

Travel

DESTINATION: HAWAII

SECRET LIFE OF LAVA

EXPLORING THE CHEMISTRY
AND CULTURE OF HAWAII'S
SACRED BUILDING BLOCK.
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GUIDE BOOK

SUITE SPOT

GRAND NANILOA HOTEL HILO

Anywhere else, the re-branding of an iconic hotel might elicit yawns. But in Hawaii's second-largest city, the addition of "A DoubleTree by Hilton" to the official name of the Grand Nanihoa Hotel Hilo has sparked excitement. Finally, the heart of East Hawaii has contemporary, clean lodgings that meet national standards, yet with a style that celebrates Hawaiian culture, thanks to \$20 million in renovations to the 388 rooms and public areas, including two restaurants, a lobby bar and nightclub.

Lead investor Ed Bushor is equally proud of the hotel's other new moniker, "The Home of Hula," reflected in the hotel's weekly free hula shows and classes, videos of Hilo's renowned Merrie Monarch hula competition playing in the lobby, and Kim Taylor Reece's black-and-white images of hula dancers nearly everywhere you *huli* (turn).

The setting: At the northern apex of wooded, hotel-lined Banyan Drive, overlooking Hilo Bay, the ocean and Reeds Bay, where cruise and cargo ships dock at one end and locals paddleboard at the other.

The appeal: All the modern comforts of the mainland and live, ocean-view entertainment, both a rarity in Hilo, plus Hawaiian hospitality (and Hilton point rates half that of the fancy resort across the island). Only 30 miles from Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, the Grand Nanihoa is also less than 2 miles from quaint downtown Hilo, home to the Mokupapa Discovery Center, focused on the remote Northwestern Hawaiian Islands; the Lyman



Grand Nanihoa Hotel Hilo photos

Grand Nanihoa Hotel Hilo has emerged from renovations as a DoubleTree by Hilton.

Museum and Bailey House, exploring Native Hawaiian, missionary era and modern ecology and culture; and the Pacific Tsunami Museum, which documents the devastating local tsunamis of 1946 and 1960, as well as more recent international catastrophes.

Insider's tips: Hilo Bay Cafe, the town's best gourmet restaurant, is a half-mile walk just past the photoworthy, Japanese-style Liliuokalani Gardens. For hearty local fare, head a half mile in the opposite direction on Banyan Drive to Ken's House of Pancakes, one of Hawaii's few restaurants open 24/7. KapohoKine Adventures' excellent zip line and volcano excursions depart from the hotel store; its guided hike to see lava starts much closer than from the public viewing area.

Good to know: All rates include a free round of golf,



Kim Taylor Reece's hula photographs are featured.

Wi-Fi and parking; book by Feb. 28 and travel by March 31 for introductory prices that add free breakfast for two. Families may want the oceanfront junior suite (742 square feet), which offers a king bed, queen sleeper sofa and kitchenette for \$289. Book early for rooms during Merrie Monarch week, which begins Easter Sunday. Locals flock to the lobby bar for Thirsty Tuesdays, featuring

\$4 draft beer and live music; the poolside restaurant is set to open mid-April.

Details: 93 Banyan Drive, Hilo, (808) 969-3333, reservations (855) 610-8733, www.grandnanihoahilo.com. Standard rooms from \$149, water-view rooms from \$164, suites from \$199.

— Jeanne Cooper,
travd@sfbchronicle.com

LODGING

New, improved places to stay

Among the record 8.9 million visitors to Hawaii in 2016, more than 5.5 million stayed in hotels, according to the Hawaii Tourism Authority, and the majority of visitors are repeat travelers to the islands. Besides Hilo's Grand Nanihoa Hotel, here are brand new or newly transformed hotels seeking to keep those statistics equally high in 2017.

Maui: After several years of planning, Westin Nanea Ocean Villas will debut two months early, with reservations accepted for May 1 and a "soft opening" April 15. The 16-acre beachfront resort in Kaanapali includes 390 one-, two- and three-bedroom residential-style villas, a 10,000-square-foot lagoon pool, children's pool and a Hawaiian cultural center with extensive offerings. Rates begin at \$665. www.westinnaea.com

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Oahu: The \$115 million metamorphosis of Pacific Beach Hotel, set to rebrand itself as Alohilani Resort Waikiki Beach in fall, has completed renovations on the initial round of guest rooms and suites. Rates for a new partial ocean-view king begin at \$168 and \$216 for a Diamond Head ocean-view room. www.pacificbeachhotel.com

Kauai: Luxurious new one- to four-bedroom bungalows and villas have joined the three-bedroom cottages at the Lodge at Kukuia. The 52 units in total permit access to Kukuia's championship golf course, spa, restaurant and other facilities otherwise only available to owners of the resort's high-end estates. Nightly rates start at \$750 for a 1,235-square-foot, one-bedroom bungalow. <https://lodgeatkukuia.com>

Hawaii Island: The Waikoloa Beach Marriott on Anaeohomalu Beach is converting a wing into Marriott's Waikoloa Ocean Club, which will offer one- and two-bedroom villas with kitchenettes, living rooms, sofas and washer-dryers, plus free parking (and no resort fee). Reservations are available starting May 5, with one-bedroom rates starting at \$308 and two-bedroom rates at \$455. www.marriottthawaii.com

Hilo Hawaiian Hotel, near the new Grand Nanihoa Hotel Hilo on Banyan Drive, recently completed a half-million-dollar renovation that included a complete makeover of its bayfront pool and ballrooms. Banyan-view rooms start at \$157, ocean-view from \$189. www.castleresorts.com/hilohawaiian

— Jeanne Cooper