

# Big Island of Hawai'i

2026  
HIGHLIGHTS  
VISITOR PLANNER



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Hawaii-Guide.com offers personalized Hawaii travel advice and vacation tips on the top attractions and things to see and do within the Hawaiian islands.

This packet, along with our [website](#), features all of the best attractions on the Big Island of Hawaii — plus you can explore our hand-picked Hawaii tours, activities, and accommodations - each vetted by our team of Hawaii experts.



Since 2002, our Hawaii website, guidebooks, and digital travel guides have assisted millions of visitors in the process of planning and booking the Hawaiian vacation of their dreams.

Our organization is dedicated to being the one-stop resource for all things Hawaii.





## HAWAII TRAVEL GUIDE - 2026 VISITOR PLANNER Big Island Highlights Edition

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**Language Note:** Hawai'i's two official languages are Hawaiian and English. It is the only state in the U.S. with two official languages. In this guide we used both the English and Hawaiian names of places when possible. There are only 13 letters in the Hawaiian alphabet: A, E, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, U, W and the 'okina ('). The okina is a glottal stop like the sound between the ohs in "oh-oh" and is considered a consonant. In order to clarify pronunciation, you will often see the glottal stop ( ' ) or 'okina used on words in this guide such as Hawai'i. Due to printing restrictions, we will not use the macron, which is found above stressed vowels in the Hawaiian language.

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# HAWAI'I TRAVEL GUIDE

## 2026 Visitor Planner

### Big Island Highlights Edition



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# HAWAII WEATHER

Weather on the Big Island of Hawai'i changes as rapidly as the terrain around it. No other island has the same diversity as the Big Island; not even by a long shot!

In some areas, rainfall can be absolutely zero; not a drop falls all year long and the terrain reflects this- it's dry and barren. In other areas, it can be rainy every day of the year (as in Hilo or Puna), creating a lush paradise for visitors who enjoy that type of environment.

For the most part, the Big Island is warm and tropical year-round. Average temperatures near the major resort areas (coastline) range from 75-85°F (23°C-29°C) in winter and summer, respectively. At the higher elevations like Volcano and Waimea, temperatures are often much cooler, especially during the night. Hilo can also have lower temperatures depending on how far mauka (inland) you travel. And, of course, the summit of Mauna Kea and flanks of Mauna Loa or Hualalai can be quite chilly, if not downright frigid.

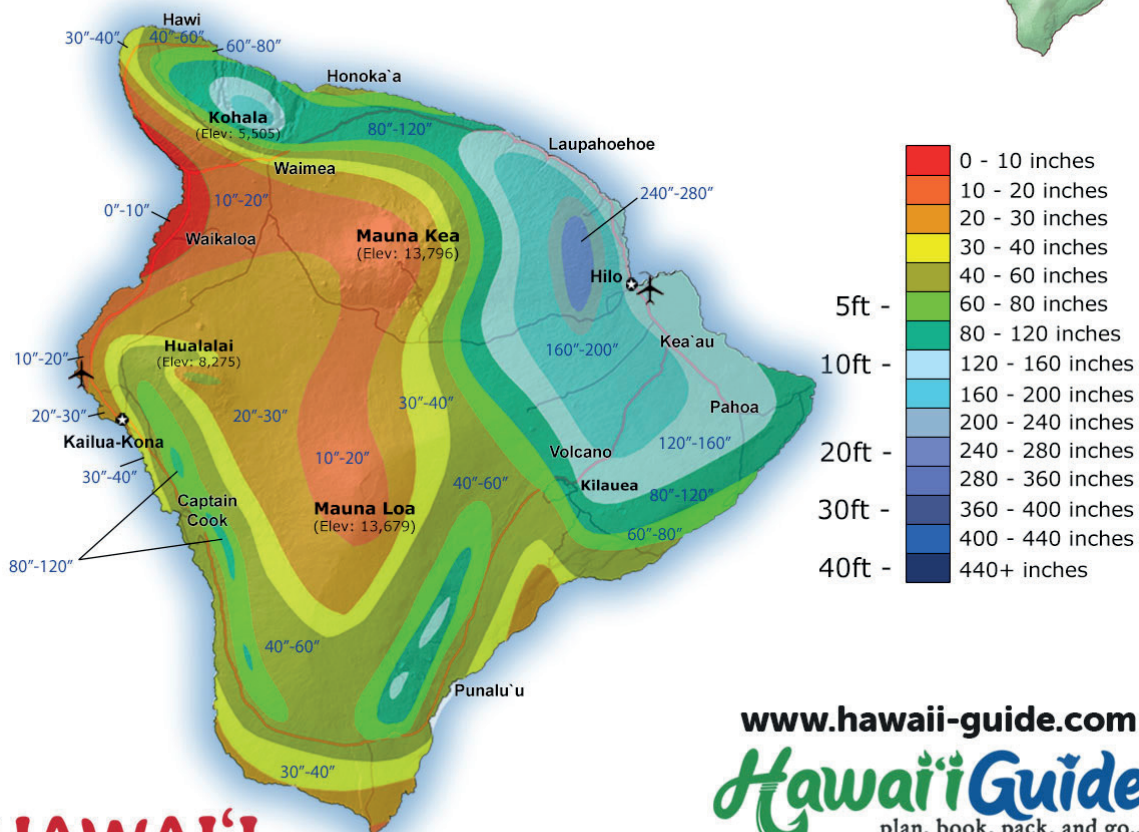
Here are a few things to keep in mind, summarized, about Hawai'i's weather:

- Check sources of reliable forecasts, like the [University of Hawai'i Weather](#), before you visit and during your stay, as they have the best and most accurate forecast in the islands.

Don't listen to the Weather Channel or watch the NOAA forecast graphs, of course, they'll predict rain - it technically rains almost every day in Hawai'i... for about 10 minutes at a time. The only time it's really wet in Hawai'i for a prolonged time is during the winter months, usually from November until March.

- As far as temperature goes, plan accordingly for the island you're visiting. At sea level, it's usually about 76-85°F (24-29°C) all year-round. Temperatures at night are typically 12-18°F (7-8°C) cooler, but this can change dramatically depending on your altitude. Volcano, on the Big Island, can get quite chilly at night for example. If you're planning to go up to higher elevations be sure to bring a small coat and long convertible pants, trust us- it gets cold!

## Big Island Hawaii Annual Precipitation

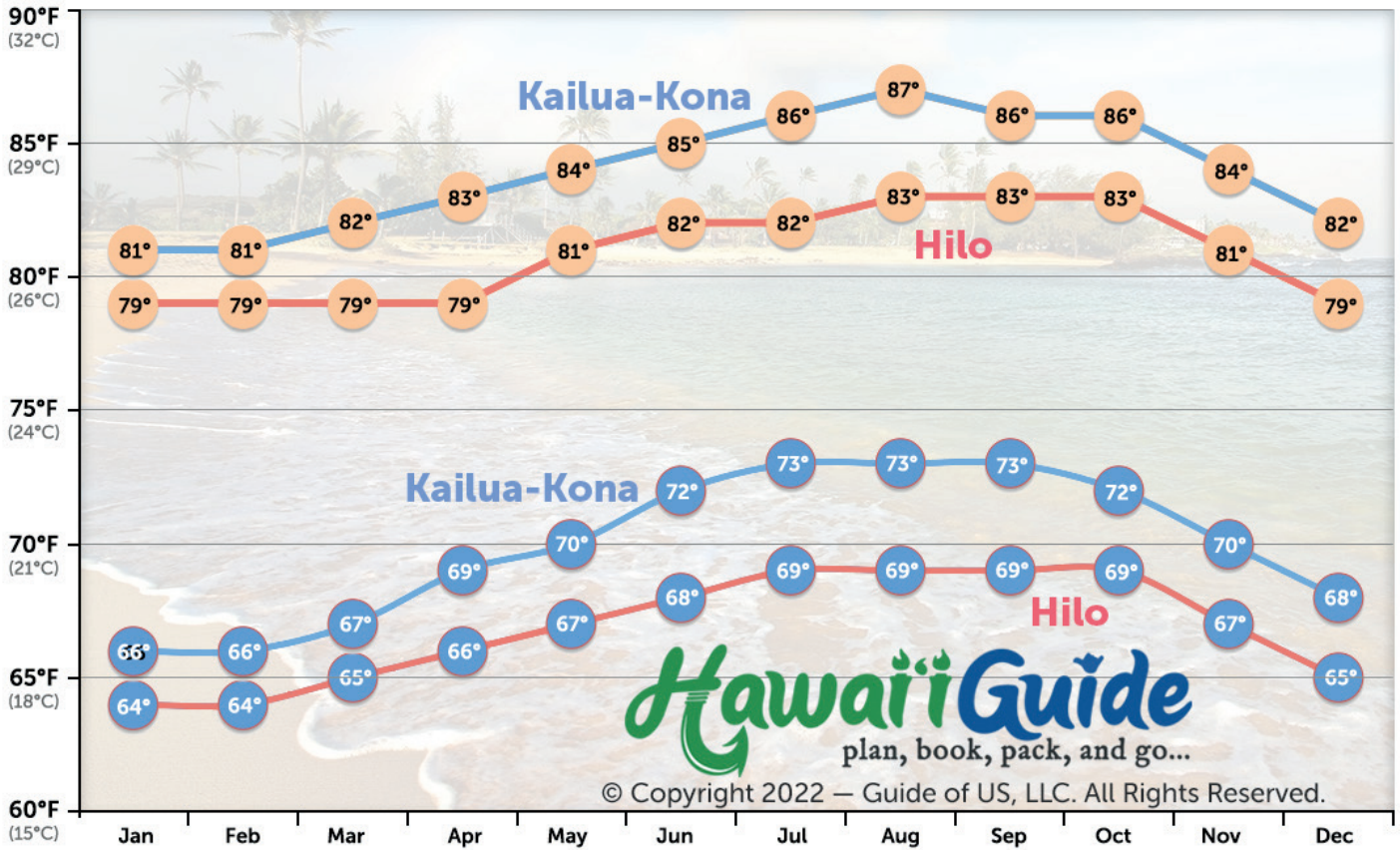


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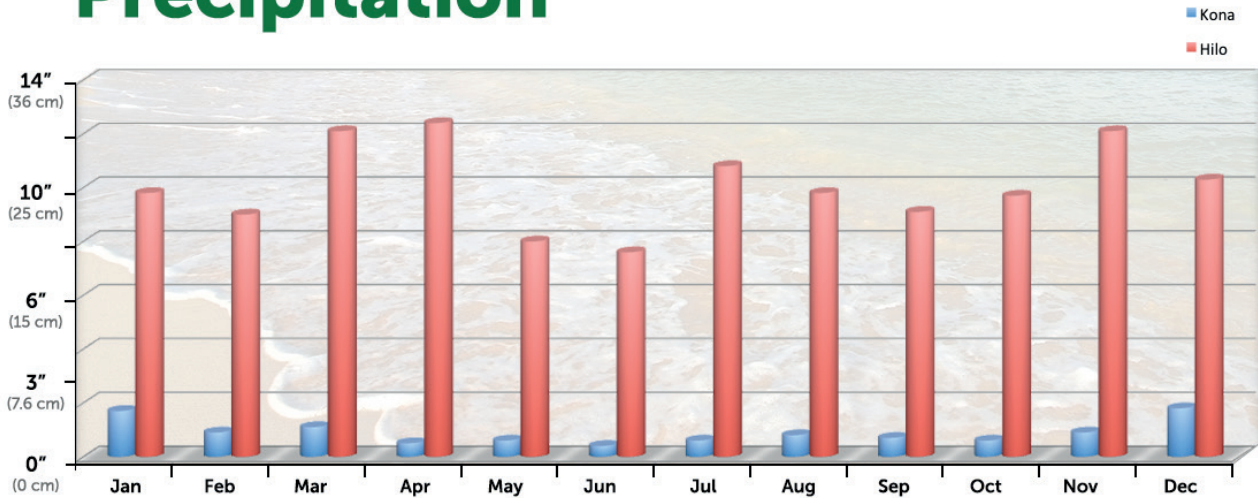
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# Big Island Temperatures HAWAII THE BIG ISLAND



# Hilo & Kailua-Kona Precipitation HAWAII THE BIG ISLAND



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Precipitation is based on average rainfall, measured in inches (estimated metric measurements in parenthesis), at Kailua-Kona & Hilo airports and may vary based on geographic location.

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Rainbow Falls State Park - Hilo

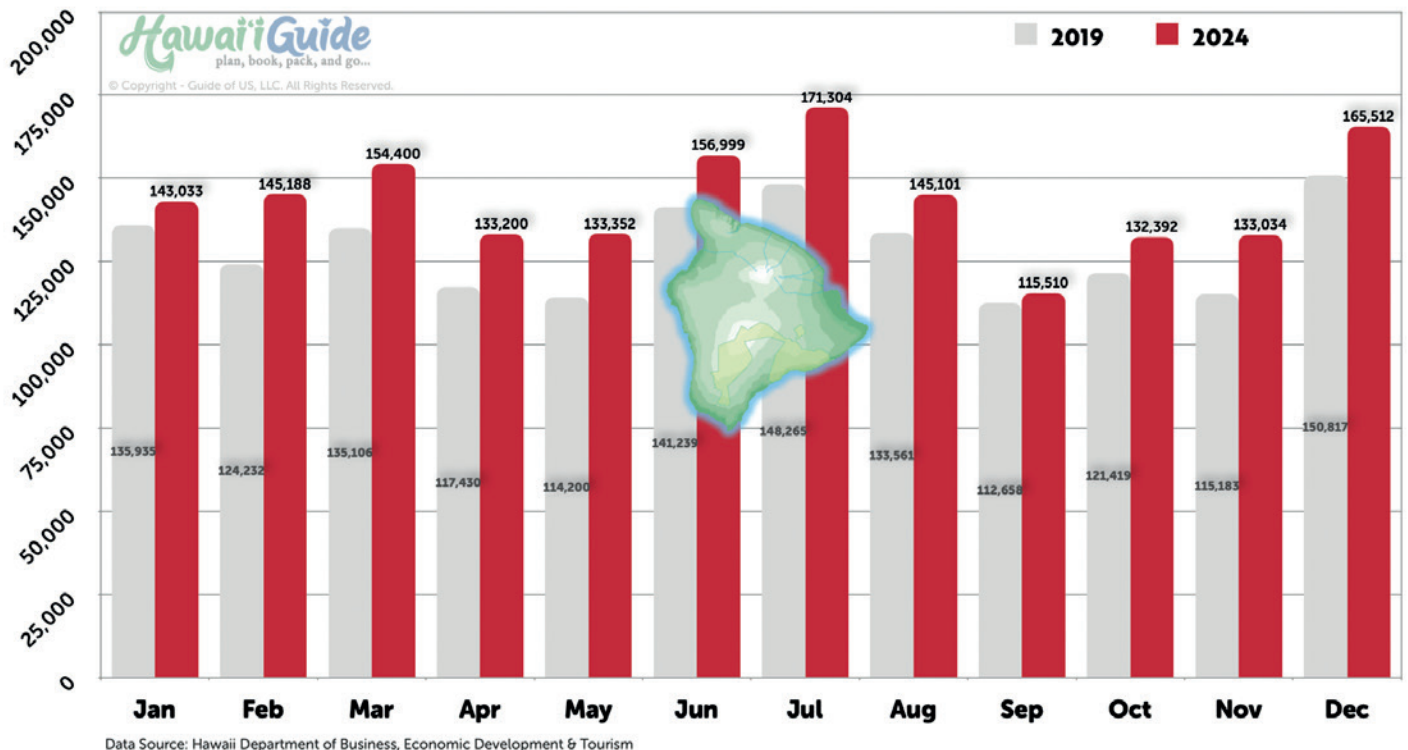
## WHEN TO VISIT

There honestly isn't a 'bad time' to go to Hawai'i. Visiting Hawai'i is a dream come true for many visitors, and who can blame them? It's a remarkable, unique, & beautiful paradise.

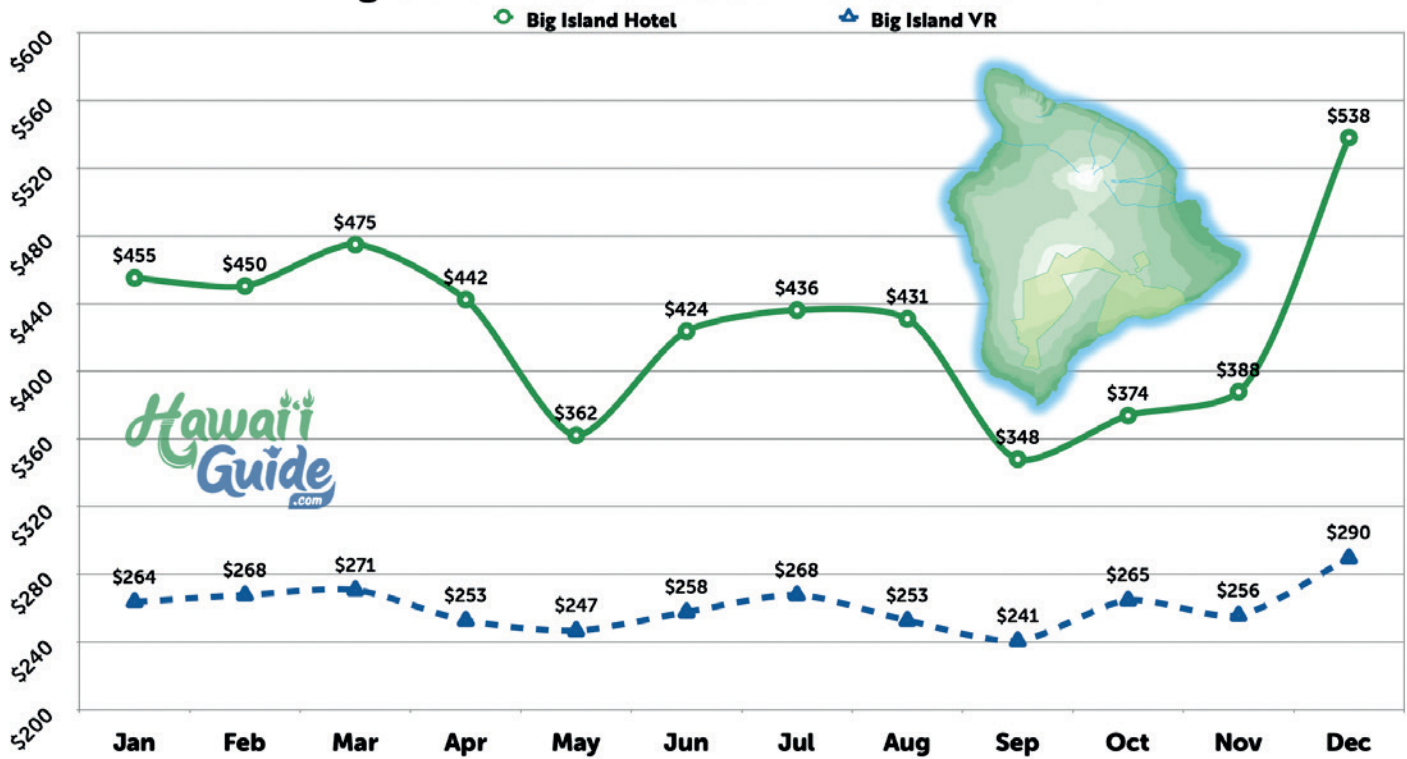
In general, the best months to visit Hawai'i are in April (avoid holidays, when applicable), May, September, or October for the best overall weather, lowest statewide rates, and fewest visitors on-island.

Let's go over a few additional topics that'll make deciding when to visit easier. First here's an overview of visitor arrivals on the islands by month. As you can see, there's an increase at three times of the year - Spring Break in March, Summer, and Christmas/New Year's.

**Estimated Big Island Visitors by Month**



## Big Island Hotel vs Vacation Rental Rates in 2024



Data Source: Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism

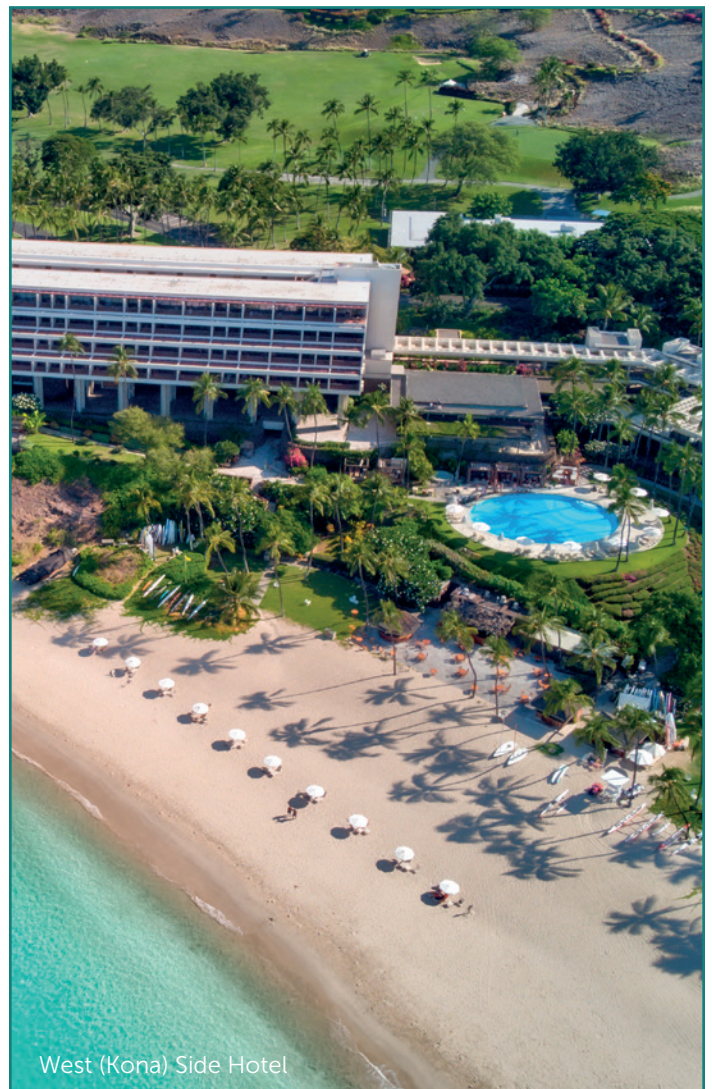
## Hawai'i Hotel Rates Average Accommodation Prices

As is to be expected, when more people are 'on-island' visiting the Hawaiian Islands - accommodation, rental, and flight costs will increase as well.

To avoid the crowds and keep rates lower, you can always try visiting during non-peak visitation periods (i.e.; spring and fall are both much quieter).

When preparing for your trip, the graphic above should help provide a general idea of the average rates during different times of the year.

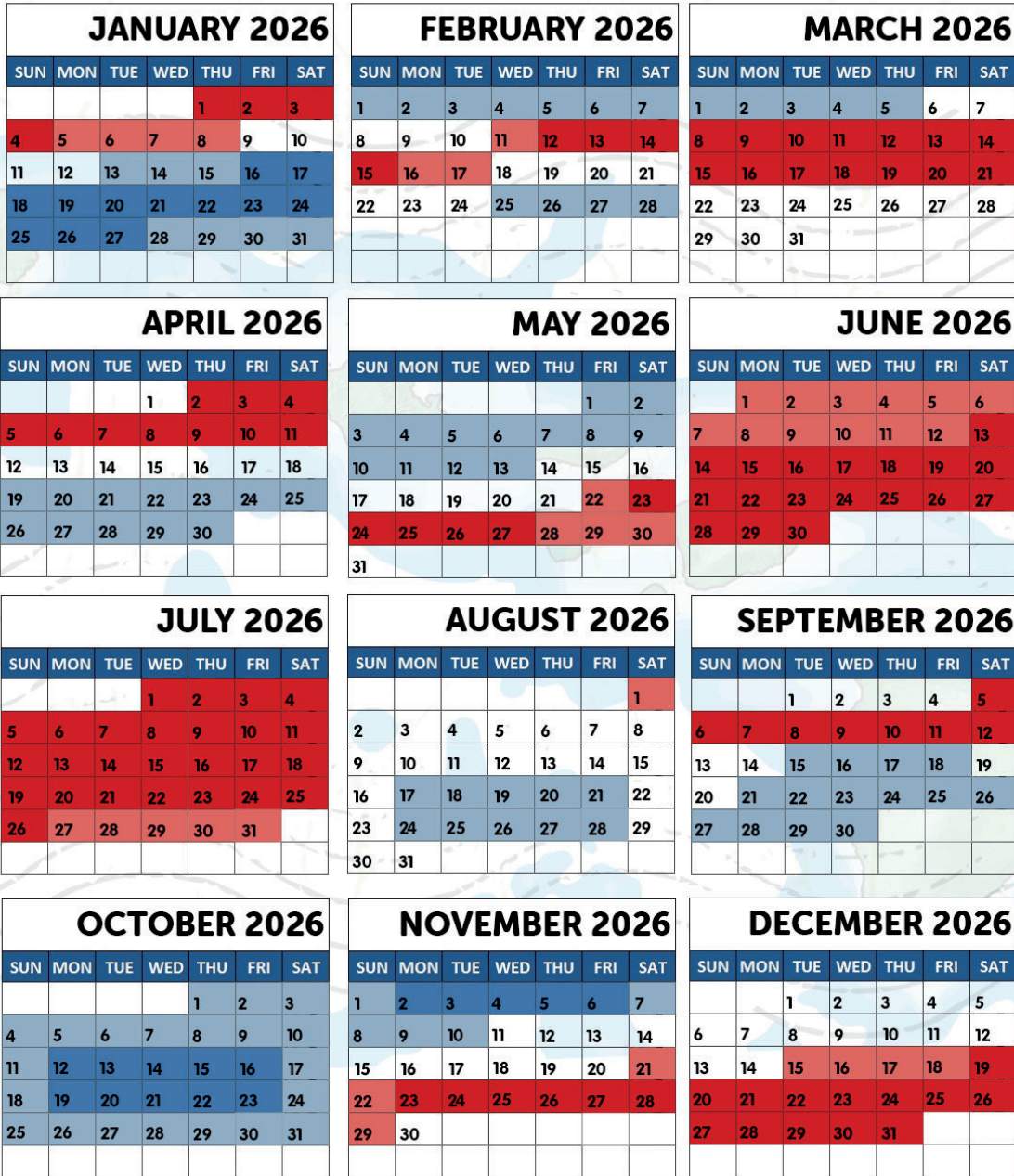
The rates can and will fluctuate by island and by year, but these figures still allow you to prepare accordingly.



West (Kona) Side Hotel

# Hawaii Demand Forecast

## Estimated High & Low Periods for 2026



**Key**

- Higher Demand
- Average / Neutral
- Lower Demand



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Akaka Falls - Hamakua (North) Coast

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

### Explore Hawai'i Volcanoes NP

A visit to the Big Island isn't complete without a visit to HVNP. Famous for Kilauea volcano, visitors can learn everything about how the Hawaiian Islands formed and are still being created to this day.

### Hike to a Green Sand Beach

You can find a lot of different color beaches on this island, but green olivine sand - now that's truly unique.

### Drive the Hamakua Coast

The road here winds in and out of several scenic valleys, some of which offer great chances to explore. Akaka Falls State Park is a real gem to stop at.

### Discover Historic Hawai'i Places

Discover the sacred places of Hawai'i's past and present by visiting Pu'uhonua o Honaunau (place of refuge).

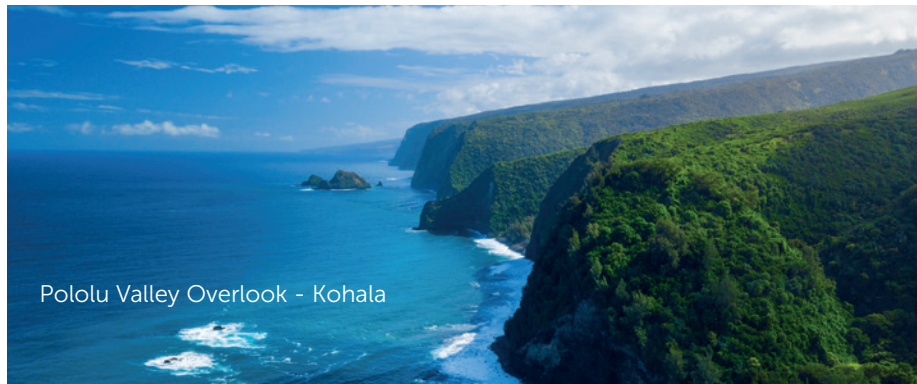
### Find the perfect Kona beach

Several white sandy beaches are scattered along the Kona shoreline; one's undoubtedly just right for you.

# BIG ISLAND

The Big Island of Hawai'i is the third most popular Hawaiian island among visitors, hosting over 1.5 to 1.7 million travelers annually.

Often called the "Big Island" to help distinguish it from the 1,500-mile long archipelago with which it shares its name, Hawai'i, the Big Island has certainly earned its nickname. Sitting in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, the landmass of the Big Island is approximately the same size as the state of Connecticut, about 4,050 sq. miles and often still growing daily thanks to Kilauea Volcano.



Pololu Valley Overlook - Kohala

## Big Island Fun Fact

*The Big Island of Hawai'i is an island of incredible diversity and is twice the size of all the other islands in the Hawaiian chain. The Big Island really is just that... BIG! The beauty of the island and its eclectic nature are only surpassed by the fact that this island is actually still growing by the day, adding some 570+ new acres to its landmass since 1983. Kilauea, on the southeastern coast, remains one of the most active volcanoes in the world, erupting almost continuously since 1984.*

### **BIG ISLAND - The Orchid Isle**

The Big Island of Hawai'i seems determined to break the stereotype of the average tropical island. Here you'll find the ongoing battle between green forests, black lava fields, the ocean, and the rain almost incomprehensible; the diversity is simply stunning. You may find yourself wondering, is this an ancient landscape or a future one?

On the Big Island, it's always best to expect the unexpected. Even the beaches don't follow the rules. It's almost easier to find a black sand beach than a white one, and if you're adventurous enough, you can even sink your toes into one of the world's few green sand beaches.

The Big Island of Hawai'i actually contains most of the world's incredibly diverse climate zones, all on an island that's just a tad over 4,000 square miles (and growing). The Big Island of Hawai'i- composed of five major volcanoes- makes up an incredible 60+% of the state's total landmass! Considered the most ecologically diverse of all the major islands, the Big Island of Hawai'i contains an incredibly vast range of natural environments just waiting to be explored.

While it may be a balmy 78 °F (25 °C ) on the coast during the winter, you can often find snow on the slopes of Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa, making the Big Island one of the only places in the world you can surf and snowboard in the same day.

### **Big Island Places To Know**

**Kailua-Kona** – Nestled at the bottom of the Hualalai Volcano is the western city of Kailua-Kona, the largest town on the west side of the island and one of the premier attractions within the famous Kailua-Kona Region. This charming town mixes numerous historical sites with modern tourist attractions.



**Hilo Town** – Hilo is an especially lush city with several gorgeous orchid gardens, interesting parks (the most prominent being Liliu'okalani Garden), museums, and other various attractions. Hilo borders a beautiful bay and is often cooled by sea breezes and tradewind showers.



**Waimea (Kamuela) Town** – It won't take you long to figure out that Waimea is not your average Hawaiian town. These are the lands where west and far west meet and create the paniolo, the Hawaiian cowboy.



**South Point** – The traditional Hawaiian name for South Point is Ka Lae meaning "the point."



Tiki's on guard at Pu'uuhonua o Honaunau - Kona



Thurston Lava Tube - HVNP



## **BIG ISLAND REGIONS**

### ***Kohala***

Pololu, Hawi Town, Hapuna Beach

### ***Hamakua (North)***

Waipio Valley, Akaka Falls

### ***Hilo***

Rainbow Falls, Banyan Drive

### ***Puna***

Lava Tree State Park, Kaimu

### ***Volcano***

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

### ***South (Kau)***

South Point (Ka Lae), Punalu'u

### ***Kona***

Kailua-Kona Town, Kealakekua Bay

### ***Saddle Road***

Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa

Hawai'i, also the youngest island in the Hawaiian chain, began over a million years ago as five separate volcanoes on the ocean floor. First, the Kohala Mountains formed as they sat over the 'hot spot' in the earth's tectonic plates below. As the plate shifted, so did the location of the rising magma, moving to Mauna Kea, Hualalai, Mauna Loa, and eventually Kilauea. Currently, only the volcanic remnants of Kohala are completely extinct, never to erupt again. The rest of the volcanoes on the Big Island aren't quite done yet. Consider this an island that's still evolving.

### **Kohala**

On the far northwest tip of the Big Island is Kohala, one of the most diverse areas on the island. This part of the Big Island started forming around 460,000 years ago and today includes the Kohala Mountains and the Kohala Ridge Road which straddles the mountain as it makes its way northwestward.

### **Hamakua (North)**

On the North Coast of the Big Island lies the Hamakua coast, one of the most beautiful stretches on the entire island. Rainwater from the northern flanks of Mauna Kea along with snow from the summit of the great mountain flows down in countless streams along this part of the Big Island. The result is a mecca of stunning waterfalls and valleys.



Onomea Falls - Hamakua (North)

## Hilo

The most notable location on the East side of the Big Island of Hawai'i is undoubtedly Hilo town. Hilo is the island's largest city (second largest in the state - population wise) and also takes the title for the wettest city in the United States (70+ inches yearly). Hilo is an especially lush city with several gorgeous orchid gardens, interesting parks (the most prominent being Lili'uokalani Garden), museums, and other various attractions. Hilo borders a beautiful bay and is often cooled by sea breezes and tradewind showers.



Puna Coastline - Hwy 137

## Puna Region

East and south of Hilo is the Puna district and the funky little town of Pahoa (often called Hawai'i's outlaw town). This is an diverse area of rain forests, lava fields, and rugged coastline. One of the major attractions in Puna is the Lava Tree State Park. In 1790 a lava flow passed through a forest of ohia trees, and today the molds of these trees are all that remain; it's a unique attraction to visit.

## Volcano

If there's one single hot-spot on the island (no pun intended) for visitors then it's definitely the Volcano area. The area, is of course, most famous for Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park (HVNP).



Pahoehoe Lava Flow - HVNP

## South (Kau)

South Hawai'i is one of the quietest areas of the Big Island. Here you'll find no large hotels or resorts, no major golf courses, and no real push for tourism. It's wild country out here.

## Kona

If you're heading to the Big Island there's certainly one area you cannot miss... the Kona (West) Coast. This warm and sunny leeward area has become the resort area of the island. In total the Kona Coast stretches some 40 miles along the rugged west coast of the Big Island. Many historical sites, beautiful beaches (some well hidden), pristine bays, and lava fields (with prominent petroglyphs) criss-cross and line the coast of this area.

## Saddle Road

Saddle Road connects the east and west sides of the island passing between the island's two largest mountains, Mauna Loa (13,679 ft or 4,169m) and Mauna Kea (13,796 ft or 4,205m).

TOP ATTRACTIONS ON

# BIG ISLAND

Discover the hottest spot on the island and tour Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. Next, head to some of the best waterfalls... or the beach, there's plenty to choose from. Whether you like to hike, walk, kayak, swim, or snorkel - the Big Island has an adventure for you.

The Big Island is home to some of Hawai'i's most beautiful sights, outdoor adventures, and magnificent beaches. Whether you're admiring one of the island's many waterfalls, hiking a scenic trail, or simply relaxing, we know you'll find your perfect experience.

There are so many things to see and great places to visit on the Big Island that choosing which ones are right for you and your travel party can seem a bit overwhelming. In this section, you'll find helpful information about some of the best and most popular Big Island of Hawai'i attractions to help you plan your perfect Hawaiian vacation.

## Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

Volcano Region



### Schedule Enough Time

- The park encompasses 333,000 acres of natural wonders and is situated at 4,000 ft (1,219m) above sea level. With its wealth of trails, drives, and activities you may need at least two days to fully experience all the park has to offer.

### Home to Kilauea Volcano

Originally founded in 1916, Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park (HVNP) is a living, breathing testament to the awesome power of Mother Nature. HVNP is located 30 miles southwest of Hilo and 96 miles southeast of Kona. It's open year-round, 24 hours a day. HVNP is home to Kilauea Volcano, one of the most continuously active volcanoes in the world, and the park offers the unique experience of walking on land that is younger than you are. Visitors are also witness to the world's largest volcano Mauna Loa at 13,679 ft (4,169m). Mauna Loa, meaning 'long mountain,' encompasses a huge chunk of the Big Island. After 38 years of inactivity, Mauna Loa last erupted in late 2022.

## Akaka Falls State Park

Hamakua (North) Region



### Photography Tip

- The best time to photograph the falls is early in the morning on a slightly cloudy day; the filtered sunlight allows the greenery to accentuate Akaka's misty waters.

### A Lush Tropical Paradise

Akaka Falls State Park, along with the northeastern Hamakua Coast, is home to two gorgeous waterfalls and an abundance of lush tropical greenery to delight visitors. The stroll to reach Akaka Falls is almost as beautiful as the falls itself. After taking a short set of stairs, turn left and follow the paved pathway through amazing greenery and small waterfalls flowing into babbling streams. Just as you round a corner, you'll catch a glimpse of Akaka Falls free falling 442 ft (228m) through a green-lined gorge. As of this writing, the non-resident fees to visit Akaka Falls include a \$10/per vehicle parking fee and \$5.00/per person fee. Children under three (3) are free.

## Hawai'i Tropical Botanical Garden

Hamakua (North) Region



### HTBG Directions

- About 1.5 miles down Onomea Scenic Drive, the parking lot for the gardens will be on the mauka (toward the mountain) side of the road. There is an admission price.

### Garden, Scenic Overlooks, & Waterfalls

This stunning rainforest preserve, Hawai'i Tropical Botanical Garden (HTBG), is touted as one of the most beautiful locations in Hawai'i; a distinction it well deserves. This garden was a gift to the people of the world from Dan J. Lutkenhouse, a businessman from San Francisco. Currently, over 2,000 species of plants, including a large variety of orchids, heliconia, gingers, bromeliads, and palms are spread throughout the garden. You'll find them accompanied by several natural waterfalls- including Onomea Falls- and a lovely view of Onomea Bay. This garden does require paid admission, but it's well worth the price.

# HAWAII

## THE BIG ISLAND



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### Big Island Drive Times

From Kona Airport (KOA) to...		
Hapuna Beach	25 - 40 minutes	25 miles
Volcanoes NP	2 - 2.5 hours	102 miles
Hilo	1.5 hours	75 miles
Kailua-Kona	10 minutes	10 miles
Kealahou Bay	40 - 50 minutes	25 miles
Waimea	45 min - 1 hour	37 miles
From Hilo Airport (ITO) to...		
Hapuna Beach	1.5 hours	78 miles
Volcanoes NP	30 - 50 minutes	31 miles
Honoka'a	40 - 60 minutes	45 miles
Kailua-Kona	1.5 - 2 hours	79 miles
Waimea	1 - 1.5 hours	65 miles

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## Pololu Valley Overlook

Kohala Region



### End of the Road in Kohala



### Seven Valley's

- Pololu is the end of a string of seven major valleys carved into the northern Kohala Coast of the Big Island which ends with Waipio Valley. The Awini Trail lets you explore both Pololu, and the next ridge - with amazing views of the coastline.

As you pass the 28 mile marker on Highway 270 past Hawi, the coast will open up and you will suddenly be treated to a breathtaking view of the lovely Pololu Valley. On a sunny day, you will see the vibrant blue and green ocean crashing into the rugged sea cliffs and the deep green carpet of vegetation lining the sides of the valley. A short walk to the lookout reveals the many folds and creases of the inner part of the valley which drop into a rich, green floor. Lines of ironwood trees divide the lush valley from the grainy black sand beach that meets the ocean. Early morning is the best time to visit, when you'll have a chance of snagging a parking space in the small lot.

## Puuhonua o Honaunau

Kona Region



### Historical Park - Place of Refuge



### Sacred Space

- At the tip of the point, encircled by imposing carved statues with fearsome expressions, ki'i, is the Hale o Keawe where the kahuna prayed and guarded the bones of 23 ali'i (Hawaiian Royalty).

Pu'uhoonua o Honaunau (poo-oo-ho-noo-ah o hoe-now-now), formerly known as Place of Refuge at Honaunau, is an incredibly beautiful and educational experience that no trip to the Big Island should be without. After you pay your vehicle fee and walk past the educational displays, you round a corner and are transplanted into the world of the ancient Hawaiians. On this scorched land of sand and lava rock, the ali'i (ruling class) of Hawai'i made their home. You can explore how they worked and played underneath the shade of Honaunau's stately palms.

# Waipio Valley Overlook

Hamakua (North) Region



**Kohala Mountain's Largest Valley**

**Valley Entrance closed...**

- In February 2022, the County of Hawai'i issued an Emergency Rule announcing the closure of Waipio Valley Road to visitors. The overlook remains open for all visitors.

Located along the Hamakua Coast on the northeastern coast of the Big Island of Hawai'i, Waipi'o Valley is the largest and southernmost of the seven valleys on the windward side of the Kohala Mountains. Time and nature's elements have carved an unimaginably massive valley filled with deep green-encrusted cliffs cut by plunging waterfalls. Its floor is carpeted with forests and neatly formed taro patches interspersed with the homes of its few residents. At the mouth of the valley, the ocean licks the mile-long black sand beach which is sliced in half by the river that is partially fed by the 1,200 ft (649m) free-falling Hi'ilawe Falls which resides deep in the valley.

# Hapuna Beach State Park

Kohala Region



**A Top-Rated Beach in the US**

**Hapuna Beach Directions**

- Take Highway 19 north from Kona. Turn left at the access road just before Mile Marker #69. Go to the end of the road, turn left, and then take an immediate right. Drive to the parking area.

This is an extremely popular beach for both locals and visitors. Conde Nast Traveler magazine has often ranked it as one of the top beaches in the U.S., and it is hard to argue that this half-mile stretch of pristine golden sand and crystal blue water is anything but a little slice of heaven. In fact, the beach is so wildly popular that tour buses often bring visitors here. There are several covered pavilions to enjoy an afternoon picnic and restrooms are available. Wear plenty of sunscreen, as there is not a lot of shade at this beach. Non-Residents must pay a \$5.00/person fee plus \$10 for parking.



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# HAWAI'I SAFETY

The islands of Hawai'i could each easily be described as paradise. But even paradise has its hazards and we'd be foolish not to educate you on at least a few of them. The truth is simple, Hawai'i isn't Disneyland; it is often wild, rough, and natural law prevails. The more you know, the better prepared you are to avoid the hazards of the beautiful Hawaiian Islands. We've put together some tips online, and we highly recommend reviewing them before your trip.

Visit: [hawaii-guide.com/hawaii-travel-tips/hawaii-safety](http://hawaii-guide.com/hawaii-travel-tips/hawaii-safety)

## PACKING YOUR BAGS

### *What to pack & What NOT to pack...*

Regardless of how much you've traveled in the past and where you've been, there is one good rule to follow when coming to Hawai'i, leave as much as you can at home!

Seriously, bring only what you'll need during your stay and nothing more. Chances are a pair of shorts, and a nice Aloha shirt is all you'll need for even some fine dining. Leave the formal wear back home. And please don't bring your passport if you're a U.S. citizen (you'd be surprised how many folks do).

A light jacket and a long pair of pants might also be helpful for those visits to higher elevations around the islands. You'd be surprised at how many "chilly" people there are in Hawai'i each day. Sure it's tropical, but not everything's at sea level either. On the other hand, don't overdo it and bring your winter coat to Hawai'i unless you feel you need it for visiting the summit of Mauna Kea on the Big Island at sunrise or sunset.

*With the motto, 'less is more' in mind, here are a few other items to bring:*

**Sunblock** (the UV on Hawai'i is typically 14+ in the spring, summer, and fall), a **backpack** (for any hikes) and a **water bottle**, **slippers** (flip flops, shower shoes, zoris), **snorkel mask and fins** (or rent locally instead), **two bathing suits** (one to wear while the other dries) and a cover-



up, **camera or phone**, **lightweight raincoat or poncho** (it's tropical here), **bug spray** with DEET (for any forest hikes), **flashlight** (for just in case), **hiking boots / hiking rods** (even if you're not a hardcore hiker, it's not a bad idea to bring proper footwear for some trails), and most importantly a **list of all your troubles to leave behind**.

For more tips and suggestions, we suggest reading through our [What to Pack](http://www.hawaii-guide.com/what-to-pack) page online: [www.hawaii-guide.com/what-to-pack](http://www.hawaii-guide.com/what-to-pack)



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## Big Island, Hawai'i Highlights Planner

