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**Plus:**

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The Greatness of Apple TV  
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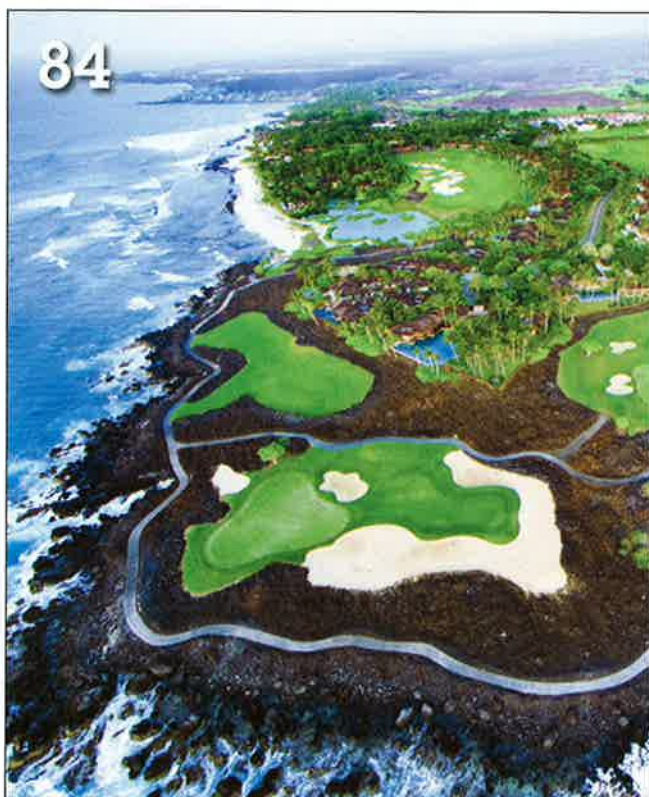
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The fairways are wide, with the lava just out of play but visually intimidating. Nicklaus left you a lot of room to make mistakes, but really errant shots meet the ultimate penal hazard: balls forever lost into OB fields of jagged lava stones.

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## **Mauna Kea, Hualalai the top golf escapes on the island of Hawaii**

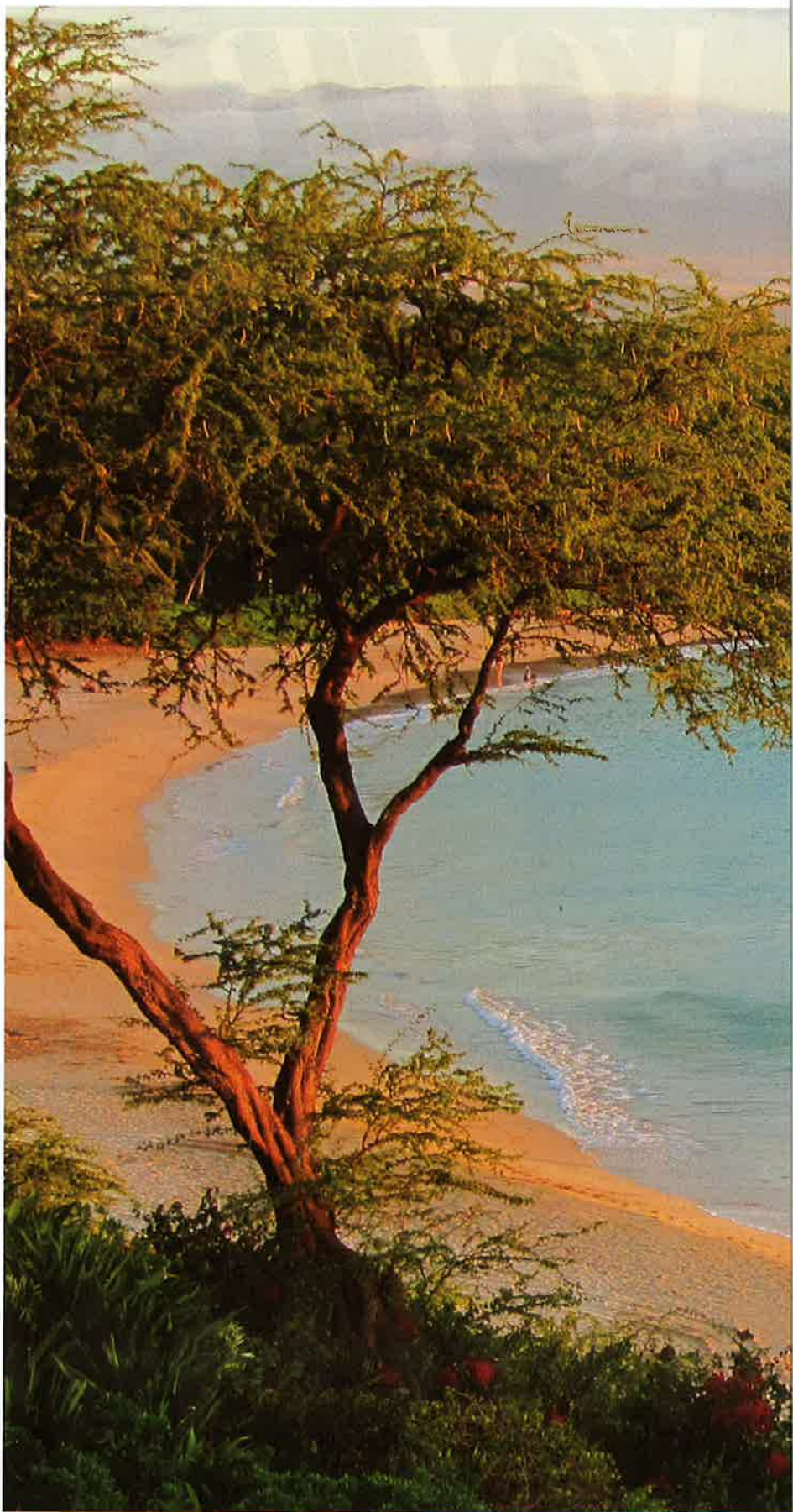
By Michael Hiller

**With the holidays behind us** but a lingering chill still in the air, the time is right to load up the family and escape to the island of Hawaii.

Imagine a week of blue skies, watermelon sunsets, strong drinks and the best golf you've ever seen. So set your internal clock to aloha, grab a Kona beer and plop down in a beach chair. Your family will love it. No matter how perfect or how dysfunctional, yours will fit right in.

Everyone has his or her own vision of Hawaiian heaven. For some, it's surfing big waves and standup paddleboarding. For others, it's a hula skirt, a beach chair and a cold Pipeline Porter beer. But if your idea heaven has more golf than milk and honey, the Big Island of Hawaii will come pretty close.

Leave your images of umbrella cocktails and "Book 'em, Danno" boxed in the attic. Today's Hawaii is about leaving your day job back home and heading to the links. A week's visit leaves you just enough time to play a few rounds in the morning and still have plenty of time to swim with the dolphins, sip a few beers and master paddleboarding before the sun sets.



# Big Island, Big Dreams



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## YOUR GOLF | Travel



First, pat yourself on the back for choosing the Big Island, so named because it is the largest Hawaiian island. There you'll find nearly every climate zone on earth, from desert to rainforest, as well as the Kilauea Volcano, still spewing lava from the southeast section of the island for more than 20 years. (You can book a helicopter tour over the volcano and still have time to play golf the same day.)

The best golf is on the island's northeast shore, along the tony Kohala coast. Of the dozen courses in the area, focus on Mauna Kea and Hualalai, both resort courses affiliated with top-tier hotels.

Laurence Rockefeller built the Mauna Kea Resort in 1965, making it the Grande Dame of the coast. The newly renovated

hotel is among the best on the island, with elegant rooms, large bathrooms and even bigger balconies.

Stately and immaculately groomed, Mauna Kea's golf course is a *Golf Magazine* Gold Medal winner. Famed golf course architect Robert Trent Jones constructed the original layout in the early 1960s, his first in Hawaii. His son, Rees, the "Open Doctor," recently freshened the entire track, adding length to some holes and risk/reward to others.

It's easy to see why Mauna Kea is a favorite. The layout is wide and forgiving, much like the now-extinct volcano for which the resort is named looming nearby. The track chugs up and slides down rolling terrain. Most of the course features either elevated tee boxes or greens – and sometimes both.



The routing sends you toward the ocean, where the third hole plays across a gaping hole filled with the Pacific, then up the mountain until the final holes drop you back to the sea. Jones' course, with its generous undulating greens and fair approaches, leaves even the highest handicapper in your group enormously satisfied.

No matter which set of tees you choose, no player should resist a shot from the tips on Mauna Kea's famous third hole, a 247-yard shot from the back tees over the surging Pacific to a target green. That single hole is reason enough to play this classic course.

Down the road a few miles, south of Mauna Kea, the Four Seasons Resort at Hualalai is still considered the jewel on the coast. Hualalai hosts the Champions Tour's Mitsubishi Electric Championship each January. To play the course, you have to stay at the Four Seasons, since only hotel guests have access to Hualalai's golf course.

The course is a Jack Nicklaus design, his first in Hawaii. Using the green fairways, black lava and blue ocean as his palette, Nicklaus achieved his stated goal: "What I (tried) to do is 'paint' something beautiful with some good golf shots in it."

The fairways are wide, with the lava just out of play but visually intimidating. Nicklaus left you a lot of room to make mistakes, but really errant shots meet the ultimate penal hazard: balls forever lost into OB fields of jagged lava stones.

So what is your Hawaii? Is it a round on Mauna Kea and carding a par on the famous ocean-hole par-3? A cozy meal under the stars of an inky sky? Helicoptering over a bubbling volcano, close enough to smell the earth's sulfuric burps?

I like to head out before daybreak and sit at the edge of the world, my feet buried in the soft white sand of the Pacific. An hour later, I'll play the first round on the tee sheet, walking the fairways with no intention of keeping score and dropping a ball (or two) whenever it moves me. No crowds, no ukuleles, no worries. That's my Hawaii.

Come find your own.

**A**

*Michael Hiller is a member of the Society of American Travel Writers and travels the world with a big appetite and a 7-iron. He is a Contributing Editor at AVIDGOLFER Magazine. Follow him on Twitter @MikeHiller.*

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