopter tour over Hawaii's volcanoes and rainforests. Or you can take the experience a step further with Kopohokine Adventures' waterfall tour (\$598/person; www.kapohokine.com) on the Big Island (which just happens to be the same tour "The Bachelorette" and her beaus took in one of last season's final episodes). Beginning with a breathtaking flight over Kilauea in a state-of-the-art air-conditioned helicopter, the tour continues with a close-up view of the massive volcano's various lava breakouts and skylights.

The tour then soars over an active vent, Pu'u O'o, where you can watch the creation of even more Hawaii. The journey concludes with a landing in the middle of the jungle, beside a spectacular mountain pool and 40-foot waterfall. Your guide prepares a Hawaiian-style barbecue, complete with cold local beer and chilled Champagne. Swim or kayak under the waterfall, or enjoy the peaceful sounds of the mountain under a private pavilion or shaded grotto.

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Clockwise from right:
A private outrigger excursion with Pure Kauai; a customized dinner from a world-class chef, arranged by Pure Kauai; solitary snorkeling on Maui.



>> Night Watch

A private stargazing trip to the top of the dormant Mauna Kea Volcano on the Big Island — a locale many Hawaiians believe to be the most sacred place in all the islands — is another experience not soon forgotten (\$185/person; www.hawaii-forest.com/adventures/mauna-kea-summit-and-stars.asp).

“Hawaii has the clearest sky in the world,” said Green. “The view from the top of the mountain is quite mind-boggling.” Private tours (the mountain is essentially off-limits to visitors except for those with special access) begin with a trip up to the 13,000-foot summit, a journey that ends in magnificent views of the horizon and the famous Mauna Kea sunset. The trip’s highlight is the descent back to 9,000 feet, where an expert guide sets up telescopes and breaks out the hot chocolate and macadamia nut cookies.

Hawaii: A Thousand Reasons to Smile — at The Grove

Hawaii is bringing the Aloha Spirit to The Grove this September with live Hawaiian entertainment, cooking demonstrations, movies in the park, Hawaii-themed fountain shows and a Hawaii vacation giveaway provided by Pleasant Holidays.

Saturday, Sept. 12, 8 p.m.: “South Pacific,” presented by arrangement with the Rodgers & Hammerstein Organization
Saturday, Sept. 19, 8 p.m.: “Lilo & Stitch”

Where: The Grove
189 The Grove Drive
Los Angeles, 90036.
Free to the public.

For more information about the events or planning a trip to Hawaii, visit www.gohawaii.com/happy.

“There are plenty of places where you can go horseback riding,” said Green. “But this is the place to feel like a Hawaiian cowboy and rustle up some cattle.”

No nose-to-tail lineups here — this is the real thing. Those with enough gumption will herd cattle with real *paniolas* (Hawaiian for cowboy). Unlike the real *paniolas*, however, after a few hours of “rustling,” you can return to your hotel for a bubble bath, massage and glass of wine.

>> Horse Play

Not afraid to get those new Ralph Lauren linen pants a little dusty? City slickers looking for action can get a taste of the cowboy life by joining an actual cattle drive on the Big Island at Dahana Ranch (\$130/person, \$1,000 for a full weekend experience; www.dahanaranch.com), one of the only family-owned and -operated “activities” ranches (basically a functioning ranch that lets visitors participate in the work) in all of Hawaii.

>> Pure Pampering

Then there’s the really, really upscale way to do Hawaii — the way the rich and famous do it. Multimillionaires seeking pampering and privacy choose the Pure Kauai company (www.purekauai.com) and its customized wellness retreats on the northern shore of Hawaii’s “Garden Isle.”

“We’re talking high-end, outside-of-the-box experiences,” said Clifford, who often works with Pure Kauai to coordinate lavish ultra-luxury vacations. Choose from a roster of exclusive cliff-top and beachfront residences — from small villas (\$499/night) to huge estates (\$2,700/night) with equally huge staffs. Think private surf lessons with an actual world pro (not just some random Hawaiian dude); a four-hour lomi-lomi massage at your bungalow with Bono’s favorite massage therapist; sunrise yoga atop a nearby cliff, followed by a customized organic and/or vegan breakfast created by a world-class chef; or a private Cessna air tour down the Napali Coast, during which you’ll touch down in otherwise inaccessible areas for outrigger canoeing and visits to hidden waterfalls and sacred pools.

>> Tours (Sans Tourists)

There are, of course, plenty of less strenuous, more “touristy” activities that are well worth doing — as long as you don’t have to deal with hordes of mainlanders, that is. Again, the key is access.

“The beauty of luxury travel in Hawaii is that there is no need to stand in lines at any of the must-see attractions or restaurants,” said Alison Traxler of MLT Vacations, operator of Delta Vacations, one of the largest providers of customizable luxury vacation packages in the United States. Her vacation musts include the Pearl Harbor Tour, where the privileged go to the front of the line and travel behind the scenes; and the Obama Tour, available only to the luxury traveler, which features deluxe transportation to key historical locations in the president’s early life.

For an especially authentic experience, hotels and high-end travel specialists can customize all manner of packages that include hands-on learning experiences like private hula lessons or classes on the art of pounding poi, throw-net fishing or Hawaiian spear throwing.

“Anyone can do the traditional touristy excursions, but not many can get the kind of insider experiences that showcase the true Hawaii,” said Clifford. “If you’re one of the lucky ones, these are experiences that last a lifetime — that can’t be bought and sold. They are the essence of Hawaii.”

Andrea Kahn is a freelance writer who writes regularly about Hawaii.

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