

# Wild Hawai'i

## The Big Island



Largest of the Hawai'iian Islands, the Big Island of Hawai'i is a land mass of 4,000 square miles—yet nearly twice the size and with a lower population density of all the other major Hawai'iian Islands. Far smaller than the state of Connecticut, the Big Island offers a spectacular wealth of photography opportunities in some of the most unique, diverse and unspoiled landscapes in the US—as well as most of the other tropical islands in the world.

The variety of photogenic landscapes, from ocean-washed black sand beaches to snowfields at the summit of nearly 14,000-foot-high Mauna Kea, is spectacular. Verdant rain forests, surreal lava formations, lush valleys leading to hidden waterfalls, and expansive raw volcanic landscapes are all within a drive of a few hours. Here, the best of the South Pacific meets the stark severity of landscapes in their infancy. As a living evolutionary laboratory, the Big Island—the youngest in the Hawai'iian chain—is home to an intriguing spectrum of endemic flora and fauna.

Our first day starts early, photographing the jagged, ocean-sprayed coast south of Hilo, and ends with a sunset shoot on the cinder-covered summit of Mauna Kea. Sunset photography here is very different than at sea level as we typically shoot above the cloud layer where the billows appear more three dimensional. We are surrounded by some of the world's most advanced astronomy arrays as we capture the setting sun.

Positioned over a geologic hot spot, the island continues to grow from five active volcanoes. Kilauea—one of the world's most active—has been erupting with some regularity since 1983. In Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park we

photograph the landscapes of the Kilauea caldera, including steaming bluffs, the Halema'uma'u Crater, and the expansive “moonscape” of the Holei Pali slope that falls spectacularly to the ocean beyond. In the early morning we charter helicopters (with doors removed) for dramatic and unobstructed aerial views of the volcanic landscapes—currently public access is limited on the ground. Our special charter flight departs at daybreak in order to capture beautiful morning light in more favorable wind and weather conditions.<

A private whale charter on the west side of the Big Island bring us within shooting distance of wintering humpback whales and the acrobatic spinner dolphins that sometimes play alongside the boat. Female humpback whales, calves and escort whales are regularly observed near the coastline. Heat runs—where males vie for female attention—result in exciting displays of lob tailing, tail slapping and breaching behaviors.

We photograph lush Hawai’ian landscapes where towering waterfalls plunge into green tropical ravines, “shoot” sea turtles basking on black sand beaches, and capture images of some of 2,000 species of exotic plants and flowers that flourish wildly along the boardwalks and trails of Hawaii Botanical Garden, as well as lava caves formed during the island’s massive eruptions.



From the luxuriant greens and brilliant bloom of rain forests, the gossamer streams of secluded waterfalls, seductive black sand beaches, to raw otherworldly volcanic landscapes, the Big Island offers an abundance of diverse photography that, amazingly, can be packed into one week. Private charters take us to the best locations in the best light where we photograph graphic, complex volcanic landscapes by helicopter, experience exciting encounters with humpback whales, and, if circumstances arise, capture dramatic images of the fiery flow of molten lava. Join Todd Pierce on the Big Island of Wild Hawai’i—an extraordinary, yet often overlooked, resource for great nature photography.

**Check out Todd Pierce's [trip report](#) from our 2018 Hawaii photo tour**

## **Tour Itinerary**

### **Day 1 (Feb 1)**

Participants arrive in Hilo, Hawai’i, and transfer by taxi to our hotel. We meet for introductions and dinner. (D)

### **Day 2**

We depart early to capture sunrise along a rugged shoreline where backlit waves crash dramatically over the jagged black lava rocks.

In the afternoon, we drive up to the Mauna Kea to the visitor center located at 9,200 feet. With weather conditions permitting, here we acclimate to the higher altitude, have an early dinner and don our warm parkas before continuing to the summit where the giant research telescopes are located. Winter storms at this time of the year may cloak the summit with snow, but hopefully it will not hinder our drive to the top! We should have an opportunity to shoot down on the cloud layer during the colorful transition from daylight to darkness in the pure clear air. We make our way down the mountain and return to Hilo for dinner. (BLD)



### **Day 3**

Our special early morning charter of three helicopters (with doors removed) allows us the opportunity for aerial photography of the graphic volcanic landscapes around Kilauea, one of the most active volcanoes in the world. After this thrilling aerial photo session we explore some of the waterfalls and creeks tucked into the valleys around Hilo, as well as the diverse native plants of Hawaii Tropical Botanical Garden. Later we transfer to Volcano House, our hotel base within Volcanoes National Park. As the light fades to night we finish our day by photographing sunset as well as possible photography of the starry night sky after dinner as weather conditions permit. (BLD)

### **Day 4**

After breakfast overlooking Kilauea, we explore the wonderfully diverse landscapes and features of the national park photographing that include endemic plants, flowers and convoluted geological formations along the Sulphur Banks Trail.



In the afternoon, we make our way down the Chain of Craters Road, stopping at various points of interest where abstract lava formations offer dramatic foregrounds to an otherworldly scene. After a stop at the Holei Sea Arch, we ascend to a high point along the Holei Pali escarpment where we can pair graphic foreground lava formations with the Pacific Ocean nearly 2,000 feet below, followed by the setting sun over the shoulder of Mauna Loa. (BLD)

### **Day 5**

Our morning photo shoot captures first light on Mauna Loa and steam vents glowing in the morning sun, we have a quick breakfast before departing for the Kohala Coast. Along the way, we stop at Punalu'u Beach to look for sea turtles basking on the black sand beach among the tidal pools.

We check into our accommodations in the small town of Waimea. Our day is topped off by a private ocean cruise on a 46-foot-long, partially-covered boat to photograph humpback whales in their winter habitat. Exuberant displays of breaching, lob tailing, and tail slapping are common at this time of year. Our boat captain has a wealth of knowledge about the whales, seabirds and marine life in the area. (BLD)



### Day 6

Following breakfast at a local coffee shop in Waimea, we explore the verdant rolling ranchlands near Waimea. After lunch we drive to the northwestern part of the island to capture the steep Hamakua Coast cliffs and the deep cut of the Waipi'o Valley, as well as the triple-tiered Umauma Falls and the dramatic 400-foot-high Akaka Falls as we make our way to Hilo. (BLD)

### Day 7 (Feb 7)

We depart from the Hilo airport for flights home.

**PLEASE NOTE: Reasonable good health is required for this diverse trip with many different components, including dramatic changes in altitude between sea level and 13,800 feet at the summit of Mauna Kea, choppy boat rides, a helicopter flight with doors off, and walking on uneven terrain of hardened lava. Our visit to the summit of Mauna Kea is not recommended for persons with serious heart or lung issues. Due to the variable and unpredictable weather conditions on the Big Island, tour activities may be subject to change at any time.**

## Trip Details

**Feb 01 - Feb 07, 2020**

**Fee:** \$6,195 from Hilo, Hawai'i

**Deposit:** \$500

**Limit:** 7 participants

**Activity Level:** Easy

## Tour Leader



**TODD W. PIERCE**

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