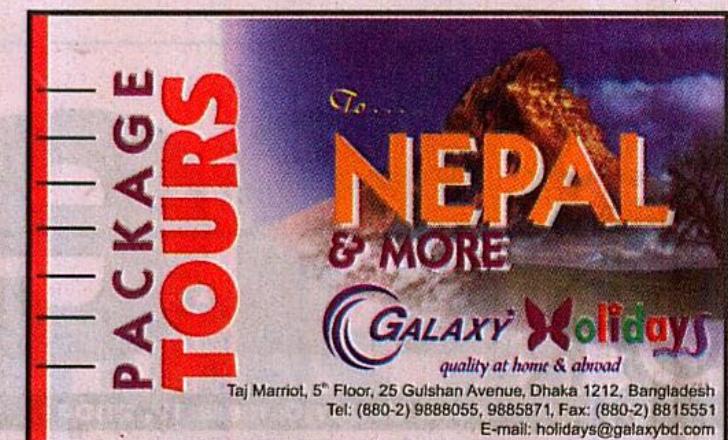




DHAKA SUNDAY OCTOBER 17, 2004

HOLIDAY



LOCATION > HAWAII CATEGORY > FAMILY

To Paradise and Back

FOR years untold, books have been written and songs have been sung about the Hawaiian islands, but upon visiting them, I found that the truth is something that cannot be expressed in any known language.

This summer I traveled to Hawaii for my brother's wedding. A great nature-lover, he chose for his romantic wedding, Kauai, the least "touristy" of the four main



Waimea Falls
(view from helicopter)

Hawaiian islands. Kauai is called the Garden Isle, and is distinguished from the other islands by its rugged, untamed beauty. The cloud-shrouded summit of Mt. Waialeale, the tropical jungle covered slopes of the central mountains, the white sands stringing the coasts and the awesome blue Pacific all around together make the island a paradise.

While infrastructure development and commercialization have altered the faces of most of Maui and Big Island, Kauai is still relatively untouched. The island has only one highway more like a circuitous two lane road which runs around three-quarters of the island. The Na Pali cliffs, 4000-foot knife-edge volcanic rock formations towering above the sparkling blue Pacific, occupy the remaining quarter. No vehicles can pass through, so the only way to see the cliffs, aside from the arduous 11-mile Kalalau hike, is by helicopter or boat. I was fortunate enough to do both.

The house we rented for the

duration of our visit was itself in an ideal location. It was a beautiful villa on the cliffs of the north coast. Looking mauka (away from the sea) one's gaze came to rest on the central mountains, the sky above them changing from moment to moment, sometimes an intense, cloudless azure, or at other times, darkening with smoky clouds whispering of the island's volcanic origins. Makai (towards the ocean), there was the sparkling ocean in shades of turquoise and blue, the towering Kilaeua lighthouse, and just below, the golden sands of Secret Beach. The house had a private entrance to the beach, and a swimming pool at the cliff's edge. The large living room had floor to ceiling glass windows through which we enjoyed a postcard view of the ocean, cliffs and lighthouse. Every morning we were there, some dolphins could be seen arching out of the water.

The first few days, we relaxed in the sun. We drove to the north-east coast for a day of beach lazing at Mololo'a

Bay. It seemed incredible that in the peak tourist season, such a gorgeous stretch of white sand was deserted besides a family of four, a refreshing change from the crowded beach scene of most tropical island resorts. The water was calm and sandy-bottomed, being shallow for a little way out before changing depth rather suddenly. On one side of the bay, a coral reef extended into the ocean like an outstretched arm, accommodating many varieties of fish, sea-turtles, and giant sea slugs, some of which we were fortunate enough to catch glimpses of. In the vicinity of the reef, large, flat rocks encircled and trapped the water. The rock pools were shallower and warmer than the rest of the beach, and my little cousins had quite a frolic!

Another beach we loved was Ke'e beach, lying within the arms of the cliffs where the Kalalau trail has its beginning. To the west you can see the Na Pali coastline

winding away in the distance, and the emerald cliffs make a spectacular backdrop for the glittering sand. At Ke'e too there is ample scope for snorkeling, since the reef curves out from the eastern side of the beach. Ke'e is also famous for its sunsets, and we took full advantage. We went early so that we could savour the slow descent of the fiery ball. At sunset time, the water became choppier than during the day, and its colour deepened into teal with white foam dancing gleefully on the tops of the waves. The sky changed gradually from intense blue to red-orange. It started with the fantastic cloud formations turning pale orange and pink. Then the cliffs started to blush with hues of red from the sun, which had by then made its own transformation from golden yellow to molten lava colour. Finally, it disappeared from view, having apparently dived into the ocean.

Two days later, my brother's future in-laws invited us on a scenic helicopter ride. Now this was the one part I would give anything to repeat. The ride was very emotional, in the sense that the beauty of it was beyond just

seeing it was something to be felt. The helicopter took off from the east coast, and hovered over the Waimea falls, where the principle waterfall's broad path was interrupted and joined with smaller falls, struggling through gaps in the mountainside with all the desperate energy of a person trapped in a dark cave trying to break out into the open air. Then we cut across to Waimea Canyon, called the Grand Canyon of the East. The angry red fissures in the earth and the well-defined red cliffs bordering the path of the Waimea River have a rugged magnificence of their own. Next up was the Na Pali coast. It is widely considered to be the most spectacular coastline in the world, and I have to say I agree wholeheartedly. The emerald cliffs have distinct, jagged edges and literally hundreds of waterfalls meander down their faces. I finally understood why my brother considered it worthwhile to undertake the grueling Kalalau hike - to see these natural wonders up close and personal would definitely be the experience of a lifetime.

As we paused over Na Pali to contemplate their splendor, a light rain passed through, quite a regular feature of the island. The pilot turned to me (I was lucky enough to be sitting next to him, in the front of the seven-seater craft) and asked with a grin, "Have you ever seen a rainbow?" As it turned out, our pilot had a knack for positioning helicopters such that the rainbow could be seen forming, it must have been my lucky day, because there were not one, but two rainbows, one within the other in a 360 degree circle of colour and light. The sheer radiance brought tears to my eyes, and nobody uttered a word for fear of ruining the magic of the moment. As the rainbow started to fade, the aircraft veered in-land towards Mt. Waialeale, the towering volcano at the geographical center of the island. The crater of the mountain is the wettest spot on earth. It rains all year round, and the waterfalls cascading down the sides of the crater are testament to that fact. The pilot flew us close to the side so that

we could have a better view of the waterfalls and we found that what looked like sleek silver serpents slithering down were actually wide sheets of rapid, tumbling water. Being completely surrounded by so many waterfalls was a truly spellbinding experience. The trip went on to complete a full circle of the

fantastic spinning somersaults they can perform. As if aware of our admiration, many of the dolphins leaped out of the water in a perfect symphony of grace. We also saw some giant sea turtles sun-bathing on the rocks. It was different from the aerial view we were closer to the cliffs, so we got a better idea of the

beach, which was more like a gigantic sand-bottom wave pool. The wide arc of coral reef made a distant barrier against which all the waves broke. The water was so shallow that I made it halfway to the coral reef without swimming a stroke. Even my mother, who is very afraid of water, could not resist the lure of the calm, warm water. On our last evening, we went to Tunnels, another snorkeling hotspot. Our feet touched coral almost as soon as we waded into the water, and there was much marine life to be viewed. A large school of zebra fish swam right past my face, oblivious to my presence. Large fish in shades of electric blue, orange tinged brain coral (so named because it resembles the human brain), giant sea slugs I could have stayed down there forever.

However, hours before my flight the next morning, I went out to the hammock on the master lanai (deck) of our house, to say my own private farewell to the ocean. I swam silently for a long time, taking in the beauty before me, trying to memorize every little detail, from the distant lighthouse to the foam on the tips of the waves. That memory is something I will always treasure, along with the other remembrances of my awesome vacation. It is not too much to say, that I feel blessed to have seen such a place.

photo & story FIDA-E-TASHFI



Waimea Canyon (view from helicopter)

island, going over the beautiful resort area of Hanalei Bay, Kilauea (where we were staying) and the sunny beaches of the northeast coast, ending at the airport where we started off.

My brother and his fiance wanted to share their love at Na Pali with the family and friends at the wedding, so one of the wedding events was a catamaran ride to see the west coast. Catamarans are light, twin hull craft often used for racing. You can stand at the front where the hulls narrow out, and taste the salty spray from behind the protective railing. Out in the open ocean, when the boat hits a wave, a wall of sea water rises up, and I got completely soaked standing at the front. On the way, we caught up with a school of dolphins. I doubt I'll ever see dolphins from so close in their natural environment ever again. If I could have reached down from the deck, I could have touched one, they were that close. They were Hawaiian spinner dolphins, so named because

geography of the gorgeous cliffs and valleys that have served as scenery for numerous Hollywood productions, including Jurassic Park, Six Days Seven Nights, and even a James Bond movie. Our captain (who was very friendly) stopped the boat at one point where a waterfall fell past a wide cavern mouth. He steered the front part of the boat into the cavern entrance so that the waterfall fell onto the boat, and those of us in the front got a taste of the purest natural water in the world. It was the most refreshing shower any of us had ever experienced. Later on we dived off the boat for a little dip in the Pacific even as far out as we were, the water was very clear, and we did not need goggles to see underwater. Our outing came to an end soon after that, and we parted from the crew in high spirits.

After the conclusion of the wedding festivities, all too soon, it was time to depart. We made the most of our last two days, visiting two different beaches. One morning was spent at Anini

