

Secluded Retreats on the Big Island

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At the center of the Bamboo Guesthouse at the **Volcano Rainforest Retreat**, a seamless 650-square-foot haiku of a cottage in Volcano, near Volcanoes National Park on the Big Island, thick unpainted beams clutch a windowed cupola high overhead. In place of walls, broad panes of glass yield views of tilting bamboo trees, a Japanese soaking tub and a rain forest so thick with foliage and the sonic veil of crickets and tapping raindrops that the nearest street may as well be in California.

For many visitors to this state, the notion of authentic Hawaii conjures up images of thatched huts accompanied by a duet of ukulele music and crashing surf. In a land where hotel developers cling to the beaten path, getting beyond touristy clichés can be a challenge. Fortunately, the Big Island has a handful of new and nearly new cottages, inns and bed-and-breakfasts that embrace, rather than tame, Hawaii's wilderness.

Kathleen Golden owns the Volcano Rainforest Retreat with her husband, Peter, and designed the new Bamboo Guesthouse, one of four cottages at the B & B, with him and a local builder, Kenneth Lathi. She said they had envisioned it as a temple of sorts: "We wanted to create a sense of sacredness in the place itself."

The interior design was inspired by an abstract silk painting by Phan Nguyen Barker, a Vietnamese-born artist who now lives in Volcano. Her painting, with its central bright red domed shape, is from a show entitled "Temple for Wandering Souls," and hangs prominently on one wall.

In the cottage, carved Buddhas and other sculptured deities and Hawaiian carved objects are arrayed in corners and platforms both indoors and out. A beautiful collection of ceramic Japanese teacups, each bearing a different design, is displayed discreetly on a shelf in the kitchen. Masks, made by a Volcano-based artist, Ira Ono, peek from the trunks of several trees in the surrounding forest.

The Golden's designed each room of the guesthouse with a skylight and large windows, so that the rain forest's beauty - including improbably large fiddleheads unfurling in the shade - seems practically within reach. "We wanted something that would have a seamless quality between ourselves and nature," said Ms. Golden. To that end, the bamboo wainscoting yields to bamboo trees just outside the door, which themselves punctuate the river-rock walkway encircling the house.

That walkway leads to the star attraction: your own Japanese-style ofuro (soaking tub). Big enough for two people to soak neck deep, the tub sits beneath a skylight ceiling, with the water temperature hovering between ideal and perfect.

Rooms at the Bamboo Guesthouse are \$260 a night, with a two-night minimum. Rates include breakfast, which on our visit consisted of a selection of barely passable scones and muffins, accompanied by some excellent local fruit. The owners suggest reserving at least a month in advance. Information: (800) 550-8696; www.volcanoretreat.com.

Some other off-the-beaten track accommodations on the Big Island include these:

Ramashala, a two-building compound that opened this year in Pahoa in the Kehena area, just off the coastal road, functions both as a conventional inn and a spiritual retreat. One building, called Ramashala, is a loosely connected series of four guest rooms and a yoga studio. The other cottage, Prana, has a thousand-square-foot guest room with king bed downstairs and a two-bed sleeping area above. Both houses brim with Balinese furniture, and are gated by more than 60 hand-carved doors made by Balinese artisans.

Meals, cooked to order, are prepared by Bhakti Rinzler, who is also a massage therapist and offers conventional and water massage in a heated pool.



Monica Almeida/The New York Times

The Bamboo Guesthouse, at Volcano Rainforest Retreat.

Rates range from \$275 to \$1,000 a night, depending on the season and availability. Information: (808) 965-0400; www.ramashala.com.

The **Falls at Reed's Island** may be only one mile from downtown Hilo, but an aura of seclusion prevails here. Thick vegetation rises on one side and, on the other, 750 feet of Wailuku River frontage yields to a 25-foot waterfall. A railed walkway leads to a ledge overlooking the river and the falls.

The spacious three-bedroom home, which easily accommodates six guests, opened last year. The three separate pavilions, with modest but tasteful furnishings, are joined by a screened lanai. Another screened-in area houses hot and cold soaking tubs. Guests may stock and use the full kitchen.

Rooms are \$325, double occupancy, a night. Information: (808) 935-7920; www.reedsisland.com.

Across the island, between Kona and Hilo, **Waianuhea**, another bed-and-breakfast inn of slightly earlier vintage (2002), is built on a gradually sloping hillside overlooking cattle pastures and the Pacific. The five-room inn is run on solar power, and has an expansive living room featuring a huge fireplace, big bouquets of fresh-cut flowers and upscale, but not showy, furnishings.

A wide porch opens to an ocean view and a Jacuzzi bath just outside. Tucked in a downstairs corner is a computer with Internet connection. The inn offers a full breakfast menu, ready-to-microwave food in the common room's refrigerator and a late-afternoon wine service.

Rates are between \$170 and \$350 a night. Information: (888) 775-2577; www.waianuhea.com.