

traveling angler

BY GARY GRAHAM

KONA CRAZY



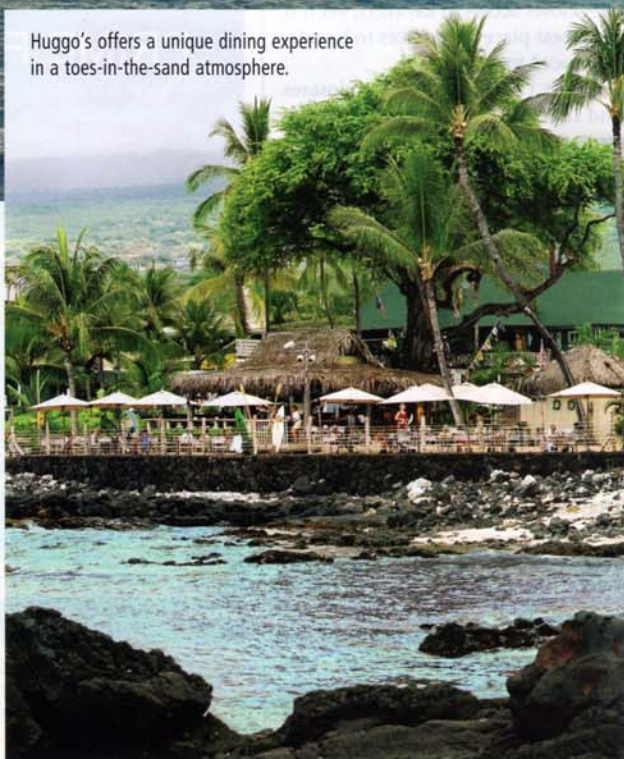
Whether it is your first or your hundredth visit to the small seaside village of Kona, you will quickly grasp why it enjoys the distinction of being one of the world's top sport-fishing destinations.

Huggo's offers a unique dining experience in a toes-in-the-sand atmosphere.

Located on the west coast of the Big Island of Hawaii, Kona is internationally known for its blue marlin fishing and its long-standing Hawaiian International Billfish Tournament (HIBT). Traveling from the four corners of the world to participate in the pursuit of blue marlin, one of the largest fish in the ocean, international friends gather to enjoy their common passion for sportfishing. For a serious angler this is a prestigious event not to be missed.

A few miles from downtown is the Honokohau Marina, home to the sportfishing fleet, consisting of boats available for charter that will fit every budget.

Volcanoes Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa, both nearly 14,000 feet high, create a north-south ridge of elevation of 5,000 feet or higher for nearly 50 miles, causing a lee that prevents the prevailing northeast trade winds from reaching the western side of the island. This allows anglers to enjoy deep-sea fishing at its finest in relatively calm waters where the depths are recorded in thousands of feet. Imagine big game fishing literally just outside the breakwater!





Six different billfish (including blue marlin and other exotic fish), yellowfin (*ahi*), dorado (*mahi mahi*), wahoo (*ono*), skipjack tuna (*aku*), amberjack (*kahala*), as well as other inshore species reside in these waters. More blue marlin have been caught off the Kona coast than anywhere in the world. At last count, over 60 granders, including the two largest marlin caught on rod and reel, have been landed in Hawaiian waters: a 1,805-pound fish was caught in the waters off Oahu by Captain Cornelius Choy, and in March 1984 a 1,656-pound fish was caught off Kona by angler Gary Merriman aboard the *Black Bart*, skippered by Captain Bart Miller.

More recently, The Billfish Foundation (TBF) recognized the *Sea Genie*, a 39-foot Rybovich based in Kona, and its Captains Gene Vander Hoek and Chris Choy for tagging the most blue marlin for the fourth year in a row. According to local reporter Jim Rizzuto: "All of the 160 billfish were caught on lures rigged with single hooks...none on bait."

While most locals favor a double-hook rig, these captains have proven that singles are equally effective and allow an easier and safer release of the fish. According to the skippers, the 160 billfish released were the result of 268 bites, a 60 percent conversion rate.

Hotel choices in Kona are numerous and varied. If you are looking for a larger resort within walking distance of the village, two choices to consider are the recently remodeled oceanfront King Kamehameha's Kona Beach Hotel, located on the grounds where the King once resided next to the Kailua Pier. Another centrally located hotel is the Oceanfront Royal Kona Resort with its seven-story Alii



tower. Most rooms have an open-air balcony overlooking the lush tropical grounds, and a spectacular view of Kailua Bay, as well. In the heart of historic Kailua-Kona town, both hotels offer easy access to restaurants, shops, and popular entertainment spots.

Six miles outside of the town of Kailua-Kona is Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort and Spa. Perched precariously close to the crashing surf of the Pacific, the hotel manages to dazzle the senses. Nearly all of the 521 rooms offer whitewater views. This family-friendly resort has two swimming pools, the centerpieces of the property, connected by a water tunnel. A wading pool with a sand bottom, no less, along with an interactive fountain and the longest water slide on the Big Island will keep the kids occupied for hours. Two Jacuzzis, an oceanfront spa with a 180-degree ocean view, a basketball court, two tennis courts, a sand volleyball court, and a complementary 24/7 fitness center are there for guests' pleasure.

There are so many fine restaurants to be found throughout Kona that it is difficult to sample them all during a short trip. The 40-year-old Huggo's, located on Kahakai Road on the waterfront, was originally a gathering spot for anglers and captains as they came in from their fishing day, but it has evolved into an award-winning, waterfront landmark dedicated to showcasing dishes made from local products of Big Island farms, fishermen, and ranchers. Huggo's offers a unique dining experience in a toes-in-the-sand atmosphere.

For something a little more laid back, Kona Brewing Company, just a few blocks from the waterfront, is a great spot for lunch or an informal dinner. It offers a large selection of local award-winning beers, along with homemade pizza, local fresh fish, and local organic salads.

Helicopter tours departing from Kona's Keahole Airport provide a birds-eye view of some of the most active volcanoes on the planet, along with lush green landscapes and deep valleys with spectacular cascading waterfalls.

Golfers will appreciate the complimentary Keauhou Trolley, which picks you up throughout town and stops not far from



the waterfront. Kona Country Club offers a choice of mountain and ocean courses, both challenging with gorgeous views.

Kona appeals to everyone: fathers and sons who have established a tradition of fishing the HIBT over many years; super athletes who come to surf, dive, or hike; or dedicated couch potatoes who simply want to lay by the pool, basking in the warm Kona sun. There are plenty of opportunities to sample local customs and cultures, and if you have never attended an authentic Hawaiian luau, Kona offers many choices.

This year, the HIBT will be held on August 2nd through the 8th. It's the 51st annual event, a remarkable accomplishment by any standard.

With direct flights from the mainland, the aircraft becomes a time machine that delivers you into a laid-back paradise where warm and friendly locals seem pleased you came. This is a place where you can catch a fish larger than your car, a place where taking a stroll along the waterfront with the sun and trade winds is a reality, a place that you take with you when you depart. You may just realize that Kona Crazy is just a pleasant state of mind. ■

CONTACT

Accommodations

Royal Kona Resort: www.royalkona.com

King Kamehameha's Kona Beach Hotel:

www.konabeachhotel.com

Sheraton Keauhou Bay Resort and Spa: <http://tiny.cc/>

[SheratonKeauhou](http://www.sheratonkeauhou.com)

Activities

www.lets-go-hawaii.com/activities

Paradise Helicopters: paradisecopters.com/kona.php

Fishing

Fire Hatt Sportfishing (Chuck Wilson): (808) 987-0038,

firehatt@gmail.com, www.firehattsportfishing.com

Restaurants

Huggo's: www.huggos.com

Kona Brewing Company: www.konabrewingco.com

Golf

www.konagolf.com