



*The walls of Wai'ale'ale Crater, from which the island of Kaua'i burst forth in a fiery cataclysm, are now home to innumerable waterfalls. This part of the crater is called the Weeping Wall.*

As with people, volcanic islands have a life cycle. They emerge from their sea floor womb to be greeted by the warmth of the sun. They grow and mature and eventually die before sinking forever beneath the sea.



## HOW IT BEGAN

The Hawaiian Islands were born of fire thousands of feet below the surface in the icy cold waters on the Pacific Ocean floor. A rupture in the earth's crust caused a vent to spew hot magma that built upon itself as it reached upward. When it began, no one knows exactly, but the first of the still-existing islands to boil to the surface was Kure. Nothing remains of that island

today but its fringing coral reef, called an atoll.

As the Pacific plate shifted over the opening of the vent like steel over a cutting torch, more islands were created. Midway, French Frigate Shoal, Necker, Nihoa—all of these once-great islands were born and then mostly

consumed by the angry ocean. What we call Hawai'i is just the last in a series of islands created by this vent. Someday these, too, will be nothing more than atolls, footnotes in the geologic history of the earth. But this vent isn't finished yet. The Big Island of Hawai'i is still expanding as lava from its active volcano continues even now to create additional real estate on that

island. As we sit here, the future island of Lo'ihi is being created 20 miles southeast of the Big Island. Although still 3,100 feet below the surface of the ocean, in but a geologic moment, the Hawaiian volcano goddess Pele will add yet another piece of paradise to her impressive domain.

These virgin islands were barren at birth. The first life forms to appreciate these new islands of volcanic rock were marine creatures. Fish, mammals and microscopic animals discovered this new underwater haven and made homes for themselves. Coral polyps attached themselves to the lava rock, and succeeding generations built upon these, creating what would become a coral reef.

Meanwhile, on land, seeds carried by the winds were struggling to colonize the rocky land, eking out a living and breaking down the lava rock. Storms brought the occasional bird, hopelessly blown off course. The lucky ones found the islands. The even luckier ones arrived with mates or had fertilized eggs when they got here. Other animals, stranded on a piece of floating debris, washed ashore against all odds and went on to colonize the islands. These introductions of new species were

rare events. It took an extraordinary set of circumstances for a new species to actually make it to the islands. Single specimens were destined to live out their lives in lonely solitude. On average, a new species was successfully deposited here only once every 20,000 years.

As the plants and animals lived out their lives, they broke up the rock, forming soil and organic debris. The ocean, meanwhile, was busily working to reclaim the horizon from these interruptions of land. Waves battered unmercifully against the fragile lava rock. In this battle between titans, there can be but one winner. While the creation of land eventually ceases on an individual island, the ocean never gives up. Wave after wave eventually takes its toll.

In addition to the ocean, rain carves up the islands. As the islands thrust themselves upward into the moisture-laden trade winds, their challenge to the rain clouds is accepted. As the air encounters the slopes of these tall islands, it rises and cools, causing the air to release its humidity in the form of rain. This rain forms channels that easily carve valleys in the soft lava rock.



*Each successive wave is like a sculptor's hand, slowly shaping the island. Large storms can generate powerful waves, such as this one, which, over the eons, patiently return the island to the sea.*



*Ancient Hawaiian petroglyphs, such as this one near the banks of the Wailua River, can still be found tucked away in the jungle.*

So what is the result of all this destruction? Paradise. Absolute paradise. There are few things more beautiful than Mother Nature reclaiming that which she gave birth to. The older the island, the more beautiful the landscape. A Hawaiian island is never more lovely than in its middle age, when the scars of constant environmental battles are carved into its face. Lush landscaped valleys, razorback ridges, long, sandy beaches—those things we cherish so much are the result of this destructive battle.

Kaua'i consists of 553 square miles of beach, rainforest, desert, mountains and plains. The island's landscape is as varied as its people. At Wai'ale'ale in the island's center, it rains nearly every day, making it one of the wettest places on earth. Just a few miles to the west, rain is rare, creating dry, almost arid conditions. The north shore is as lush as any place on the planet. The south shore is a sunny playground. The island's first inhabitants surely must have felt blessed at the discovery of this diversity.

## THE FIRST SETTLERS

Sometime around the fourth or fifth century AD, a large, double-hulled voyaging canoe, held together with flexible sennit lashings and propelled by sails made of woven pandanus, slid onto the sand on the Big Island of Hawai'i. These first intrepid adventurers encountered an island chain of unimaginable beauty.

They had left their home in the Marquesas Islands, 2,500 miles away, for reasons we will never know. Though some say it was because of war, overpopulation or drought, it was more likely part of a purposeful exploration from a culture that had mastered the art of making their way through the featureless seas using celestial navigation and reading subtle signs in the ocean. Their navigational abilities far exceeded all of the other "advanced" societies of the time. Whatever their reasons, these initial settlers took a big chance and surely must have been highly motivated. They could not have known that there were islands in these waters since Hawai'i is the most isolated island chain in the world. Those who did arrive brought with them food staples from home: taro, breadfruit, pigs, dogs and several types of fowl. This was a pivotal decision. These

first settlers found a land that contained almost no edible plants. With no land mammals other than the Hawaiian bat, the first settlers subsisted on fish until their crops could mature. From then on, they lived largely on fish and taro. Although we associate throw-net fishing with Hawai'i, this practice was introduced by Japanese immigrants much later. The ancient Hawaiians used fishhooks and spears for the most part or drove fish into a net already placed into the water. They also had domesticated animals that were used as ritual foods or reserved for chiefs.

As the culture evolved and flourished, it developed into a hierarchical system of order. The society was governed by chiefs, called *ali'i*, who established a long list of taboos called *kapu*. These *kapu* were designed to keep order, and the penalty for breaking one was usually death by strangulation, club or fire. If the violation was serious enough, the guilty party's family might also be killed. It was

*kapu*, for instance, for your shadow to fall across the shadow of the *ali'i*. It was *kapu* to interrupt the chief if he was speaking. It was *kapu* to prepare men's food in the same container used for women's food. It was *kapu* for women to eat pork or bananas. It was *kapu* for men and women to eat together. It was *kapu* not to observe the days designated to the gods. Certain areas were *kapu* for fishing if they became depleted. This allowed the area to replenish itself.

While harsh by our standards today, this system kept order. Most *ali'i* were sensitive to the disturbance their presence caused and often ventured outside only at night, or a scout was sent ahead to warn people that an *ali'i* was on his way. All commoners were required to pay taxes to the *ali'i* in the form of food, labor and in other ways.

In January 1778 an event occurred that would forever change Hawai'i. Captain James Cook, who usually had a ge-

## Who Were the Menehune?

*Although the legend of Menehune exists throughout the Hawaiian Islands, the folklore is strongest on Kaua'i. Hawaiian legend speaks of a mythical race of people living in the islands before the Polynesians. Called the Menehune, these people were always thought of as being small in stature. The legend initially referred to their social stature, but it evolved to mean that they were physically short and lived in the jungle away from the Hawaiians. (The ancient Hawaiians avoided living in the jungle, fearing that it held evil spirits, and instead settled on the coastal plains.) The Menehune were purported to build fabulous structures, always in one night. Their numbers were said to be vast, as many as 500,000. Today, archeologists speculate that a second wave of colonists, probably from Tahiti, may have subdued these initial inhabitants, forcing them to live in the woods. It is interesting to note that in a census taken of Kaua'i around 1800, 65 people from the upper region of the Wainiha Valley identified themselves as Menehune.*

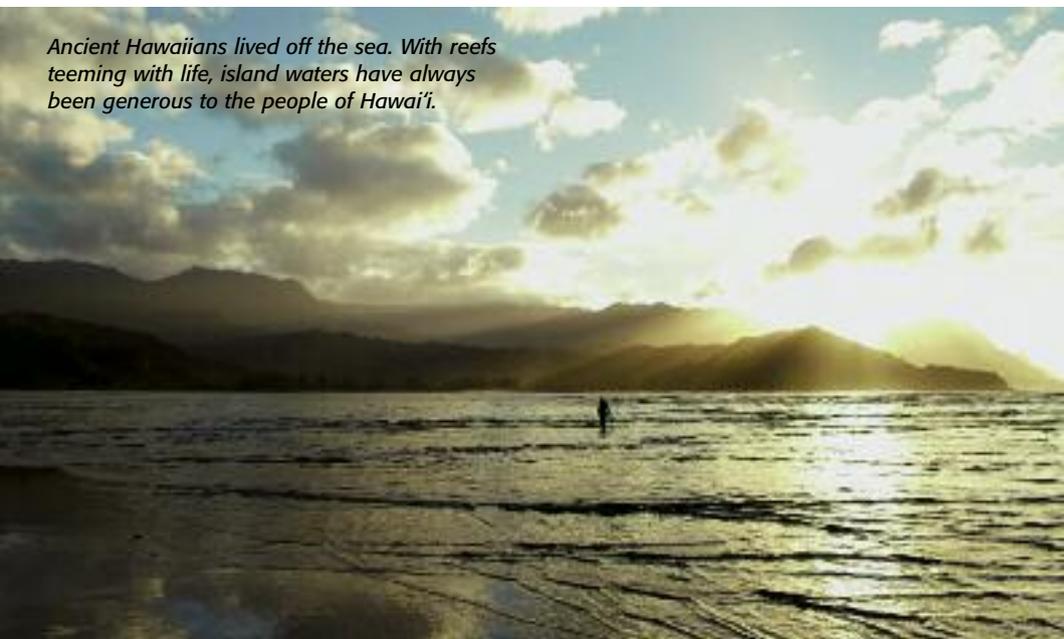
*Today, Menehune are jokingly blamed for anything that goes wrong. If you lost your wallet, Menehune took it. If your car won't start, Menehune have been tinkering with it. Kaua'i residents greatly cherish their legends of the Menehune.*

nus for predicting where to find islands, stumbled upon Hawai'i. He had not expected islands to be there. He was on his way to Alaska to search for the Northwest Passage linking the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. As Cook approached the shores of Waimea, Kaua'i, on January 19, 1778, the island's inhabitants thought they were being visited by gods. Rushing aboard to greet their visitors, the Hawaiians were fascinated by what they saw: pointy-headed beings (the British wore tricornered hats) breathing fire (smoking pipes) and possessing a death-dealing instrument identified as a water squirter (guns). The amount of iron on the ship was incredible. (Hawaiians had only seen iron in the form of nails on driftwood but never knew the source.) Cook left Kaua'i and briefly explored Ni'ihau before heading north for his mission on February 2, 1778. When Cook returned to the Big Island of Hawai'i after failing to find the Northwest Passage, he was killed in a petty skirmish over a stolen rowboat. The Hawaiians were horrified that they had killed a man they had earlier presumed to be a god.

Just after this, Kamehameha the Great of the Big Island began consolidating his power by conquering the other islands in the chain. Kaua'i, however, presented a unique problem. Cut off from the rest of the chain by the treacherous Kaua'i Channel, Kaua'i's King Kaumuali'i had no intention of submitting himself to Kamehameha. In the spring of 1796 Kamehameha tried to invade Kaua'i. He and his fleet of 1,200 canoes carrying 10,000 soldiers left O'ahu at midnight hoping to reach Wailua, Kaua'i, by daybreak. They were in the middle of the Kaua'i Channel when the wind and seas picked up. Many of the canoes were swamped. Reluctantly, Kamehameha ordered a retreat, but too late to stop some of his advance troops who were slaughtered after they arrived at the south shore beach of Maha'ulepu.

In 1804 Kamehameha tried again. He gathered 7,000 men, all heavily armed, and prepared to set sail for Kaua'i. Just before they were to leave, typhoid struck, decimating his troops and advisers. Kamehameha himself contracted the disease but managed to pull

*Ancient Hawaiians lived off the sea. With reefs teeming with life, island waters have always been generous to the people of Hawai'i.*





through. Kaua'i's king must have seen the writing on the wall and agreed to give his kingdom of Kaua'i over to Kamehameha. When Kamehameha died, his son, in order to solidify his power on Kaua'i, arranged to kidnap Kaua'i's King Kaumuali'i and forced him to marry his stepmother, the powerful widow of Kamehameha. Kaua'i's last king would never return and was eventually buried on Maui.

During the 19th century, Hawai'i's character changed dramatically. Businessmen from all over the world came here to exploit Hawai'i's sandalwood, whales, land and people. Hawai'i's leaders, for their part, actively participated in these ventures and took a piece of the action for themselves. Workers were brought in from many parts of the world, changing the racial makeup of the islands. Government corruption became the order of the day, and everyone seemed to be profiting except the Hawaiian commoner. By the time Queen Lili'uokalani lost her throne to a group of American businessmen in 1893,

*The earliest Hawaiians built elaborate terraces to grow taro, used to make poi. This terrace, in Limahuli Garden, is estimated to be 700 years old.*

Hawai'i had become directionless. It barely resembled the Hawai'i Captain Cook had encountered in the previous century. The kapu system had been abolished by the Hawaiians shortly after the death of Kamehameha the Great. The *Great Mahele*, begun in 1848, had changed the relationship Hawaiians had with the land. Large tracts of land were sold by the Hawaiian government to royalty, government officials, commoners and foreigners, effectively stripping many Hawaiians of land they had lived on for generations.

The United States recognized the Republic of Hawai'i in 1894 with Sanford Dole as its president. It was later annexed and then became a territory in 1900. During the 19th and 20th centuries, sugar established itself as king. Pineapple was also heavily grown in the islands, and the entire island of Lana'i was pur-

## What's it Like in the Wettest Spot on Earth?

*The center of the island is called Mount Wai'ale'ale, meaning "rippling waters." It is here that you will find one of the rainiest spots on the planet with an average of 432 inches. Rain around the rest of the island is a fraction of this (see chart on page 27). The ancient Hawaiians recognized the importance of this spot and built a temple on the summit, its remains visible to this day. Unless you're up for an extremely adventurous hike (page 202), the only way you will get to see Wai'ale'ale up close and personal is by air.*

*The top of Mount Wai'ale'ale is somewhat barren. While this might sound strange given its moniker as the wettest spot on Earth, remember that few plants in this world are genetically programmed to deal with that much rain at that altitude. Plus the ever-present rain clouds prevent sunshine from enriching the plants. The bogs on top of the mountain make for a less-than-well-defined soil base, and fungi and lichen flourish in the constant moisture. The result is few trees. Those trees that do survive are stunted by nature's over-generous gift of water.*

*Just below the summit—3,000 feet straight down, to be precise—exists the unimaginable lushness one would expect from abundant rain. As the clouds are forced up the walls of Wai'ale'ale Crater, they shed a portion of their moisture. With the majority of the rain*



*The summit of Wai'ale'ale feeds the Wailua River 3,000 feet below the sheer cliffs.*

*falling on the summit, the crater floor is left with just the perfect amount. With volcanically rich soil left over from the fiery eruptions, the crater floor has become a haven for*

*anything green. Ferns rule the crater. The ground shakes beneath your feet as your footsteps echo through generations of water-saturated fallen ferns, which have created a soft underbelly on what was once a savage, lava-spewing giant.*

*There is a surprising lack of insect presence. And most that do live there are endemic, appearing nowhere else on earth. Aside from mosquitoes in the stream beds, we've encountered almost no insects in the dense fern growth of the crater. The only exception was a single flightless grasshopper. We have found some 'o'opu fish inhabiting streams between towering waterfalls. They live in these isolated pools and use their pelvic fins to actually climb the falls.*

*Everywhere one looks, plants have taken root. Every rock has moss, every fallen tree has other plants growing on it, every crevice has growth. Surely no other place on earth is as lush as Wai'ale'ale Crater.*

chased for the purpose of growing pineapple. As the 20th century rolled on, Hawaiian sugar and pineapple workers found themselves in a lofty position—they became the highest paid workers for these crops in the world. As land prices rose and competition from other parts of the world increased, sugar and pineapple became less and less profitable. Today, these crops no longer hold the position they once had. In the 1990s the “Pineapple Island” of Lana‘i completely shifted away from pineapple and started luring tourists. And where dozens of sugar companies once dotted the islands, the last one, on Maui, shut down for good in 2016. Former sugar workers have moved into other vocations, usually tourist-related or farming.

The story of Hawai‘i is not a story of good versus evil. Nearly everyone shares in the blame for what happened to the Hawaiian people and their culture. Never-

theless, today Hawai‘i is struggling to re-define its identity. The Islands are looking back to the past for guidance. During your stay you will be exposed to a place that is attempting to recapture its cultural roots. There is more interest in Hawaiian culture and language than ever before. Sometimes the process is clumsy, sometimes awkward. There is no common agreement regarding how to do it, but in the end, a reinvigoration of the Hawaiian spirit will no doubt be enjoyed by all.

## NI‘IHAU

No man is an island, or so they say. But in Hawai‘i, one family can own one. The island of Ni‘ihau is a dry, somewhat barren island of 46,000 acres located 17 miles to the west of Kaua‘i. When Scottish-born Eliza Sinclair was sailing in the islands with her family in 1863, they were looking for land on which to settle. Having turned down offers of several

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*On Kaua‘i, the first settlers found an Eden more beautiful than any place they’d ever known.*





*The private island of Ni'ihau has mile after mile of beautiful, untouched beaches. Unfortunately the only way you'll see this scene is to take a pricey tour with Ni'ihau Helicopters.*

tracts on O'ahu (including Waikiki, which they dismissed as showing no promise), they were about to leave for California when King Kamehameha V offered to sell them Ni'ihau. When Eliza's sons went to look at it, they found a green, wet island with abundant grass—perfect for raising cattle. What they were unaware of at the time was that Ni'ihau had experienced a *rare* rainy period and was flourishing as a result. They offered \$6,000, the king countered with \$10,000, and they took it.

This was 1864 and, unfortunately for the Sinclairs, the residents of Ni'ihau did not respect their ownership and resisted them. They had a further setback when an old Hawaiian showed them a deed indicating ownership to a crucial 50-acre sliver of Ni'ihau deeded to the old man by King Kamehameha III. The Sinclairs were in a bind and solicited the aid of Valdemar Knudsen to negotiate the purchase of the remaining 50 acres. He spoke fluent Hawaiian and was well known and respected by the islanders. Knudsen went to Ni'ihau and

offered \$1,000 to the old man by slowly stacking the silver coins on a table while he explained how much better off the old man would be if he sold his land and lived in comfort on Kaua'i. After repeated refusals from the man, Knudsen went to take the money away when the old Hawaiian's wife grabbed the money, and the deal was consummated on the spot.

When the Sinclairs discovered that the land was actually dry and barren, unsuitable for a cattle ranch at that time, they arranged to buy 21,000 acres of West Kaua'i. (They would continue to buy land on Kaua'i, eventually acquiring 51,000 acres of the island, which they own to this day.) If you take a helicopter ride, you may see their fabulous estate nestled high in the mountains near Olokele.

Today, about 130 Hawaiians live on Ni'ihau. Most use bicycles for short trips on the unpaved roads, horses for trips more than a few miles and trucks for longer journeys. No telephones, except for a wireless two-way to Kaua'i, no

broadcast TV and no Internet, by order of the Robinsons—the descendants of Eliza Sinclair. Intermittent power is supplied by generator and solar.

Ni'ihau's one school hosts around 20 students K–12. The sense of family on the island is strong, and only Hawaiian is spoken in most homes. (Classes, however, are taught in English.) Ni'ihau residents are a deeply religious people, and crime against one another is almost unknown. They are intensely proud of their community and feel strongly that their people, their heritage and their way of life are special and are protected by God. They are quick to smile and laugh.

They live in one village called Pu'uwai (located in the only part of Ni'ihau where you can't see Kaua'i) and receive their mail once a week—the Post Office only delivers as far as Makaweli on Kaua'i. They shop for clothes and other durable items on Kaua'i, where most have family.

Time is fluid there. If someone says they'll see you on Wednesday, it could be any time of the day. There's no such thing as being late on Ni'ihau.

With a warehouse for staples and gardens for their fruits and vegetables, Ni'ihau islanders are reasonably self-sufficient. Travel to and from the island is via old military transport boats (like the kind that stormed the beaches of Normandy in WWII), and the rough, bumpy ride takes around three hours each way (during which many get seasick).

Life on Ni'ihau is certainly not without problems. No drugs or alcohol are allowed on the island, and families have been banished forever from the island for growing pakalolo (marijuana). Their mortality rate is high. Virtually everyone receives welfare and/or food stamps. With no permanent streams on the island, water is scarce, so they live off catchment. Although the largest lake in the state is on Ni'ihau, it is usually only a few feet deep, muddy and generally unpleasant.

The Robinson's land is valued at well over a *billion* dollars, but crushing tax burdens and losses (from Kaua'i operations) leave them relatively cash poor. Though the land has been in the family for over a century and a half, every time a land-owning relative dies, the government takes a huge bite out of the family in massive inheritance taxes. They claim that they can only afford to go out to dinner a few times a year. (You can dry your eyes now after that one.) They warmed to the idea of using some of their Kaua'i land for tourism for a few years, then backed away. They almost allowed the federal government to install (for a fee) rocket launchers on Ni'ihau as part of an expansion of the Pacific Missile Range Facility on Kaua'i's west side. The deal fell through when the government insisted on an ethnographic survey, which the secretive Robinsons feared would be used to create precedents that would allow native Hawaiians from *Kaua'i* to visit the island (for constitutionally allowed ritual or gathering purposes). Instead, they now lease much of their Kaua'i land to large, mainland seed growers cultivating genetically modified plants. They are also increasing their cattle operations, built a slaughterhouse here, raising eland (a large, African antelope), distributing venison from Maui and Moloka'i, and bring about 50 sheep a week over from Ni'ihau and market them to restaurants, calling it "forbidden lamb chops."

The Robinsons claim that their unique deed to the island gives them ownership of Ni'ihau's beaches—directly in conflict with state law that proclaims that *all* beaches in Hawai'i are public beaches. To date nobody has challenged them in court. If you land on a beach on Ni'ihau, you will be asked to leave. If you refuse, a truly *gantuan* Hawaiian gentleman will be summoned, and he will ask you a bit more firmly. This request is usually sufficient to persuade all but the most determined individuals to leave.