

the **BIG ISLAND** goes
BIG TIME

This longtime vacation destination is finally luring second-home seekers with superb private communities offering world-class attractions

BY SCOTT KAUFFMAN

When Mauna Kea Beach Hotel opened on the Big Island of Hawaii in 1965, the resort, along with its famed Robert Trent Jones Sr. golf course, were the standard bearers of Hawaiian-style hospitality and great volcanic golf. Over the years many resorts have helped make Hawaii's Gold Coast a leading destination, but there remains only one matriarch.

Now, more than four decades after Mauna Kea's debut, its long-term appeal has spurred a new residential golf course project called Wai'ula'ula at Mauna Kea Resort. Actually located "mauka" or toward the mountains, Wai'ula'ula features 102 upscale condominiums set amidst Mauna Kea's sister resort, the modern Hapuna Beach Prince Hotel and its stunning Arnold Palmer-designed course.

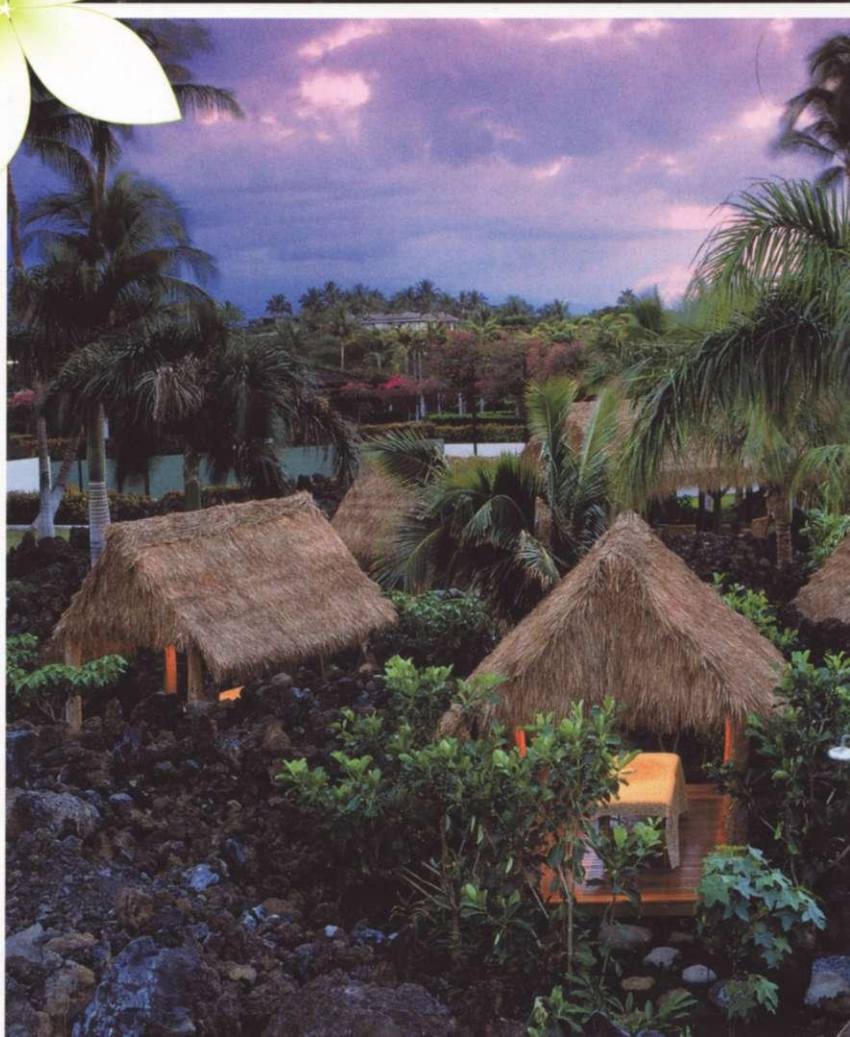
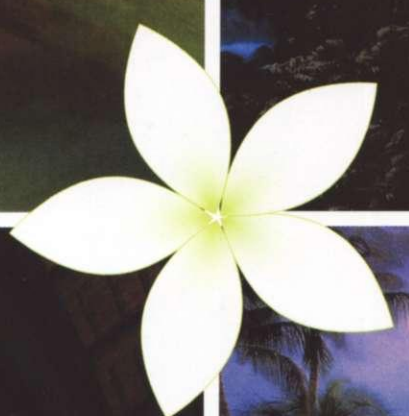
Surrounding Hapuna's 11th and 14th holes, Wai'ula'ula is a gated enclave that emphasizes environmentally sensitive tropical landscaping (the golf course is a member of Audubon International), low-density buildings and open sightlines that afford residents

rare unobstructed 180-degree vistas of the Pacific Ocean and the Kohala Coast. Prices start at \$1.5 million for the sold out Ridge homes (2,100-square-foot quadplex units), \$2.2 million for the villas (2,500-square-foot duplexes with a garage and pool) and \$3.8 million for a single-family estate with separate pools, spas and spacious two-car garages.

Among the many amenities associated with Wai'ula'ula are special privileges at Mauna Kea Resort, including easy access to fabulous white sand beaches, championship golf courses, tennis and fitness centers, spas, nine restaurants, hotel facilities, and a full slate of concierge residential services overseen by a security team formerly associated with Hawaii's governor.

The lifestyle and the relatively affordable entry prices by Big Island standards is what attracted Ed Miklas and his wife, Janet, to Wai'ula'ula from a nearby community.

Clockwise, from top left: A private residence at Wai'ula'ula at Mauna Kea Resort; No. 3 at the Mauna Kea Golf Course; thatched hales (huts) at the Mauna Lani Spa; outdoor dining at Kuki'o





The private Ke'olu clubhouse at Hualalai



A Hainoa Villa at Hualalai Resort

A self-described golf nut, Miklas, 76, says the move gave him what he's always wanted in a Hawaiian vacation home. "Here you don't have that closed-in feeling," says Miklas. "The density is very low here and we have great views from two different sides—you can see the mountains and the golf course—so the aesthetics and views are much more exquisite."

Miklas has owned a vacation home on the Big Island—perhaps the only place on the planet where one can visit a live volcano, snow ski and sunbathe on the beach all in one day—since the 1990s.

"The island is still not as crowded as Maui and Oahu. And there's not as much rain. I like to compare it to the Palm Springs of Hawaii."

Jim Dollens, a former sales executive with Boeing, couldn't agree more. After retiring, he set out to find his dream place to live. With homes in the Caribbean, France and elsewhere, he eventually settled on the Big Island and Mauna Kea.

"I've lived all over the world and found there is no better place to enjoy life than at Mauna Kea," says Dollens, who is developing Wai'ula'ula with Blackpoint Capital Advisors LLC and the Maryl Group Inc. "I always feel this is the place where dreams go to come true."

Another unique gated enclave within Mauna Kea is Kauna'oa, which features a rare 3-hole golf course designed by Tom Weiskopf and just 48 residential units. According to sales agent Kathryn Frietas, 20 of the 28 estate homesites were sold as of March, with prices ranging between \$1.5 million and \$4.5 million for up to 1.5 acres. Kauna'oa also offers luxury townhomes priced from \$3.5 million.



Oceanview accommodations at the Mauna Kea Resort



The Tom Fazio-designed golf course at Kuki'o

Just down the Kohala Coast toward the main town of Kona, the Four Seasons Hualalai Resort is home to numerous business tycoons and the prestigious PGA Champion Tour's MasterCard Championship. "Hualalai embodies the quality that has become synonymous with the PGA Tour," says PGA Tour Commissioner Tim Finchem. "We are pleased to be associated with what is recognized as one of the finest resorts in the world."

Hualalai's renowned resort recognition coupled with the new private Hualalai Club keeps driving the demand for real estate. The latest addition to the 865-acre development is Weiskopf-designed Ke'olu golf course (Jack Nicklaus designed the oceanfront resort course), where villas start from \$1.75 million and estate homes go up to \$10 million. Residents will enjoy use of the magnificent Hualalai Sports Club & Spa, a laid-back open-air Canoe Club facility, residential concierge service and a 14,000-square-foot clubhouse highlighted by celebrity chef Alan Wong's Hualalai Grille.

"The buyers in our market belong to a number of private clubs so they're used to having the private experience," says Jeremy Sosner, an Hualalai executive. "They want their 7 p.m. sunset seat at the restaurant when they want it, and they like playing hassle-free golf. But they also enjoy the energy of the resort."

For many, though, the island is still not private enough, and that explains the impetus behind Kuki'o Beach Club, a 1,200-acre property on picturesque Kuki'o Bay. Developed by Mike Meldman's Discovery Land Company, a former regular at Hualalai, Kuki'o was the Big Island's first private equity golf and beach club (initiation fee is \$250,000) and a real estate juggernaut

with homesites going for \$2 million to \$20 million. Highlighted by a full-service member's clubhouse, luxurious spa and fitness facilities and 28 holes of Tom Fazio-designed golf, Kuki'o's ultra exclusive 375-home community has attracted the likes of Charles Schwab and Michael Dell.

"What we do is develop private communities that have resort amenities without the resort," says Meldman, whose Scottsdale-based firm is currently working on projects in the Bahamas and Los Cabos, Mexico. "We're much more than just about great Tom Fazio golf. What we're trying to do is take all of our amenities and service it to the next level."

When you have the breathtaking beauty of the Big Island as your backdrop, the proposition is pretty powerful.

"First, it's the location," says Kuki'o president/CEO Sam Ainslie, when asked why Kuki'o has been so successful with two-thirds of the homesites sold as of March. "There's only one Hawaii, and it's America. And it's 12 months out of the year."

"Until Kuki'o, and now others, private residential club communities were never a choice here. We've always been a great place to visit as a resort guest, and we've always had great resorts, but homes were secondary. It sounds so obvious, but it just wasn't a choice like you have in popular places on the Mainland. Now, the Big Island is becoming a bonafide second-home destination."

SOURCES: Hualalai: Four Seasons Resort, (808)325-8000, fourseasons.com/hualalai; Hualalai Realty, (808) 325-8500, hualalairesort.com; Kauna'oa at Mauna Kea Resort, (888)528-6262, kaunaoa.com; Kuki'o, (808)325-4040, kukio.com; Wai'ula'ula at Mauna Kea Resort, (888) 657-4253, waiulaula-maunakea.com

KUKI'O

Maybe the smartest way to build an extraordinary golf community is to start by putting it in an unbelievable location where people dream of vacationing anyway. That works for Kuki'o, where the white sand beaches are private and the climate is as close to perfect as it gets. With a pair of 10- and 18-hole courses by Tom Fazio and a clubhouse with a beach bar, spa and fitness facilities, the views overlooking the Pacific from the west side of the Big Island will bury in your heart faster than you can learn to pronounce Uluweauweau, a scenic bay adjacent to Kuki'o. The striking contrasts of black lava against white sand bunkers and emerald grass abutting vast blue ocean create an unforgettable visual feast. Best viewed while hanging from a hammock strung between swaying palms after a morning round, of course.

Kuki'o, (808) 325-4040, kukio.com