

The Whales of Kauai

Mount Everest, the Grand Canyon, and Niagara Falls are all marvels of the natural world. But one of nature's greatest spectacles lies in one of the planet's most remote areas.

The majestic Na Pali

Coast of Kauai is a spectacular wilderness area that the typical tourist will never see. Located along Kauai's remote North Shore, the Na Pali Coast is an awe-inspiring 6,175 acres; and although it has been converted into a state park, and remains as isolated from civilization as it was many centuries ago. Practically inaccessible to vehicular traffic, the Na Pali Coast is ideal for adventurous hikers and campers. However, to truly appreciate the unmitigated view of the famous and breathtaking cliffs, your best bet is to travel by helicopter or boat.

If fate allows

you to cruise the 15-mile stretch of Na Pali Coastline, you will witness an awesome view of the stunning 4,000-foot cliffs. The area was named for these rugged cliffs, as "pali" is the Hawaiian word for "cliffs". As you near the coastline, you will see these cliffs rising abruptly from the Pacific Ocean, occasionally giving way to gaps and revealing wide stretches of golden sand, deep jungle valleys and the mysterious sea caves between.

Winter is the best time to go on a cruise up and down the

Na Pali Coast, as that is when the humpback whales frequent the Kauai waters. If you take a chartered ship, your captain will likely know exactly where these wonderful sea creatures can be seen. Truly fortunate sight-seekers will have the opportunity to take pictures and enjoy a spectacular show by these playful dirigibles of the deep as they perform with sea turtles, dolphins and other oceanic creatures.

Humpback

whales can be measure 40 feet in length and can weigh up to 85,000 pounds. The fifth largest of the world's greatest whales, humpbacks are seen only in Hawaii over the winter months. Federal law protects these breathtaking creatures, so their population is rising. Plan a tour of the Na Pali Coast during humpback season, and you're sure to witness a fantastic spectacle of nature.

Na Pali boat tours are not necessarily restricted to the

coastline. Both Hanakapiai and Kalalau Beach (named one of America's Top 40 Beaches by the National Geographic Traveler) are well-known Na Pali Coast State Park destinations. You can also visit the famous arch of Honopu, or the stunning fringing reefs of Nualolo and Milolii.

Depending

on your itinerary and how adventurous you feel, the tour options you choose can be as wildly exciting as the Na Pali coastline itself. Most boat companies launch their charter tours from west side harbours. However, you can choose to sail from the quaint town of Hanalei if you choose to charter one of the smaller companies. Cruises to Ni'ihau are also available, providing you the opportunity to stop for a bit of snorkeling and scuba diving.

Tips to Successful Kauai Whale

Watching:

* Choose a professional boat company, with a captain who

knows where to find the whales and more importantly, respects the safety and environment of the whales

* Catamarans, cruise vessels, sailboats and rubber zodiac rafts are all good choices for whale watching

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Bring your camera so that you can preserve this incredible sight forever. You could be in for a wet ride, especially if you'll be riding in the bow area of the boat. Consider bringing waterproof, disposable cameras.

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Binoculars give you a closer observation of whale behavior, but they can be tricky to use if the water is rough. Your best bet for binoculars is to choose a pair with 8 x 40, or 7 x 50 dimensions.

* Keep a keen eye.

You could see spinner dolphins, sea turtles, albatross and other sea birds and animals, in addition to humpback whales. Pay attention and see what you can spot in the air and in the water.

* Dress accordingly. Wear

a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen. Remember, you'll be in a boat, so be prepared to get wet. Wear your beach clothes, and bring a towel. If you decide to bring extra clothes to change into, make sure you keep them in a waterproof bag.

* If you are prone to motion sickness, be sure to

take homeopathic or non-prescription motion sickness prevention medication at least one hour before getting on a boat. Your trip will likely include the North Shore, where winter waves can swell to 10-30 feet, so the ride can get very bumpy at higher speeds. Medicated motion sickness treatments can make you drowsy and you don't want to miss a thing, so consider a non-medicinal alternative. Dry bread, crackers, ginger, papaya and avoiding alcohol can help reduce nausea.

Traveling is a great way

to witness nature's most impressive sites firsthand, but the truly adventurous travelers go to where others only dream of. When planning your next journey, plan on cruising the Na Pali coastline with humpback whales. It will be an experience you'll never forget.