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Summer Travel

By Fran Miller



Hulopo'e Bay, Lanai Photos Fran Miller

A mere 35-minute plane ride divides them, and each is visible to the other on an ultra clear day, but the islands of Oahu and Lanai offer varying visitor experiences. Both provide alluring and warm Hawaiian hospitality, a bevy of adventure and cultural activities, and of course surf and sand, but the delivery systems differ.

Unless arriving by private or charter jet, one must pass through Oahu's Honolulu airport to get to and from Lanai, making a pre- or post-layover nearly a given. Three nights on each island is about right, and allows for an adequate exploration of both. Start in Oahu and head west to Ko Olina - far from the crowds of Waikiki but close enough to capture Honolulu's urban buzz. Four pristine beach coves dot Ko Olina's sunset view-perfect, fit-for-a-king coastline. Not mere hyperbole, the area was long ago the vacation choice of King Ka'mehameha himself.

Accommodations include Four Seasons Resort O'ahu at Ko Olina, Disney's Aulani Resort, Beach Villas at Ko Olina, and Marriott's Ko Olina Beach Club. With its spectacular west-facing infinity pool (the largest on the island) and its destination level restaurants, including Mina's Fish House, featuring the world's first 'fish sommeliers,' the Four Seasons is a winning choice. (If the lure of neighboring Aulani is too hard to resist, simply stroll next door to find Mickey and Moana.) The early 20th century outrigger canoe spanning the length of the spacious Four Seasons lobby is an indication that this is not a typical tropical resort. A quick peak at the 3,200 square foot Penthouse Suite confirms it. With panoramic views of the Pacific from its wraparound lanai, the suite makes this resort a favored choice of notables who have their pick of worldwide lodging options.

Steeped in Hawaiian culture, the 17-story high rise takes its cues from the innate beauty and history of the area to create a tranquil oasis. Four swimming pools, a calm-watered beach cove perfect for paddle boarding and snorkeling, and a number of activities such as lei making, hula and ukulele lessons, stargazing, and yoga mean that everyone in your group finds something to love. Be sure not to miss the Saturday and Sunday brunch at the resort's La Hiki Kitchen. Word has it it's the island's best and most bountiful.

As opposed to the multitude of resort choices on Oahu, Lanai currently features just two lodging options: the charming 10-room Hotel Lanai located 'up country' in Lanai City, or the elegant Four Seasons Resort Lanai perched above Hulopo'e Bay. (A third Lanai City option nears completion.) The pristine, unspoiled beauty of this island astounds. With just more than 3,000 full-time residents (and nary a stop light to be found), Lanai is the epitome of old Hawaii - free of the crowds and traffic now associated with its sister islands.

Once the world's largest pineapple plantation, Lanai was purchased by Oracle's Larry Ellison in 2012. He and his team remodeled the existing Four Seasons resort, making it one of the world's most beautiful and luxurious vacation spots. With just 213 guest rooms linked by lush gardens, the resort is intimate and sophisticated - perfect for a romantic getaway (Chris Pratt and Katharine Schwarzenegger honeymooned here) but equally appealing to families who enjoy the numerous activities. Every day from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., cultural team members man a lobby table inviting guests to partake in lei making or coconut weaving, yoga, archery, helicopter tours, horseback riding and more are readily available. And if it's not listed on the daily activity list, resort staff can make it happen. Keep an eye out for Resident Uncle Bruno, the resort aviarist who meanders with one or more rescue birds perched upon his arms. It's worthwhile to take the resort's Holoholo tour; a cultural team member likely a Lanai native, provides a guided, four-wheel drive exploration of the 140 square mile island, sharing cultural details along the way. The pineapples are long gone but the island's ranch roots remain, as illustrated by the horse-filled Ranch at Ko'ele, one of the stops along the tour that ends in Lanai City. Head to Richard's Market for the fresh poke, visit the cultural center, and purchase souvenirs at Local Gentry or the Mike Carroll Gallery before catching a shuttle back to the Four Seasons.

Dining options match the resort's sophistication. Try a venison burger at The Sports Bar & Grill, enjoy steak or seafood at One Forty (the island's square mileage as well as steak's perfect temperature), or indulge in Nobu Lanai's signature Japanese dishes. At Four Seasons Resort Lanai, any choice is the best choice.



Four Seasons Resort O'ahu at Ko Olina



Torch Lighting, Four Seasons Resort Oahu at Ko Olina

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