

GOLF

YOUR LIFE, WELL PLAYED

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MATTHEW WOLFF

GENNEXT

The young superstar (21!) isn't the only one poised for a stellar 2021. You are too.

Hokul'a
BIG ISLAND
Hawaii No. 6





Travel

GOLF.COM / GOOD TIMES, GREAT PLACES.



AWAY GAME

HAWAII

Trance Encounters

PERHAPS ONLY IN OUR DREAMS CAN WE CONSIDER, RIGHT NOW, A BALMY ESCAPE TO A GOLFER'S PARADISE. BUT HAWAII IS ALWAYS WORTH DREAMING ABOUT.

By Josh Sens

PEOPLE LIKE to talk about a “wraparound season,” but we all know golf’s calendar doesn’t really flip until we catch a glimpse of humpbacks breaching on national TV. The whales take their annual network star turn just after New Year, when the PGA Tour kicks off its west-of-the-West-Coast swing at the Plantation Course in Kapalua, on the leeward side of Maui, where the coastal eye candy is tough to beat.

For any golfer huddled in a winterized home—or pretty much any golfer, anywhere—the imagery of palm trees swaying in the trade winds and Tour pros draining birdies in floral-patterned shirts

Nanea
BIG ISLAND
Hawaii No. 1

while large aquatic mammals frolic in the background is a form of torture and temptation.

Ah, Hawaii. *Why don't I live there? How quickly can I get there? Where should I play when I arrive?*

With 80 courses spread across six islands, many built by towering names in golf design, the fourth-smallest state in the union—only Delaware, Connecticut and Rhode Island cover less square acreage—punches well above its weight in the quantity, quality and variety of its options, which range from scruffy munis to private hideouts and include most everything in between. In Hawaii, you can play through lush rain forests and over hardened landscapes of black lava. There are courses in the sky-piercing mountains and lagoon-dotted lowlands. There are dunes-y layouts, tucked along the water, that could almost pass for Scottish links.

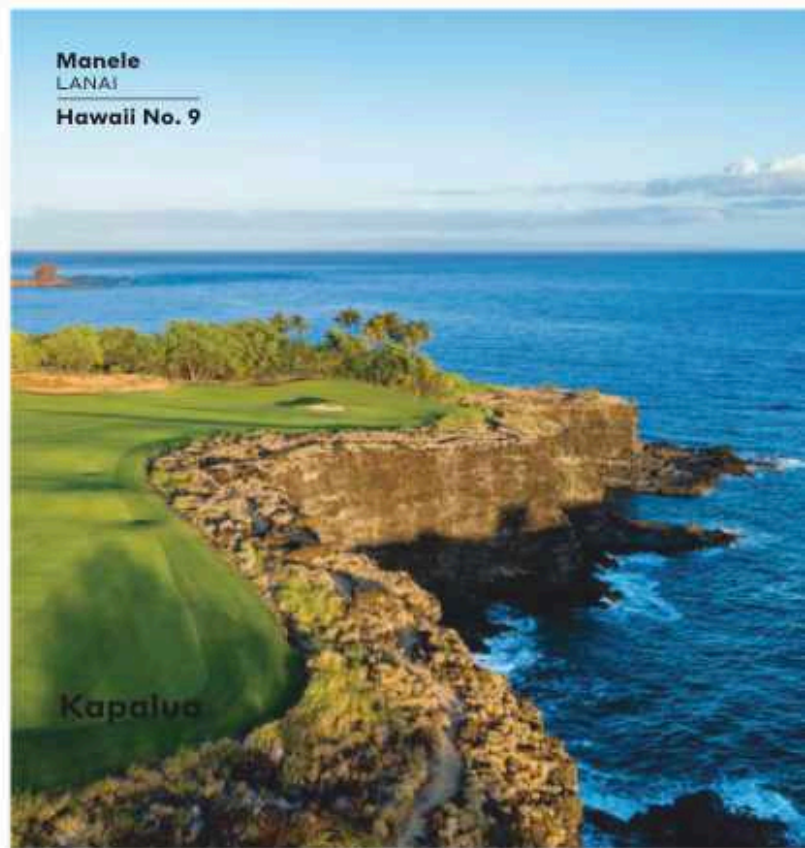
So where should you play? *Mahalo* for asking. In assembling its most recent list of the Top 100 Courses in the U.S., GOLF did a bit of island-hopping to cite 10 of the finest in the Aloha State. At press time, Hawaii was newly open to tourism after a lengthy shutdown. Visitors from out of state are required to take a Covid test within 72 hours of scheduled flight departures to the islands. It's the least you can do to experience peerless splendor. So pack your sticks (and, please, a mask).

Nanea Golf Club, The Big Island

Money was no object for Charles Schwab and investment giant George Roberts when they put their minds to building a private playground that would bring a touch of Scotland to the tropics. To execute their vision, they tapped Bandon Dunes

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Manele
LANAI
Hawaii No. 9



course architect David McLay Kidd. The designer moved little land on the elevated site cloaked in dark lava, instead finding natural fits for fairways amid the rocky flows. Firm, fast and fringed by wispy fountain grasses, Nanea looks and plays like a throwback links. The rest of the property is pure upscale Hawaii, low-key but luxurious—easy living. The only tough part is getting on.

The Ocean Course at Hokuala, Kauai

Consider this a case of making more with less. Formerly known as Kauai Lagoons, this daily-fee resort course, near Lihue Airport, began as a 36-hole extravaganza, only to shrink, under different ownerships, to 27 holes and, more recently, to 18. As

Hokuala
KAUAI





Pages 100-101: James Lear - 4E; North; Pages 102-103: Jon Covallier@LinksGems; Brian Orr; Channing Benjamin; This page, from left: Channing Benjamin, Brian Orr; Next page: George Fuller

part of that last change, Jack Nicklaus, the original designer, seized upon the strengths of the coastal setting by taking the best of what was left. His routing, which winds around lagoons and through forests of palm and mango trees, builds toward a crescendo on the back side, highlighted by a half-mile stretch of uninterrupted oceanfront golf, the longest such expanse in the state.

Kukui'ula, Kauai

A few groups on the course count as a crowded morning at Kukui'ula, the only private golf club on Hawaii's Garden Island. But even when it's "busy," the sheer scale of the property is apt to make you feel like you've got the whole joint to yourself. Spread across a former sugar plantation, Tom Weiskopf's design unfolds in broad strokes, with wide, rolling fairways, ample greens and bold bunkers popping white against an ocean backdrop that appears to stretch on to infinity. Aside from members, play is restricted to guests of the Lodge at Kukui'ula and to a limited number of island residents, who get a block of steeply discounted tee times every afternoon.

The Plantation Course at Kapalua, Maui

According to Hawaiian legend, the demigod Maui created his namesake island (and all the others) by latching a fishhook to the ocean floor and tricking his brothers into pulling it up. Let's call this high-end resort course the second-most impressive local work. In 1992, given an expansive and severely sloping site seemingly ill-suited to a world-class course, Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw produced exactly that: a big-boned layout befitting the scale and drama of the setting, its fairways climbing and tumbling with the landscape, giving way to views of waves and whales that you've only seen in Sentry Tournament of Champions broadcasts—and certain David Attenborough films.

The Club at Hokuli'a, The Big Island

The first splashy golf development on the Big Island was Mauna Kea, a landmark Robert Trent Jones Sr. resort course that opened for play in 1965. In more recent decades, other big-name projects have come in waves, a number of them private, including this oasis on the Kona Coast. Sheltered from the strongest winds but kissed by ocean breezes, Hokuli'a sweeps along gentle slopes, with ocean views from nearly every tee box. Several fairways skirt protected cultural sites, while an understated Polynesian-style clubhouse adds to the sense of a property in tasteful sync with its surroundings.

Manele Golf Course, Lanai

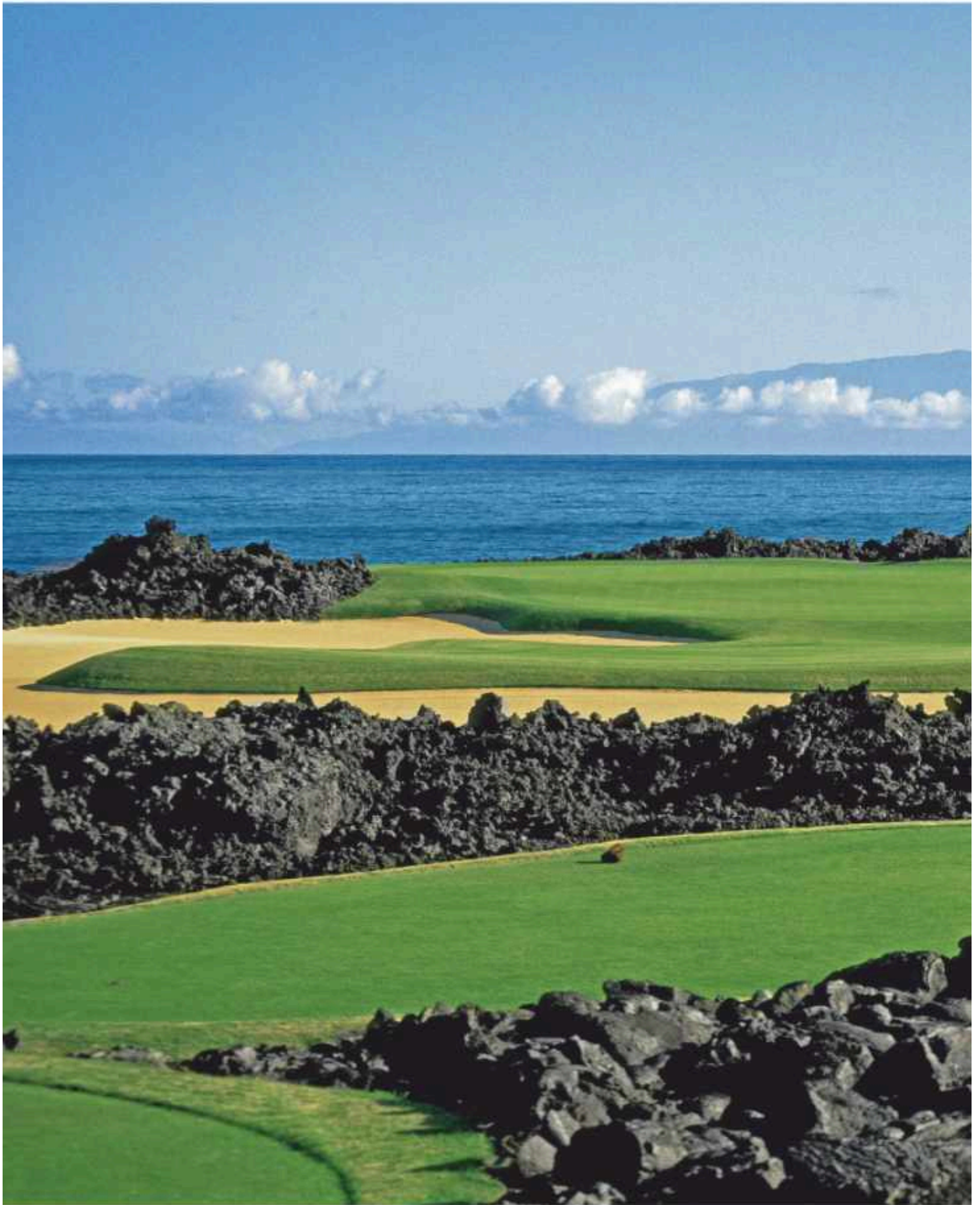
In 2012, tech billionaire Larry Ellison bought the entire island of Lanai, but Manele still owns the southern coast. From its commanding perch over Hulopoe Bay, with start-to-finish views of white sands and turquoise waters, this Jack Nicklaus Signa-




ture design could get by on looks alone. But there's plenty of substance amid the spectacle on a course that carves a scenic path along the bluffs, enlisting gorges and ravines to test your shot-making and your tolerance for risk. The demands of the exam depend on the wind and the tees you choose (there are five sets), but they're most entertaining on three holes cut so close to the cliffs that they bring the ocean into play. Accessible only to guests of the Four Seasons resort.

Kahuku Golf Course, Oahu

"Keep the country, country" goes the North Shore slogan. Golf doesn't get any more country than this. A sleepy turnoff in the small town of Kahuku takes you toward the ocean and a tattered, tin-roof pro shop, which backs up to a scruffy nine-hole muni to match. From its opening par 3, the routing rushes hard along the water and then ducks into the dunes before curling back for more close encounters with the coast. Not all the bunkers are well raked and not all the greens roll true, but what Kahuku lacks in pristine maintenance it makes up for with its charming personality and prime location. It's a proudly unpretentious course, with a vivid sense of place.





Hualalai
BIG ISLAND
Hawaii No. 5

In Hawaii, you can play through lush rain forests and over hardened landscapes of black lava. There are courses in the sky-piercing mountains and lagoon-dotted lowlands.

Wailua Golf Course, Kauai

Not all golf in paradise is pricey or private. A little slice of Eden with a lofty pedigree, Hawaii's finest muni fetches \$60 on the weekend (\$20 for locals), a pittance for a pinch-me pretty course that hosted the U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship three times. If Wailua's bargain rate is almost hard to fathom, so is the splendor of its setting, between the mountains and the ocean on Kauai's lush Royal Coconut Coast. Pace of play is—how to put it?—leisurely. But relax, mainland. Think of the strains of a slack-key guitar and let that be the rhythm of your round.

Hualalai Golf Course, The Big Island

On the far side of the island, molten lava still flows from an active volcano. But here on the resort-rich Kohala Coast, the stuff has cooled and hardened into coal-black rock. Stretched against the stark, dark canvas is a Jack Nicklaus Signature design that makes a striking study in contrasting shades and textures, all ebony and emerald, framed by the ocean. It's a composition of rare beauty that doubles as a fair, compelling test. The game's best seniors play here every winter at the PGA Tour Champions Mitsubishi Electric Championship. But to land a tee time otherwise, you have to be a member or a guest of the Four Seasons resort.

Princeville Makai Golf Club, Kauai

Some courses keep adrenaline on a slow drip, doling out excitement in small, steady doses. Princeville wastes no time in administering a rush. The green on the 611-yard par-5 2nd hole doubles as a lookout point toward Hanalei Bay, an arresting introduction to the North Shore scenery that shows itself repeatedly throughout your round. At its birth, in 1971, this daily-fee resort course represented the first solo project by Robert Trent Jones Jr., who returned 10 years ago to freshen up the layout, fine-tuning greens and bunkers, replanting fairways and sharpening sight lines on a routing highlighted by six holes along the coast. This is the essence of golf in Hawaii, as picturesque as a postcard, as unhurried as a sunset—tropical escapism at a time when we could use it most.

Nicklaus Design and GOLF are affiliates of BAM Golf.