

# GARDEN ISLE GOLF

*Imagine you're working on a movie and you've been tasked with finding the perfect setting for golf. Your mind goes through the standard checklist: ocean vistas, mountainous backdrops, dramatic elevation changes and beautiful, exotic trees to frame every shot. There are few places that have everything on your list, but after a visit to Kauai, you discover there is no locale on earth that fulfills every criterion in such an intensely gorgeous manner.*

**Kauai** delivers a world-class golf and resort experience

| BY SCOTT SEWARD

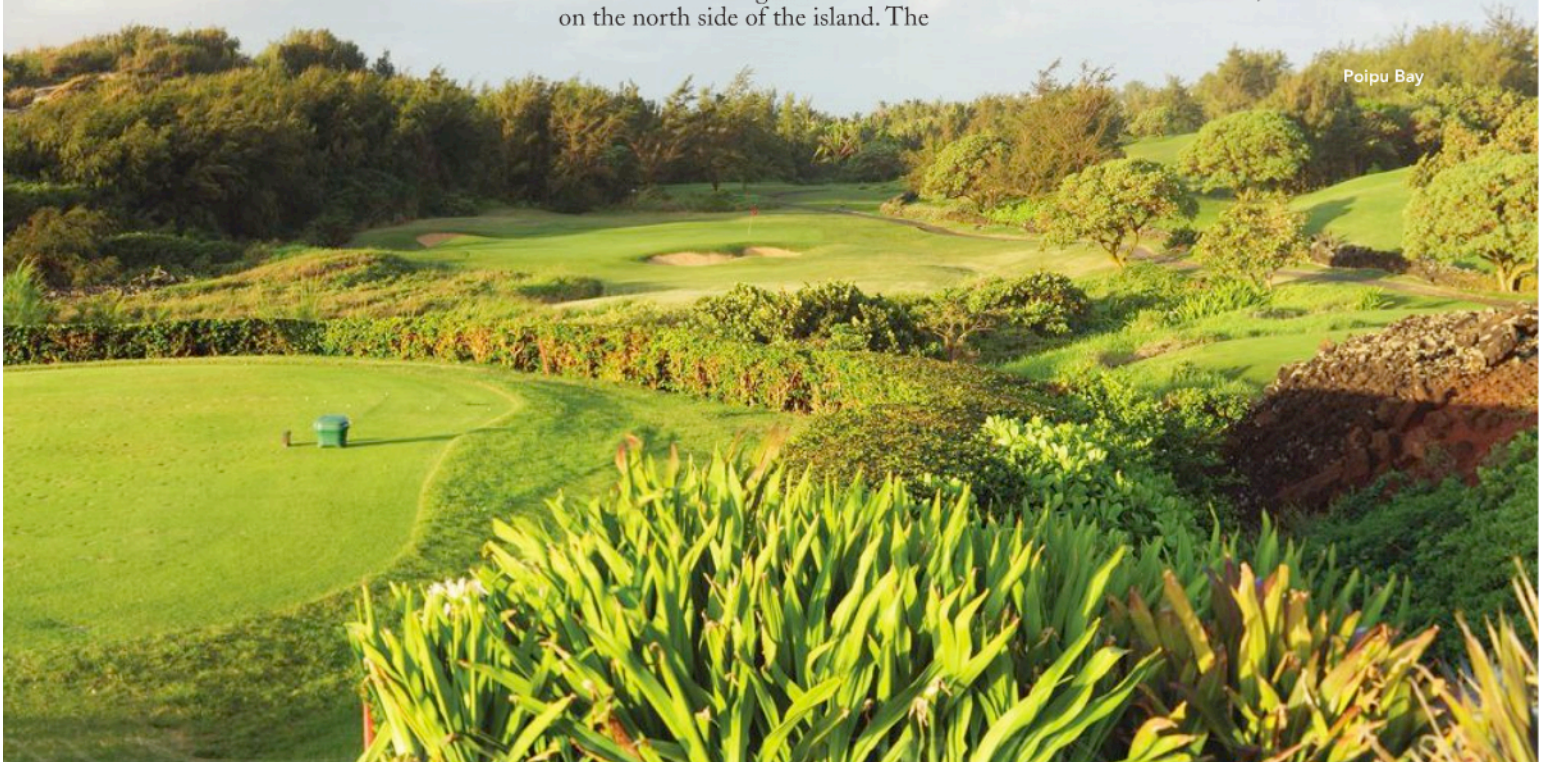
It's as if the beauty meter maxed out and blew a gasket; almost every aspect of a striking landscape exists in abundance here. Verdant, lush and dramatic at every turn—even for Californians used to beautiful panoramas—Hawaii, and especially Kauai, take many of the different aspects of the Golden State to their

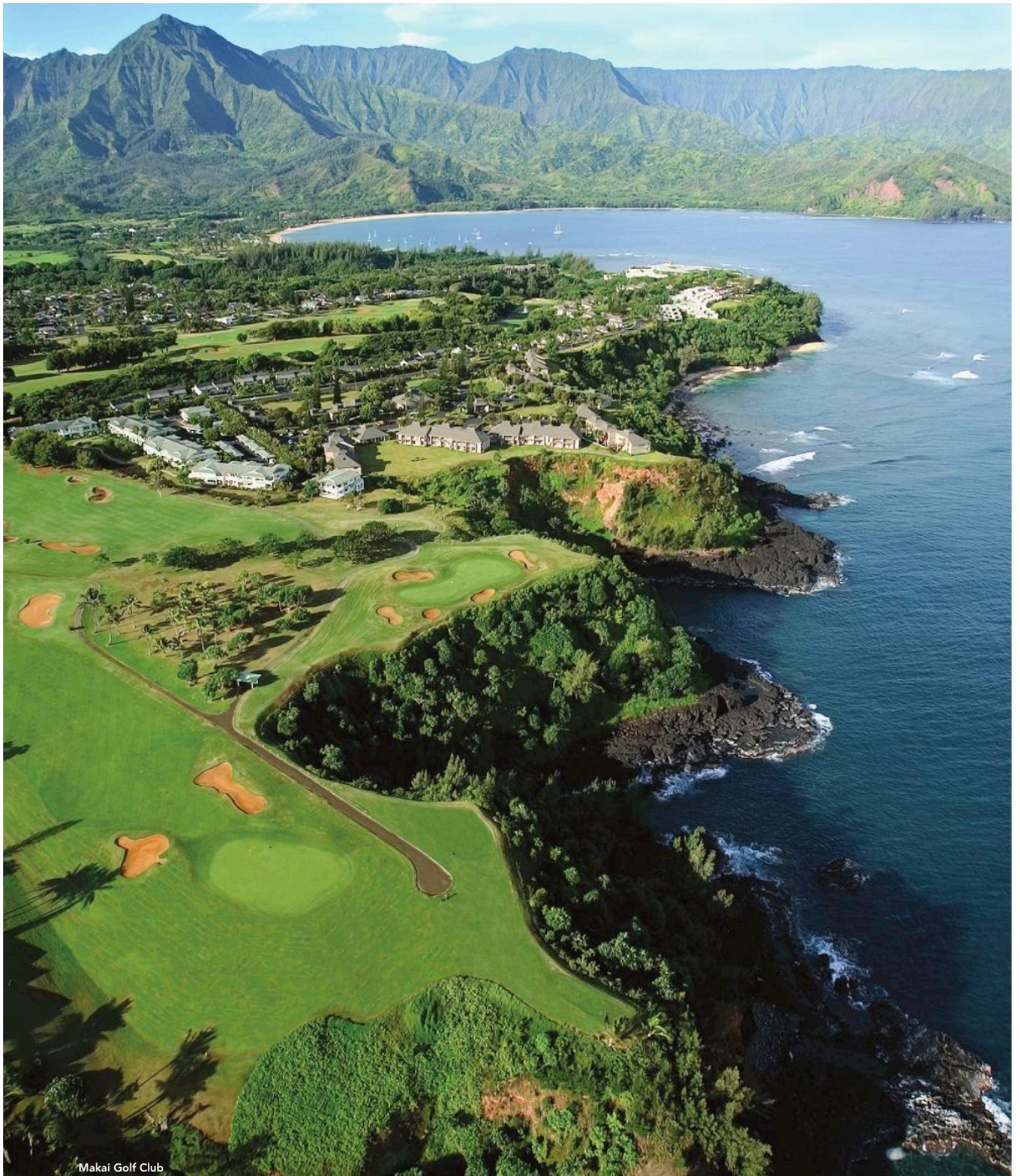
ocular max. To say the views here are postcard-worthy is an understatement. With 95% of the island undeveloped and most of it inaccessible by car, the “Garden Island” represents the ideal of “getting away from it all,” while still presenting numerous intriguing resorts and golf courses for the discerning traveler.

Take the St. Regis at Princeville on the north side of the island. The

property reopened last October after an extensive renovation. Now one of only 18 St. Regis properties in the world, the facelift added a spa, upgraded rooms and a fitness center, fulfilling the ideal of a complete resort. With Bali Hai visible in the distance, the landmark famous for its appearance in the movie version of “South Pacific,” sunsets have

Poipu Bay





Makai Golf Club

a distinctive and memorable feel. The Makana Terrace and the Kauai Grill, with chef Jean-George Vongerichten, offer regional, innovative meals utilizing locally grown ingredients showcased in the Korean braised short ribs with baby bok choy and celery root purée.

Guests at the St. Regis have access to two world-class golf courses at reduced rates. The Prince is one of the highest-rated course in all of Hawaii according to most magazine rankings. Its sprawling routing over 390 acres encompasses severe tropical ravines, streams and jungle terrain. While only touching the ocean once, at the juncture of the sixth and seventh holes, the course's topography places the golfer in the middle of a scene from "Jurassic Park," which was, in fact, filmed on Kauai. The 390-yard 12th embodies the course's different elements: a dramatic 100-foot downhill tee shot to a tight landing zone followed by an approach to a small green surrounded by a stream of natural ferns and tropical foliage. The Prince is not for the faint of heart. Much like Spyglass Hill, missing a fairway can have dire consequences to a good score, and even placing the ball in the middle of the target zone can yield an uneven lie.

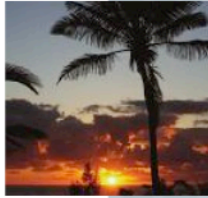


Marriott



St. Regis

## The Big Island Shines



While other Hawaiian islands might garner more attention, the Big Island has several resorts and courses situated along the pristine Kona-Kohala coastline that are worth a visit.

**Mauna Kea**, Trent Jones Sr.'s 1964 classic resort course, has in its third hole perhaps the best ocean-carrying par-3 west of Cypress Point. The pioneering track introduced the concept of building a course on the forboding landscape of barren lava rock, proving that it could be utilized as an excellent foundation for turfgrass. This procedure has since been copied throughout the islands. The course was recently refurbished by Jones' son Rees.

Guests staying at the Hapuna Beach or Mauna Kea Beach have access to Trent Jones' masterpiece as well as Arnold Palmer's **Hapuna GC**, a compact layout demanding precision on its routing, which meanders from the coastline to 700 feet above sea level. The

snow-capped Mauna Kea volcano looms as a commanding backdrop.

Other courses include **Mauna Lani's** 36 holes, named for original owner Francis H I'i Brown, routed over a lava bed and through a mesquite forest, presenting the quintessential Hawaiian setting.

**Waikoloa Beach Resort** also has 36 holes. The Beach Course is literally laid out over lava flow along Anaeho'omalua Bay; its best-known hole is the oceanfront par-5 seventh, where the sight of humpback whales might be a distraction. The Kings Course boasts views of the towering volcanoes of the Big Island framed by palm trees and vibrant flowers. The resort also has an entertaining 30,000-square-foot putting course, perfect for developing golfers, which also includes a self-guided botanical tour of some of the island's interesting plant species.

The Hualalai Four Seasons completed a 15-month, \$40 million enhancement last July, adding 20 new suites, expanded spa and oceanfront pool deck and a renovated beachfront bar and restaurant. The first Nicklaus design in Hawaii—**Hualalai GC**—is home to a Champions Tour event, the Mitsubishi Electric Championship held in January.

While many might think of Maui as a first choice for a Hawaiian golf vacation, the Big Island holds its own as a worthy destination.



## Getting There

Direct flights are offered via SFO on United and US Air. All other flights from San Jose, Oakland or Sacramento to the island require a change in Los Angeles or Honolulu.



The Makai Golf Club, the other course associated with St. Regis, also just debuted a renovation. Robert Trent Jones Jr.'s first solo design and the first of his eight courses in Hawaii, the refurbishing incorporated new bunkers, more yardage and reshaped greens. The course's two encounters with the ocean produce memorable sequences—the 6th and 7th holes (the 7th with a dramatic ocean carry tee shot) and the 13th and 14th holes. The course is more player-friendly than the Prince, with wider fairways and less punish-

ment for missing a target. The club has an additional nine-hole course, the Woods, which reopened April 1 and is perfect for the beginning or developing player.

Moving to the southern side of the island, a 90-minute drive on the island's winding roads, the climate is more arid, sunnier and windier due to the mountainous interior stopping some of the wet weather that begins in the north. The open-air and luxurious Grand Hyatt Resort and Spa is set on Keonelo Bay amidst tropical

gardens. The Hyatt is an impressive property situated on 50 oceanfront acres with four-story buildings that conform to the island's code that no structure can be higher than the tallest coconut tree. The Seaview Terrace, in the lobby atrium, is the ideal spot for a continental breakfast in the morning and live entertainment with cocktails in the afternoon. With the breeze and ocean view, it's difficult to want to do anything else. The 602 guest rooms will undergo a multi-phase renovation to be completed in 2011.

A perfect introduction to the resort, or after golf, is a lomilomi massage at the adjoining Anara Spa. Dine at Tidepools at the resort, a restaurant that floats over a koi pond, with flora and waterfalls to complement the decor. Also consider Merriman's, a nearby restaurant that served as a pioneer in the "Farm to Table" concept, using only the freshest products, at least 90% of which are locally grown or caught.

Poipu Bay GC, adjacent to the Hyatt, hosted the season-ending PGA Grand Slam, featuring the four major championship winners each year from 1994-2006. With that kind of talent playing the course, low scoring is inevitable, so it is no surprise that Phil Mickelson's 59 is the course record. But amateurs will be severely tested by the stiff winds that demand strategic

thought on every hole—six holes are downwind, six are into the wind and six have a crosswind. The closing stretch, 15-18, showcases the churning Pacific sporting huge waves on their left. Poipu is closed for the remainder of 2010 as the greens are upgraded with Seaside Paspalum, a stronger, more tolerant grass that will promote more consistent and speedier putting conditions.

Don't let the first two holes at nearby Puakea GC fool you. Their rather plain appearance is not a harbinger of the rest of the course, which is a terrific Robin Nelson track laid out in stages. (Nelson is responsible for the design or renovation of more than 30 courses in a state that has roughly 90 overall.) Ten holes were constructed in 1997, with the rest of the course added in 2003, making Puakea the island's newest course. The back nine, in particular, is an inventive routing that delightfully mixes and matches shot values.

Kukuiula is slated to open in December (six holes are already completed). Holes are shaped through orchards, gardens and native landscaping, some with ocean views. The plantation-style clubhouse is envisioned as a centerpiece for the entire community. The private club, with multi-million dollar residences, will be part of a complete development including an already-open outdoor shopping complex with 45 restaurants and shops.

For the first or final stay on a Kauai itinerary, consider the Marriott Resort, just minutes away via a private road to Lihue airport. The award-winning resort has the largest pool in the state, which backs up to Kalapaki beach set on Nawiliwili Harbor. Watching large cruise ships navigate the harbor from the deck of your room provides unique entertainment. All guest rooms and suites, as well as six restaurants, have been completely renovated since 2009. Try the pool and oceanfront Kukui's with its open air atmosphere or the northern Italian Cafe Portofino. Enjoying a tropic thunder pomegranate cocktail while listening to live Hawaiian music poolside will make the memory of a bad round melt away quickly.

Next door to the Marriott is the Jack Nicklaus-designed Kauai Lagoons Golf Club, a facility in transition from 36 to 27 holes. The architect is supervising the addition of two new ocean holes to complement the current 16th from the old Kiele course. (When completed, the course will have more ocean holes than any other course in the state.) Perhaps the most dramatic on the island, the short par-4 16th plays downhill, with views of Nawiliwili Harbor in the distance. The green perches on a rocky cliff surrounded by ocean in a manner reminiscent of the 7th at Pebble Beach.

As with all courses on the island, greens roll true but slow. Due to changeable weather and Bermuda grass, the greens are allowed a little more growth for their health. And enough cannot be said regarding the wind, which is both omnipresent and almost omnipotent. It is wise to polish your punch and knock-downs before begin-

ning your Hawaiian golf adventure.

Off the course, try a cruise on Captain Andy's Sailing Adventures aboard a custom catamaran, or take a helicopter tour. Both will allow exploration of the Na Pali coast, a 16-mile portion of the remote northwest section of the island that boasts 4,000-foot peaks, dense flora and an abundance of color. Hiking enthusiasts can take advantage of more than 45 miles of trails, some quite strenuous. The 3,567-foot-deep Waimea Canyon, named "The Grand Canyon of the Pacific," should not be missed. Kayaking, snorkeling and zipline tours round out a complete vacation experience.

When the writer's plane landed at the beginning of the trip, travelers' anticipation was such that they started applauding. Not many destinations provoke such a response. Indeed, a trip to the "Garden Isle" warrants a standing ovation. 🎯

HUALALAI GOLF COURSE, Hole #7

A Course Carved from Lava!

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Courtesy of Hualalai Resort, photographer John Russell.

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