

Waimea

The interior of the Big Island comes as a surprise: pastoral meadows roll over gentle hills where once stood forests of sandalwood. This is cattle-ranching country, most of it - ten percent of the island - owned by the United States's largest private ranch, the Parker Ranch

WAIMEA

(also known as Kamuela

) is not the company town it once was - the Parker Ranch now employs just one hundred of its eight thousand inhabitants - but more of a sophisticated country-town resort, which retains traces of its cowboy past. Though you can no longer tour the ranch itself, the ranch has an interesting visitor center

(Mon-Sat 9am-5pm; \$6) in town; the nearby Kamuela Museum

is enjoyably eclectic and eccentric, with an extensive range of ancient Hawaiian artifacts (daily 8am-5pm; \$5).

B&Bs

are a booming business in Waimea; in fact there's little else. Barbara Campbell runs her own very appealing Waimea Gardens Cottage

(tel 808/885-4550 or 1-800/262-9912; \$130-160), and also coordinates

Hawaii's Best B&Bs (PO Box 563, Kamuela, HI 96743,), a selection of properties on all the islands. The main alternative is the

refurbished Kamuela Inn

(tel 808/885-4243; \$75-100), which is part inn, part luxury hotel.

Merriman's

in Opelo Plaza (tel 808/885-6822) wins awards for its innovative cuisine

, but if paying \$20 for an entree puts you off, cross the street and walk a few yards to the

Waimea Coffee Co

in Parker Square (tel 808/885-4472), which offers good coffees and vegetarian specials.