

West Kauai

Two of the major scenic attractions in all Hawaii, the gorge of Waimea Canyon and

Kokee State Park

, with its views of the Na Pali cliffs to one side and the sodden Alakai Swamp to the other, can only be reached from the west coast of Kauai. The coast itself, however, is nondescript.

WAIMEA

, the largest town, is just one short street at the foot of the poorly marked road up to the canyon. The statue of Captain Cook

, which commemorates his "discovery" of Hawaii here on January 20, 1778, is an exact replica of one in Cook's home town of Whitby, England. Western Kauai's only accommodation

option is

Waimea Plantation Cottages

(tel 808/338-1625,

; \$130-160), set in an attractive coconut grove, and with a good restaurant and brewpub in the main plantation house.

It's not unreasonable to call

Waimea Canyon

the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific." At three thousand feet, it may not be quite as deep as its Arizona rival, but the colors - all shades of green against the bare red earth - are absolutely breathtaking. Erosion by torrential rains created this landscape, but the process began when a massive geological fault almost split Kauai in two. The road from Waimea climbs beside the widening gorge, until after eight miles the mile-wide canyon can be seen in all its splendor. Each of the roadside lookouts is definitely worth stopping for.

Explore Kokee Park as early in the day as possible; by late

morning the valleys may be filled with mist and clouds. Trails head off to both sides of the highway. Although the ranger station at KOKEE

, the park headquarters, is often unstaffed, you can pick up detailed information from the small but informative Kokee Natural History Museum

nearby (daily 10am-4pm; \$1 donation), where displays center on the indigenous wildlife. Kauai is the only island where mongooses have not killed off most native birds

, and at this height mosquitoes are no threat either, so some of the world's rarest species (such as the o'o a'a

) survive here and nowhere else.

Kokee Lodge Housekeeping Cabins

, next to the park headquarters, are rented by the day (PO Box 819,

Waimea, Kauai, HI 96796; tel 808/335-6061; \$35-50), and there's free camping

, with permits from the parks office in Lihue. For

food

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Kokee Lodge

has lunch specials for around \$8.