

**instinct**

**...follow yours**

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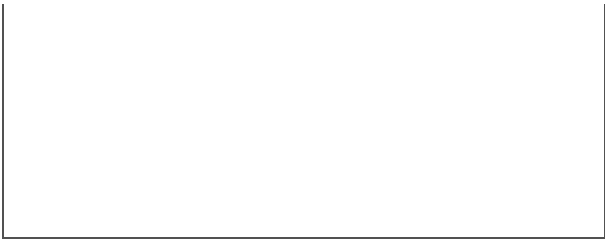
When thinking about visiting the great state of Hawaii, the first thing that comes to my mind is which island should I land on to have the best time. I often rely on the recommendations of friends when it comes to travel, my own online research, but I also don't mind a nudge in the right direction from a professional once in a while. When researching Hawaii and where to go, Travel + Leisure recently lent a helping hand.

### ***Kauai Recognized in Travel + Leisure's World's Best Awards***



The island of Kauai was recently recognized on several Travel + Leisure Magazine Annual World's Best Awards lists, by being ranked No. 7 among the World's Top 10 Islands and No. 2 among the Best Islands in Hawaii. The [Ko'a Kea Hotel](#) and Resort ranked No. 48 among the Top 100 Hotels in the World and No. 1 among the 15 Best Resorts in Hawaii. The [The Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort and Spa](#) ranked No. 11. The World's Best Awards are determined annually via a reader survey developed by the editors of Travel + Leisure.

So not only is Travel + Leisure Magazine turning my compass toward the island of Kauai, one of my fellow writers shared his and his partner's fantastic experiences below.



Landing in **Kauai**, you are immediately transported to a different and glorious place and time – where everyone takes the time to appreciate and experience the beauty that surrounds. Lush vegetation, unique bays, and first class accommodations make Kauai an ideal romantic vacation for weddings, honeymoons, and anniversaries. Trust us when we say that you will not disappoint your significant other.



We

arrived at **The Grand Hyatt** where we would be staying for two nights. The Grand Hyatt is a beautiful beach side resort with stunning views and an incredibly gorgeous beach, all in great proximity to most everything. As soon as we arrived, we were greeted by friendly and smiling staff members. Jacob, who checked us in at the reception was warm, friendly, and very helpful.

Our rooms were not ready since we were well ahead of schedule, so we arranged for a couple's massage at the Anara Spa. The spa incorporates traditional healing customs to inspire unity, harmony, and balance. Ancient Hawaiians believe in an intimate relationship with nature and the intuitive healing practices to care for the mind, body, and spirit as one. Amidst lush tropical gardens and cascading waterfalls, the spa was truly welcoming and relaxing all at once. The spa attendant brought us to a private hale (hut) to wait for our therapists. My husband and myself received an invigorating and relaxing massage in a private setting. *Friendly Tip!* – after a long plane ride, it's very helpful and refreshing to get a massage to officially start your vacation! After the massage, we enjoyed the soaking tub and the private lava rocks showers.

Next we headed over to the pool area and enjoyed some drinks and food at Hale Nule. Our drink of choice? The

obligatory mai tais. Being completely exhausted from our journey and totally relaxed from the spa, we retired to our room for our first night at The Grand Hyatt and decided to do room service. Staying in was a great decision since we knew we'd be waking up early the next morning to explore even more of the island of Kauai.



The following morning, we were off to experience one of [Capt. Andy's Sailing and Raft Expeditions](#). The 5 to 5 ½ hour trip was truly enjoyable as we marveled at the magnificence of the Na Pali Coastlines, amazing waterfalls, and breathtaking scenery. We anchored at a tropical reef and took advantage of the great snorkeling. Unlimited refreshments were provided which did include alcoholic drinks. The crew was super friendly and very knowledgeable of the scenic wonders. We also lucked out in spotting a school of dolphins enjoying the sea and frolicking with each other.



For dinner, we headed to the Grand Hyatt's feature restaurant, [Tidepools](#). Thatched-roof bungalows that float above a koi-filled lagoon at the base of a waterfall created an intimate and romantic ambiance. We were told that the majority of the patrons that night were celebrating special occasions and being there and experiencing this setting first hand, we totally understood why they chose to spend it there. The food is clearly inspired by local ingredients and the culinary traditions of Hawaii. Or meals were of course superb, but we do recommend you save room for some of their amazing desserts.

The next morning, we had breakfast at Ilima Terrace, a casual restaurant with beautiful views, high ceilings, and open air terraces, quite a spectacular setting to start our day. Ilima Terrace serves a buffet breakfast where everything was enjoyable, especially the fresh fruits and incredibly friendly staff.

After breakfast, we were off to explore the [Kilohana Plantation Railway](#). We started off with a tour of the mansion of sugar baron Gaylord Wilcox, who built this beautiful 16,000 square foot plantation estate. The mansion was renovated in 1983 after hurricane Iwa damaged it. Hawaiian artifacts are proudly showcased alongside rare artwork from the Orient and Pacific Kingdom. After the tour, we went on a 40-minute fun and educational train ride around the ranch. The conductors entertainingly showcased orchards with over 50 rows of fruit tree varieties, vegetable gardens, and most important of all, animal pastures with donkeys, goats, sheep, horses, cattle, ducks, geese, and a herd of wild pigs. The train does stop, giving you a chance to offer bread to the animals. Being an animal lover, I was so happy to interact with these animals. When the train was finally leaving, one of



the pigs decided to run after us, hoping for more food. It was so cute and beyond words.



After the train ride, we explored the shops and then on to a tasting at the [Koloa Rum Company](#). The award winning Koloa Rum is distilled in vintage copper pots using Hawaiian cane sugar, pure mountain water, and the Aloha spirit of Kauai. Our host gave an oral history of Koloa Rum while making sure that we were all having fun. The rum did not disappoint. We tasted all their rums, each one is an award winner. Of course, we had to stop by the gift shop to purchase some as it was too good not to share with friends.

For lunch, we decided to try the food truck scene in Kauai which has been permanently established in a local parking lot. Al Pastor Tacos Food Truck did not disappoint for it was delicious, causing me to reorder my grilled ahi as I needed a second serving. For dessert, we tried the local favorite, Tege Tege Shaved Ice, and wow, we highly recommend it as we enjoyed it to the very last drop.



Our next destination was [St. Regis in Princeville](#), located in the northern coast of the island of Kauai. Upon entering the lobby, we were immediately awestruck by the beauty and elegance of the hotel with its spectacular views overlooking Hanalei Bay. It's hard to describe just how breathtaking the sights are here. The rooms are beautifully appointed, each with their own amazing views. As soon as we got settled in, we decided to check out the pool and beach area. The St. Regis is comprised of three cliff-side structures cascading down to the beach. The design adheres to Kauai's strict building rules which dictate that no single structure can be taller than a coconut tree, approximately four stories. The way the bay is structured, most of the sounds from the ocean go up and into the resort area, making the waves much louder and lovely in your room than they are down on the beach.

Whether it's from the beach, from your room, or from the balcony off the main lobby, the highlights of the St. Regis are the impossible majestic views of five mountains surrounding the bay, beautiful home, cascading waterfalls, vibrant rainbows, wisps of clouds, fresh sweet air, and a sense that this must be what paradise is like.



For our

next activity, we headed to do the Sunset Golf Club Tour in the neighboring [Princeville Makai Golf Club](#). The Makai course winds its way around serene lakes, woodlands, and an amazing coastline with views of Bali Hai and Hanalei Bay. The 18-hole golf cart tour is offered during late afternoon, just before the setting sun. To commune and appreciate the wonder that nature has to offer, this is truly the best way to enjoy the splendor of the North Shore.

For dinner, we went to the [Kauai Grill at St. Regis](#), a Jean Georges restaurant with a menu consisting of internationally influenced cuisine utilizing the freshest fish and ingredients indigenous to the islands. The dinner was definitely something to write home about, from the succulent Hamachi appetizers to the grilled ahi tuna to the decadent desserts.



The next morning, we decided to visit Makana Terrace for its breakfast buffet overlooking the same awesome views as the day before. The food was as fresh and delicious as we expected. After walking around the beautiful property, it was time for our massage at the Hale'a Spa. We both had a wonderful treatment at the 10,000 square foot facility where wellness consultants can design an individualized spa program for body and mind, all inspired by native Hawaiian healing rituals.

Each evening at Sunset, the St Regis bar has a tradition that is a must experience, the art of Champagne Sabering to celebrate the transition of the work day to a relaxed night against the backdrop of the setting sun. Guests watch their host use sabers to remove the foil, the wire basket around the cork, and the cork itself, all at the same time.

We then proceeded to a dinner hosted by the Director of



Sales and Marketing, Donald Chock (thank you!). Not only was the meal superb and scrumptious, but the conversation was also fun and full of laughter. Don told

us stories about growing up in Hawaii and the history of St. Regis at the same time, bantering with the servers, all for a very entertaining evening. For dessert, Don offered two of the St Regis wedding cakes. They were almost too beautiful to touch, but then after trying a piece, all bets are off. Creamy, moist, and not too sweet. In short, delicious. So delicious I had to sneak out a piece for my midnight snack.

The next morning, we were off the [Kipu Ranch](#) for an ATV Waterfall Picnic Tour, Once we checked in, each couple was given an ATV to drive. The sights on the tour were truly wondrous and the trails were fun and easy to navigate. The Indiana Jones swing was cool especially to those who are not afraid to embarrass themselves. The guides were super friendly, knowledgeable of the area, and really fun to hang out with. The tour lasted for 3 hours but it all went fast as there was so much to see. The waterfall spot was definitely worth the short hike, after which a deli style picnic was served in a pavilion. This adventure is definitely recommend.



For our final night, we checked into the [Ko`a Kea Hotel](#) and Resort at Poipu Beach, an exceptional boutique oceanfront hotel that offers beautiful and romantic accommodations, luxurious and stylish rooms with amazing surroundings, and above all, an excellent staff. Since we mentioned that we were celebrating an anniversary – we were greeted by a wonderful heart shaped swan in our room as well as rose pedals scattered everywhere. It was amazing!

For



dinner, we dined at the hotel's award winning **Red Salt Restaurant**. We can honestly say that this is worth your time as the chef is amazing. Red Salt features contemporary upscale cuisine with creative blends of fresh, local ingredients from the island. The appetizers were perfectly delicious and the entrees were top notch. I really enjoyed the spiced seared ahi and my husband decided to try the \$50 burger (wagyu beef, foie gras, bacon, onions, cheddar, and lobster) and it was amazing, served with truffle fries and a gold aioli! They also have an extensive wine list for pairing.

The next morning, it was time for us to say good bye to this island paradise that I hope to visit again in the very near future. One of the things that really stood out, aside from the wonderful hotels and excursions we did, were the people that make this place truly magical. Everyone smiling and happy – this is how life should be.

