

North Kona and the resorts

The best of the spectacular sandy beaches along the Kona coast - safe for summer swimming, though with tempestuous winter surf - lie to the north of Kailua.

Hapuna Beach

, almost forty miles up the coast, is deservedly the most famous, despite being overshadowed by the giant Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel (tel 808/880-1111 or 1-800/882-6060, ; \$250+); it's still possible to rent \$20 beachside cabins (tel 808/974-6200), but since opening in 1994 it has lost some of its charm.

For real idyllic seclusion, head instead for Kona Coast State Park

(daily except Wed 9am-8pm; free), reached via a bumpy dirt road just a couple of miles north of Keahole Airport.

Several extraordinary resort hotels

lie in the district of South Kohala, thirty miles north of Kailua.

Three separate enclaves - Waikoloa, Mauna Kea and Mauna Lani - have been landscaped out of this inhospitable lava desert, each one a self-contained oasis holding two or three hotels, a beach or two, and nothing else.

Although Waikoloa

is the least exclusive of the three, it's home to the ludicrously ostentatious, mile-long Hilton Waikoloa (tel 808/886-1234, ; \$250+), said to consume seven percent of all the island's energy. Guests travel to and from their rooms by electric boats or monorail.