

History of West Kaua'i

With the coming of westerners, came new religions, ways of doing things and a new economy. The sugar industry flourished in the area by the 1880's bringing in waves of immigrants starting with Chinese. They came from many lands but the largest populations came from Japan and Portugal followed by the Philippines. Many became entrepreneurs. Hanapēpē and Waimea towns flourished while others were company towns operated by the plantations. Together, the plantations and immigrant entrepreneurs built churches, community halls, schools, hospitals, railroads, businesses of all sorts. The west side of Kaua'i teemed with people. Following World War II, the plantation workforce dwindled and many of the smallest towns exist only in memory.

'Ele'ele

Home to one of the major shipping ports on the island and one of the island's power plants, the town owes its existence to McBryde Sugar Company which converted its sugar fields to coffee as Kaua'i Coffee Company at Numila Village.

Hanapēpē

The town boomed due to its location near Port Allen and once boasted two roller skating rinks, two theatres, many eateries, stores and bars. Walking tour brochures are available at town businesses.

Kaumakani

Rebuilt as a model plantation community in 1946, the village once thrived until the workforce dwindled. It is at the heart of the last sugar plantation on Kaua'i.

Waimea

The capital of the district since ancient times, it has many layers of history and many historic buildings due to this prestige. Walking tour brochures available in the West Kaua'i Visitor Center.

Kekaha

A company town founded by Kekaha Sugar Company that ceased operations in 2000. Although it has very little in the town core, it is the fourth largest town on Kaua'i. There were several other towns, the largest Mānā, that have disappeared.

Points of Interest & Overlooks

① Hanapēpē Valley Overlook

Kaua'i's third largest river drains from the remote and wet central part of the island. On a clear day the highest point of the island, Kawaikini, can be seen. The town of Hanapēpē sprawls near the mouth of the river while 'Ele'ele sits on the hillside above.

② Hanapēpē Salt Pond

Famous salt pans used from ancient times were unique. Sea water is flooded in earthen troughs and allowed to evaporate forming salt crystals. The people of Kaua'i add to the crystals an iron-rich ochre called 'alaea, casting a reddish hue.

③ Russian Fort / Pā 'Ula'ula

Built in 1812 by the Russian American Trading Company, cannon once mounted the star-pointed walls. The site was once a heiau. King Kaumuali'i's compound was nearby.

④ Menehune Ditch

A technological wonder, the earth-faced, stone ditch brings water around a cliff 25 feet above the river. It is claimed that the Menehune, ancient people skilled in engineering made the ditch in a single night.

⑤ Waimea Landing

Famed as Captain Cook's first anchorage in 1778. Ship traffic followed suit for over a century and a half with cattle, sugar and rice the chief export products from the landing. The first commercial pier was built in 1865.

⑥ Waimea Town Overlook

Waimea Town has been the capital of the island on numerous occasions and has many historic building reflecting its history. To the right can be seen Kekaha with its landmark sugar mill and beyond the island of Ni'ihau.

⑦ Two Rivers Lookout

Waimea River and its tributaries form the most complex river system on Kaua'i draining from the Alaka'i Swamp. Overlook of Waimea and Makaweli Rivers.

⑧ Lower Waimea Valley Lookout

From this vantage, the 1911-12 Kekaha Ditch cuts above the river before entering a siphon to take it up the cliffs to Waimea and then Kekaha. The finger canyons can be seen in the distance cut from many layers of lava flows.



Museums & Visitor Centers

★ Kaua'i Coffee Visitor Center

ph. 335-0813 , Hwy 540

★ Gay & Robinson Visitor Center - Robinson FamilyAdventures

ph. 335-2824, Hwy 50 mile marker 19

★ West Kaua'i Visitor Center

ph. 338-1332, Waimea, corner of Waimea Canyon Drive and Hwy 50,

★ Waimea Sugar Mill Museum

ph. 338-1332, Waimea, Hwy 50, across from West Kauai Visitor Center

★ Faye Museum

ph. 338-1625, Waimea Plantation Cottages

★ Kōke'e Natural History Museum

ph. 335-9975 , Kōke'e State Park

★ Kaua'i Museum

ph. 245-6931, 4428 Rice Street, Līhu'e