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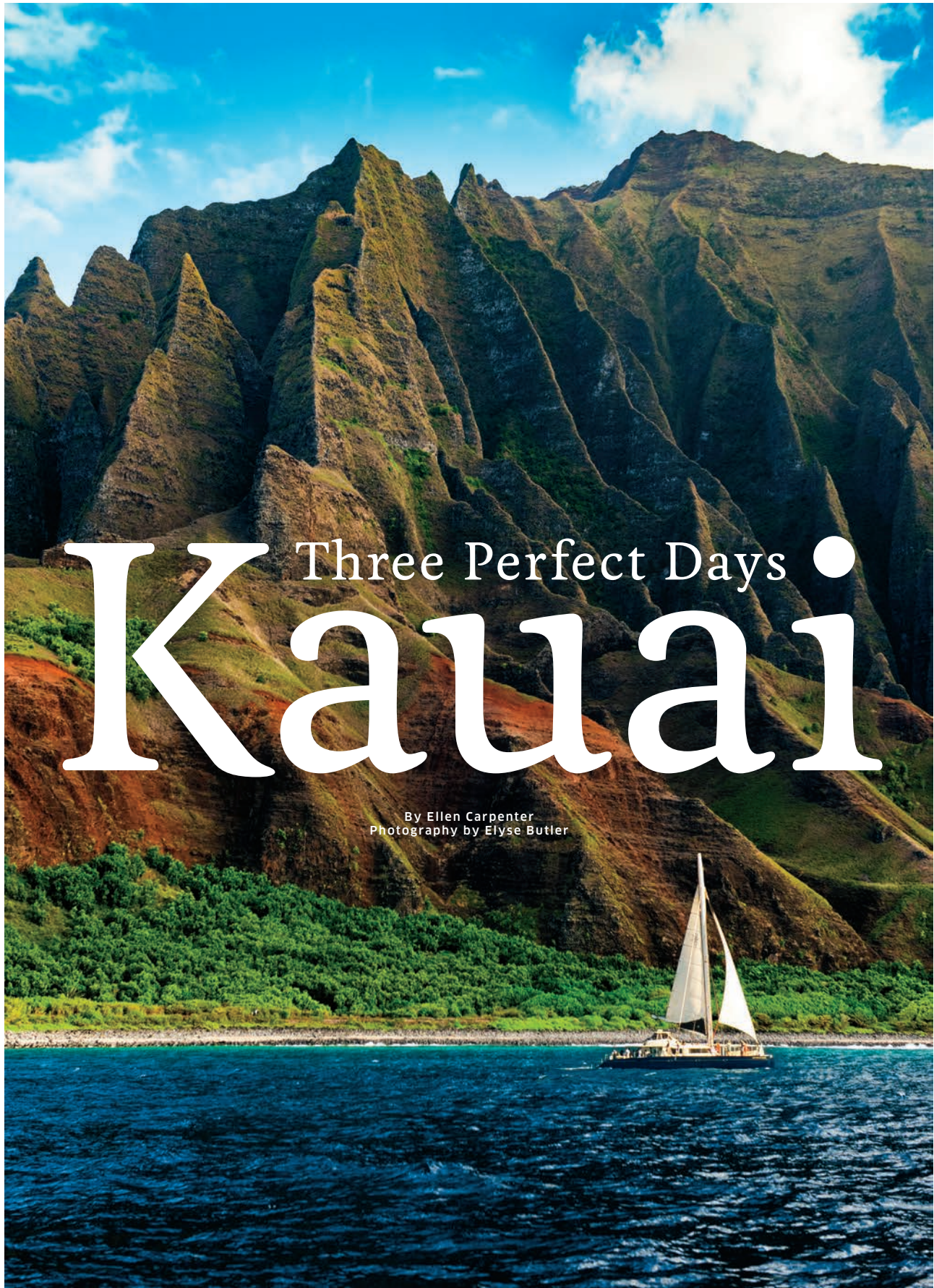
NOVEMBER 2019

Where you
can leap over
waterfalls in
Mars-red
Waimea Canyon

Three
Perfect Days

Kauai

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 



Three Perfect Days in Kauai

By Ellen Carpenter
Photography by Elyse Butler

Five million years ago an underwater volcano erupted, creating a 552-square-mile paradise in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The oldest Hawaiian island, Kauai is also the most untamed, with more than 90 percent of its land inaccessible by car and covered in craggy green mountains, epic canyons, towering waterfalls, and only-in-your-dreams beaches. There are no high-rises; buildings can't be taller than a coconut palm, which means you can see the sunset from pretty much anywhere. Sure, you could spend all day poolside drinking mai tais, but why would you when the Napali Coast is beckoning, when the Waimea Canyon is calling your name? The Garden Island is for explorers, for people chasing unforgettable experiences that can't be captured with selfies. What are you waiting for?



► Swimming with seals and hiking along canyons

Opening spread, from left: the Napali Coast; a happy customer at The Fresh Shave in Kalaheo; this spread, from bottom: an aerial view of the island; Shannon Hiramoto of Workshop by Machine Machine

blond, flip-flopped—does the same, leading us to our motorized catamaran.

Our seven-hour tour promises to combine epic views of the Napali Coast—a 17-mile stretch of towering, rugged sea cliffs—with snorkeling near the forbidden island of Niihau, which has remained private since a Scottish farmer named Elizabeth Sinclair bought it in 1864 for \$10,000 in gold. I grew up in Kentucky and have never been on a boat in the middle of the ocean. Which, of course, means I’ve never swum in the middle of the ocean. And, no, I’ve never snorkeled. Everything about today terrifies me. But the promise of seeing Hawaiian monk seals—I’m a seal obsessive—lures me on board. My son, Calder, who, at 6, just makes Holo Holo Charters’ age cutoff, is keen to look for sea turtles. My husband, Chris, just wants to avoid getting a sunburn.

The front of the boat is like the splash zone at SeaWorld, so we keep to the back and eat a breakfast of scrambled eggs, fresh fruit, and donuts. Jason Mraz and Jack Johnson keep the vibe chill, and before I know it, it’s time to suit up:

“Tears form in the corner of my eyes, and I realize I don’t know if it’s OK to cry in a snorkel mask.”

fins, mask, courage. “If you see a monk seal,” Captain Drew tells us, “be like a monk seal.” As for tips on using a snorkel for the first time? “Just breathe like Darth Vader.”

With that, I jump in. I put my head under and see a school of needlefish swimming right toward me. I can’t breathe. I pull out the snorkel, coughing. Just then, Captain Drew calls over the loudspeaker: “There’s a monk seal to the left if you can make it over there!” This is it. I’m the only person anywhere near the seal. I put the snorkel back on. *Just breathe like Darth Vader.* I go under and see the seal twisting and turning playfully. I swim toward him as quickly as I can, huffing like a Sith Lord. He flips and locks eyes with me. Then he turns and swims right below me as I stare in

awe. Tears form in the corner of my eyes, and I realize I don’t know if it’s OK to cry in a snorkel mask.

I come up for air and see Calder jumping up and down on the boat. “Mom! Did you see the seal?” Yes. Yes, I did.

Nothing can top that moment, but the Napali Coast comes close. I’ve seen it in movies, of course—*Jurassic Park*, *South Pacific*, *Tropic Thunder*—but the silver screen can’t compare with real life. The vibrant green cliffs look like giant Christmas trees piled on top of each other, leading down to pristine golden beaches. We cruise under a waterfall and into a sea cave carved by the waves. A school of spinner dolphins swims alongside us. Even a sea turtle comes by to say hello. I can’t stop smiling. “Does it ever get old?” I ask crew member Ahren Kaneshiro, a Kauai native. He shakes his head. “No. Never.”

Calder’s main goal on our Hawaiian vacation is to eat as much shave ice as possible, so as soon as we get back on land, we head over to **The Fresh Shave**, a mini trailer in nearby Kalaheo with offerings named for mustache styles; I



get the Fu Man Chu (strawberry, banana, cream) while Calder gets The Whiskers (lime and mint), and Chris opts for The Handle Bar (pineapple and coconut). The cart is parked outside **Warehouse 3540**, a hip artist collective. Inside, I’m drawn to the block-print designs at **Workshop by Machine Machine** and strike up a conversation with the owner and artist, Shannon Hiramoto, who opened the shop three years ago with her dad, Charlie, a retired Kauai firefighter turned letterpress artist. As I check out her collection of blouses and dresses printed with watercolor-like

hearts and waves, she tells me how Warehouse 3540 is a blessing for her. “You can play and experiment and be more creative and loose,” she says. “It has that art-school vibe.”

I figure we have just enough time to drive up to see **Waimea Canyon**—nicknamed the Grand Canyon of the Pacific—and do a short hike before dinner, so we hop in our rental and head 45 minutes west. At **Waimea Canyon Lookout**, Chris buys some ridiculously sweet mango—“The last of the season!” the vendor tells us—and we climb the stairs and are immediately overcome by the view. It’s

similar to its mainland cousin, but where the Grand Canyon is all shades of red and brown, the 14-mile-long, 1-mile-wide Waimea has a broader palette, with red and brown giving way to jungle green that stretches down 3,600 feet. It looks so much more alive, the crags and crests cinematically illuminated by the late-afternoon sun. I take a picture, but it doesn’t do it justice.

We head back on Waimea Canyon Drive and proceed up to **Kalalau Lookout**, which offers dumbfoundingly beautiful views of the Kalalau Valley and the Pacific Ocean.



*“The Waimea Canyon looks
alive, the crags and crests
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WHERE TO STAY

The Lodge at Kukui'ula

Traveling with kids? It's tough to beat this luxury vacation rental property on the island's south shore. There's a waterslide by the pool, Pac-Man in the game room, bikes for every age, and Lappert's Hawaii ice cream on demand. Parents will love the luxurious spa (definitely do the rejuvenating Wet Ritual) and the Tom Weiskopf-designed golf course, not to mention the plantation-style cottages, complete with firepits. Daily activities include ukulele lessons, double-hull canoe sails, and lei-making classes. Can't bear to leave? Home sites start at \$625,000. From \$737, lodgeatkukuiula.com

Timbers Kauai

This sleek, one-year-old residential and vacation rental property, located on the southeast shore's Hokulua resort, is the newest place to stay on Kauai, boasting two-, three-, and four-bedroom residences with lanais and floor-to-ceiling windows. Flit between the infinity pool overlooking Kalapaki Beach and the two-tiered *keiki* pool, or get in a round at the Jack Nicklaus-designed course. At night, savor inventive cocktails and farm-fresh fare at Hualani's, easily one of the best restaurants on the island. Then head up to the observation deck for some stargazing. From \$850, timberskauai.com

From top: a pool at The Lodge at Kukui'ula; the lodge's double-hull canoe sets sail

The Kalalau Trail is considered one of the most beautiful—and dangerous—hikes in the world, but we figure Calder's up for it, so ... Just kidding. We drive a tiny bit farther to the **Puu O Kila Lookout** to tackle the 2-mile round-trip Pihea Trail. It's still not easy, though. It's muddy and steep and we have to maneuver around boulders and tree roots. We get covered in Kauai's famous red dirt—basically rusted volcanic rock—but we're rewarded with another epic view of the valley stretching down to the ocean. It really never does get old. Back at Kukui'ula, we take outdoor showers and then



head to the pool for a special family-style dinner. Calder swims with other kids while we have a glass of wine and listen to a musician play a ukulele and sing traditional Hawaiian songs. A feast arrives just as the sun is setting: a salad of greens from the property's farm, with avocado and calamansi vinaigrette; masa cakes with black beans and feta; grilled swordfish; and addictive fried chicken. This day, I think, can't get any more perfect. Then I take a bite.

AD

DAY

2

► Visiting the Professor and Mary Ann and getting our luau on

The six-hour time change from New York means we wake up early once again. So after I make a much-needed pot of Kauai Coffee, Calder and I borrow bikes and go on a sunrise ride up to the Kukui'ula farm, where residents and guests are welcome to pick what they want: kale, okra, beets, star fruit, calamansi, papaya. One of the farmers, Saundri, offers to cut down some apple bananas for us. "When the flower, or the heart, gets long, that's when you know it's ripe," she tells us, as she machetes off a



hearty bunch. They're fruitier and tarter than a mainland banana. Better, basically.

Chris is up when we get back to the cottage, and we're all ready for something a bit more filling, so we bid farewell to Kukui'ula and drive a half hour to Lihue's **Tip Top Motel, Café, & Bakery**, a local breakfast institution since 1916. We settle into a vinyl booth, clearly the only tourists in the joint, and in no time we're devouring pancakes riddled with macadamia nuts and sweet bread French toast. On the way out, Calder talks me into buying a bag of plastic shark toys to take to the beach. ("That's really the one present you want to get on this trip? OK...")

Choosing a beach in Kauai is like choosing a gelato flavor in Italy: Pretty much impossible, but at least you know that there's no wrong choice. We decide to let history steer us—television history, that is. **Moloka'a Beach**, on the

northeast coast, is where much of the pilot of *Gilligan's Island* was filmed in 1963. Chris cues up the theme song on Spotify on the 40-minute drive over. We park and walk down a sandy path, past people's living room windows, to the beach; I feel like we're trespassing, but every beach in Kauai is open to the public—even the one in front of Mark Zuckerberg's mansion, just north of here. Calder slips off his shoes and makes a run for it. "I can totally see the S.S. *Minnow* right there," Chris says, pointing at the U-shaped lagoon. We are, amazingly, the only people here, which means I don't have to tell Calder to hush when he screams every time a big wave comes crashing into him. Heck, I scream too.

"We're bringing back traditions," says Kauai Museum's Chucky Boy Chock, "and having you feel a part of it."

After burying Calder in the sand and making a goofy video with the new shark toys attacking Chris's leg (maybe that was a good purchase), we're ready for some lunch. At **Pono Market** in nearby Kapaa, Chris and I share a Hawaiian plate lunch



This page from top: a Hawaiian plate lunch at Pono Market; Moloka'a Beach; opposite page: Chucky Boy Chock at the Kauai Museum



with chicken laulau (cooked in taro leaf), rice, spicy ahi poke, and macaroni salad. Calder opts for a margherita pizza from the **Scorpacciata** food truck, parked in the lot next door. We sit at a picnic table and chow down (the poke is so fresh and silky soft), knowing that when we finish we'll be rewarded with shave ice from the **Wailua** truck, parked right next to us.

From there we're off to check in at **Timbers Kauai**, a rental and residential property that opened last year at the Hokuala resort in Lihue. Chris and Calder head to the pool while I duck out to meet Chucky Boy Chock, the executive director of the **Kauai Museum**, in town. Chock, a teddy bear of a man with the most infectious smile I've ever seen, greets me with an

oli, a welcoming chant. His rich baritone echoes throughout the museum as he walks toward me, past an outrigger canoe and framed pupu o Niihau shell leis, gracefully moving his arms like an interpretive dancer. When he finishes, I burst into applause. "What we're doing here is bringing back the traditions and having you feel a part of it," he says. "We did lose our

LYDGATE FARMS CHOCOLATE FARM TOUR



"Don't worry about eating chocolate at 9 in the morning," says guide Kate Markowski (pictured) at the start of Lydgate Farms' tour. "Chocolate is a health food! It's fruit!"

You'll get to try plenty of fruit and chocolate on this three-hour tour of the Lydgate family's lush 46-acre farm, which produces everything from cacao (Hawaii is the only U.S. state where cacao trees grow) and vanilla to mamey sapote and dragon fruit. Will Lydgate, a fifth-generation Kavaian, took over the farm three years ago and has seen tourists' interest in local food rise. "Ag tourism is a big part of the agriculture of Hawaii now," he says. "People have an innate desire to be connected to their food." The tour culminates with a chocolate history lesson and a blind tasting of chocolates from around the world. Lydgate's creamy, fruity options stand out—and, of course, are available for purchase. New this month: Lydgate partnered with Koloa Rum Co. to release a chocolate rum and rum-infused chocloate bar. "The future is chocolate," says Lydgate, "and I need more." lydgatefarms.com



From above: performers at Luau Kalamaku; artisan Phil Villatora demonstrates how to play one of his bamboo nose flutes

traditions for a bit. Our grandparents weren't allowed to speak Hawaiian in public." Now, though, he explains, Hawaiian is mandatory in schools, and the younger generations are embracing their heritage and traditions. "The millennials are learning the old ways. It's so cool."

Chock then walks me through the museum, pointing out Kauai goods, like hand-woven *makaloa* mats; pictures of Kauai's famous surfers; and paintings of the island's royals, giving me a mini history lesson at every turn. I could happily spend the rest of the day chatting, but it's time to say mahalo and meet back up with my boys for another Hawaiian tradition: the luau.

When we arrive at the **Luau Kalamaku at Kilohana Plantation**, we're welcomed with leis, a beautiful orchid



one for me and puka shells for Calder and Chris. We're early, so we wander around and explore the "made in Kauai" market, where we spot a man wearing a Tahitian *hei* headdress playing a flute—with his nose. Turns out it's a *hano*, a traditional Polynesian bamboo nose flute. "Do you make these?" Chris asks the artisan, a Kauai native named Phil Villatora. "They make me," Villatora responds. We buy two.

After a train tour around the historic plantation, we make it back just in time to witness that night's main course, a whole pig, being unearthed from an imu (underground oven). Time to eat. I grab a mai tai at the open bar and we head to the buffet line and fill our plates with kalua pork, teriyaki chicken, mashed purple sweet potatoes, chow mein, potato-macaroni salad, fruit, and thimble-size cups of poi (they're that small, I soon learn, because it's an acquired taste). While we eat, a master of ceremonies asks who in the audience is on their honeymoon. Half the crowd screams in response. Then she asks who is celebrating an anniversary, and the other half of the crowd screams.

This is my first luau, but I have a feeling Kalamaku's is in a league of its own. It's more akin to a Broadway musical than I expected, with a fully fleshed plot (about the Polynesian migration to the Hawaiian Islands, with a love story at the center), beautiful singing, flashy costumes, and jaw-dropping dance numbers. (I mean, really, how do people shake their butts like that?) I look over at Calder when the fire dancers take the stage, twirling and throwing flames, the heat palpable to us front-row viewers, and the look of wonderment on his face makes me almost teary. "How did he *do* that?" he says, after the man swallows the flame. "Magic," I whisper.

AD

DAY

3

► Off-roading and flying high

This page, from top: marlin with avocado-poblano puree and yucca fries at Hualani's; Hokuala's resident farmer, Cody Meyer; opposite page: a Kauai ATV ride through a blasted-out mountain tunnel

We're up early again, with just enough time for coffee and fresh fruit from Timbers' vast breakfast spread before we have to hit the road. We don't even bother with showers, because we're about to get dirty. Really dirty. At **Kauai** ATV in Koloa we get outfitted with helmets, goggles, orange bandannas, and, unexpectedly, well-worn T-shirts. "I mean, you can keep yours on, but it's gonna get covered in mud," says Mikayla, our 19-year-old guide, who speaks in an affectless, Daria-like drawl. There are about 20 of us, and once we get buckled into

our four-seater buggy, we're off, playing follow the leader in a single-file line. Chris lets me take first shift at the wheel, and I can't help but scream the first time I dip into a puddle-filled crater, sending mud flying everywhere.

We pull over at a particularly scenic spot overlooking majestic green mountains. "Look familiar?" Mikayla asks. Then she ticks off about 15 movies filmed there, from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *Jurassic Park* to *Mighty Joe Young* and *Joe Versus the Volcano*. "Anybody see *Jurassic World*? Remember the scene with the rolling glass balls?" Lots of people nod, and she points to the field in front of us. "That was right here. But that was CGI, because you can't really

"I can't help but scream the first time I dip into a puddle-filled crater, sending mud flying everywhere."

the Ha'upu Range in 1948 so sugarcane farmers could transport their goods, and on through the jungle to a two-tiered waterfall, where we break for a swim and a snack. The water is bracingly cold, but it feels great to wash off the mud. We munch on Anahola granola bars and chips and fend off the roosters



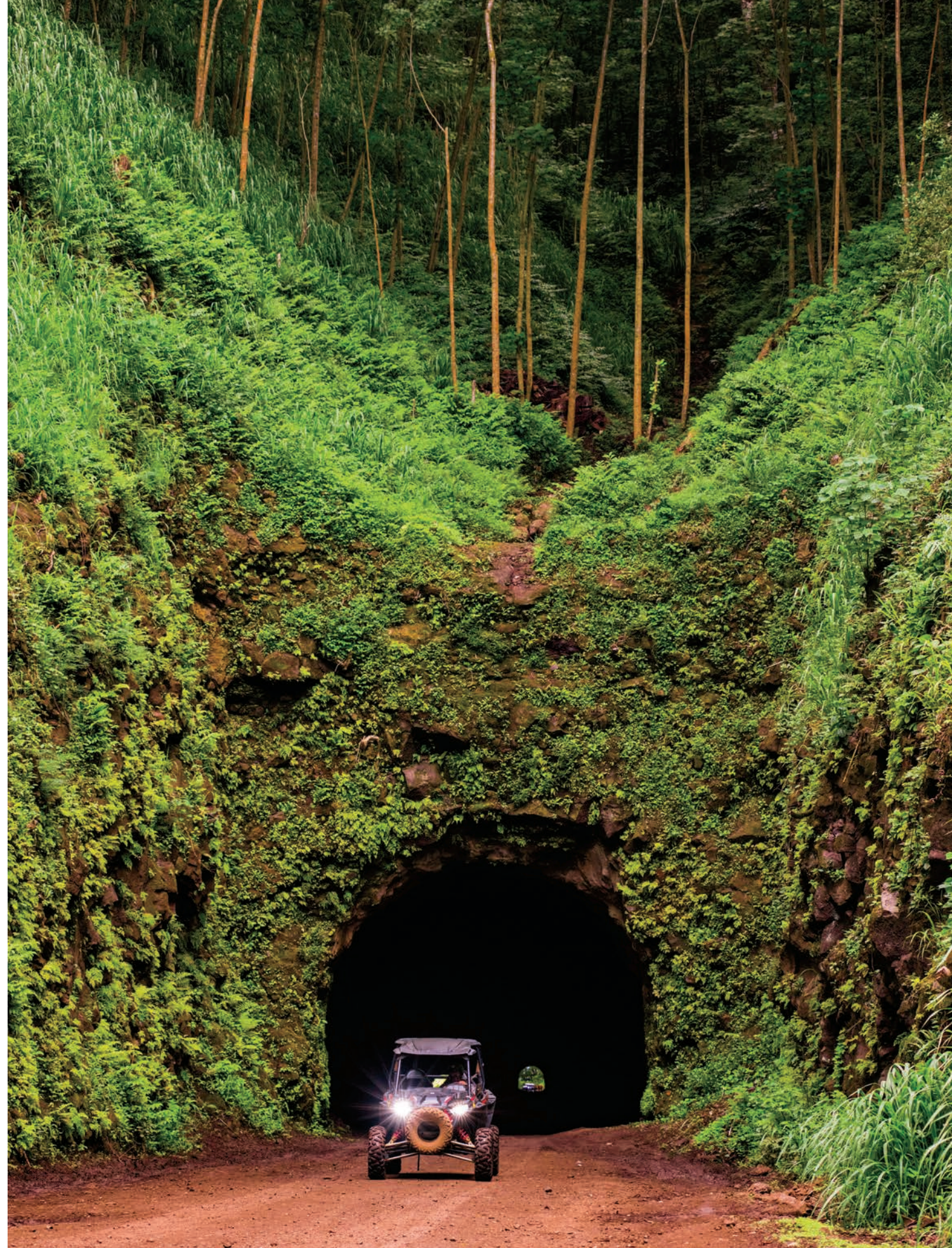
have clear glass balls roll through a cow pasture..."

Chris takes the wheel next and leads us through a half-mile-long tunnel blasted from



trying to score our crumbs. Mikayla tells us that the reason there are so many wild chickens on Kauai is that during the 1982 hurricane, all the fighting cocks broke loose from their cages. "It was a real chicken run!" she says with a laugh. "That's why they're so aggressive." As if on cue, a scrawny red one jumps up on the picnic table and steals one of Calder's Doritos.

After our last stop, exploring a World War II bunker, built in 1942 after the attacks on Pearl Harbor, we hose off and head back to Timbers for a cooking class with Zach Cummings and Phillip Harbin, chefs at the





From left: Opaeka'a Falls; the La Piña cocktail at Duke's; sunset over the infinity pool at Timbers Kauai

resort's farm-to-table restaurant, **Hualani's**. They bring everything we need to make poke and ceviche in our residence, which has an enviably well-designed kitchen. Cody

Meyer, Hokuala's resident farmer, stops by to drop off the produce, still warm from the sun. We sip fresh coconut water and gnaw on strips of sugarcane. I see Calder's eyes widening, the sugar going straight to his brain, and I realize we better get him some solid food, stat.

We start with the ceviche, which we're making with *ono*, or wahoo. "We call it wahoo

because that's what you say when you get one on your line," Harbin jokes. He liberally seasons the fish with kosher and Hawaiian salt and then adds lime juice along with finely diced red onion, jalapeño, red pepper, and daikon. The first bite jolts my mouth awake, and then I'm unable to put down my fork. Even Calder loves it. "Wahoo!" he shouts and

runs around the room after each bite.

Next, we master the poke. "The basis of all poke is Hawaiian salt and seaweed," Cummings explains as he adds those ingredients to a bowl of cubed ahi, along with shaved red onion, toasted kukui nut, a touch of sesame oil, soy sauce, and sea salt. I'm amazed by how different it tastes from the ceviche; the poke is mellower in flavor, letting the fish really sing.

I have one last adventure to tackle before our trip is over: a helicopter tour. Chris decided Calder is too young, so I selfishly have opted to go alone. I drive over to Lihue Airport and check in at **Island Helicopters**, where I'm partnered with five other tourists. Chief pilot Gary Peterson, who's been flying with Island for 19 years, gives us all headsets, and as soon as we take off, he cues up the James Bond theme. It's exhilarating, overwhelming even, to be looking down on all the places I've explored the



last three days. The familiar John Williams trumpet blasts let us know we're ready for our stop at **Manawaiopuna Falls**, which is where the helicopter lands at the start of *Jurassic Park*. "It took three days to get that shot," Peterson says, as we walk over to take photos of the 400-foot-high waterfall, which is accessible only by helicopter. I take a video for my brother (who may or may not have had



a *Jurassic Park* poster in his room in high school).

Back in the sky, Enya leads us into the Waimea Canyon, which is even more gorgeous and mysterious from above, and then we dip alongside Mount Waialeale Crater, one of the wettest spots on Earth. We make our way over to the Napali Coast, and I spot some goats and hikers hugging a particularly narrow path and feel glad that I'm inside the copter.

I make it back just in time for cocktail hour. The three of us wander over to **Duke's**, a casual beachfront spot near Timbers on the Marriott grounds that's named for Duke Kahanamoku, an Olympic gold medal-winning swimmer and the father of modern surfing. We score the perfect table abutting Kalapaki Beach and watch surfers catching mellow waves and tanned youths playing volleyball as we sip over-the-top drinks served in carved-out pineapples. Calder

runs off to play in the sand and after a few minutes returns to the table, out of breath and soaking wet. "Come on! It's so much fun!"

Chris takes Calder's hand and runs with him toward the water while I wave for the check. The sun is starting to set, giving the sky an orange-sherbet glow that you see only on postcards. We're due for dinner at Hualani's, but they'll understand if we're late. I sign the bill and then slip off my flip-flops and dash along the sand to join my family. Chris and I each hold one of Calder's hands and swing him in the air as the waves crash at our calves. My skirt gets wet, but that only makes me want to go in deeper. So we do.

Aloha, Kauai: For decades, the Hawaiian Islands have been United's "little corner of the world." The airline offers more seats and departures from the continental U.S. to Hawaii than any other carrier. Plan your trip today at [united.com](https://www.united.com).

AD