



Ke'e Beach and its reef lagoon offer some of the best swimming on the north shore. This is how it looks from the Kalalau Trail.

Because Kaua'i is older than the other major Hawaiian islands, it is blessed with having more sand beaches per mile of shoreline than any other. No part of the island is without sandy beaches. Many are accessible by merely driving up and falling into the sand.

Others are deliciously secluded, requiring walks of various lengths. Some are local secrets; others are unknown even to most locals. In this section we will describe virtually all of Kaua'i's beaches starting from the north shore and working our way around the island clockwise. All of these beaches are located on the maps of the various areas.



BEACH SAFETY

The beaches of Kaua'i, and Hawai'i in general, are beautiful, warm and unfortunately can be dangerous. The waves, currents and popularity of beachgoing have caused Hawai'i to become the drowning capital of the United States. If you're

going to swim in the ocean, you need to bear several things in mind. We are not trying to be killjoys here, but there are several reasons why Hawai'i's beaches can be particularly dangerous. The waves are stronger here in the open ocean than in most other places. Rip currents can form, cease and form again with no warning. Large "rogue waves" can come ashore with no warning. These usually

occur when two or more waves fuse at sea, becoming a larger wave. Even calm seas are no guarantee of safety. Many people have been caught unaware by large waves during ostensibly "calm seas." We have swam and snorkeled most of the beaches we describe in this book on at least two occasions (usually more than two). But beaches change. The underwater topography changes throughout the year. Storms can take a very safe beach and rearrange the sand, turning it into a dangerous beach. Just because we describe a beach as being in a certain condition does not mean it will be in that same condition when *you* visit it.

Consequently, you should consider the beach descriptions as a snapshot in calm times. If seas aren't calm, you probably shouldn't go in the water. If you observe a rip current, you probably shouldn't go in the water. If you aren't a comfortable swimmer, you should probably never go in the water, except at those beaches that have lifeguards and protected pools, such as Lydgate State Park. But during abnormally high seas, even these are potentially hazardous. Kaua'i averages nine drownings per year—58% of these are visitors. We don't want you to become part of that statistic. There is no way we can tell you that a certain beach will be swimmable on a certain day, and we claim no such prescience. There is no substitution for your own observations and judgment.

In general, the north shore beaches are calmest during the summer months (meaning April–September). The south shore is calmest during the winter months (meaning October–May). North shore high surf is stronger than south shore high surf since our location in the northern hemisphere makes us closer to northern winter storms than southern hemisphere storms.

A few of the standard safety tips apply. Never turn your back on the ocean. Never swim alone. Never swim in the mouth of a river. Never swim in murky water. Never swim when the seas are not calm. Don't walk too close to the shore break; a large wave can come and knock you over and pull you in. Observe ocean conditions carefully. Don't let small children play in the water unsupervised. (In fact, it's best to keep them at the protected ponds such as Lydgate.) Fins give you far more power and speed and are a good safety device (besides being more fun). If you are comfortable in a mask and snorkel, they provide considerable peace of mind, in addition to opening up the underwater world. Lastly, don't let Kaua'i's idyllic environment cloud your judgment. Recognize the ocean for what it is: a powerful force that needs to be respected.

When frolicking at a beach, especially a rocky one, **reef shoes** are invaluable for protecting your feet from cuts. They can turn a marginal beach into a fun beach.

People tend to get fatigued while walking in sand. The trick to making it easier is to walk with a very gentle, relaxed stride while lightly striking the sand almost flat footed.

Beach conditions are usually best in the first half of the day. And remember that weekends—like weekends everywhere—are more popular with local beachgoers, so it's best to plan your beach activities for weekdays, if possible.

One thing you should be aware of is that in Hawai'i, all beaches are public beaches. This means that you can park yourself on any stretch of sand you like. The trick, sometimes, can be access. To get to a public beach, you might have to cross private land. The county and state have procured easements to many of the beaches. On our various maps, we have marked these public access routes in