

KAUAI

A First-Timer's Island Itinerary

Monday, July 13 – Friday, July 17, 2026

Home base: *The Kauai Inn, 2430 Hulemalu Rd, Lihue* · (808) 245-9000

Aloha, Pam! This plan keeps a relaxed pace built around a **later, no-rush start** each day — no early alarms — with short, scenic walks rather than strenuous hikes, and plenty of time for coffee, sweets, and easy evenings. Almost everything is free or low-cost. Each day includes addresses, phone numbers, and drive times, plus an **alternate option**. There's also a full **North Shore day** you can swap in (page 6).

Drive times from the inn (Lihue is the island's hub)

East Side (Wailua / Kapaa): ~15 min

South Shore (Poipu / Koloa / Spouting Horn): ~25 min

Kalaheo (Kauai Coffee): ~30–35 min

West Side (Hanapepe / Waimea / Canyon lookouts): ~50–60 min

North Shore (Kilauea / Hanalei): ~60–75 min

One main road rings the island, so allow extra time in morning/afternoon traffic around Kapaa.

For your mom — comfort notes

Late starts are built in. She's a night owl (up till ~11pm) and not a morning person, so every day starts mid-morning. Evenings are kept lively with sunsets, dessert runs, and easy strolls — see the evening ideas below.

Balance-friendly walking. She walks ~2 miles a day and handles medium terrain for short stretches, but has some balance concerns — so picks favor flat, even paths with firm footing and turn-around-anytime flexibility. The two spots with uneven ground (soft sand at Maha'ulepu, lava rock at Spouting Horn) are flagged in the plan; a pole or steadying arm helps there.

One timing note: the North Shore and Waimea Canyon are the only outings that reward leaving by ~9:30 (afternoon clouds and traffic). Everything else is genuinely flexible.

Bring water, a hat, reef-safe sunscreen, and a light layer for breezy lookouts.

Easy evening ideas (she's good till 11pm)

Sunset spots: Kalapaki Beach (5 min from the inn), Spouting Horn at golden hour, or Hanalei Bay if you're up north.

Dessert runs: shave ice, Lappert's ice cream (a Kauai original), or warm malasadas.

Strolls + bites: Kapaa's lit-up main street and seaside path; Old Koloa Town in the early evening.

Stargazing: away from Lihue's lights (south or west shore), the night sky is spectacular — a relaxed late-night treat.

At your hotel — The Kauai Inn

Complimentary continental breakfast daily ~7:00–9:30am — go a little early, the cozy breakfast area fills up.

Outdoor pool and lush tropical garden grounds to relax between outings.

Live Hawaiian music some evenings (guests often mention a Friday-night gathering with music) — a fun, free on-site treat for a night owl.

BBQ / picnic facilities and occasional outdoor movie nights on the lawn.

Borrow snorkel gear from the front desk if you'd like to try a calm beach — optional, no pressure.

Practicalities: free parking and Wi-Fi, on-site laundry, 24-hour front desk.

Heads-up for Mom: it's a peaceful, local-feeling property — and the resident roosters crow early, so a night owl may want earplugs.

Monday, July 13 — Arrival & Settling In

Land ~noon · pick up rental car · easy afternoon and evening close to the inn

When	Plan
Afternoon	Pick up your car and check in , then a first local lunch — a plate lunch or poke bowl in Lihue.
~2:30 pm	Menehune (Alekoko) Fishpond Overlook. A roadside lookout over an ancient fishpond, legend says built in one night by the Menehune. No walking — just a pretty river view. <i>Where: Hulemalu Rd (5 min up from the inn) • Drive: ~5 min</i>
~3:30 pm	Niumalu Beach Park stroll. Calm, local, shady spot on Nawiliwili Bay — a gentle flat amble to stretch out after the flight. <i>Where: Niumalu Rd, Lihue • Drive: ~3 min</i>
3:00–5:30 pm	Pau Hana Monday Market at Kukui Grove — a Monday-only farmers market with fruit, flowers, and Kauai-made treats for Mom. <i>Where: Kukui Grove Center, 3-2600 Kaumualii Hwy, Lihue • Drive: ~5 min</i>
Evening	Dinner — Duke's Kauai (casual). Oceanfront on Kalapaki Bay with sunset views, live Hawaiian music, fresh island fish, and the famous Hula Pie for Mom. The downstairs Barefoot Bar is the relaxed, lower-cost option with the same view — a perfect easy first night. <i>Address: 3610 Rice St, Lihue • Phone: (808) 246-9599 • Drive: ~7 min</i>

Coffee + sweet fix

Coffee: Kind Koffee, Anchor Cove, 3366 Waapa Rd, Lihue · (808) 320-3146 — or Aloha Roastery, 3-3100 Kuhio Hwy · (808) 651-4514

Sweets: Kauai Bakery, Kukui Grove, 3-2600 Kaumualii Hwy · (808) 320-3434 — island's best cream-filled malasadas

Tuesday, July 14 — South Shore: Coffee, Blowholes & a Coastal Walk

The big coffee day · relaxed ~10am start · ~25–35 min from the inn · mostly flat walking

When	Plan
10:00 am	Kauai Coffee Company. Largest coffee farm in the U.S. — free self-guided walking tour through the trees and free tastings of dozens of roasts. Flat shaded paths, a café, and chocolate-covered beans for Mom. <i>Address:</i> 870 Halewili Rd, Kalaheo • <i>Phone:</i> (808) 335-0813 • <i>Open:</i> daily 9am–5pm • <i>Drive:</i> ~35 min
11:45 am	Spouting Horn. A lava blowhole that shoots seawater skyward with a moan — legend says a giant lizard is trapped below. Viewed from a railed overlook a few steps from the lot; shell-jewelry vendors alongside. <i>Balance note:</i> stay on the paved railed area — the surrounding lava rock is uneven. <i>Where:</i> End of Lawai Rd, Poipu (free parking) • <i>Drive:</i> ~15 min from Kauai Coffee
12:45 pm	Lunch in Old Koloa Town — a restored plantation-era street full of local eateries and shops. <i>Where:</i> Koloa Rd, Koloa • <i>Drive:</i> ~10 min
Afternoon	Maha'ulepu Heritage Trail. An easy, flat coastal cliff walk near Shipwreck Beach — scenic from the first steps, so go as far as feels good and turn back. <i>Balance note:</i> the first stretch is firm and level; soft-sand and uneven patches come further along — fine for a short out-and-back, just go slow with a steadying arm or pole where footing softens. <i>Where:</i> Trailhead at Shipwreck Beach, Poipu (by Grand Hyatt) • <i>Drive:</i> ~10 min
Evening	Dinner — Keoki's Paradise (Poipu). An open-air, thatched-roof island classic with koi ponds and live hula some nights — fresh local fish, prime rib, and big tropical desserts. Grab shave ice or Lappert's first if you like. Reserve ahead. <i>Address:</i> 2360 Kiahuna Plantation Dr, Poipu • <i>Phone:</i> (808) 742-7534 • <i>Drive:</i> ~5 min from the trail

Alternate — gentler / rainy-day version

Skip the coastal trail and relax at **Poipu Beach Park** (flat, grassy, monk seals often haul out on the sand), then browse **The Shops at Kukui'ula**. Java Kai in Old Koloa Town (5356 Koloa Rd · (808) 635-1982) is a cozy coffee-and-pastry stop if weather turns.

Coffee + sweet fix

Coffee: Kauai Coffee tasting bar (you're at the source) · backup: Java Kai, Old Koloa Town

Sweets: Shave ice or Lappert's ice cream; pineapple fritters from a local bakery

Wednesday, July 15 — West Side: Waimea Canyon & Old-Town Charm

The big scenery day · try to leave by ~9:30 to beat clouds · drive-up lookouts, no hiking · ~50–60 min

When	Plan
~9:30 am	Drive to Waimea Canyon — the “Grand Canyon of the Pacific,” a mile wide and 3,000 ft deep. Best views are drive-up lookouts (Waimea Canyon Lookout, Pu'u Hinahina) — a few steps from parking. Big payoff, minimal walking. <i>Where:</i> Waimea Canyon Dr (Hwy 550) • <i>Fee:</i> \$5/person + \$10 parking • <i>Drive:</i> ~60 min
~11:00 am	Kalalau Lookout (Kokee). A stunning view down the Na Pali Coast valleys. <i>This one clouds over by early afternoon — it's the reason for the earlier start; if it's socked in, the canyon lookouts below are still spectacular.</i> <i>Where:</i> Kokee State Park, Hwy 550 • <i>Drive:</i> ~20 min up from canyon
12:30 pm	Lunch in Waimea or Hanapepe — Hanapepe is “Kauai's Biggest Little Town,” a walkable strip of galleries, a swinging footbridge, and old storefronts.
Afternoon	Hanapepe stroll + bakery stop. Flat, shady main street made for slow wandering and gallery browsing. <i>Sweets:</i> Midnight Bear Breads, 2-3687 Kaumualii Hwy (Lawai) · (808) 335-2893 — coconut croissants Optional: Salt Pond Beach Park — a calm local beach with a flat grassy edge for an easy sit on the way home.
Evening	Dinner — Hamura's Saimin (Lihue). A beloved local institution since 1952 — steaming bowls of saimin noodle soup, BBQ skewers, and the must-try lilikoi (passionfruit) chiffon pie for Mom. Cash only, casual, cheap, and full of local color — a great low-key night after the long drive. <i>Address:</i> 2956 Kress St, Lihue • <i>Note:</i> cash only · ~7 min

Alternate — shorter day closer to home

If the full west-side drive feels like a lot, do **Wailua Falls** (a tall drive-up waterfall ~15 min from the inn) and **Kilohana Plantation** — a historic estate with gardens, shops, and a café — then a relaxed afternoon and evening.

Kilohana Plantation — 3-2087 Kaumualii Hwy, Lihue · (808) 245-5608 · ~5 min from inn

Coffee + sweet fix

Coffee: Midnight Bear Breads espresso bar · or Kalaheo Cafe & Coffee Co. en route

Sweets: Coconut croissants at Midnight Bear; chocolate-covered macnuts if you pass Kauai Coffee

Thursday, July 16 — East Side: Waterfalls, River & Local Color

The closest, most relaxed day · easy late start · ~15 min from the inn

When	Plan
~10:30 am	Opaekaa Falls + Wailua River Overlook. Two drive-up viewpoints steps from parking — a tall waterfall on one side, the lush river valley on the other. <i>Where: Kuamoo Rd (Hwy 580), Wailua • Drive: ~15 min</i>
~11:30 am	Smith's Fern Grotto River Cruise. A gentle, seated riverboat to a fern-draped lava cave with live Hawaiian music — a calm, senior-friendly way to see the jungle. Midday/afternoon departures suit a late start. <i>Address: 3-5971 Kuhio Hwy, Kapaa (Wailua Marina) • Phone: (808) 821-6895 • Note: call to confirm cruise times</i>
1:30 pm	Lunch + wander in Kapaa Town — laid-back caf��s and boutiques, plus the flat seaside path (Ke Ala Hele Makalae) for a short ocean-side stroll.
Afternoon	Slow it down — stop at Kilohana Plantation's gardens and shops on the way back, or rest at the inn.
Evening	Farewell dinner — The Beach House (Poipu). Kauai's iconic sunset restaurant, right at the water's edge — award-winning local seafood and arguably the best sunset table on the island. This is the splurge; book 2+ weeks ahead for a sunset seating and time your arrival for golden hour. <i>Address: 5022 Lawai Rd, Koloa • Phone: (808) 742-1424 • Drive: ~25 min</i>

Alternate — make this the North Shore day

This relaxed east-side day is the easiest to swap for the full **North Shore tour on page 6**. The North Shore is a longer drive but Kauai's most iconic scenery — if Mom's up for a bigger day, this is the one to trade (and it wants the earlier ~9:30 start).

Coffee + sweet fix

Coffee: Java Kai, 4-1384 Kuhio Hwy, Kapaa · (808) 823-6887 — or Aloha Roastery, Wailua

Sweets: Passion Bakery, Kapaa (malasadas Tue/Thu/Sat AM — Thursday works!) · or Holey Grail taro

Friday, July 17 — Easy Morning & Departure

Flight out 1:17 pm · keep it light and close

When	Plan
Morning	Slow coffee + last malasadas at a favorite from the week — no need to rush out.
~9:30 am	Kalapaki Beach walk — a flat, protected beach minutes from the inn and airport for a gentle final stroll. <i>Where: Kalapaki Beach, Nawiliwili • Drive: ~7 min</i>
~10:45 am	Return rental car and head to Lihue Airport (~5–10 min). With a 1:17 pm flight, aim to be at the airport by ~11:15 am.

Optional Day — The North Shore Tour

Kauai's most iconic scenery · a bigger day (~60–75 min each way) · best swapped in for Thursday

A full North Shore loop runs about 6–8 hours if you do everything. This is the one day that rewards leaving by ~9:30 — Kilauea Lighthouse opens at 10am and the drive home is long. Here's a senior-friendly version that skips the hard hikes.

When	Plan
~9:00 am	Drive north from Lihue up Hwy 56, with a coffee stop in Kapaa.
10:00 am	Kilauea Point Lighthouse & Wildlife Refuge. A scenic peninsula alive with seabirds; watch for dolphins and monk seals below. Short, mostly level walking from parking. <i>Where:</i> Kilauea Rd, Kilauea • <i>Hours:</i> Wed–Sat, 10am–4pm • <i>Note:</i> advance reservation required — book online • <i>Drive:</i> ~50 min
11:00 am	Kilauea sweets stop. Kilauea Bakery in the historic Kong Lung Center has wonderful malasadas and pastries. <i>Where:</i> Kong Lung Center, 2484 Keneke St, Kilauea
12:00 pm	Hanalei Bay + Hanalei Town. The North Shore's most beautiful spot — a wide crescent bay framed by green peaks. Easy flat strolling, the Hanalei Pier, galleries, and lunch in town. <i>Where:</i> Hanalei • <i>Drive:</i> ~25 min from Kilauea
Afternoon	Limahuli Garden (optional). A gorgeous tropical garden of native plants and ancient terraces — a gentle alternative to hiking if you go to the end of the road. <i>Address:</i> 5-8291 Kuhio Hwy, Haena • <i>Phone:</i> (808) 826-1053 • <i>Hours:</i> Tue–Sat, 8:30am–4pm
~4:00 pm	Sunset at Hanalei Bay. If you linger into the evening, the wide bay and pier at golden hour are unforgettable — flat, easy strolling right by the restaurants. (Mid-July sunset is ~7:00pm.)
Dinner	Eat in Hanalei, then drive home. Pick from the options below and head back to Lihue afterward (~75 min). Prefer an earlier night? Start back by ~4:30 and have dinner near the inn (Duke's at Kalapaki) instead.

Dinner on the North Shore

Hanalei Dolphin (seafood). Fresh fish cut daily from its own market, relaxed riverside tables, and a sushi lounge — a longtime local favorite. Kuhio Hwy, Hanalei · (808) 826-6113.

Tahiti Nui (local & lively). A storied Hanalei institution with live Hawaiian music nightly and changing local specials — casual and full of character. (808) 826-6277.

Bar Acuda (splurge). Intimate small plates with a Mediterranean-island bent and a strong wine list; open from 5:30pm, reservations recommended. (808) 826-7081.

Night-owl note: dinner up north means a dark ~75-min drive back on a winding, one-lane-bridge road — fine for a late evening, just take the curves slowly.

North Shore tips

Reserve Kilauea Lighthouse in advance — entry is limited and it's only open Wed–Sat.

Watch the time — it's a long way back; turn around with daylight to spare unless you plan to stay for sunset.

Coffee + sweets up north: Wishing Well Coffee (5-5080 Kuhio Hwy, Hanalei) and Hanalei Bread Company (5-5183 Kuhio Hwy · (808) 826-6717, 7am–12:30pm).

Where to Eat — Dinner Guide

A dinner pick for each night, chosen for where you'll be: casual local spots most nights, with one splurge — the farewell at The Beach House. Reserve the two sit-down spots (Keoki's and The Beach House) ahead; the others are walk-in.

Place	Address	Phone
Mon — Duke's Kauai	3610 Rice St, Lihue (Kalapaki, oceanfront)	(808) 246-9599
Tue — Keoki's Paradise	2360 Kiahuna Plantation Dr, Poipu	(808) 742-7534
Wed — Hamura's Saimin	2956 Kress St, Lihue (cash only)	—
Thu — The Beach House	5022 Lawai Rd, Koloa (splurge, sunset)	(808) 742-1424

More local favorites (casual & cheap)

- **Mark's Place** (Lihue) — classic plate lunches (Korean chicken, teriyaki beef, katsu) at local prices · 1610 Haleukana St.
- **Fish Express** (Lihue, near the airport) — outstanding poke bowls and Hawaiian plate lunch; a perfect quick bite on departure day.
- **Wailua Drive-In** (Kapaa) — old-school roadside loco moco and katsu, huge portions (Tue–Sat).
- **Pono Market** (Kapaa) — counters of fresh poke, sushi, and Hawaiian plate lunch to go.
- **RumFire Poipu Beach** — another oceanfront option with 180° sunset views if The Beach House is booked.

Dinner tips

Reserve the splurge early. The Beach House sunset tables go 2+ weeks out — call (808) 742-1424 as soon as your dates are firm.

Bring cash for Hamura's Saimin (card not accepted).

Sunset timing in mid-July is roughly 7:00–7:15pm — aim to be seated by ~6:30 for the view.

Contact Directory

Phone numbers are worth a quick check the day before — hours change seasonally.

Coffee

Place	Address	Phone
Kind Koffee	3366 Waapa Rd, Anchor Cove, Lihue	(808) 320-3146
Aloha Roastery	3-3100 Kuhio Hwy, Lihue	(808) 651-4514
Kauai Coffee Company	870 Halewili Rd, Kalaheo	(808) 335-0813
Java Kai (Kapaa)	4-1384 Kuhio Hwy, Kapaa	(808) 823-6887
Java Kai (Koloa)	5356 Koloa Rd, Koloa	(808) 635-1982
Wishing Well Coffee	5-5080 Kuhio Hwy, Hanalei	—
Hanalei Bread Company	5-5183 Kuhio Hwy, Hanalei	(808) 826-6717

Sweets & Bakeries

Place	Address	Phone
Kauai Bakery	3-2600 Kaumualii Hwy (Kukui Grove), Lihue	(808) 320-3434
Midnight Bear Breads	2-3687 Kaumualii Hwy, Lawai	(808) 335-2893
Kilauea Bakery	2484 Keneke St (Kong Lung Ctr), Kilauea	—
Passion Bakery	Kapaa (malasadas Tue/Thu/Sat AM)	—

Sights, Tours & Walks

Place	Address	Phone
Smith's Fern Grotto Cruise	3-5971 Kuhio Hwy (Wailua Marina), Kapaa	(808) 821-6895
Kilohana Plantation	3-2087 Kaumualii Hwy, Lihue	(808) 245-5608
Kilauea Lighthouse / Refuge	Kilauea Rd, Kilauea (reserve online)	—
Limahuli Garden	5-8291 Kuhio Hwy, Haena	(808) 826-1053
Spouting Horn	End of Lawai Rd, Poipu (free park)	—
Maha'ulepū Trailhead	Shipwreck Beach, Poipu	—
Waimea Canyon Lookouts	Waimea Canyon Dr (Hwy 550)	—
The Kauai Inn	2430 Hulemalu Rd, Lihue	(808) 245-9000

Itinerary assembled June 2026. Hours, days, and prices change — please confirm the Fern Grotto cruise, bakery hours, the Kauai Coffee tour, and your Kilauea Lighthouse reservation before going. Have a wonderful trip!