

Lihue

Flights to Kauai arrive at the capital,
LIHUE

, which stands slightly inland of little Nawiliwili Harbor. It's roughly at the midpoint of the round-island highway (prevented from completing a loop by the Na Pali cliffs), but as a base it's pretty undistinguished. The population is just five thousand, and downtown consists of a few tired plantation-town streets, well back from the sea and surrounded by anonymous malls.

The small

Kauai Museum

at 4428 Rice St (Mon-Fri 9am-4pm, Sat 10am-4pm; \$5) traces the island's history from the mythical menehune

(the most ancient Hawaiian people) through Captain Cook's 1778 landfall and on to its sugar-growing heyday. Kauai was the one island not conquered by Kamehameha the Great; he spent six years amassing a fleet that never sailed, and settled in the end for accepting economic tribute.

Lihue's

airport

is only two miles from downtown (\$8 by

taxi

; Wailua or Kapaa cost more like \$20). Along with the usual

car

rental outlets, it also has

helicopters

- Safari Helicopter Tours (tel 808/246-0136) is typical, offering basic tours from \$120. The

Hawaii Visitors Bureau

is in town at 4334 Rice St (Mon-Fri 8am-4.30pm; tel 808/245-3971,

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There's no real point staying in Lihue rather than along the coast. However, the Garden Island Inn

, near the harbor at 3445 Wilcox Rd (tel 808/245-7227 or

1-800/648-0154, ; \$75-100), is a lovely refurbished three-story motel,

dripping with purple bougainvillea. For a quick meal in the heart of

town, call in at Hamura's Saimin , 2956 Kress St (tel 808/245-3271), a

family-run communal Japanese food counter, open very late and

specializing in bowls of saimin

(noodles) for \$3.50. The

Hanamaulu Restaurant and Tea House

(tel 808/245-2511), a mile or two east, is a delightful old place,

complete with fishponds, that serves both Chinese and Japanese food.