

## North Kauai

Northern Kauai is unique and unspoiled. The astonishing valleys of the Na Pali coast itself must surely remain inviolate - though accessible enough by canoe to sustain large Hawaiian populations, their awesome walls shield them from any attempt to build roads there. Only temporarily did 1991's Hurricane Iniki manage to slow the growth of the resort of Princeville, which began life as a sugar plantation in 1860.

Long, golden Secret Beach, hidden away from the road up from Kapaa, is among Kauai's best-looking beaches, though swimming is usually unsafe. An unofficial center for campers and nudists, local landowners have been cracking down on long-term stays. To get there, drive up Hwy-56 from the south, pass Kilauea and then turn right at Kalihiwai. Take the second right onto a dirt track leading to a parking area, and the beach is a ten-minute walk down through the woods. At the far end a waterfall of beautiful fresh mountain water cascades down the cliffs, and there are often spinner dolphins just offshore, especially around the picturesque 1913 Kilauea lighthouse. The cliffs above are a bird sanctuary.

For the moment, major development stops beyond Princeville, mainly because the road then crosses seven successive one-lane bridges. The first is over the Hanalei River, where the valley stretching away inland is a National Wildlife Refuge. Here endangered Hawaiian ducks, coots and stilts are protected by the preservation of their major habitats - natural wetlands and taro ponds. As a result, this is a rare chance to see a Hawaiian landscape relatively unchanged since ancient times.

The small town of HANAIEI, set around a magnificent bay, has some low-key apartments for rent, but otherwise little formal accommodation. Of local restaurants, the Tahiti Nui (tel 808/826-6277) is particularly nice, with authentic Tahitian decor,

rattan screens and old prints; go for the simple steak or fish entrees

(\$16). In the Hanalei Center mall, the busy Hanalei Gourmet (tel 808/826-2524) is the ideal stop for breakfast or a

sandwich lunch, and also has live music every night.

Gorgeous Lumahai Beach, at the western edge of Hanalei Bay, has starred in countless movies, among them South Pacific, but is too treacherous for swimming. All the roadside beaches from here on, however, are good for snorkeling. Just two miles from the start of the Na Pali coast, the Hanalei Colony Resort (tel 808/826-6235 or 1-800/628-3004, ; \$160-200) is Kauai's most dramatic waterfront property, within a few feet of the pounding surf; its units all have two bedrooms. The road finally comes to an end at Kee Beach, perhaps the loveliest spot of all.

The lush valleys of the Na Pali coast, separated by knife-edge ridges of rock often thousands of feet high but just a few feet thick, make Kauai one of the world's great hiking destinations. Although many of the best views (other than from a helicopter) are from the trails in Kokee State Park or boat trips out at sea, the Kalalau Trail along the shore is unforgettable. The full eleven miles to Kalalau Valley is arduous and gets progressively more dangerous; in places you have to scramble along a precipitous (and shadeless) wall of crumbly red rock.

However, the first two miles of the trail, to Hanakapiai Beach, are probably the most beautiful. They're steep but straightforward,

passing through patches of dense vegetation where you clamber over the gnarled root systems of the splay-footed hala (pandanus) tree. Creepers and vines hang down, and it's all exposed to the sun. From the beach, a further hour's arduous hike (off the main trail) leads inland to the natural amphitheater of the towering Hanakapiai Falls. It takes at least four and a half hours to get to the falls and back from the trailhead at Kee Beach, opposite the ten-mile marker at the end of the road. Hikers and campers doing anything more than a day-hike must obtain (free) permits from the State Parks Office (3060 Eiwa St, Lihue, HI 96766; Mon-Fri 8am-3.30pm; tel 808/274-3444). Accidents and drownings are not uncommon, and the staff need a record of who may be missing.

Until recently, boat excursions along the Na Pali coast were a major attraction for visitors to Hanalei. Fears that such trips were causing irreparable environmental damage have resulted in their suspension, though it's still possible to take rather longer and less exciting trips up the west shore of the island from near Waimea.

