

Hiking in Kaua'i

If you ever find yourself on the island of Kaua'i in Hawaii as I did recently, make sure you don't miss out on the excellent hiking there. In fact, a number of hikes offer a lot of reward for just a couple hours of effort, leaving you plenty to hit the surf and sand afterward. I would like to share my memory of two of the best ones I did.



The best full-day hike on Kaua'i, for me, was definitely, the Nu'alolo and Awa'awapuhi loop trail in Waimea Canyon/Koke'e State Parks on the west side of the island. The two trails which offer scenic lookouts at the end are linked in the middle by the Nu'alolo Cliff Trail, and takes around 6 hours to complete, including reaching the two lookout points. The entire loop is approximately 9.5 miles (15.3 km) in length. It's a good idea to start with the Nu'alolo Trail as it has many slippery, steep parts that are harder to navigate in the reverse direction. It's also a much more difficult trail than the Awa'awapuhi Trail, which is a walk in the park in comparison. So even though it's all uphill on the way back, it's better to save this easy trail for the end when you're tired. If you only have time to do one trail, pick the Nu'alolo Trail. It is a much more challenging trail, but the lookout point at the end offers even more breath-taking scenery than the wonderful outlook at the end of the Awa'awapuhi Trail.

Details: The Nu'alolo trail (3.75 miles) starts off a dirt driveway just south of the Koke'e Museum, which has a large parking lot where you can park your car. The first section of the trail runs through dense forest and swampy growth before turning into sections of slippery red clay tunnel-like grooves literally burrowed through the dirt. Eventually, you emerge onto a ridge with a teaser of the breath-taking views to come, and a view of the long jutting ridge you will be walking on. As you pass a fork in the trail where

the connector trail (Nu'alolo Cliff Trail) runs eastward, you soon reach the 3.50 mile marker. After a little while, you find yourself emerging into the open and walking on a narrow ridge trail on a high cliff that slopes off on both sides, with a particularly high vertical drop on the right, and stunning views of the mountains along the Na Pali Coast and the ocean in the backdrop. The trail then crosses a grassy part that leaves you just feet away from the cliff edge on the right. Once you've crossed this slightly vertigo-inducing section, you soon come to a sign marking the end of the trail at Lolo Vista, which is the wide end of a long red clay ridge that juts out into the ocean. The views from here are absolutely incredible, and there is ample room on the rocks (which are away from the erosive, vertical cliff edges) to drink in the scenery and have a snack.



From Lolo Vista, you then backtrack back to the start of the Nu'alolo Cliff Trail which runs about 2 miles in length and connects with the Awa'awapuhi Trail (3.25 miles) at the 3.0 mile marker. The first 0.25 miles section of the Cliff Trail suffers from frequent erosion, as a "hiker beware" sign indicates, and runs precariously along the side of a vertical cliff face that offers virtually no hand holds as the pumice in the rock face crumbles the minute you grab it. Fortunately, the open left side descends in a slope overgrown with grass and vegetation, which makes the crossing somewhat less intimidating. Although this initial section was not long, I did have to go very slow, and muster up some "Spiderman" moves in the process. Once you manage to manoeuvre this first section, the rest of the so-called Cliff Trail is just a regular trail through the forest. There are no real views at all, and at the end, you will reach a fork and a sign (that reads from the other way around), marking the point where you connect with the Awa'awapuhi Trail. Take a left to reach the viewpoint (0.25 miles). This lookout, again, offers spectacular views, but the stunner is Lolo Vista, in my mind. From here, you can then hike back down the trail and all the way back to the head of the Awa'awapuhi Trail. The trail ascends most of the way, but is an easy walking trail. You will encounter many people heading the other way, walking down towards the lookout, and all the mile markers will face the other direction.

When you're back at the top and come out onto the road from the small Awa'awapuhi Trail parking lot, try to hitch a ride, as many people do apparently, down the road back to the Museum parking lot (0.75 miles). We got a ride with a driver who had been given a lift by some Canadians the last time he did the hike, so he was more than happy to give us one.



I had the good fortune of doing several outstanding short hikes in Kaua'i. One of the best was the Cliff and Canyon Trails. Also located in the Waimea Canyon area, it takes about 2 hours to complete. The first trail provides so much reward for so little effort, while the ridge walk at the end of the other trail is not only rather unique, but very, very scenic. This is also a hike that you can combine with the 19 mile long scenic drive up to the top of Waimea/Koke'e State Parks for a long, but satisfying day trip.

A good way to do the hike is to do it on the drive down after you've visited all the scenic outlooks. As you make your way back down the road, look for a small parking area on the left between the mile 14 and mile 15 markers where the trailhead is located. The first 0.5 miles is simply a walk through the forest. Then, you will come to a fork marked by signs for the Cliff Trail and the Canyon/Waterfall Trail. Do the Cliff Trail first as it's just a short walk (0.1 mile) to a terrific lookout that gives you an expansive view of Waimea Canyon. After admiring the scenery, backtrack to the fork, and turn down the Canyon Trail leading to the right. The trail descends for a good distance initially, then, winds steeply through forest before suddenly breaking out into the open onto Kumuwela Ridge, directly opposite the cliffs you had just viewed from the other side. The ridge has a smooth surface, and straight drops from its edges, but fortunately, is wide enough to provide plenty of safe walking room. The views are wonderful, and as you continue along the ridge, you will encounter log-steps that lead down into the forest to a mini waterfall, and the top of Waipo'o Falls. You can skip the falls, but make sure you catch a view of the stone arch on the edge of the cliff in the distance before heading back up the ridge on your return hike.