



ISLAND OF HAWAII

Return to Kīholo Bay

Nestled along Hawai'i Island's North Kona coastline, Kīholo Bay was once coveted by Hawaiian chiefs—and for good reason.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KIRK LEE AEDER

It seems like something out of a fantasyland. Kīholo Bay's dazzling coastline features black sand beaches, anchialine ponds, towering coconut tree groves and abundant marine life.

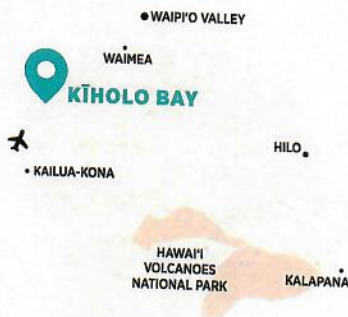
The main attraction amid this idyllic tropical setting, however, is the spectacular Wainānāli'i Pond. Big Island locals simply refer to the vibrant-looking pool as the "blue lagoon."

Having resided on the island for the past 25 years, I have fallen in love with a particular handful of locations to photograph. Kīholo Bay, home to this magical lagoon, is one of these. Once you set foot inside this extensive rugged coastal environment, you will understand why.

Kīholo Bay is just one portion of the much larger Kīholo State Park Reserve established in 2002. A lava flow from Mount Hualālai created the land that forms the bay to the south, circa 1801, and the entire area encompasses 4,362 acres along an 8-mile stretch of coastline. Here, you'll find a variety of Hawaiian archaeological features, such as a path from Kīholo Bay south to Nawaikulua Point that's part of the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail.

Located 11 miles north of the Ellison Onizuka Kona International Airport, Kīholo is relatively easy to find. On the Queen Ka'ahumanu Highway (Route 19), a scenic lookout near mile marker 82 is a good place to pull over and enjoy a panoramic view of Kīholo Bay, the South Kohala coastline and the island of Maui in the distance. Kīholo's popularity has increased through the years; not long ago, the

ABOVE: Two stand up paddleboarders enjoy the spectacular view while making their way through the pristine waters of the blue lagoon at Kīholo Bay.



area was an off-the-beaten-path hidden gem with just a few daily visitors.

Such is the case today at Kīholo Bay, with hardly anyone in sight. There are two main entry points into Kīholo. The first is a bumpy dirt road slightly south of the lookout, leading to a black sand beach on the south end of the bay. Depending on conditions, this route is generally accessible by most vehicles; it provides a quicker passage to the ocean but puts you farther away from the lagoon.

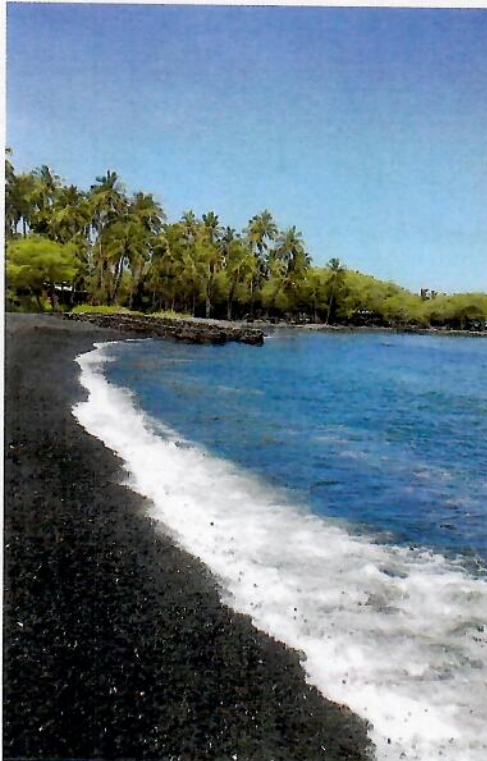
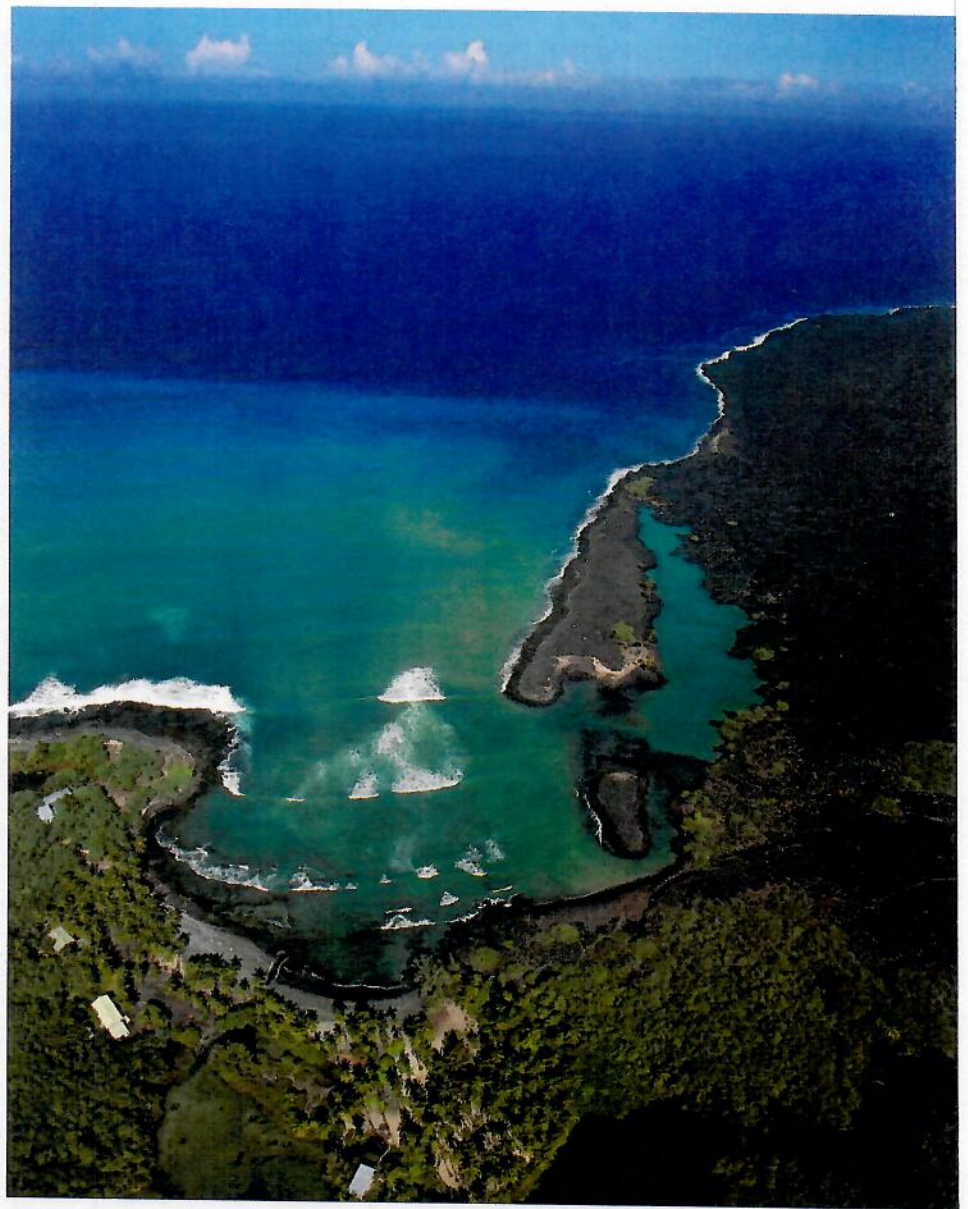
Reaching the magical pool directly, via the second entry, requires parking off the highway north of the scenic lookout near mile marker 81. Just look for a few parked cars on the *makai* (ocean) side to confirm you're in the right area. From there it's a mile hike along the foot trail that winds through 'a'a (stony) lava fields and limited vegetation. Since many of the sites at Kīholo Bay are not close together, moderate hiking is involved.

I take the second route in the early morning hours, and walk beneath the shadows of numerous *kiawe* trees. Hiding from the intense sun along the coast will be difficult, so I enjoy the shade while I can. Trekking onward I know that adventure looms just ahead.

Soon I arrive at the ocean's edge, where the landscape changes drastically. It feels like the old days: The pebble black-sand beach is empty. As I make my way north toward the blue lagoon, other sights catch my attention: sea turtles basking on the beach, two large fishponds surrounded by lush tropical fauna and a vibrant blue ocean bounded on the north side by dark black *pāhoehoe* (smooth) lava flows, providing a startling contrast in color.

The two fishponds hold special significance. These interconnected spring-fed pools host abundant native species of fish, along with 'ōpae (shrimp) and *hapawai* (mollusk), and the ponds have historical connections to Hawaiian *mo'olelo* (stories). Extending outward from one of them is a 200-foot stone 'auwai (ditch) that connects the ponds to the ocean. During high tides, sea turtles utilize the waterway to enter and exit the brackish water.

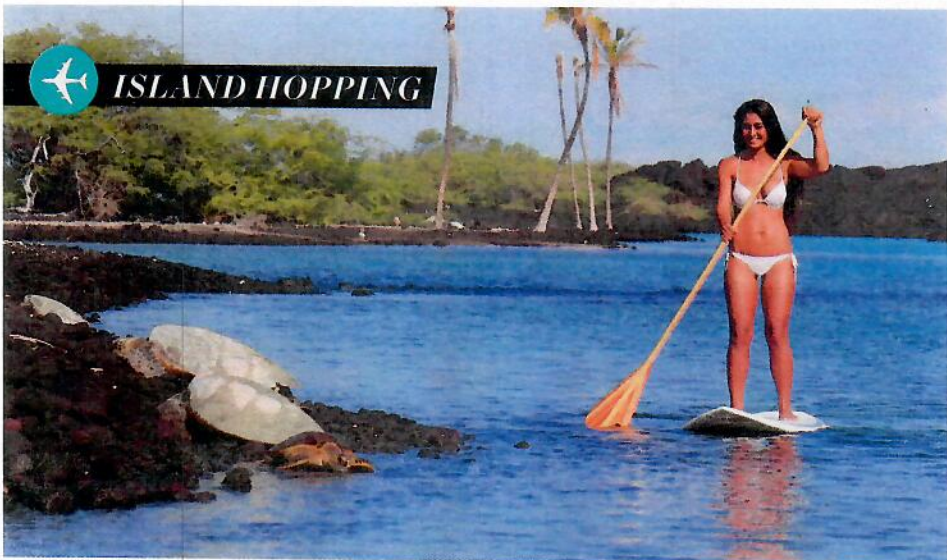
Kīholo Bay was favored among Hawaiian chiefs, including King Kamehameha, for its plentiful fish supply and protective location. Kamehameha was quick to recognize Kīholo's uniqueness. He oversaw the construction of a large fishpond separate from the others, which was later destroyed in 1859 by a volcanic eruption



TOP: Aerial perspective of a portion of Kīholo Bay, showing the blue lagoon on the right, surrounding pāhoehoe lava flows, and two fishponds further inland. **LEFT:** There are several portions of pebble black-sand beaches at Kīholo Bay. This one is located closer to the blue lagoon and two fishponds. **ABOVE:** A girl enjoys swimming underwater in an area just outside the blue lagoon where the water is clearer.



ISLAND HOPPING



Marine activities are popular at Kiholo, but enjoying the turtles from a safe distance is the law and always recommended.

from Mauna Loa nearly 30 miles away.

Heading farther north, I hug the shoreline along the pāhoehoe lava rock. Over the years, other lava flows have occurred in this area, but eventually, they all ceased, leaving behind the beautiful sight before me now. The blue lagoon description might seem a bit cliché, but it fits Wainānālīʻi Pond perfectly. The turquoise-colored pool provides a sanctuary for countless fish and other marine life. Green sea and hawksbill turtles rule the pool.

As the edge of the lagoon nears, the ocean beckons, offering a reprieve from the heat. Marine activities inside the lagoon include swimming, kayaking, snorkeling, stand-up paddleboarding and just floating atop the clear water. Out in the ocean toward the middle of the bay is a surf spot and scuba dive site.

Although enticing, snorkeling conditions inside the lagoon are not always ideal. The mix of salt water with fresh water muddles visibility. It's estimated that around 4 million gallons of groundwater pass through the fishponds in this area each day. Nevertheless, I capture several good images with my underwater camera.

Away from the lagoon, many other sights await. The stretch of coastline south of the blue lagoon leads past several rustic beachfront homes and, often, local fishermen casting their poles. Further along is Keanalele, a sacred pool of fresh water inside a lava tube cave. It's possible to wade into the pool, but caution is advised due to tidal changes.

Beyond lies the main part of the black sand beach. In the late 1890s, cattle ranchers used the beach as a staging area, informally christening it Shipping Pen Beach. In 1946 and 1960, tidal waves caused a fair amount of destruction in this area and altered the landscape along the shore.

The history and beauty at Kiholo Bay is limitless. No matter how many times I come to Kiholo it always feels a little different; it's a unique environment resonating in Hawaiian history. As I hike back to my car parked along the highway, I know it won't be long until I return. It's one of the joys of living on the Big Island—knowing that places like this are always within reach. 🌺



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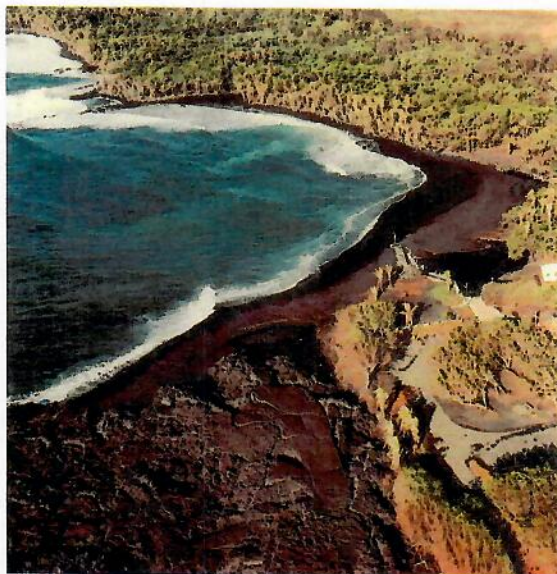


“In Search of the Manapua Man”

Associate editor Kevin Allen wrote about his search for the modern-day manapua man in our September/October issue.

“Thank you for the article on the manapua man. Takes me back to my childhood days when the manapua man would come through the neighborhood with his bamboo stick and the tin cans at the ends. He would yell out, “Manapua, pepeyaw!” and I would run to get my treat for the day. Glad to see he is still around.”

— Ann M. Allen
Napa, California



“There’s a New Black-Sand Beach on the Big Island and It’s Gorgeous”

September 2018

Kilauea’s eruption this year created a new black sand beach at Pohoiki, also known as Isaac Hale Beach Park. This online story shared the latest photos and our social media audience was amazed.

“Wow that view! Stoked to explore the new beaches and caves some day.”

—@nikothenomad, via Instagram

“What Mother Nature creates and gives, Mother Nature will also destroy and take away. Respect Mother Nature!”

—Francis Chong, via Facebook

“Amazing!”—Kathy Weiss, via Facebook

“Hope to see come January 2029.”

—William Floyd, via Facebook

“Pele knows what she’s doing.”

—@gbwimberley, via Instagram

“Hanging with He’e”

In our July/August issue, writer Tiffany Hill went on a tour of a Big Island octopus farm to learn about the intelligent creatures.

“I am writing in response to the article on the Kanaloa Octopus Farm. This farm is perusing raising octopi for human consumption. Yes, we eat a lot of animals, too. However, it is becoming very well known that octopi are one of the group of animals science is showing have ‘sentience’ and awareness of themselves and emotional behavior. I think she should have also given this information in her article to keep the reader informed. It’s nice to support local businesses (I have a house on the Big Island), but it’s also good to keep principles and values in place while you do it.”

—Dr. Larry Harrison
Novato, California



COURTESY OF U.S. GEOLOGICAL STUDY, KATIE WINKENHOWER



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By Tiffany Hill

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By Kevin Allen and Daniel Ikaika Ito



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ON THE COVER

Sunrise Shack, a roadside stop on the North Shore, with co-owner Travis Smith on the left. Also, look out for its new, additional location in Waikiki.

Photo by Ryan T. Foley