

Choosing the Hawaiian Island That's Right For Your Family

By Mary Barbour



Hawaii has long been thought of as the perfect destination for honeymooning couples, but these days the islands also have much to offer families of all sizes. From the shopping and attractions on Oahu to the natural, untouched beauty of the Big Island, there are many reasons why Hawaii has become such a popular destination for family vacations year-round. No matter what age your kids are, you and your family can plan a beautiful tropical getaway to middle of the Pacific. Here are some tips to help you figure out if you should head to Honolulu, Kauai, Maui or one of the other gorgeous tropical destinations.



Oahu

Best for: Families who want the “classic” Hawaii experience.

Oahu is perfect for a family or couple looking for a vacation that will keep them busy day and night with a wide range of activities you think of when you think “Hawaii”. By day, hit the beach for scuba, snorkeling and some of the best surfing in the world; then hit the dance floor when the sun goes down to take in the rhythmic nightlife of the island. Did somebody say luau? It is also super easy to get around the island with a [rental car at Aulani](#) on the isle of Oahu or at the [Honolulu International airport](#). Honolulu is the biggest city and most active destination but Kaneohe and the North Shore are also popular places to visit.

Maui

Best for: Families who want to get off the beaten path to find adventure.

Maui is great if your family prefers a destination filled with lots of tourist fun but also many rural getaways. Many folks feel this island has some of the very best beaches in the world. So if your family is in the market for beautiful azure-blue waters and spectacular sunsets, along with mesmerizing coastal drives filled with some of the state's best whale-watching, look no further than Lahaina Town, the most historic hot spot on the island. It's easy to fly into [Kahului](#), the island's biggest airport, near the town of Haleakala, where you can find plenty of places to stay.

Kauai

Best for: Families who know there is more to the Great Outdoors than the beach.

Kauai is the oldest and most historic island in the Hawaiian chain. It's nicknamed the "Garden Isle" for good reason – much of the landmass is covered in lush, tropical rainforest. The many cliffs, canyons and trails that dot the island are ideal for the family who prefers hiking boots to flip-flops. You can access it by flying directly into [Lihue Airport](#) or by flying into Honolulu and then taking a short connecting flight. Your entire family will enjoy a drive along Kalalau Trail, a spectacular coastal trail that leads into Wailua Falls, one of the most breathtaking waterfalls in the Hawaiian islands. And if you don't want to forget the beach completely, Poipu Beach is often voted one of the best beaches in America.

Molokai

Best for: Families who want to see what it's like to live like a local.

Molokai doesn't draw nearly as many tourists as the bigger islands, which is why some people find it to be their favorite. Almost half the population is Native Hawaiian, so it has a very unspoiled feel to it. To get a sense right away of how the indigenous people have worked to preserve their connection to their Hawaiian past, visit the Kapuaiwa Coconut Grove, Kumu Farms and the Molokai Plumeria where you can fashion your own lei. The tiny town of Kaunakakai is just a few miles from the [Molokai airport](#) and gives you a glimpse into what real Hawaiian life is like day-to-day. Enjoy authentic Hawaiian fare, browse boutique shops and stroll the Kaunakakai harbor.

Lanai

Best for: Families who don't want their vacations feeling too crowded.

Lanai is the place to head for the family that's in the mood for a true vacation away from civilization. A small island, Lanai has plenty of things to do and see, but it's more sparse tourist traffic allows for all activities to feel more intimate. You can access it via Lanai Airport, which is about 3 miles south of Lanai City, the island's commercial center. Make sure you take the time to rent a 4-wheel drive vehicle and trek up the Munro Trail to get a glimpse of the natural beauty of the island and its beaches. The shopping, dining and golfing in Lanai City is quite a juxtaposition to the barren landscape of Keahiakawelo on the outskirts of town.

Big Island

Best for: Families who want to experience a range of landscapes and climates all in one place.

The Big Island, or the island of Hawaii proper, is perfect for families who want to get a taste of the full range of what Hawaii has to offer. From white sand beaches to the frosted tips of mountains, your family can explore 11 different climactic zones all within a short drive of each other. The island features delicious coffee plantations where mom and dad can fuel up with a cup of locally-grown brew, take the spellbinding drive with the family down the Hamakua Coast to see the island's spectacular waterfalls, and check out one of the world's most active volcanoes in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. It's easy to access via [Kona](#) or [Hilo International Airports](#).

A vacation to Hawaii is like visiting no other place on earth - it's no wonder why so many people end up coming back time and time again! The islands have plenty of different activities to offer visitors, but the one thing you'll find everywhere is the beautiful Aloha spirit of the locals, whose happy and optimistic attitude makes it one of the most remarkable and memorable places in the world to spend a family holiday.



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