

To truly experience Hawaii, it has to be hiked.

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Waipi'o Valley, which has breathtaking views of taro fields, ocean vistas and amazing waterfalls.

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One can't simply sizzle on a pristine beach, golf 18 holes or gorge at a luau and claim to have "seen Hawaii." To truly experience the lush beauty of the Big Island, it has to be hiked.

Hawaii Forest & Trail's Waipi'o Rim Hike Adventure is a sure-fire way to become immersed in the botanical and historical splendor of the island. It's also a great way learn a lot about the history of the Hawaiian people, and get a great workout in the process. For one thing, after going up and down the stair-stepping trail, you'll feel less guilty about consuming mountainous piles of shredded Kalua pork.

The intermediate-level, three-mile hike winds through rainforests a thousand feet above the Waipi'o Valley floor, which has been a thriving Hawaiian sea village for centuries. From the rim, hikers gaze upon glorious views of taro fields, ocean vistas and more waterfalls than you can shake a walking stick at.

While the hike itself takes about 2.5 to 3 hours, visitors will need to set aside eight hours for a departure from Hawaii Forest & Trail Headquarters in Kailua-Kona, or from the Waikoloa Queen's Marketplace on the Big Island's Kohala Coast. The journey includes

climbing into the back of a Swiss Army Vehicle called a Pinzgauer for the rollicking ride down a muddy road to the trailhead.



What made the experience incredibly rich was that our guide, Rob Pacheco, was practically percolating with excitement, pointing out hidden wonders, explaining the variety of plants and water sources, and retelling stories and that he's probably recited hundreds of times before.

"No, I never get tired of it," said Pacheco, owner of **Hawaii Forest & Trail**. "I love how often I hear 'Wow!' and 'Oh my!' when we encounter that first, panoramic view of the Waipi'o Valley. Plus, I'm fascinated by how this area is always changing, from the river levels, to the encounters with wild pigs and other critters."

I came across a mongoose, but it gave me a bored look and slunk off into the foliage.

Waipi'o, located on the Hamakua Coast on Hawaii's Northeastern side, is one of the island's most storied places in song, chants and history. It also remains the largest taro-producing area outside of Hanalei. Probably no other place has more oral tradition, with stories of the underworld, gods, chiefs and kings, according to Pacheco.

One of the most colorful stories was Pacheco recitation of the legend behind **Nanaue Falls – the Sharkman of Waipi'o**. It's the story of a boy who was born with a shark's mouth on his back, being the product of a beautiful Waipi'o-born mother and a shape-shifting, shark king father. Once the boy grew up and was fed meat, there was no turning back and people in the village began to disappear into the shark mouth. Nanaue stayed on the run, changing from shark to man and back again in order to elude his hunters. Finally, he was stabbed with spears, beaten with clubs, dragged to



An uluhe fern.

shore, cut into small pieces and cooked in a great oven. A tough way to go, but he did get a waterfall named after him!

The hike also provides a view of Hi'ilawe Falls, which is the tallest waterfall in the state.

The trails can be steep and slippery in certain areas, and the trek requires a moderate amount of physical exertion. "It's more about mobility than what kind of shape people are in," explained Pacheco. "We take our time along the way and make a lot of stops. What is required is a good sense of balance, and the ability to go up and down steps on the trail."

Our group was comprised of hikers young and old, including a grandmother in her 70s. There were a few spots she wasn't very happy about hiking, because she feared she was holding us up. But we kept reassuring her that the pace was just right.

I wish I could report that I handled the trail like a nimble mountain goat, but with one false step, I stumbled and hit with a splat upon a wide, flat rock. With nothing injured except my pride (and a giant mud smear down my leg) I continued onward, enduring the snickers of my fellow writers.

"I would say it was one of the most diverse hikes I've ever been on in terms of scenery – which made it interesting the entire way," said Sami Ewers, a Portland-based writer for **Wend Magazine**. "I thought it was definitely an intermediate-level hike because there were small, uneven paths and lots of semi-rough terrain bordering giant cliffs. But it is manageable for almost anyone as long as they are willing to slip or get a little muddy."

"What makes this hike special for me is the connection people can make between the natural and the cultural," Pacheco said. "You can provide a Hawaiian world view, its connection to the past and how it forms our future. This hike provides a powerful place to be able to do that."

If you go: Schedule: Tours daily. 8 hours round trip, departs from Hawaii Forest & Trail Headquarters, and Waikoloa Queen's Marketplace. **Rated:** Moderate; ages 8 and over. **Food provided:** Deli-style lunch with assorted soft drinks, juices and bottled water. **Gear Provided:** Walking sticks, warm wear, day packs and rain ponchos. **Prices:** Adult: \$149.00, plus tax. Child (12 and under): \$119.00, plus tax. **Group Size:** Tour limited to a maximum of 12 guests. **Restrictions:** Guests should be able to hike on uneven or rocky terrain and not have knee or hip problems. We usually encounter cool, wet or muddy conditions. Other tour restrictions may apply. **What to Bring & Wear:** Closed-toe walking shoes, shorts or long pants, hat, sunscreen and a light jacket or sweatshirt.