



Pele’s Paradise: The Big Island of Hawaii

By Mary Welch

According to Polynesian storytellers, who should know these things, the gods came from Tahiti, which makes a lot more sense than some mountain in Greece.



But Pele, daughter of the sky god and the earth mother, was a gal who needed to get away. A strikingly beautiful goddess and an overachiever, Pele had anger management issues (she burst aflame when upset – or was this simply a hot flash?) Let’s just say Pele wasn’t having a good year. She wasn’t getting along with her parents and her jealous sister was plotting behind her back. An ill-fated romance didn’t work out and her underlings were grumbling about her taking away benefits. So Pele did what any self-respecting goddess might do. She went to Hawaii – the Big Island

Small wonder modern-day goddesses continue to come in Pele’s flaming footsteps. Several direct flights to the Big Island are available from Delta Air Lines and other carriers. From the snows of the great mountain, Mauna Kea, to the snow-white beaches of the Kona Coast, the Big Island is one of the few places on earth where you can go from snowboarding to snorkeling in a single day. Between these two extremes, you will find virtually every type of outdoor activity imaginable: world-class fishing, gorgeous golfing, pristine snorkeling, horseback riding, hiking on an erupting volcano and much more.

Any trip to the Big Island needs to start at Pele’s place – Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, where ribbons of fire trickle down to the sea and vistas of otherworldly volcanic landscapes bring an appreciation of how the earth is formed and made – and remade – continuously. This is perhaps the original ecotourism spot. At the park, you may choose to hike, drive, ride over in a helicopter or skirt the flaming shore in a speedboat – and still have time for lunch at the lodge near the top of the mountain. Whether you do a day trip or spend weeks in studying the geology, biology and botany of a true primeval paradise,



the national park offers something for virtually every interest level. One word of caution... be sure to wear thick-soled shoes as the volcanic rock underfoot can get uncomfortably hot. And remember a jacket is almost always a good idea, even in the summer since the thin air and altitude can make the temperature plunge. The Big Island offers so many varieties of accommodations that you can pick and choose a place that suits you. Of course, volcanophiles will want to stay at the lodge directly on the volcano and close to the activities there. If sun and surf and sipping tropical drinks are more your style, then consider three separate resorts near the fabled Kona coast. Perhaps the most authentic Hawaiian resort on the Kona coast is the Kona Hawaiian Village since it is the incarnation of a real 18th century village that was flourishing long before Western people came to the island. Ka’upulehu, the site of Kona Village Resort, was at one time home to between 10,000 and 12,000 Hawaiian residents. In 1801, many of the residents left because of shifting lava flows. A tidal wave in 1946 mixed the white sands of Kahuwai Bay with the black sands of Maheawalu, thus creating the salt and pepper beach now fronting Kona Village. In 1961, Johnno Jackson and his wife, Helen, arrived at what was left of the long-abandoned village. They had sailed much of the South Pacific and quickly saw the possibilities of fulfilling their dream of building a truly Polynesian resort featuring



palm huts called hales just like the ones the Hawaiians lived in for centuries. Over the next several decades, the resort changed hands. Two swimming pools and more hale were added and a bar was constructed using the hull of Jackson’s schooner, which had sunk in the bay. Ty Warner Hotels & Resorts purchased the resort in the summer of 2004. For reservations and information, go to www.konavillage.com. If children are a consideration, the Hilton Waikoloa Village is your best bet. It has in the last two decades become Hawaii’s number one family resort, according to *Travel & Leisure* magazine. Much like a Disney property, the Waikoloa Village is a destination in itself. Located on the Kohala Coast of Hawaii’s Big Island, the Hilton Waikoloa Village lets you experience lush tropical gardens, abundant wildlife, a wide variety of dining choices, surprisingly varied shopping and founder Conrad Hilton’s extensive art collection, as well as an array of outdoor activities ranging from golf and tennis to an interactive dolphin program to a five-star spa. The entire resort is made easily accessible by family groups on air-conditioned trams, canal runabouts or palm-shaded flagstone walkways. It is safe, enclosed and offers a family a hermetically sealed vacation experience. The kids won’t want to leave the Hawaiian river pool, but get out anyway for a day and experience the real island’s black sand beaches. Or visit an authentic working cattle ranch a few miles upslope. For

reservations and information, go to www.hiltonwaikoloavillage.com. If you are in the mood for a significant celebration, Mauna Kea Beach Hotel offers the perfect location on the sunny Kohala Coast of the Big Island. Nestled on a beautifully formed crescent beach, the resort offers guests the ideal setting for a relaxing getaway in paradise. When you choose to stay at Mauna Kea Beach Hotel, you become a guest of Mauna Kea Resort, offering double the options in beaches, dining, golf, spa and resort activities. If your preference is golf, the nearby Hapuna Beach Hotel is your obvious choice, while the Mauna Kea gives you the best beach views, privacy and a sense of being away from it all. Impeccable cuisine and service are experienced throughout the resort. The Saturday seafood buffet will coax the most ardent honeymooners out of their suite and over to a vast sea of seafood alternatives. And across the entire Mauna Kea experience, you never fail to get a sense that you are at a place that is a cut above. In the souvenir shop, the Mauna Kea T-shirts are made by Ralph Lauren. For reservations and information, visit the Web site www.princeresortshawaii.com. As you sip a signature Mai Tai cocktail on the tropical lanai as the sunset breeze brings a refreshingly soft and cool caress in the corner of your eye, you just might catch sight of a volcanic flash of light reflected in the water and sky as your fellow Goddess, Pele, goes for her evening swim. ♀