



the big ISLAND Hawaii



If you have been reading this travel column for the last two months, you know I have spent quite a bit of time in the paradise that is the Hawaiian islands with Brendan Vacations. I have had the time of my life. From Oahu, my husband and I flew with the escorted group to the most famous island, The Big Island of Hawaii. When you talk to anyone who has visited the Hawaiian islands, they

all have a favorite, and we are no exception. Our favorite was, without a doubt, Hawaii. It's where we saw our first black sand beach. Lava from the active volcanoes on this island pour into the Pacific Ocean, where it is tumbled, pulverized and eventually turned into soft, black sand. It's really incredible to see, especially when there is a rather large, green sea turtle casually lounging on the sand, as there was when we visited.



BRENDAN VACATIONS

Taking You Personally

Dear Traveler,

We know you've thought about it - the perfect vacation that takes you away from your weekdays, brings you closer to your loved ones and infuses your life with rejuvenating youth and energy. Yes, these are the things dreams are made of, and we have made it our purpose to ensure your dreams become your reality.

-Brendan Vacations

by Jan Ross, Social Media Director, The Travel Authority

But our goal on this island was not only to see the black volcanic sand but to see the volcanoes where that sand originated. So, first we headed to Volcanoes National Park straight from the airport in Hilo. There are two airports in Hawaii, one in Hilo and one in Kona. You can easily get to the park from either one, but Hilo is closer. We were with our tour group on a bus, but it's easy to rent a car and drive to the park.

You can choose to spend as long as you want at the park, but you will want to start at the visitor center, which is located at the summit of the Kilauea Volcano on Crater Rim Drive and has all kinds of information, exhibits and a gift shop. There is a charge at the entrance to the park of \$10 per vehicle or \$5 per person if you are biking or hiking. There are 150 miles of trails throughout the park, so biking or hiking is a great way to see the area. We stood at the summit of the Kilauea Volcano, amazed to see clouds of hot, snow-white steam coming out of the open crater. Then, we walked on tumbled black rocks which were remnants of an ancient lava flow. We even walked through a lava tube, created when the burning hot lava runs over the top of the cooled lava and creates its own path underneath.

But there was no lava, and we wanted to see lava ... red, hot, golden lava pouring into the ocean. This was our vision, and there was only one way to see that — from the air. Brendan Vacations helped us arrange a helicopter tour with Blue Hawaiian Helicopters. If you go to Hawaii and can only manage to do one thing while you are there, that one thing should be taking a helicopter tour. Just make sure you take your Bonine if you have a tendency toward motion sickness.

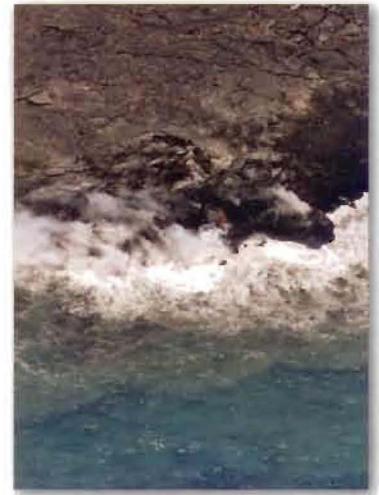
We had flown in a float plane in Alaska, and let me tell you, a helicopter ride is nothing like a float plane. After being securely buckled in, we lifted off the

ground as lightly as a dragonfly and zipped over the lava fields toward the active Kilauea Volcano. Dipping and weaving through the white steam of this crater was quite a different experience from viewing it on the ground. Then, we began to see evidence of recent lava flows. Small patches of green rainforest and one lone house were all that were left after a recent lava flow, and some of the trees were actually on fire. Then we saw the snake-line outline of the golden red lava flowing toward the ocean. We flew above it, marveling at the power of something which could literally wipe out a landscape in just a few hours; then, we saw the steam rising as the lava poured into the cold ocean. Flying along the coast, we slipped into deep, emerald-green canyons where waterfalls plummeted thousands of feet to the bottom of the canyon. It was absolutely amazing and like nothing we had ever done in our lives. That helicopter trip will be something we remember forever.

While we were in Hawaii, we stayed at the Royal Kona Resort, a gorgeous place perched right above the ocean on ancient, black volcanic rock. The views from our room of the ocean crashing on the rock were incredible. It was always really convenient to the town of Kona which was only about a five minute walk.

We had a great lunch in Kona at Bongo Ben's Island Café. It's right on Ali'i Drive, which is the main road through town and it's all open-air style, so you can overlook the lovely Kailua Bay while you eat. Don't even order two entrees because they serve huge portions which you can easily share. I recommend the fish taco which came with a large platter of delicious, sautéed fresh fish and all the taco fixings for you to make your own — plenty for two.

You can walk off that huge lunch by doing some shopping at the hundreds of shops right along Ali'i Drive and the small roads that run off it. Pick up some world-famous Kona coffee and a variety of seasoned or chocolate-



covered Macadamia nuts to take home for gifts. One of the best places to buy these items as well as T-shirts and any sundries you need is in one of the many ABC stores which are located all over the Hawaiian islands. You can also buy more high-quality T-shirts at Crazy Shirts or Dirt Shirts, where they dye the shirts with red Hawaiian dirt.

Of course, there are dozens more things to do in Hawaii which we didn't have time to get to, such as whale-watching in the winter, gorgeous beaches with swimming and snorkeling, hiking through beautiful canyons and visiting the many national parks. That's why we have decided we have to go back. And why, if you have never been, you should plan a trip right now!

About the Author:

Jan Ross is the Social Media Director for The Travel Authority. Read her travel blog at <http://thetravelauthority.blogspot.com/> to find out about other fabulous travel deals and travel information. Or call The Travel Authority at 1-877-AXP-1515. They have offices located all over Central Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee and Florida and will help you get the best possible deal for a wonderful trip. You can contact Jan at kentuckygal53@gmail.com with comments or suggestions for article topics.

Aloha, Welcome to Hawaii


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