

HAWAII™

The BIG ISLAND

Big Island Visitors Bureau
101 Aupuni Street #238
Hilo, HI, 96720

68-1330 Mauna Lani Dr. #109B
Kohala Coast, HI 96743

Museums of Hawaii Island



Hulihee Palace

Hawaii Island has wonderful museums, big and small, that tell many of the island's stories – all the way from its earliest volcanic beginnings, to aspects of its natural and cultural history, to the wonder of how its people are looking outward into space. You can almost time travel by visiting Hawaii Island's museums. It's a fascinating way of learning about a truly unique island.

Here, then, is the history of Hawaii Island as told by its museums:



James Watt

The ocean's coral reefs teemed with life.

Mokupapapa Discovery Center is a museum dedicated to the natural science, culture and history of the extensive coral reefs of the remote and uninhabited northwestern Hawaiian Islands

area called Papahānaumokuākea – uninhabited, that is, except for some scientists and lots of wildlife – that most people don't get to see. The coral reefs there, sometimes called “the rainforests of the sea” and perhaps representative of how Hawaii Island's coral reefs once were, are home to more than 7,000 marine species, a quarter of which are found only in the Hawaiian archipelago. Mokupapapa's goal is to “bring those remote islands to the people” and to teach about the area and about ocean conservation issues.

Kids love this Discovery Center, which has a 3,500-gallon salt-water aquarium, interactive exhibits, life-size wildlife models, Hawaiian artwork inspired by the islands, and other interpretive displays in both English and Hawaiian. It's located across from Hilo Bay in a lovely, hundred-year-old building with koa floors, a grand koa staircase, and its own interesting history.

Mokupapapa is jointly administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Hawaii State Department of Land and Natural Resources.

Mokupapapa Discovery Center

76 Kamehameha Avenue, Hilo

Open Tuesday through Saturday

9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

808-933-8180

Admission free

[Visit Website](#)

Jaggar Museum



NPS Photo/Jay Robinson

The island itself was born of a stationary “hot spot” below the Pacific Plate.

Jaggar Museum, inside of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, is located at the overlook for Kilauea Caldera, one of the world’s most active volcanoes (it’s been erupting since 2008). The caldera itself is a sight to behold, especially in the dark, and you might consider arriving just before sunrise or staying until the sun sets. The National Park stays open around the clock, every day of the year, though the museum itself has set hours. Jaggar Museum is all about volcanology, and its exhibits teach about the “hot spot” that created the Hawaiian Islands, different lava types, and eruption “by-products” like volcanic bombs and Pele’s tears and hair. You can see real-time eruption monitors and seismographs, too, and equipment that scientists used in the past to study volcanoes. There are also displays about Pele herself, volcano goddess. Their live volcano cam updates every 15 minutes (best views at night).

Jaggar Museum

On Chain of Craters Road in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

Open every day

10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

National Park entrance fee applies.

[Visit Website](#)

Pacific Tsunami Museum



Pacific Tsunami Museum

As long as there's been an ocean, of course, there have been tsunamis.

The Pacific Tsunami Museum, just down the street from Mokupapapa Discovery Center in downtown Hilo (smack dab in the tsunami zone), is a small museum that packs a wallop with photos, displays, videos, and other stories from people who survived the 1946 and 1960 tsunamis that devastated Hilo and other parts of the island. Other displays describe the science

behind tsunami events. Some survivors work at the museum and “talk story” with visitors. The museum also operates a Hilo Bay webcam, through which you can see Hilo Bay conditions 24/7.

Pacific Tsunami Museum

130 Kamehameha Avenue, Hilo.

Open Tuesday through Saturday

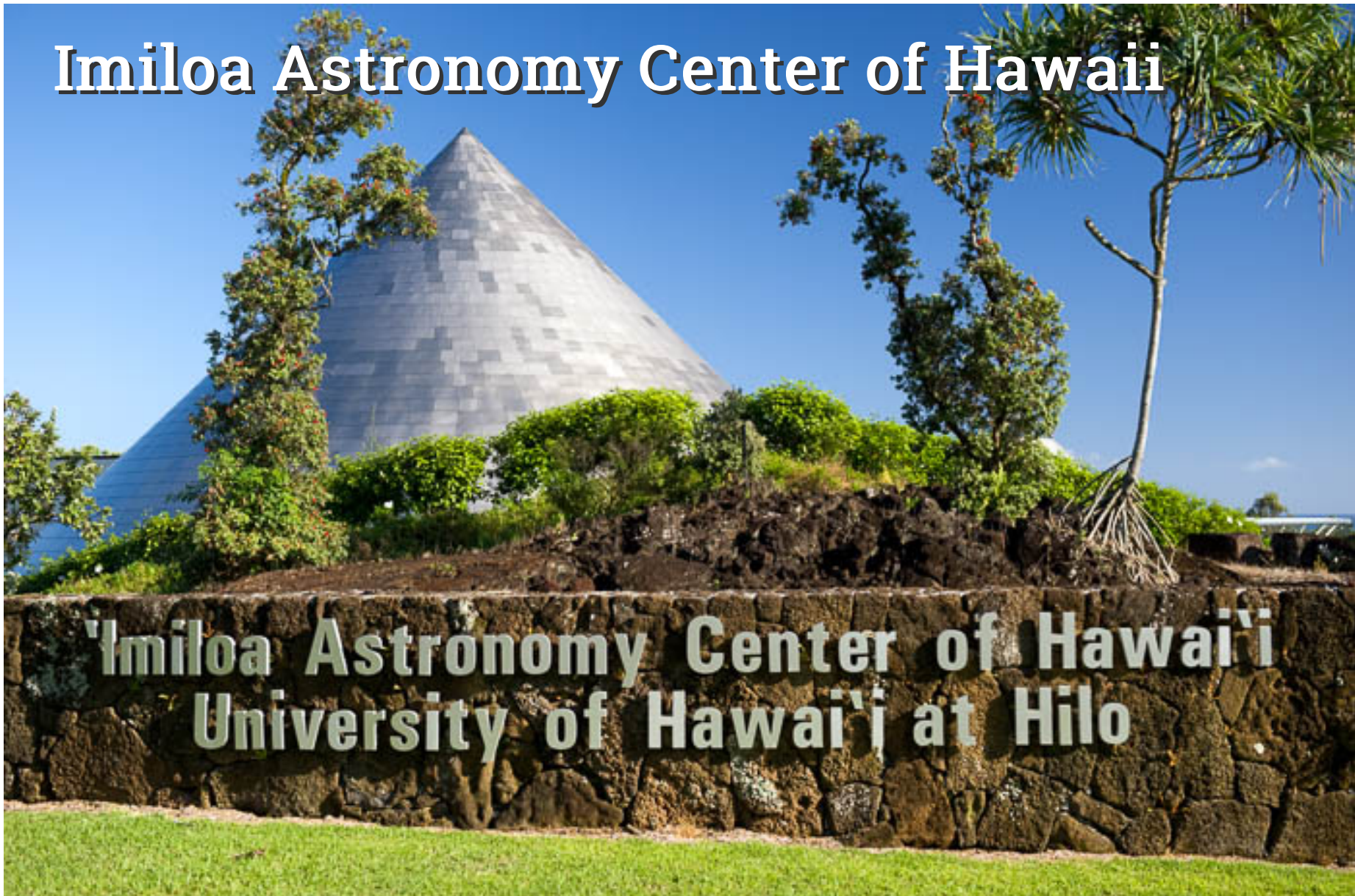
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

808 935-0926

Admission is \$8, Seniors \$7, Children 6-17 \$4, Children 5 and under free.

[Visit Website](#)

Imiloa Astronomy Center of Hawaii



Imiloa Astronomy Center of Hawaii

Polynesians navigated across the sea to Hawaii and became Hawaiians.

Imiloa Astronomy Center is an impressive museum where astronomy meets Hawaiian culture. Definitely worth a visit, it's up the hill in Hilo and brings together two types of exploration: One, human exploration in terms of early navigation to Hawaii in voyaging canoes, one of the great achievements of human exploration. Related exhibits present Hawaiian beliefs, theories and practices relating to Hawaii Island's mountain, Maunakea; the stars by which the great navigators traveled; and a Hawaiian perspective of the world. The second type of exploration is that of our universe's origins – the birth of the cosmos and the beginnings of life on earth. Related exhibits explore astronomy. Imiloa also has a full planetarium with shows. Native landscaping replicates the types of plants that grow at different elevations. Imiloa's Sky Garden restaurant, which serves both American and Chinese food and has scenic views of Hilo and the bay, is often full of local residents who dine there even when not visiting the Astronomy Center.

600 Imiloa Place, Hilo.

Open Tuesday through Sunday

9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

808 969-9703

Adults \$17.50, Children 5-12 \$9.50, Children 5 and under free. Senior/military/local student discounts apply.

[Visit Website](#)

Hulihee Palace



Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA)

For centuries, a chiefly class, the alii, ruled the land.

Hulihee Palace was built of lava rock in 1838 by Governor John Adams Kuakini, and the lovely, two-story palace on the waterfront in downtown Kailua-Kona was used by generations of alii as a vacation home. A simpler edifice than Honolulu's Iolani Palace, it's on the National Register of Historic Places, maintained by the Daughters of Hawaii, and open to the public as a museum. It's filled with artifacts from the Victorian era of King Kalakaua and Queen Kapiolani such as koa furniture and quilts, portraits, intricate feather and kapa (tapa) work, and much more. It's a lovely look at how and where the alii (ruling class) went to get away.

Hulihee Palace

75-5718 Ali'i Drive, Kailua-Kona.

Open Monday through Saturday

9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

808 329-1877

Docent-led tours:

Adult \$10, Seniors/military \$8.

Self-guided tours:

Adults \$8, Seniors/military \$6.

Children 18 and under free.

[Visit Website](#)

The Hawaii Plantation Museum



The Hawaii Plantation Museum mural

Westerners arrived in Hawaii, and with them came new ways of life.

The Hawaii Plantation Museum, six miles north of Hilo in Papaikou, is chock-full of artifacts from the sugar plantation era, which was the backbone of Hawaii's economy from the late-1800s to the mid-1900s. Entrepreneurs planted sugar and recruited laborers from China and Japan, and later Portugal, Korea, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Plantation camps and a plantation lifestyle was born.

The museum tells a lot of Big Island history in general. A list of the first hundred licensed vehicles on the island, with their owners' names, stands next to the island's first two gas pumps. But where the museum really shines is its extensive – and impressive – collection of artifacts recalling the history of Hawaii Island's plantation lifestyle. There are old "kaukau tins" (lunch cans used by plantation workers), bango tags (metal tags with numbers that workers showed to pick up their pay in the days before Social Security numbers), and what looks like every plantation company's sign on the walls. There are canes and machetes that are unique to Hawaii. Photos show the long flume networks that transported sugar, and bridges and railroads being built. A mannequin stands dressed in the layers of protective clothing women wore to work in the fields. She's called "Mrs. Hanabata."

The Hawaii Plantation Museum

27-246 Old Mamalahoa Hwy., Papaikou.

Open Tuesday through Saturday

10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

808 964-5151

Adults \$8, Seniors \$6, Military \$5, Children 6-17 \$3, Children 5 and under free.



[Visit Website](#)

Laupahoehoe Train Museum



Courtesy Flickr Danny Howard

[With plantations came railroads to transport sugar to the docks.](#)

Laupahoehoe Train Museum, housed in the former Laupahoehoe Train Station agent's house, is

one of the island's smallest museums but definitely worth a stop for train enthusiasts or anyone who wants to learn more about the rich history of the island's Hamakua coast. Much of its collection focuses on the Hilo Railroad, which ran from 1899 until 1946, when its tracks and other facilities were irreparably damaged by a tsunami. In the museum's backyard, you can see a wye – where a train engine's direction could be switched – complete with a standard gauge caboose, a restored narrow gauge boxcar and a diesel switch engine. There's also a model train room. Train geeks love this place.

The station agent's home is furnished as it might have been in the early 1900s and it's filled with photos, memorabilia and people's stories about Hawaii's railroads, plantations, tsunami, and Hamakua history.

Laupahoehoe Train Museum

36-2377 Mamalahoa Hwy., Laupahoehoe.

Open Thursday through Sunday

10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Monday through Wednesday by appointment.

808 962-6300

Adults \$6, Seniors \$5, Students \$3. Or Family rate, \$15.

[Visit Website](#)

The Kona Coffee Living History Farm



Interpreters provide an authentic living history experience.

In Kona, coffee became king.

The Kona Coffee Living History Farm is its own time travel experience. The 5.5-acre farm is still a working coffee farm that grows, harvests, roasts, and sells its coffee, just as when the Japanese immigrant family lived there a hundred years ago. What's unusual is that the people working in the preserved and restored 1913 farmhouse now, and in the coffee and macadamia nut orchards you can tour, and tending to the donkeys and chickens you see, are actually living history interpreters dressed as though they are in the 1920s through 1940s. You'll notice that everything they do so casually as they chat with you, and go about their daily chores, is in an early 20th-century, sustainable style. It's the only living history coffee farm in the nation. They sell their coffee beans on-site.

The Kona Coffee Living History Farm

82-6199 Hawaii Belt Road, Kealahou.

Open Monday through Friday

10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

808 323-3222

Adults \$15, Seniors 60+ \$13, Children 5-12, \$5, Children under 5, free.

[Visit Website](#)



Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) / Kirk Lee Aeder

[Kona sent a native son into space.](#)

The Ellison S. Onizuka Space Center is a small, hands-on museum at Keahole Airport in Kailua-

Kona. It's dedicated to the memory of the first astronaut from the Hawaii Island, Ellison Onizuka, who died in the tragic Space Shuttle Challenger explosion in 1986. Onizuka's family operates the museum, which has Space Shuttle replicas, a real Apollo 13 space suit, hands-on exhibits, and videos about the history of manned space flight. There are videos, too, about daily life in space, such as how astronauts brush their teeth. If you're early for a flight, it's a great place to spend time - adults and kids alike.

The Ellison S. Onizuka Space Center

Keahole International Airport in Kailua-Kona.

Open Monday through Saturday

9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

808 329-3441

Adults \$3, Children 12 and under \$1.

[Visit Website](#)

For information on visiting Hawaii, please email us at hawaii-island@hvcb.org or call 1-800-GoHawaii (1-800-464-2924) from U.S. and Canada.

This page does not include diacritical markings for Hawaiian words because not all computers are able to reproduce these markings or true fonts in normal text.

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