

An Insider's Guide to the Big Island

When it comes to the Big Island of Hawaii, there's no way a guidebook can include everything there is to do, see and eat. The island is simply too expansive, too diverse and too beautiful. If you really want to find the heart of the place, you've got to ask the locals.

An Insider's Perspective on the Big Island

Stroll through the travel section of any bookstore, and you're likely to run across several (if not dozens!) of guidebooks purporting to be the ultimate authority on the Big Island.

Don't stress about making the "right" choice. One of the things I like most about the Big Island is that everywhere you turn, there's something new to be discovered. And because of this, there's no way a guidebook can include everything there is to do, see and eat. The island is simply too expansive, too diverse and too beautiful.

"These are a few of my favorite things . . ."

If you really want to find the heart of a place, you have to ask the locals. I've managed vacation rental properties in Mauna Lani for more than five years, and I've lived on the Big Island for even longer—so there are a handful of places I always recommend to the guests who stay at my properties.

I've included most of those insider's tips in this brief guide, which I highly recommend you keep with you as you plan your upcoming vacation to the Big Island. You'll find everything from the best golf courses on the island to out-of-the-way eateries only locals know about.

I hope your time in Hawaii becomes a treasured memory for you and your family. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have about the island.

Warmly,

Shig Shiwota

Places to Eat

Hawaii has something for every palate—whether you're craving homemade shortbread cookies or a succulent fish taco. My top dining recommendations include everything from breakfast joints to what is, without question, the best restaurant on the island.

Hawaiian Style Cafe. The cafe's signature 12-inch pancakes are as delicious as they are huge—but that's not all this local favorite has to offer. From its old-time vibe to its excellent service, the cafe is a shining example of Big Island hospitality. I recommend the combination omelet with Portuguese sausage, which comes with brown gravy, fried rice, and two oversized pancakes. 65-1290 Kawaihae Road, Kamuela.

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/hawaiian-style-cafe-kamuela-2>



Manago Hotel. Perched on the slopes of Mauna Loa, this historic, 100-year-old hotel offers panoramic views of the Kealahou Bay. It's also home to the Manago Hotel Restaurant and its famous pork chops with brown gravy and onions. Another perk: every entrée is a steal at less than \$15. 82-6155 Mamalahoa Highway, Captain Cook

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/manago-hotel-restaurant-captain-cook>



Teshima's Restaurant. Tempura lovers rejoice—this Japanese eatery boasts the best tempura around. I recommend ordering yours as part of the bento lunch special. The sashimi is top-notch. 7979-7251 Mamalahoa Highway, Kealahou

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/teshima-restaurant-kealahou>



Minnie's Cafe. Minnie offers simple yet deeply satisfying Hawaiian-style comfort foods. It's the perfect place to stop after a long hike or a zip line expedition. The Korean fried chicken and roast pork plate are my favorite everyday dishes. On Friday nights, the cafe serves a superb prime rib for \$20; reservations are recommended. 54-3854 Akoni Pule Highway, Kapaau (near Hawi)

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/minnies-kapaau>



Sam Choy's Kai Lanai. For a romantic evening out, Chef Choy's delivers the best fine dining experience on the Big Island. The restaurant boasts an open and relaxing feel and stunning ocean views. I recommend the poke, the award-winning seafood laulau, and the fried ice cream, all of which is perfectly complemented by a freshly mixed cocktail and the unbeatable sunset view. Reservations are recommended for brunch, lunch and dinner. 78-6831 Alii Drive, Kailua Kona

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/sam-choys-kai-lanai-kailua-kona>



Gill's Lanai. At first glance, Gill's looks like an unassuming shack, but this eatery serves some of the freshest fish around. One bite of the fish tacos and you'll be hooked. The fish and chips are equally delicious. 54-3866 Akona Pule Highway, Kapaau (near Hawi)

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/gills-lanai-kapaau>



Blue Dragon Restaurant. This award-winning restaurant has some of the best live entertainment on the Big Island. My favorite group is the Olliephonic Horns, a 1950s-style, big dance band reminiscent of Glen Miller. Ollie, the leader, used to play for Herb Albert's Tijuana Brass. Check out

www.bluedragonrestaurant.com for a schedule. There's a small cover charge to see the Olliephonics. 6111-3616 Kawaihae Road, Waimea.

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/blue-dragon-kawaihae>



Kau Kau Depot & Dave's Coffee Shack.

Exceptional dining and hospitality await you at this charming cafe in the heart of Waikoloa Village. Malcolm, the owner of the café and friendliest face on the island, will greet you with a hearty “shaka” gesture as you peruse the menu, which includes sweetbread French toast with coconut syrup and loco moco (Hawaii’s traditional fast food). Of course, no trip to Malcolm’s is complete without a freshly brewed cup of Kona’s best signature coffee. 68-1895 Pua Melia St., Waikoloa Village
<http://www.yelp.com/biz/kau-kau-depot-waikoloa-village>



Lemon Grass Express. This express kitchen is run by the experienced Chef TK, known for his ability to blend cultures and cuisines. Located in one of Hawaii's main shopping hubs, this quick-stop eatery serves up a blend of French and Asian fare. Budget-friendly lunch and dinner specials are offered available along wine and beer lists that pair delightfully with the menu options. Queens Shopping Center, Food Court, Waikoloa

Mrs. Barry's Kona Cookies. The perfect place for cookie and coffee lovers! Yummy buttery shortbreads, chocolate-dipped macadamia nut cookies and delicious macadamia nut brittle are just a few of the mouth-watering treats found at this little bakery. Enjoy them on the island with a cup of hot Kona coffee or take them with you to give as gifts at home. Either way, you'll be glad you discovered this sweet “gem.” 73-5563 Maiiau St. Kailua Kona
<http://www.yelp.com/biz/mrs-barrys-kona-cookies-kailua-kona>

Places to Shop

No vacation is complete without a little retail therapy. You're sure to find the perfect souvenir in one of the Big Island's charming boutiques. I've also included my favorite fish market—not a gift shop exactly, but definitely worth a stop.

Kings' Shops. Located at the Waikoloa Beach Resort, Kings' Shops boasts everything from high-end designers like Louis Vuitton to local boutiques and art galleries. The resort hosts an open-air Farmers' Market every Wednesday from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. 69-250 Waikoloa Beach Drive, Waikoloa
<http://www.yelp.com/biz/kings-shops-waikoloa>

Queens' Marketplace. Also located at the Waikoloa Beach Resort, Queens' Marketplace is one of the Big Island's most popular shopping centers. You'll find old favorites such as the Sunglass Hut as well as new finds like the Hawaiian Quilt Collection. 69-201 Waikoloa Beach Drive, Waikoloa
<http://www.yelp.com/biz/queens-marketplace-waikoloa>

The Shops at Mauna Lani. This resort has fewer stores than Kings' Shops and Queens' Marketplace, but the live entertainment is not to be missed. The shops host music performances throughout the week, during which you can learn to play the ukulele or dance the hula with Aunty Tutu. 68-1330 Mauna Lani Drive, Kamuela
<http://www.yelp.com/biz/the-shops-at-mauna-lani-kamuela>

Da Fish House. The first time Maya and I went here, we were looking for ahi tuna. Da Fish House was sold out, but they said some would be arriving fresh off the boat within an hour. We waited, and it goes without saying that it was some of the best ahi and ahi poke we've ever had—and it cost less than we'd have paid in the supermarket. The owner was also super friendly and provided us with several recipes. 61-3665 Akoni-Pule Highway, Kawaihae
<http://www.yelp.com/biz/hale-ia-da-fish-house-kamuela>



Things to Do

You could easily spend your entire vacation on the beach, but there's plenty more to do and see. From world-class golf courses to free performances by local artists, the Big Island has it all.

Mauna Lani Country Club. Without a doubt, the North and South Courses are the most picturesque 36 holes on the island. There's a good chance you've seen images of the South Course No. 15—it's one of the most photographed over-the-water holes in the world. 68-1310 Mauna Lani Drive, Kohala Coast
<http://www.maunalani.com/hawaii-golf-resort-overview.htm>

Waikoloa Beach Golf Resort. While the South Course at Mauna Lani is our favorite place to play, the Beach Course at Waikoloa is a close second. Built on lava beds and accented with swaying coconut palms, the Beach Course offers incredible views of the Pacific Ocean. *600 Waikoloa Beach Drive, Waikoloa*

<http://waikoloabeachgolf.com/>

Big Island Country Club. Located on the slopes of Mauna Kea, the Big Island Country Club is a budget-friendly alternative to the big-name resorts. The course was designed by Perry Dye and boasts sweeping mountain and ocean views. *71-1420 Mamalahoa Highway, Kailua Kona*

<http://www.bigislandcountryclub.com/>

Aloha Show. For an authentic taste of island life, look no further than Aunty Tutu and her crew of local performers. Every Tuesday at 4 pm at the Wyndham Kona Hawaiian Resort, Aunty Tutu and her group puts on a free show featuring local stories, songs and hula dances. Complimentary *pupus* (appetizers) are included. Be sure to say hello to Maya the hula dancer—she's my better half! *75-6106 Alii Drive, Kailua Kona*

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/wyndham-kona-hawaiian-resort-kailua-kona>

John Keawe. This self-taught, slack-key guitarist has become something of a local celebrity. He's the winner of multiple Na Hoku Hano awards and was a contributing artist on a 2005 Grammy-winning album. You can hear John play live at the Kings' Shops every Tuesday evening. *69-250 Waikoloa Beach Drive, Waikoloa*

<http://www.yelp.com/biz/kings-shops-waikoloa>

About Shig Shiwota and Shiwota Resorts

Shiwota Resorts, LLC is a privately vacation rental management company based in KaMilo, Hawaii. The company is owned by Shig Shiwota, who takes a hands-on role in managing each of the properties in his portfolio.

Shig and his wife, Maya, lived in Huntington Beach, California, for over 30 years. They started a successful powder coating business and raised their three sons.

In 2008, Shig and Maya sold their business and retired to Hawaii, but they both remain extremely active: Shig with Shiwota Resorts LLC and ukulele making, and Maya with hula performances. The couple also paddles three times per week with the Kawaihai Canoe Club.

For more information about Shiwota Resorts LLC or to book your stay, please visit www.shiwota.com/resorts.