

Hike the Kalalau Trail

Want to get up, close and personal with Mother Nature? Grab a backpack and hit the trail. Want to experience natural wonders you've never seen before? Backpack the Kalalau Trail.

If you're a backpacker at heart, then your list of backpacking trips isn't complete until you've conquered the Kalalau Trail. Beginning where the paved road ends on Kauai's North Shore, this 11-mile trail alternately challenges and rewards hikers with a breathtaking combination of cliffside promenades, deep forest, silent skies, stark cliffs and views of wild sea. When you reach the trail's end, you'll step onto a white sand beach stretching as long as several football fields lay end to end. It is here, at the end of your journey that you are left to meditate, enjoy the sheer beauty of the place and reflect on your own inestimably good fortune.

Most hikers claim Hanakapiai Beach as the end of their journey. Found two miles in to the trail, Hanakapiai can be considered a mere stopover for more resilient backpackers. A more complex and engaging symphony of jungle, sea and sky wait along the remaining nine miles of Kalalau Trail.

If you are one of these committed backpackers, you will leave the beach at Hanakapiai and climb about 800 feet out of that valley to traverse the ridges of Hono O Na Pali Natural Area Reserve. You will cross the streams that bisect a series of valleys, including Ho'olulu and Wai'ahuakua. Four miles later, you will arrive at Hanakoa Valley where you will rest for the night before starting off again for Kalalau.

On this second day of travel, your mettle will be tested by one of the most grueling hikes you will ever attempt. The final five-mile section of the hike is so steep, many backpackers have been known to swear (and believe) that they will never do anything like it ever again. But carry on, for when you emerge, likely at sunset, you will be on a red-dirt slope that leads to an old Hawaiian heiau, a sacred place so beautiful you forget how to breathe for a minute. Catch your breath and carry on, across a final stream to the spectacular glowing view of the white sand of Hauopo Valley, just past Kalalau Beach. This is where the adventure really begins.

Kalalau Trail Facts:

Starting at the northwest end of Kuhio Highway, the Kalalau Trail begins about 40 miles, or a one-hour drive, from Lihue Airport. Backpackers are allowed a maximum five-night stay within the Na Pali State Park. Permits are \$10 per person, per night, issued by the State Parks Division.

Tips to Ensure a Great Time on the Kalalau Trail:

- * Park rangers insist that you have a valid camping permit. Be sure to get one.
- * Camping permits for up to three nights in Lihue are available at the County building.
- * Take advantage of the best weather conditions by hiking the trail between May and September. You will enjoy 11 miles of the most beautiful tropical coastline you've ever seen.
- * If you plan on camping or hiking beyond Hanakapiai, be sure to sign in at the start of the trail at the registration box.
- * If you choose, you can arrange for a boating company to drop you off at Kalalau Beach Park and pick you up at a pre-designated time.

Seasoned hikers will go to any length and take on any challenge to explore new terrain. The Kalalau offers both beauty and excitement but be careful; the area is so breathtaking that future trips will pale in comparison.