

"At Home" On The Big Island

Villa rentals are hot — not “hot” as in the A/C isn’t working — but “hot” as in a fab new trend. This fits right in with the growing popularity of customized travel itineraries. It seems travelers — including our family — just don’t want to feel like tourists anymore.

I’ve long been an advocate of having “real experiences” and savoring the local culture, and that’s just what our family did in April. Our home was a spacious ground-floor, three-bedroom villa in the Waikoloa Beach Resort on the Kohala Coast of the Big Island. We chose a residence within Kolea, a gated community, and enjoyed all the comforts of home. There, a six-panel, 18-foot-wide glass pocket door separated the living-dining area of the villa from the large lanai,

surrounded by a lush lawn and flowering shrubs. Our unit, 7D, also provided a view of the local outrigger teams practicing on the bay in the early morning and late afternoon.

We found this idyllic spot through Rob Dalton at Waikoloa Vacation Rentals, who very patiently responded to my stream of questions prior to our arrival. Would there be a crib for the toddler in our group? Wi-Fi? Snorkel fins large enough for my husband’s big feet? (Yes. Yes. And yes.) Did I need to bring a hair dryer? Beach towels? Kitchen and bath amenities? (No.) I also really appreciated that he sent very clear direction to Kolea from the Kona airport, about 20 miles south of the resort. (www.waikoloavacationrentals.com/kolea-rentals)

When we arrived, the snorkel gear was ready and waiting, the crib was set up — and I was pleasantly surprised to find lots of beach toys, a very well equipped kitchen, and an outdoor wet bar and gas barbecue.



Kolea's sand-bottom kiddie pool is a big hit with the toddler crowd

As rental guests, we had access to the private Kolea Beach Club, which includes a sand-bottom kiddie pool with pint-sized waterfall, large infinity pool, open-air fitness center, and natural lava spa pool. The beach at Anaeho’omalū (“A”) Bay, where sea turtles bask in the sun, is just steps away.

Kolea turned out to be the perfect base for enjoying all things Hawaiian. Our first night we walked over to the Waikoloa Beach Marriott and enjoyed their Sunset Family Luau. Here, *keiki* (children) were given a hula lesson, watched coconut husking, and took turns strumming a ukulele. This was a traditional luau — complete with pig and veggies cooked in an *imu* (underground oven) — and we all enjoyed the feast, as well as performances of Polynesian



Colorful tropical plants add to the beauty of the Kolea community

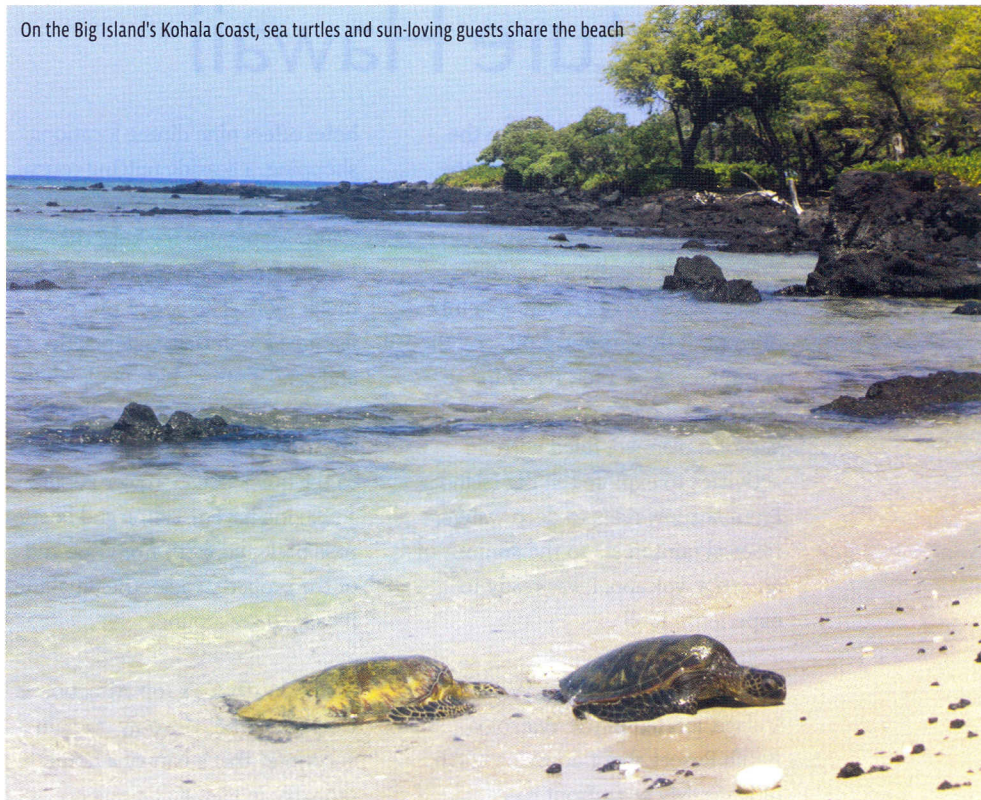
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songs, dances, and fire show.
(www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/koamc-waikoloa-beach-marriott-resort-and-spa)

The luau was the perfect start to our week, which included snorkeling, playing in the pools, relaxing on the beach, and taking walks on lava-lined trails. My biggest thrill was swimming with sea turtles. Our *keiki's* papa tried his hand at paddle boarding, and granddad perfected the art of cooking mahi mahi on the grill.

We were all impressed with the beautiful landscaping throughout Kolea. From our lanai, I saw my first mongoose as he darted between yellow and red hibiscus, bougainvillea, plumeria, and flowering ginger. The plants also attracted many birds that provided *au naturel* musical entertainment.

Everything we needed was within walking distance. The Queen's Marketplace had a good — albeit pricey — grocery store and another dozen or so colorful shops. One trip to this center



On the Big Island's Kohala Coast, sea turtles and sun-loving guests share the beach.

happened to coincide with a performance by a local hula school. The students ranged in age from 5-15 and were talented beyond their tender years.

We also visited the King's Marketplace, where our *keiki* fed the koi in a stone pond while grandma snuck a quick peek into Tiffany's. A farmers' market takes place one day a week in this location, but we opted to drive into Kona and browse through the maze of stalls at a much larger bazaar. Here, we loaded up on pineapples, papayas, rambutan, and other tropical fruit, as well as locally-grown vegetables — and yes, one of us did find the jewelry more compelling than the edibles.

I would have lingered longer, but we wanted to be at Huggo's On the Rocks — a nearby waterfront restaurant — in time to watch the sunset. This open-air spot offers live entertainment nightly



The Polynesian fire dance is the grand finale of the Sunset Family Luau at the Waikoloa Beach Marriott Hotel & Spa

and is easily Kona's most atmospheric place to dine. The floor is covered in beach sand and, while her parents and grandparents listened to Hawaiian melodies, our *keiki* made a "cake" and decorated it with pink drink umbrellas.

At the end of the evening we returned to our home at Kolea — the perfect base for enjoying all things Hawaiian. ELIZABETH HANSEN



The King's Shops include Tiffany & Co., Coach, Louis Vuitton, and a popular koi pond