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Celebrating in Kauai, Hawaii

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By Kühl Editor (<https://www.kuhl.com/borninthemountains/author/ed/>) on July 21, 2021

To celebrate our wedding anniversary and to embrace Ira's quality of life in the wake of glioblastoma treatments, we flew to Kauai. Unlike many other brain cancer patients, Ira has yet to be adversely affected by either his treatment or this incurable disease. We are extremely grateful that we can continue to engage in active adventures both in our home state of Colorado and elsewhere. Most glioblastoma patients are incapable of enjoying such experiences after they undergo surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy.

Instead of staying in a large luxury resort like we have for previous Hawaiian Island trips, we opted to stay at the Ko'a Kea Hotel & Resort (<https://www.meritagecollection.com/koa-kea>). When we made this reservation, the outlook for pandemic travel to Hawaii was still in flux. We

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INSPIRED BY HER MOTION



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felt it would safer to visit a boutique hotel rather than a mega resort. It did not occur to us that a smaller facility might offer fewer amenities during the pandemic.

As the pandemic winds down, I encourage travelers to call potential destinations to confirm onsite services such as spa availability, pool chairs and umbrellas, restaurant hours, and room service menus and hours. Prior to departure, be sure to check whether reservations for restaurants and activities are required.

When we visited Kauai with our four children in 1995, our itinerary was limited to kid-friendly activities. Looking back on our yellowing images from this earlier trip, we were reminded of a time when cameras used film and when the island of Kauai was considerably less developed. Traveling without young children allowed us to trek at a brisker pace and to snorkel off the coast of Ni'ihau.

Koke'e and Waimea Canyon State Parks

To avoid the crowds, we headed to the state parks immediately after an early breakfast. It took a little less than an hour and a half to reach Koke'e State Park's (<https://dlnr.hawaii.gov/dsp/parks/kauai/kokee-state-park/>) Kalalau Lookout parking lot where we paid a small fee to park our car. At this lookout, we gazed at the Kalalau Beach and the broad valley floor. The blue skies accentuated the contrast between the green vegetation and the fluted jagged cliffs surrounding the lower valley's red hued walls.



Waimea Lookout

We trekked to the nearby Na Pala Kona Forest Preserve Pihea Trail. Within a short period of time, the clouds obscured our view so we returned to our car. The local trade winds frequently cause a blanket of fog to encase this area. Had the visibility been better, we would have walked further down the trail. Decades ago, we observed how the unpredictable cloud patterns can limit photographic opportunities.

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Clouds roll in on Na Pala Kona Forest Preserve Pihea Trail

As we headed back down the road, we stopped at several places highlighted on the park map. Our ability to capture images was based on luck. When we reached the Koke'e Museum, we were surprised to see that it had abbreviated hours and had not yet opened for the day.

Since we only planned to spend one day in these state parks, we opted to take one of the popular moderate trails, the ~~Canyon Trail to Waipo'o Falls~~ (<https://www.alltrails.com/trail/hawaii/kaui/canyon-trail-to-waipoo-falls?u=i>). Under partly cloudy skies, we entered a muddy trail filled with exposed roots and uneven surfaces. Early on, I appreciated the fact that I had packed a sturdy pair of hiking shoes. Several fellow hikers were less prepared and encountered greater difficulty navigating the slippery terrain in sandals or water shoes.

Along the path we encountered warning signs for hazardous cliffs and the potential for flash floods. As we traversed in and out of the tropical jungle, we stopped occasionally to take photos of the canyon. The terrain fluctuated as we continued to walk downhill. Some points were steeper than others, and further down the trail we encountered rockier and slippery surfaces.

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Sandy navigates the obstacles on Canyon Trail. Pictured in KÜHL Sun Blade Hat (<https://www.kuhl.com/kuhl/mens/accessories/sun-blade/>) and Women's Hiking Apparel (<https://www.kuhl.com/kuhl/womens/>).

After reaching the waterfalls, dark gray clouds replaced the partially blue sky. Within a matter of a few minutes, we were forced to endure a pelting rainstorm. It was not possible to retrieve our raincoats from our backpack without destroying Ira's camera. The muddy trail was suddenly consumed by a fast-moving stream of water. Our uphill journey was treacherous but at the same time exhilarating. By the time we returned to our rental car, we were drenched, and the clouds were dissipating.

At the Pu'u Ka Pele and Waimea Canyon lookouts, we were greeted by a blue sky. We appreciated Mother Nature's handiwork that began more than 5 million years ago when the island was formed. A nearby sign described how the layers of color reflect different lava flows that occurred four to five million years ago. We were thrilled to see this patchwork of colors since our 1995 photos show more clouds than the canyon.



Panoramic view of Waimea Canyon on Canyon Trail

Maha'ulepu Heritage Trail

To appreciate a coastal perspective, we hiked on the easier ~~Mahaulepu Trail~~ (<https://www.alltrails.com/trail/hawaii/kaui/mahaulepu-heritage-trail-shipwreck-beach-to-punahoa-point?u=i>) that runs between Shipwreck Beach on Keonelo Bay and the Mahaulepu Beach near Kawaihoa Bay. We quickly saw why so many people commented online about this confusing trail system. Some of the sandy and rocky paths hugged the coastline while others zig-zagged inland.

Whenever possible, we stayed as close as possible to the ocean so that we could watch the waves crash against the rocky cliffs and coves. Our normally brisk pace was slowed by our desire to enjoy our incredible surroundings and to stay on the lookout for green sea turtles and monk seals. Even though we didn't encounter anything other than an abundance of coastal birds, we enjoyed our trek along this coastline.



Maha'ulepu Heritage Trail

The trail eventually moves away from the shore to straddle the Poipu Golf Course. After this flat stretch, we entered a lava field running adjacent to the CJM Country Stables. From this vantage point, we looked down at the end point, Mahaulepu Beach.

Makauwahi Cave Trail and Tour

If time allows, hikers can wander a bit further to visit the Makauwahi Cave (<http://www.cavereserve.org/>). To enter the cave, we crawled on our hands and knees through a small opening which led to a large sinkhole adjacent to the cave. Inside the cave, Edward Sills told us about the 10,000-year history of the rock formations and the work being done to

restore Hawaii's largest limestone cave and the surrounding area. Next, we walked across a bridge to look at the site's adopted tortoises and then retraced our steps back to Shipwreck Beach.



Ira and Sandy hiking along Makauwahi Cave Trail

Ni'ihau/Na Pali Snorkel Tour

Before sunrise, we drove to the Port Allen Marina Center to embark on a Blue Dolphins Charters (<https://bluedolphinkauai.com/>) excursion that included snorkeling off the coast of Ni'ihau and viewing the rugged Na Pali coast from our catamaran boat. We cruised over the chopping channel to Ni'ihau. As experienced snorkelers, we have grown accustomed to turbulent waters. Unfortunately, this was not the case for a sizeable number of passengers who became seasick when we encountered large waves on the way back to the Na Pali Coast.

At a designated spot off the Ni'ihau coast, we snorkeled for approximately an hour. Adequate swimming skills were required in order not to be pushed too far away from the boat by the ocean's currents. A friendly Hawaiian monk seal along with a pair of manta rays stood out from the smaller selection of native marine life.



Hawaiian Monk Seal

Decades ago, we introduced our children to the inherent beauty of the Na Pali Coast. Even though this famous destination has changed little, we were thrilled to view the towering cliffs, beaches, waterfalls, and lush

landscape. This time our experience was enhanced by a family of spinner dolphins keeping pace with our moving boat.



Na Pali Coast, Kauai

Sleeping Giant Trail

To add another layer to our Kauai hiking experiences, we drove to the East Kauai Region where we found the ~~Nounou East or Sleeping Giant Trailhead~~ (<https://www.alltrails.com/trail/hawaii/kauai/sleeping-giant-nounou-mountain-east-trail?u=i>). From the parking lot, we saw the notable rock formation labeled "The Sleeping Giant." The trail meandered uphill with a plethora of steep switchbacks. Fortunately, the heavily wooded parts of the trails shielded us from the intense heat. Occasionally, we came to open areas where we snapped photos of the coastal valley.



Ira and Sandy pose with Sleeping Giant in the background

The AllTrails App stated that the trail ended at the picnic shelter and did not mention anything about the oversized rock formations that are considered the Sleeping Giant's face. This part of the trail is considerably more treacherous with 100-foot drop offs near the apex.

It was not possible to find an effective path to accommodate my short stature and hip replacement limitations. Ira's longer legs coupled with his strong desire to face all obstacles in his path propelled him forward and allowed him to climb two of the three scrambles. These intense segments illustrate how Ira's coordination and balance has remained intact despite his brain cancer. I was inspired by his courage not to give up on the things that he loves to do.



Ira descends rocky section of Sleeping Giant Trail

Kauai Dining

Dining in Kauai was a frustrating experience. Even though I attempted to book reservations prior to departure, I was unable to reserve times for our entire stay, and the hotel's concierge was not able to find a suitable place to celebrate our anniversary. The hotel's award-winning restaurant was closed, and the dinner room service menu was not available. Instead of dwelling on a shortage of dinner reservations, Ira and I celebrated our 46-years of marriage by doing the things we love to do.

Our two favorite meals were at the Red Salt (<https://www.meritagecollection.com/koa-kea/dining/red-salt-menu>) restaurant. On our first night, we shared a Kailani Farms green salad with strawberries, toasted pistachio nuts, tomatoes, and shaved red onions topped with a sherry vinaigrette. I savored a miso marinated Hawaiian butterfish entrée served with cauliflower rice, Japanese green beans, edamame, and a black bean chili glaze while Ira enjoyed a Madagascar vanilla bean seared mahi entrée with forbidden black rice, avocado-ginger salsa and mango vinaigrette.



Hawaiian butterfish at Red Salt

Sunsets

Each day, we either sat on our ocean view veranda or took a romantic walk along the ocean to watch the sun descend into the western sky. Surfers scurried to get in their last big wave of the day while young children scampered on the beach as their parents stood nearby. These peaceful moments allowed us to unwind after full days of exploring Kauai.



Dusk at the Ko'a Kea Hotel & Resort

After U.S. Senator John McCain passed away from glioblastoma in 2018, a bipartisan group of U.S. Senators sponsored a bill to set aside a day in July to raise awareness for the research and treatment of glioblastoma, a deadly and rare disease with a median survival of 15 months. Earlier this year, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed the bill. This year, Glioblastoma Awareness Day is Wednesday, July 21. Learn more.

(<https://braintumor.org/take-action/gbm-day-raise-awareness/>)

Every day, we appreciate Ira's ability to remain active and his stamina to travel. We realize that many glioblastoma patients cannot maintain their previous quality of life. On Glioblastoma Awareness Day, we publicly thank

Dr. Kevin Lillehei, Dr. Douglas Ney, and Dr. Chad Rusthoven at the Anschutz Medical Campus in Colorado and Dr. David Reardon at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Massachusetts for their compassionate care and expertise in treating glioblastoma." #GBMDay

When Sandy Bornstein isn't trekking in Colorado or writing, she's traveling with her husband Ira (<http://www.thetravelingbornsteins.com/>). After living as an international teacher in Bangalore, India, Sandy published an award-winning book, *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life* (<https://sandrornstein.com/>), as a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Among other things, Sandy writes about family, intergenerational, and active midlife adventures highlighting land and water experiences.

The Traveling Bornsteins received a media rate for their Blue Dolphin Charters boat/snorkel tour.

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