

Kailua (Kona)

Although the Big Island's main resort is officially called KAILUA, and its postal address is "Kailua-Kona," you're likely to hear it referred to as Kona as often as not. It's reasonably attractive, and has played its part in Hawaiian history, but its summer-holiday seafront of fast-food restaurants and souvenir shops could be anywhere; and the wind-borne "vog" means that the atmosphere can be as bad as in Los Angeles or London.

Hulihee Palace

(Mon-Fri 9am-4pm, Sat & Sun 10am-4pm; \$5) faces out to sea from the center of Kailua. Built as the governor's residence in 1838, it's not all that imposing from the outside. Within, it's notable for massive koa-wood furnishings, made to fit the considerable girth of the various members of the Hawaiian royal family who later lived here, such as the redoubtable 400-pound Princess Ruth. The 1836 Mokuaikaua Church directly opposite was the first in Hawaii, and part of it has been set aside as a museum of the early days of Hawaiian Christianity. A peculiar "sausage-tree" from Mozambique, named after the elongated fruit that dangles from its branches, grows in the church grounds. Nearby, King Kamehameha's Kona Beach Hotel dominates the northern end of the bay. King Kamehameha's funeral rites were performed in the ancient temple of Ahuena Heiau, which juts into the sea in front of its beach.

Some of the world's best fishing, snorkeling and scuba spots are approached by sea from Kailua. Expensive two-hour tours on Atlantis Submarines (\$79, under-12s half-price; tel 808/329-6626) descend one hundred feet to a coral reef, accompanied by the Star Wars theme, to see a frenzy of feeding fish and the occasional lurking shark. The catamaran Fair Wind (\$80; tel 808/322-2788) goes to Kealakekua Bay, for snorkeling and a bit of scuba. If you fancy chartering a boat to fish for the big ones, contact the Charter Desk (tel 808/329-5735,); rates start at \$75 for a half-day.

Open-plan

Keahole Airport

, on a field of black lava nine miles north of Kailua, has the usual car rental places; otherwise Speedi Shuttle (tel 808/329-5433) into town costs around \$20 per person. In Kailua, a regular shuttle bus runs the six-mile length of Alii Drive every ninety minutes (8.30am-9.30pm; \$2; tel 808/961-8744). One daily bus follows Hwy-11 around the north of the island to Hilo, leaving Kailua just before 6am and returning in the evening.

Competition ensures that the bars and restaurants of central Kailua - especially those along the seafront - are well priced, though the relentless vacation atmosphere means the place can seem a bit unreal.

Cassandra's Greek Taverna Kona Plaza, 75-5719 Alii Drive tel 808/334-1066. Delicious and inexpensive Greek food, from

light salads to substantial moussakas.

Huggo's 76-6828 Kuhakai St tel 808/329-1493.

Lunch and dinner only served on a large ocean-view terrace. The menu includes burgers, salads and sandwiches, as well as Pacific Rim specialities, and there's often live evening entertainment.

Ocean View Inn 75-5683 Alii Drive tel

808/329-9998. Very inexpensive Hawaiian and Asian diner overlooking the sea, where the menu includes roast beef dinners, traditional fish dishes and even Chinese cuisine. Closed Mon.

Oodles of Noodles Crossroads Shopping Center,

75-1027 Henry St tel 808/329-2222. Pan-Asian noodle joint, a mile up from the ocean near the highway, serving great dinners from around \$15.

Sibu Café Banyan Court Mall, 75-5695 W Alii

Drive tel 808/329-1112. Popular, informal Indonesian restaurant, with no views but some atmospheric outdoor seating. Serves \$11-14 entrees, including a tasty shrimp sate

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