

For the stories on the next 50 pages, we were looking to get lost. The plan couldn't have worked out any better than when **TONY PERROTTET** landed on

# ... the forgotten

# HAWAII

*Be the First* ▶ LANAI ▶ *Photos by* ZACH STOVALL



**T**he filthy adventure begins, improbably enough, with a massage. “Oil or lotion?” coos my masseuse. We’re in a private cabana at the Four Seasons at Manele Bay on the most inconspicuous of the Hawaiian islands, Lanai. Perched belly-down on this headland, with sweeping views of Hulopoe Beach and the pods of spinner dolphins that have arrived for sunset, I start to nod off into the balm of luxury. But then I spy something. They look like odd geometric shapes huddled near the beach below.

“Are those tents?” I ask.

“Oh, yes,” the masseuse announces without surprise. “Visitors from the mainland don’t know about it, but this is a fantastic place to camp. People from the islands come when they want to get away.”

I’m wide awake while she kneads my shoulder and tells me about sandy, potholed roads that lead into wild forests. She goes on about ancient Hawaiian fishing spots and stretches of coastline where you might not see another person for weeks.

As I lie there, I can’t take my eyes off those tents. When I arrived from Maui by ferry yesterday, Lanai looked devoid of vegetation or things to do. I couldn’t quite imagine how I would spend eight hours here, let alone eight days. Staying at the Four Seasons made it difficult to think I’d ever venture more than a few steps from the infinity pool. By the time I roll off the massage table, I have a new plan. I’m leaving these comforts to take a vacation like an islander from Maui, Oahu or the Big Island.

NEXT MORNING, BAGS IN HAND, I EXIT THE cabana beds and sweet smells of the Four Seasons. I’m checking out and heading into the wilds of Lanai. Just as the shuttle van arrives to take me into town so I can rent a jeep, the resort manager comes hustling out to stop me. He’s a young Australian named Frankie, and he has heard about the venture I’m about to pursue. Frankie is holding a saucepan from the kitchen.

“You’ll need this,” he says, knowing how impossible it will be to find one on the island at the last



minute. I accept his gift like a sacred urn.

To gather basic camping supplies, I have to comb Lanai City — which isn’t a city, or even really a town, but a collection of weather-beaten wooden houses lining a small grid of streets, like a Western-film set. A faded sign with a pineapple on it declares that its empty central square is called Dole Park. It’s a relic from the glory days of Hawaiian fruit, when the island of Lanai was the world’s biggest pineapple plantation. The last harvest was in 1992, but 98 percent of the island is still private — and was most recently purchased in 2012 by the software billionaire Larry Ellison of Oracle.

Ellison now owns the island’s two luxury hotels, most of the shops, the gas station, the water utility and, I discover, the only car-rental agency on Lanai. When I walk into the humble storefront of the agency, the attendant shows me an array of four-wheel-drives, all well worn. She also hands

**Past Times**  
It’s only nine miles from the Four Seasons Resort at Manele Bay (far right, bottom) to Lanai City, where locals still hunt for food, take pride in the pineapple harvests of the past and drive off the map.





### ► Landing on Lanai

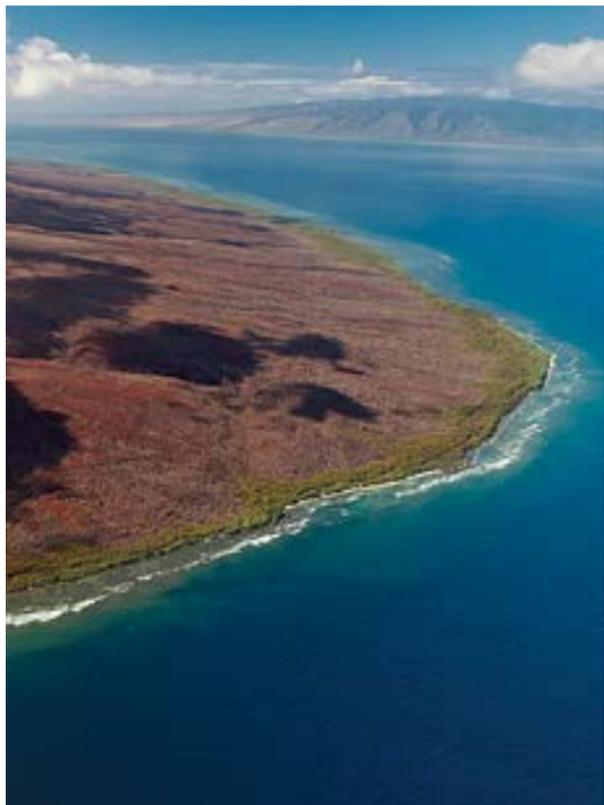
#### Three Resorts

There are only 349 rooms on the entire island. One of the two Four Seasons on Lanai fronts Hulopoe Bay, a favorite camping and body-surfing spot for visitors from the other islands.

# 45

MINUTES (AND \$30) BY FERRY FROM MAUI TO LANAI. THE SITE OF THE WILD ISLAND LOOMING IS WORTH IT.





**Pay Dirt**

There are only 30 miles of paved road on Lanai. The other worn trails through the countryside lead past churches in once-thriving villages, and they usually dead-end at a thick forest or on a wide beach.

me a map with “Not Accessible” stamped on some tracks and notes scribbled on others: “Stop Before Soft Sand!” and “Do Not Use Beach Access!” Decorating the walls are snapshots of jeeps stuck in mud and overturned on the beach.

I’ve noticed many locals are driving monster trucks with extremely high chassis. But I pick a smallish jeep, coated in orange dust.

“Just remember,” the attendant says, “there’s nothing out there. No gas, no food, no water. Nothing.”

On the way out of Lanai City, I stop by the only hardware store, which seems to have been decked out during the California gold rush. It has the goods for every island eventuality, from machetes to shotguns. I pick out a small tent and a sleeping mat. The cashier suggests water containers and begins making more notes on my map.

“You should go here,” he says, pointing at the

southwestern coast. “It’s like the end of the world.”

At the old Japanese grocery store, I buy a pile of food supplies, including rice balls with Spam. By now, everyone in town seems to know that a crazy haole is going camping by himself.

To get the larger picture of life on the island, I drop by the Lanai Culture & Heritage Center, which must be one of the world’s most casual museums. A voluptuous woman named Mikala emerges with a frangipani flower in her hair.

“In ancient Hawaiian times, there used to be 6,000 people living on Lanai,” she says. But they were decimated by disease and migration when the Europeans came. By 1900, there were only about 125 people left on the island. Not long after that, a single investor had purchased 98 percent of the land. Filipinos, Japanese and Pacific islanders arrived to work the fields, creating a unique racial mix.

**Decorating some of the walls are snapshots of jeeps stuck in mud and overturned on a beach.**

Today, many people here still look back on the pineapple days as a golden age. Every family had something to do with Dole. Teenagers worked there every summer. The company taught them how to drive and sent some to college on scholarships. It even provided trucks to take kids to the beach on the weekends. So it was a huge social trauma when cheap pineapples from Asia forced the last plantation to close in the ’90s. Lanai had to reinvent itself as a unique escape from the other Hawaiian islands.

Before I leave the cultural center, Mikala offers her own favorite camping spots. Then I stagger out of the museum with my two giant water containers, leaving a trail of drips on the floor.

**A**N HOUR LATER, I’M CROSSING THE LONE ridge that forms the island’s spine and negotiating hairpins to the west coast. Unless you’re an archaeologist, the dry landscape could only be described as barren. Filling the blue horizon are contours of Maui and Molokai. I rattle through the forest on a dirt road, with clouds of orange dust billowing behind me. The rear window flap won’t close, which means I’m slowly engulfed in a film of dust.

This is the sort of freedom Hawaii symbolizes. It could be the 1920s, and I’m driving the island’s only car, falling off the map. The lack of human life

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***The Other Ride***

Lanai's upcountry is home to the Stables at Koele, formerly a horse ranch for the pineapple plantation. Visitors can ride into the ironwood forests with the Stables' three cowboys (all sporting 10-gallon hats).

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adds a surreal edge. Scattered in the rocks above are Hawaiian petroglyphs, possibly dating back to a 1797 war on Lanai named the “Campaign of the Loose Bowels,” because the invading army was reduced to eating indigestible weeds.

As I head south, the foliage grows denser. I switch the jeep into four-wheel drive to slide through sand traps. Mesquite branches scratch at the windows. Just past a train engine half-buried and choked by vines is the “ghost resort” — Club Lanai. It was set up as a hipster resort in the 1980s but failed, so the owners abandoned it. Hollywood could not have crafted a better set for zombies.

The forest finally opens onto Lopa Beach, where another jeep is parked. Two island guys are giving surfing lessons to a German backpacker. I dust myself off and ask where I should pitch my tent.

“It’ll be windy here tonight,” one of them says, looking at the ocean and the sky.

“I’d keep going,” the other says. “Just pull off the side of the road where it’s more protected.”

I’m looking for more than a campsite. I want to taste the freedom islanders feel on vacation. Sunburn. Sand. Damp socks. Not caring. So I continue south, craning my neck to inspect the private spots that have been carved from the forest at regular intervals. I turn into one: A small circle of stones is evidence of a fire pit, and when I step out to the beach, a turtle floats by and sticks up its head. I take this as a good omen. I set my tent so I can walk out under the flap and straight into the waves.

That night, the stars are mirrored by the twinkling lights of Maui across the strait. A chef in Lanai City had joked to me, “It’s just like Gilligan’s Island out there,” and I can begin to see why. For the next two days, I spend my time lying in the sun, swimming with the turtles, wallowing in the shallows, reading novels and cooking vegetables over the mesquite wood fire. The only other life are the deer, which randomly bound through the site. Finally, one morning, I spot a jeep parked in the forest. Near it is a group of islanders from Lanai City who have come to spearfish on their day off.

“We brought a couple fresh limes and a knife,” says one. “We’ll make a fire later. That’s all we need.”

**A**FTER THREE DAYS, I PACK UP MY TENT AND head back to civilization. I’m sun-scorched and salt-encrusted. But just when I think I have Lanai figured out, I drive through the mountains above Lanai City into a pine forest swathed in fog. I pull up to what seems to be a colonial mansion,



the Lodge at Koele (another Four Seasons property), surrounded by lush gardens. The bellman doesn’t flinch at the sight of the muddy jeep, dust-covered luggage or my unshaven, wild-haired features.

“Just back from camping,” I confess.

“Really?” His eyes light up. “Did you make it south of Lopa? That’s my favorite spot.”

After a long shower, I walk outside and realize I’m in a Hawaiian version of *Downton Abbey*. I learn the rules of croquet on a lawn overhung by breadfruit trees. I promenade in the manicured grounds as a mist falls on my face, like a celestial moisturizer. A roaring fire is lit and guests gather to play billiards and bridge. Luckily, there is no dress code — my clothes are still covered in orange dust.

“This place feels far away from home,” a lawyer from Honolulu tells me. I finish my gin and tonic and take another turn around the koi-fish ponds. Every footstep leaves a tiny trace of fine sand.

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**Head for the Hills**  
After breaking camp, the author picked up a lesson at the horse stable, a classic Hawaiian lunch at Ohana Poke Market and some dust from Garden of the Gods before settling into the Four Seasons in the hills.

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