

Table of Contents

Day 0: Day of Travel to LA	2
Day 1: Arrival! Day of flashbacks and black sand	4
Day 2: Holding out for a Hilo	7
Day 3: Life's a (black sand) Beach!	11
Day 4: Christmas Eve with Volcanos!	13
Day 5: Christmas on the beach(es)!	18
Day 6: Snorkeling!	21
Day 7: Outty to Maui! (Travel Day)	27
Day 8: Trilogy - Part 2	29
Day 9: Trilogy - Part 3 & a Luau!	33
Day 10: Beach Surfing	37
Day 11: New Years in Oahu	41
Day 12: 2023! Surfing, Waterfall and Turtle Beach	44
Day 13: Kailua Beach and Waikiki	47
Day 13: Aloha, Aulani!	51
Day 14: Rain Rain, Go Away!	54
Day 15: Aulani to the fullest!	57
Day 16: Bye to HI	60

Day 0: Day of Travel to LA

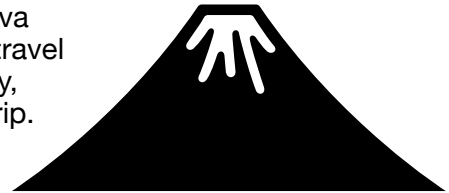
12/21/2022

Start: PHL

End: LA

We're going back to Hawaii! I'm so excited to go back with the boys. I love our adventures with the four of us. I know that Ben will be away at college before I know it and trips like these will be harder (if not impossible) to do in the future.

Hilary is nervously checking the traffic, beach, air, wind, and lava conditions non-stop. I'm so happy I'm married to the perfect travel planner. She has backup plans to the backup plans. Hopefully, things will just go smoothly, and we'll have a safe and happy trip. I keep jokingly ask her the status of Saddle Road (which was almost overtaken by the recently erupting volcano Mauna Loa).



We had a whirlwind of a week leading up to this. In order to take this trip, we had to span a Christmas and a New Years so Hilary could have enough vacation to make this work. So we had to observe Christmas a week early: Friday was Christmas Eve, Saturday was Christmas, Sunday was Hanukkah, and Monday was Ben's birthday. We pulled all that off and now, we're ready to start our travel day.

We drove down to Michael's house and picked him up to drive him to the airport (and to finish off the chocolate Maccabees from the Hanukkah party the other day). (Side note: we put those maccabees in Hilary's purse and they melted all over the place when we found them a few days later.) We all had a pit stop, got back in the car, and then headed to the airport. Hilary was nervously checking traffic patterns to make sure we wouldn't get delayed ("why did it delay 4 minutes? ok, good it's back down to 1 minute delay")



We got to the airport with plenty of time, though, and Michael said goodbye to us and drove off with our car. I almost forgot to give him the keys!

We ate at Geno's steaks! I liked mine ("Provolone with"), Ben's was drowning in grease ("Wiz without"), and Hilary's was a little dry, but it's been so long since I've had a Geno's cheese steak, even if it was at the airport!

Now I'm typing at the terminal, awaiting boarding, and I

can't wait for the adventure Hilary has been meticulously planning for over 3 years. I write these journals when I travel because pictures aren't enough.



You forget the little details, jokes, and stories when enough time goes by. I love reading these later, and seeing the little things that have receded from my brain only to live the adventure one more time. Hopefully, we get to do the same again.



Our view of LA from the room

Side note, we just heard Michael is going to take our CRV to get serviced while we are gone. Thanks, Michael!

On the plane we watched all our downloaded content. I saw the rest of Season 1 of Wednesday on Netflix, and Underground 6, a ridiculous Michael Bay movie.

Later, we got our airport shuttle to the hotel, unpacked and crashed. It felt like it was 1 am for us. We had a very scenic view of LA. It's just how I remember it... spread out, full of traffic and tons of air quality alerts on my phone.

Day 1: Arrival! Day of flashbacks and black sand

12/21/2022

Start: LA

End: Kona to Hilo, Hawaii

We took a shuttle to the airport, but it only runs every 30 minutes or so, and we just missed it, so we waited in the lobby. One thing I also remember about LA is that it makes people cut in line and get a little “cut-throat”. So we stood outside in line, rather than just sitting in the lobby and waiting for the shuttle to arrive. If we waited inside, we would risk not getting a spot on the shuttle. I can’t wait to experience the “Aloha” spirit of the islands.



Got some dunkin donuts in the airport. And played on our phones trying out anime tik tok filters.

We got on our plane, and I sat next to a fella who thought it would be socially acceptable to take his shoes off for the whole flight. I didn’t realize they were his shoes and I picked them up and was about to tell Jacob not to do that, when slowly it dawned on me ... those aren’t Jacob’s shoes... THOSE AREN’T JACOB’S SHOES!!! After dousing my hands with sanitizer and 5 1/2 short hours later, we were landing in Kona on the Big Island in Hawaii!



We had a ramp right off the side of the plane to the tarmac, where we walked right into the airport. It’s like no other airport I’ve ever been to, but immediately, memories came flooding back from 20 years ago. That was the airport where Hilary and I ended our honeymoon 20 years ago. The last picture we

had in Hawaii was me writing in my paper journal. I can still remember the exact spot (because we didn’t want to leave!)



Kona Airport 20 years ago

After we picked up our rental car (a new Kia Sorrento) we headed over to the Pine tree cafe for lunch. We had an amazing lunch of Korean Chicken and Ahi Tuna Belly. And it came with a tuna macaroni salad that



tasted exactly what my mom gave me for lunch every day when I was in 2nd grade or so. I loved it back then. Took me right back. And the chicken tasted like a much better version of that “Crunchikin” place in Ocean City. Jake couldn’t finish his, so bonus! We tasted some of his chicken teriyaki. It was the best. There was quite a wait for everything because I think everyone who was on our plane (including some of the flight staff was in there. One funny thing that happened there was we gave them my name for the order (“Jason”) and TWICE, they called out for Jason, but it was other Jasons. I haven’t had that happen in a while. I guess middle-aged guys named Jason are going to

Hawaii.

We picked up a case of water from the convenience store next to the cafe, and we were on our way. We drove down the infamous Saddle Road, which was still open. Luckily, the eruption stopped before we got here and the lava flow didn't reach the road to close it. If it were closed, we would have had to take a huge detour around the whole island to get to our hotel, which wouldn't have been ideal. We did see the area that was affected by the lava flow, but now the mountain that was violently erupting just a few weeks ago had snow on top of it. It's funny, when we picked up our car, it was hot (like 77 degrees), then we climbed up these roads to cut across the island and it would drop down to 65 degrees and then go back up to 70+ again). It really varied! We listened to Ukulele Christmas music as we drove around the island. The vegetation and weather patterns changed at least 2-3 times as we drove across the island. It is fascinating how the trees and vegetation changes on a short, 55 mile journey.



When we got to our hotel in Hilo, we checked in, and we flipped out because our hotel has a view overlooking Hilo Bay, one of the most picturesque views you could hope for in a hotel. Just beautiful. Ben was really into it, too. We just sat there on the balcony for a while, staring at the water, watching people jump off these stone platforms into the water of the bay 10-30 feet below. There were unique birds and sounds, too. It was worth it just to sit and take it all in.

We had a little sunlight left, so we decided to check out a black sand beach nearby (Richardson Ocean Park), but on the way, I realized we were on Banyan Drive! This is a famous road with all these named Banyan trees named after famous people. The hotel is right in front of the one named after Babe Ruth! I remember posing in front of it 20 years ago with Hilary! It is so crazy that now the boys are both posing in front of that same tree in the same way I did all those years ago.



Above: Boys in front of Babe Ruth tree (2022)
Right: Jason in same spot (2002)

We drove out to Richardson Ocean Park and it was largely under construction with fresh cement blocking some pathways, but it still looked amazing there. The beach entrance reminded me of shark's cove because there were some rock steps that were slippery, so we went extra slow to not have a



repeat of that day. But we took off our socks and shoes and put our feet in the sand and water. The sand was really soft and the water was very cold, but crystal clear. You could see all the way to the bottom. The clouds on the horizon looked a bit foreboding, but beautiful, which I hear is common for here as they're known for their rainbows in Hilo.

We took lots of pictures and video of this beach park and walked around a bit, too. There were some folks around, but not too many. We went to go out to dinner after that, so we went to this sushi place called



Genki Sushi! It was so cool. There was a bit of a wait, but the weather was nice (70 degrees), even though the sun had gone down, and it was raining. We just sat outside on a bench and relaxed while we waited to be called. Then, we sat down, and they had a tablet for us to order our food on. And what I didn't realize was that a short while later, our food would come zooming out on a conveyor belt shaped like an alligator (and another shaped like a bullet train). We ordered all these plates and then then we realized that's how they charge you ... by the color of the plate! I'm still full thinking about all the food we got (Udon for the kids, tempura rolls, gyoza, and so much more, ending with mochi ice cream).



Ben and Jacob were running around in circles after we were done, so either they liked it or they were high on caffeine. On our way back to the room, we saw koi fish in a pond the hotel had created. I think they thought we were going to feed them because they rushed over to us. We could hear the local coqui frogs chirping away into the warm night air.

The kids took showers while I plugged every device known to man in to recharge. We all needed to recharge, as well. We had a full day considering we woke up at 5 am in LA and are now getting ready to pass out at 9 pm in Hawaii. I still can't believe we're back here. I'm so glad Hilary is great at planning these trips. We've set our alarms for tomorrow to get up early to watch the sun rise over the bay from our balcony.



Day 2: Holding out for a Hilo

12/22/2022 (That's a lot of "2's")

Location: Hilo & Volcano

Weather: perfect 73 and sunny

We woke up early, and I didn't sleep well at all last night. The boys kept snoring, and Hilary kept waking me up thinking it was me! :) Plus, I think I had too much caffeinated soda too late in the day.

But getting up early was worth it. Plus, we weren't fully adjusted to the time difference yet, so it wasn't too hard to get up at 6 am. We went to this little island (called "Coconut Island") we could see from our room the day before. It had a little walking path right from our hotel. There were some clouds in the morning and not a clear line of sight of the sun with the hotel in the way, but it was still a beautiful sky, just the same. Plus, we could see the sun hitting Mauna Kea. When the clouds cleared later, we could see snow-capped mountains.



From the island, we were right next to Liliuokalani Gardens, so we headed out there to check out the unique plants and animals. There were beautiful displays of trees, flowers, birds, and structures you don't typically see! We even saw a Nene (a goose looking bird). Hilary had to remind me that we took pictures in this garden 20 years ago, too! The water in the garden was so clam it was like a mirror reflecting all that beauty. On our way back through the path, two nice couples offered to take our picture for us. We got to talking and we think they are locals because they referred to each

other as the "mayor of coconut island". One guy had a headband with fake hair on the top that made him look like he had gray frosted tips. I was so out of it from the night before, though, I could barely carry on a conversation. He asked, "How'd you guys get here?" I said, "on a plane." I thought that's what he meant!

We clearly needed coffee, so we went to get some frosted coffee drinks for me and Hilary, smoothies for the boys, and some breakfast sandwiches at "Just Cruisin' Coffee.". It was really good and much better than typical drive-through. We were well-fueled for our trip to Rainbow Falls. A short drive later (with our Ukulele Christmas music sound-track with fun factoids from our GyPSy App tour guide), and we were at Rainbow falls. It was fun to see the plaques and





history here where people have been coming to visit Rainbow falls for over 100 years, sometimes by horseback, and eventually by car. We took a picture where we made it look like ben was drinking the whole waterfall.

From there, we drove up 40 miles to Waipio Valley lookout to return to the place where Hilary and I went horseback riding on our honeymoon, and where apple filmed our screen saver. But, alas, it was not meant to be. When

we got 5 minutes from the lookout point, we saw a dreaded sign: "Road closed: local residents only" - They were serious about it to, as they stopped us and had us turn around. There were a lot of downed trees and power lines from a storm that had blown through 2 days ago. So, we consoled ourselves the best way we knew how ... with food.



We went to Tex's Drive In and got some Malasadas (like fruit/chocolate filled donuts). We got way too many of them, trying the Mango, Chocolate, Strawberry, and Pineapple filling flavors.



We headed out to Laupahoehoe Point next. It is a beautiful spot with a tragic backstory. Back in April 1, 1946, a terrible 50' Tsunami leveled this area, it's school, the huts, and killed all the students and teachers who were there at that time except for 2 who survived floating in the ocean for hours before they were rescued. We saw these huge waves crashing. Luckily, the rocks on the shore broke the waves before they hit the shore. We spent a lot of time here because it was so beautiful and there were so many spots to watch all the waves crash. We even skipped a few volcano rocks, but they were so brittle, that when they hit any other rock in the surf, they would split apart.

We wanted to see some more big waterfalls, so we left for Akaka falls (and yes made a lot of "Kaka" 🐛 jokes while doing so. Hilary was nervous going there, though, because we didn't have any cell service to buy parking between where we were and the Falls. We kept pulling over whenever we had a single bar, but then it would go away. Luckily, we got service long enough for Hilary to buy parking passes as we were pulling in. We hiked the 1 mile trail to see Kahuna falls, first, which was a 300 ft tall waterfall. The lookout point there wasn't very roomy and there were people there already, though, so we quickly went on the the big boy: Akaka falls.





After stopping a few times to rest because there were a ton of stairs involved, we arrived at the overlook for Akaka falls. This was a much better view to see all 442 ft of water falling from the sky all the way down to the pool below. This whole place looked like something out of Jurassic Park. The ferns were enormous and had red pods hanging down from them, and since none of us are botanists, we assumed that's where the new ferns come from.

On the way out of the parking lot we saw a farm stand to

get some fresh fruit and coconuts, so we stopped in. They tapped into some fresh coconuts, and we drank out of them with straws! After we finished all the coconut juice, they sliced them open and separated out all the coconut "meat" and we had fresh coconut to eat! It wasn't as sweet as I would have expected, but it was very filling. We also had some apple bananas, which tasted a little sweeter (and vaguely of apple, go figure). They were tiny little bananas.



After petting the farmers' dog, we were on our way back to Hilo to see if we could catch the Tsunami museum, which is a big attraction for Hilo because it also got severely affected by the Tsunami in 1946. After that tragedy, measures went into place to protect the island with an early warning system. When we arrived to the museum, however, it was closed since November! So, instead of going there, we went to plan b: finding the best Mochi on the island. (and picking up more fruit from a farmers market on the way). This fruit looked like no fruit we typically eat. More on that tomorrow.



With a backpack full of really heavy fruit, we made our way to the Two Ladies Kitchen, where they are rated to have some of the best Mochi on the island. There was a line out the door, but we had time. The line was moving pretty well, when the two women in front of us ordered literally \$350 worth of Mochi ... It must have been over 20 boxes. Most people order 1 box, so they had to back their car in to load it into their trunk. The line basically stood still for 45 minutes. But, we didn't have much left to do, so we

waited, but my fruit-laden backpack kept feeling heavier and heavier. Luckily, Ben helped me out after a while.

After about an hour, we got our Mochi (I got Oreo and Peanut Butter ones), and we left for dinner. (We didn't eat the mochi right there or it would have spoiled our dinner)- We went to Pineapple's! It's rated as the best restaurant in town, and it didn't disappoint. Plus, we bumped





into our new friends from this morning near coconut island. Ben got a virgin pineapple drink (we all got non-alcoholic drinks because I'd be driving soon). He must have eaten that pineapple down to the pulp. When we was done with the drink, he asked for a spoon. We watched a surfing contest on the TV over the bar while a warm breeze floated through the placed. It was all very open and was just a great place to end the evening (at 4:00 pm!) We were still pretty tired and getting used to the new time. We got this calamari that was awesome. It wasn't cut up like rings, and it was very tender. I got the coconut-crusted Ahi Tuna. So good! We finished with a lichee dessert we split 4 ways just to taste it. That was good, too. It reminded me of a sweet cheesecake or flan consistency with graham cracker crust. I tried to take a picture, but it didn't last long.

After settling up at Pineapple's, we traced our steps back to our car, and drove to our next place: an airbnb in the town of Volcano, right outside Volcano national park. It's a beautiful cabin, with a bungalow for Jacob upstairs, a two story family room, and a whole separate cottage for Ben in the back. He even has his own half-bathroom in there! We're exhausted so, going to pass out now!



A view of the dining area of the AirBnB

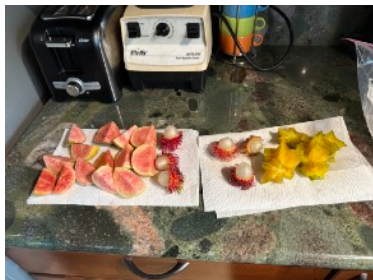
Day 3: Life's a (black sand) Beach!

12/23/2022

Location: Volcano

Weather: Sunny on the beach, rainy back at the room - 80 degrees!

We all slept much better last night. We all got up around 7 am or so local time and were able to finally see what the place looked like from the outside. Since this is located in a "lights out" area near a national park, they limit most exterior illumination.



For breakfast, Hilary cut up all the fruit that was in my backpack! We had Strawberry Guava, a type of Hairy Lichee (not the official name, just what I call it), star fruit, and an avocado the size of your head! Between that and muffins Hilary had picked up the day before, we were eating like kings! The guava was good, but the seeds were very crunchy, so it was our

least favorite, and the star fruit were really nice and ripe. The best I ever had of those.

We took a tour of the outside of the place, and it looks so tiny, but it feels really big inside. I think it helps that Ben has his own hut in the back. He said today, "call me when you're ready. I'll be in my house." I think he likes having his own space there.



Today, Hilary shuffled some things around so we'd have time to go to the black sand beach on this side of the Island. So, we went to the Punalu'u black sand beach. There were a fair number of black rocks mixed in with the black sand, but it was really nice. The water was too cold for me to go in all the way, but it was refreshing for sure. Every hour or so, the lifeguards would announce to the snorkelers to clear the channel for the boats to get to the loading dock. It was fun to watch them load the boats out of the water. The beach was fairly crowded, too. We met some friends who asked us to watch their stuff. I guess we look trustworthy. :) It was

a not the same friends we met yesterday.

We sat in a great spot in the shade of some coconut palm trees (but not directly under them as we've heard some horror stories of coconuts just falling from the sky and hurting you). And we were by a little lake that had some beautiful lily pads and water lilies on there. Mostly we just ate lunch / snacks Hilary had picked up from a supermarket on the way, read our books, took an occasional dip / swim, and take some naps! In other words, a successful beach day! My favorite part was just laying down, looking up at the blue sky and palm trees and listening to the wind rustle through the fronds. It was a



sound that surrounded us because there were trees all around, and it was very relaxing. Hilary and I took a walk and found a spot where there was a park with some better bathrooms. It was in rough shape, though... it looked like the roof was missing in spots.



Before we left, I was determined to see a sea turtle because there were so many sighted in the area, we just would keep missing them. But lo and behold, there was a sea turtle waving to us! Okay, it was kind of flipping its fin to keep itself lodged between some rocks while it chowed down on what looked like algae on some rocks.

On our way out, we saw a barefoot guy climb up a palm tree, and he was kicking down the dead branches / fronds. He must have been hired to do some tree management, but it looked impressive.

For dinner, we wanted to make our way up to a food truck we heard was really good, ("Tuk Tuk Thai Food") and it did not disappoint. The way up to the truck was foggy and spitty rain that was annoying because our visibility was

so bad we had to slow down a bunch. Luckily, we made it in time because they were almost out of everything. We got some spring rolls and some summer rolls and got a variety of curries. We ate the rolls tailgate style out of the back of the Kia, but we saved the curry for back at the house. The only downside was that they made Jacob's a little too spicy, so he had to split Hilary's.



Then we showered up (the hot tub was not warm enough to use - only 75 degrees), and I lit a fire in the wood stove. UPDATE- it burned out in 10 minutes. We're not sure about the flue / chimney situation, so we're going to leave it not lit.

Jake's favorite part: relaxing & SNL

Ben's favorite: the beach

Hilary's favorite: relaxing on the beach

Day 4: Christmas Eve with Volcanos!

12/24/2022

Location: Volcano to Kona

Weather: Mostly Sunny and varying from 60-83 degrees

We had a much busier start to today. We got up at 6 am and packed up everything and tidied up the cabin by 7 am sharp! It's always a little stressful worrying about forgetting something on the way out. But we did it!



Today's focus was getting through Volcano national park in a day. It is such a great park. You could easily spend a week here if you wanted to see every scenic overlook and every lava flow. Hilary had picked out the best ones for us to look at in advance, so all we had to do was put on the GyPSy app and the tour guide narrated our journey. First stop: Kilauea Iki Crater overlook: a good overview of the park from high up. We'd get closer throughout the day, but the kids were both immediately interested in the steam that was rising out of the caldera of the most active volcano in the world ... just not this week. Kilauea stopped erupting JUST last week. Hilary found

out, then pivoted our whole day to make up for it. There's a trail there that you can take, but it's 4 miles long. We saw a family with little kids go down there (Hilary even took their "before" picture). I think they might still be there as I write this. Hopefully, they're okay!

We kept hopping in and out of the car and driving to new places in the park. They really do a great job here keeping the roads and trails in tremendous shape, especially because the lava keeps messing with what can be open and what is not safe to see anymore.

The next stop on our drive was the Thurston Lava Tubes, which was this giant cave where lava would flow through it. The outside of the lava flow would harden when exposed to air, but the lava would still keep flowing, so it would create these caves or tunnels. We walked down a short trail and arrived at the tubes themselves. We got there so early that they hadn't turned the lights on yet, so we had to use our phone flashlights to see! I thought I would be more creeped out by being in the confined space, but it was just a little creepy with the ceiling dripping down on us and us walking through puddles we couldn't see. I almost hit my head a few times, but luckily I caught it in time.



The next section we drove through was the coolest road, called "Chain of Craters Road" where you get to see the past craters and lava flows of volcanos past and present. We were driving through this lush vegetation when all of a sudden, we emerged into a black clearing, where all vegetation was gone. This was the first old lava flow from the 70s, and the kids went "woah" because it was a black landscape in all directions with no trees at all ... just shiny, black rock from where the lava cooled all those years ago. It was beautiful in it's own way, and it was neat seeing a snow-

capped Mauna Loa in the background of all our pictures at the beginning of the day. That would be only the first of many lava-covered landscapes we would explore today, though.

The next stop was Keauhou Trail, where we stepped out onto the rocks themselves and it was just a giant field of flat, black rock. We didn't go down that trail, but simply looked all around at the nothing that was left after the destructive force of all that lava flowing through this former forest. We stopped to hear what animals were around, and we could barely hear any chirping of some far-away birds, but there was very little noise from any animals. One interesting thing we learned as that as lava flows around these areas of thick vegetation, sometimes it can cut off or create an island of a forest. That forest could be ecologically isolated from the trees in the area and it creates a type of time capsule to study what the forest was like when it was cut off from the outside world.



The next stop was the Mauna Ulu Overlook, which added not just immense lava lookouts, but a great view of the ocean, as well. Every time we would stop, it just amazed me the scale and scope of this big island. It truly is a marvel. This overlook had a nice boardwalk and some picnic tables, too. But it wasn't time for lunch just yet. We had to see the Petroglyph trail.

This was the same petroglyphs trail we saw 20 years ago, but we wanted to share this with the kids because it was so amazing. What I forgot was that the trail is very rocky (walking over old lava flows) and 0.7 miles to get to a nice boardwalk overlooking the petroglyphs and .7 miles back. It was getting really hot as we walked this trail and luckily we had brought some water, because it was more strenuous than I remember. I checked my journal from back then ... no mention of the rocky hike to GET to the petroglyphs. I was probably in better shape back then, and I also didn't have to consider a complaining 11-year-old the whole time.



When we made it to the petroglyphs, it was amazing, though. To think that parents of children 400-800 years ago would carve into the rocks and place their newborn's umbilical cord in the center hole to bring them long lives! And there were thousands of these. Some looked like over exaggerated stick figures of a very tall figure. Others looked like a bullseye target. Their meaning was largely lost to time, but luckily the glyphs remain. I wonder if there were landmarks to help the originators of the petroglyphs find the location again.

We made it back to the car alive and well. We only passed a few other groups as we returned, some quipping that "I can't believe we're walking all this way to see ancient graffiti." I think they were missing the point.

We drove to the end of Chain of Craters Road to where Hilary and I saw lava flowing 20 years ago. We saw the Holey Sea Arch, a natural structure where the ocean carved away an arch in the rock after years and years of it pounding the shore. It's just amazing how the forces of nature work against each other. Volcanos making more land and ocean waves eroding it away. Eventually, this arch will fall, but other arches along the coast line may take its place.



They blocked off auto travel to the 2003 flow, so we walked the paved road to that flow. We think it's the same one we saw 20 years ago, but we couldn't be certain. Things are always changing in this park! The kids were not impressed because they cleared the flow off the road. Instead of seeing lava overtake a road and all the road signs, they had ground down the lava over the road to be a type of path now.

Now, all that I described above was

before 11 am and before lunch. The boys were getting restless and hungry, so it was time to go to "The Rim" restaurant that is in the Volcano House Hotel, residing just on the rim of Kilauea. In fact, our window had a great view of the smoldering caldera. So while we ate, I just kept staring out at it. We really have seen amazing things. I'm very grateful. This reminded me of the grand canyon, but not on that extreme a scale (even though this is very big). Even though it wasn't erupting, it was neat to see all the steam and sulfur venting out the edge of the caldera.



Unfortunately, there was an Eagles football game on today, so Ben was watching that while we were taking in nature's splendor, but he didn't get too annoyed when they lost to Dallas. Lunch was pretty good, but you were definitely there for the view more than the food.



After lunch, we drove to this trail where you could see a bunch of the steam vents up close and some of the sulfur vents, too. The steam vents were funny because as we walked by them, the wind shifted, and Ben and I had our glasses fog up and we couldn't see where we were going. It was remarkable how warm the steam from the vents were. The sulfur trail was a little more intimidating because there were warning signs around if you had lung problems to stay away, so we only did a quick glance at these and went back to the car. They looked a

lot like the steam vents anyway. We drove up the road a little ways and came upon the Kilauea overlook, which was the best view of the caldera we've had all day. The multi-layered edges of this thing were remarkable and you couldn't see it all before this one overlook. All the pictures and video I took don't do it justice because it's hard to capture the scale of this mountain.

After the post-lunch adventures, Hilary saw a bakery she was dying to try (and who am I to say "no" to baked goods). This was in the town of Naalehu (Punalu'u Bake Shop). She picked up some more malasadas (donuts) and cookies to tide us over until dinner.



We wanted to visit the southern most point in the United States, but it was on sacred land, so there were signs stating to keep away. The last time we were there, we kind of stumbled onto that point as we were looking for the green sand beach, but this time, it wasn't in the cards. So, we got within a mile of the southern most point in the United States, and could see the ocean from our car. We were looking at Antarctica (7,500 miles away from it, anyway). Hilary and the boys got out of the car to see the crazy people go cliff diving into the ocean. And Ben had to warn Jake not to keep walking because there was a hole in the path that opened up to the ocean down below. The biggest adventure was the port-o-potty's they had there. I cannot

describe to you how disgusting they were, but just know I couldn't even use them, and I'm a dude. There was a bungee cord to help keep the door closed... and it didn't work.

It was time to leave Volcano and head to Kona, where we're staying for the next few days. It took 2 hours to drive there, and our Ukulele mix on Apple music is getting a little stale. I need to find more music. Luckily, our Gypsy app told us all about the history of Hawaii, the kings, and representatives, and how it became a part of the United States.

After 2 hours, we dropped the luggage and the kids off at the new place, went grocery shopping really quick, unloaded the groceries, and picked up the kids again to drive to dinner. One side-note, the grocery store was a little hectic, but we forgot, this was Christmas Eve! What were we expecting? This town is amazing and has a nice snorkeling beach right down the road from where we're staying. There's a lot of nice stores around, and we could see the sun set on the ocean from here. We had reservations for dinner at Izakaya Shiono, so we saw the sun set from the car on the way there. It reminds me a lot of where we stayed in Maui - just a nice beach town with a great condo walking distance from the beach. Luckily, after all that driving today, dinner was only 15 minutes away. So we ate outside and ordered two giant boats of sushi, and it was great. The sashimi was such a good quality, and I ate everything Jacob didn't like, so it worked out perfectly.



We got back to our condo after dinner, and watched lego masters finale on TV while we ate pints of ice cream for dessert. You couldn't ask for a better, fun-filled day. Oh, and the toilets here have bidets! I may try that later.



Our Airbnb condo in Kona

Day 5: Christmas on the beach(es)!

12/25/2022

Location: Kona & Waikoa Area

Weather: Sunny and warm! (80+ degrees)

We all woke up at 7 am and I cut up some breakfast papaya and avocado and some Hawaiian bread we picked up from the bakery yesterday. We ate overlooking our balcony view of the ocean. This is really the nicest place we've stayed so far.

Hilary researched some great beaches in the northern part of the big island where we could stay near so we don't need to travel as far to dinner and can stay on the beach longer. And by researched, I mean, she's figured this out months (or years) ago and has been running scenarios in her head every night as she drifts off to sleep.



So, we drove off to Spencer's Beach Park. There was plenty of parking, and we were relieved because we figured there'd be a lot of folks trying to get to the beach on Christmas since it's the only thing open! (where "we figured" means "Hilary figured this out months to years ago ...etc...") So we parked, got all our chairs out of the car, planted the umbrella in the sand, got settled, and took a dip in the ocean, and it was murky and there was sticks and crud floating everywhere. Ben said that it reminded him of swimming in a lake. So after some hemming and hawing on my part. — (I just wanted to not relocate our entire camp and take a nap on the beach) — we unplanted the umbrella, folded up all

the chairs, and carried everything back to the car to find a beach that didn't evoke an image of swimming in raw sewage. ("I love it!")

So we drove up the road to a beach that was behind a nice resort. They had no more public parking available. This is a trick we've discovered the hotels do to block public beach access indirectly. Since they're not allow to block access to the beach since it's a public good for Hawaii, they just limit how many public parking spaces they offer. This fills up fast, and then you've effectively blocked off access from the public to give exclusive access to resort guests.

So, we drove up to the next beach, called Hapuna beach. This one is rated as one of the best beaches in the area and after comparing it to the compost beach, we could see why: there was pillowy-soft sand and great waves breaking against the rocks. The only catch was we had to pay for parking, so after we bought a parking ticket, we were committed. We did the calculus of how close to set up camp to other people ... not too close to



be rude, but not giving enough space so that others would fill in the gap we left between folks. Luckily, as a Jersey Shore aficionado, we chose a great spot and no one plopped down in front of us. This beach was great! It had a nice, gradual grading to the water so there was no sudden drop-off, and there was no brown muck like there was at the last beach we were at. Also, there were waves! We were kicking ourselves for not bringing the boogie boards, because the waves looked nuts. They were probably consistently the size of the biggest waves I've ever seen in Wildwood. The current was pulling you toward this giant cliff, though, so you had to be mindful of that. Also, you had to tread carefully, as every now and then there would be a stick or log underneath the water you didn't see. One thing that was absent was there were no sea shells. I don't know why they were so absent, but it may just be timing-related or how this one beach was set up.



Ben, Jake and I took turns battling the waves all afternoon, and it was a lot of fun. I body surfed a few in, but one wave was so big, I couldn't even go under it. It rolled me around like I was in a laundry machine. So we kept further back from those breakers.

I was able to take a nap, eat lunch and snacks and finish my book (I read "The Godfather").

Another fun past-time was just hanging back a little bit and watching people's faces as they turn around to realize there's a huge wave crashing down on them. Jake kept laughing hysterically.



It was really odd and wonderful that we were celebrating Christmas on a beach in Hawaii in 80+ degree weather. It was easy to forget that it was Christmas (and the last night of Hanukkah), but there were a few reminders. One guy had a light-up Christmas light necklace. Folks had holiday hats on, and on the way to the beach, we passed a lot of cyclists who were biking in fun Christmas stockings. On the beach, another guy made a snow man out of sand.

We eventually ran out of snacks, and were getting a little sun-soaked, so we needed to call it the end of our beach day around 3:00 pm. Besides, we had dinner reservations at 4:15, so we had to get cleaned up first. We had heard there was a place to shower at Spencer's beach (the place we were at initially), but when we got there, they did have some outdoor showers, but no changing areas we could find. We ended up changing in the handicapped stalls in the spider-filled bathrooms. We didn't notice when we were first there, but they had a lot of tents set up. It looked like a great camp site overlooking the ocean.



You could smell the tent material in the air as you walked by and it took me back to the days camping in my childhood.



After we got changed into our “Aloha-wear,” we drove up to Merriman’s for a nice Christmas dinner! It was a fixed price menu, and I chose the Hapa Style Shoyu Poke for an appetizer, and a New York Strip Steak for entree. They even brought out little cups of soup for us to try. When Ben got up to use the restroom, Santa came into the restaurant and handed out candy canes and he had an elf with a funny animated hat. She gave Jacob a gift card, too! (\$15 at Starbucks!) I even had my first Mai Tai drink (Hilary had a Margherita)!

We finished the meal with a Chocolate Torte & Lilikoi Mousse (and I put the candy cane in

my decaf french press coffee! The food was delicious, and everyone was super-nice there, too.

We drove back the hour drive to our place, and saw an amazing sunset from the road. We played the game “is that a cloud or a mountain” as we went, too, because it’s difficult to tell sometimes!

When we got back to the room, we did some loads of laundry, watched Ben’s Youtube Channel, Daily Dose of Internet, and I wrote in my journal, which is what I’m doing right now.

Day 6: Snorkeling!

12/26/2022

Location: Kona

Weather: Sunny and warm! (80+ degrees)

We woke up this morning to sliced bread and unpeeled bananas (a dad-made breakfast specialty). We quickly got in the car (this time just around the corner!) to get to our snorkeling outing in Kealahou Bay with Sea Quest Hawaii tours.



We navigated to the right spot in the parking lot, went to the bathroom which was a literal s\$%# show, and then we were called to our ship. I say ship, but this was a flat bottom boat with seating for 8 and 12 people were on board. Luckily, we sat on the interior seats. The rest of our fellow travelers had to sit on the outside edge of the boat and hang on to the rope to keep from getting thrown overboard!

And when we took off, this boat flew down into the ocean. We got some serious air and came crashing down in spots. I make it sound dangerous because this was what was going through my mind at the time. In reality, this was a very fun experience. None of us got sea sick, which I don't know how that happened, and none of us got thrown overboard. Jacob was grabbing my hand extra tight and laughing whenever we would hit a real giant wave with the speed boat. Our captain Jill stopped the boat at one point, and we were looking at the beautiful green big Island of Hawaii, bobbing along in the crystal deep blue water beneath us. She was really great in



Captain Jill

pointing out all kinds of great Hawaii facts. One that stuck with me was when she asked, "how far deep do you think it is to the bottom of the ocean under us right now?".

It turns out, where we were (about a mile off shore) it was over 1500 feet deep to the bottom of the ocean there. There's no continental shelf, so it just drops off very suddenly. I knew it was a steep drop-off, but for some reason, this fact terrified me. What demon could be lurking down there? What if I just hit my head, passed out, and sank into the crystal blue depths? What if I dropped my phone? Luckily, none of those things happened, but I clutched my phone in its water-proof case, just the same.

Captain Jill throttled the boat back to cruising speed and headed toward a protected bay area. At this point, I asked, "ummm ... about how deep is the area we'll be snorkeling in?". And she said, "oh about 5-10 feet.". "Perfect," I thought. I can recover my phone and loved ones if I needed to.

As we got close to the snorkeling area, we were handed out flippers and snorkel goggles. Jill and her assistant were asking what shoe size, and I said "14", and she said, "14? You don't even need flippers! haha". I always appreciate a flipper joke. We got vests for Hilary and Jacob just to be safe, and a few pool noodles for us, too. Ben jumped in the water and was the most adventurous. Then, after making sure Jacob and Hilary were set up, I jumped in, too.



Bubbles from Below!

What

amazed me

was the salt content was so high in this bay that we could float even without the pool noodles or vest. After a short while, even Hilary and Jacob gave me their vests and asked me to return them to the boat. The boats couldn't be anchored because we were over a living reef, and the anchor would damage it. So, the boat was moving around while I swam the vests back.

Also, shortly after I got in the water with Ben, there were a TON of little bubbles, like I was

swimming through seltzer. We don't know what it was, but it was amazing to see and feel. It kind of tickled! Perhaps there was a school of fish underneath us we spooked and that was them all yelling "look out!" at the same time? (Update: we found out later this could have been shrimp)



We all floated along the coast, looking at fish, coral, and dodging other snorkelers. There were a ton of them all around. Ben would get really bold and just take off in a direction. I was holding Jacob's hand, so Hilary would take off toward Ben, but he was faster.

It was truly a beautiful spot, though. It was at a cliff and a natural rock jetty of sorts, so it protected the bay. Other, larger boats had fun music playing, and people were even jumping off the 15 foot tall diving board they had on the boat, shouting "yahooo!". The sun was hitting the water and side of the cliff and I would just have to stop sometimes and admire the sheer beauty we were seeing. Also, I kept having to empty my snorkel mask. It took me literally until I handed them back in later to ask, "hey, does having facial hair mess with the seal on these masks?" Then, I learned, "Yes, yes it does!"





We also saw (from the water, anyway) the monument to where Captain Cook was killed in 1779. Apparently, he tried to capture the King hostage, and the folks didn't like that, so they stabbed him to death. And now, there's a nice monument to where that happened!

Once we snorkeled all we could snorkel, it was time to get back to the boat. We had gently drifted down along the coast of the bay, thinking the boat would meet us there, but the boat was back where we started. No worries. We'd just swim back. Ben was the fastest, and Hilary kept up with him. So it

was just me and Jacob. I held his hand so we wouldn't be separated, but he was getting tired, so I was kicking with my fins, and swimming with one arm, pulling him with the other, making sure he wasn't drifting too close to shallow reefs, or the propellers of any of the many boats in the bay. It wasn't that dangerous, because they could see us, but still, better safe than sorry! So, I pulled Jacob along, and by the time I got back to the boat, I was exhausted. I handed my fins to Captain Jill and climbed the ladder. After feeling weightless for the better part of an hour, my legs were definitely wobbly! Jacob felt it, too. I had to go after him to steady him on the ladder because he was scared he'd fall off.



But, we all made it back safely on the boat. And while we were getting everyone on board, we had a nice fruit plate snack and some chips and juice!

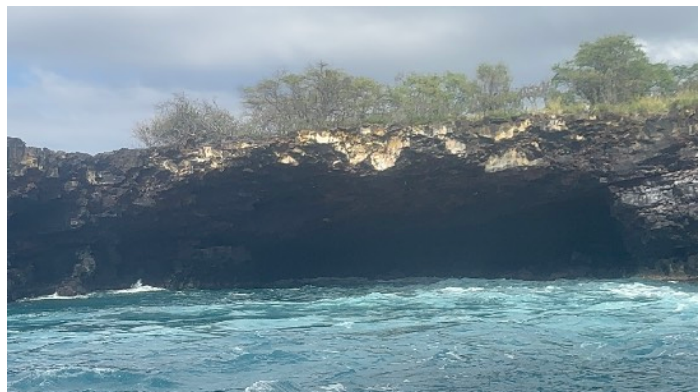


After everyone was aboard, we saw dolphins! So Captain Jill navigated us closer to them (within a safe distance). Then, the dolphins swam over toward us! One even swam upside down and slapped its tail in the water. It looked like it was hoping for a belly rub! Then it swam under the boat. They had little baby dolphins with them, too! The one we saw was about the size of a football. So tiny! But they were

swimming around, and even jumped out of the water a few times, spinning around! That's how they got their name, "spinner dolphins."

We got a lot of pictures and video of the dolphins. Everyone aboard was excitedly pointing out where they saw more. There must have been at least 25-50 around us at one point. It was so amazing to see.

They try not to disturb the dolphins because they need to rest in the bay so they can hunt for





food later. If they come up to you, though, it's okay to be closer. But you can't swim with them anymore.

Once we were convinced the dolphins had moved on, we puttered over to some features of the Island itself, which Captain Jill would tell us about. We saw a natural grotto, where the water just erodes a type of cave into the side of the island. And on one of these formations, it looked like two lava tubes in the shape of eyes formed. And you could see the face of Pele, the volcano goddess. As legend has it, she will curse you if you take any of her sand or rocks because they are her children.

We sped on back to the dock after that, and since we were closer to shore, it felt less bumpy than on the way there. We switched seats, too, so Hilary could be toward the back of the boat, and Ben and I were more toward the front. Poor Hilary was on the very front of the boat on the way out, and was sure she was going to get thrown. Luckily, she had a "gin gin" candy before we went out, so I think that helped with the motion sickness.

We docked, said our goodbyes to Captain Jill, and got back to our car. The ride back in boat had the added benefit of drying us off!

It was time for lunch, and Hilary had found a great place called "Da Poke Shack" for some good, fresh poke (ahi tuna sushi cubes seasoned in a variety of ways). When we got there, the line was already out the door and across the parking lot. We had to park on the street and join the line for 45 minutes. But it was worth the wait. We got these huge platters with different kinds of sushi, great sticky rice with Hawaiian



seasoning on top, and a few sides each. We toiled over which to get as they were running out of certain kinds the closer we got to the front of the line. But in the end, we all got what we wanted (including Jacob, who got shrimp because he doesn't like tuna). We drove it back to our place, and ate outside on our deck since we were still in our bathing suits. It was some of the best sashimi tuna I've ever had. The difference was it was caught in Hawaii and never frozen. It was like butter!



We all finished our platters and walked down to the local beach. It was right near our condo we were staying at, so we had to check it out. It turns out, it is a salt and pepper sand beach, which is cool because it's like a black sand beach, but with traditional



brown or white sand mixed in there. (thus the name, “salt and pepper sand beach”). When we looked at the water, though, we realized it was more of a snorkeling beach than a sit and swim kind of beach. We had just spent the morning snorkeling, so we checked out the pool for the condo complex instead.



The pool was cute! It overlooked the ocean, and the hot tub had decor on it to make it look like it was a volcano and the lava was flowing into the pool. We got in the pool to cool off and it was very cold in there. Then, we checked out the hot tub. Hilary and I found it relaxing, but unfortunately, the kids couldn't join us because their sunburn hurt too badly in the hot water. They played together in the pool as they tried to “dunk on each other.” Not dunking them underwater, but trying to jump over the other to tap something high in the air, like the wall of the hot-tub from the pool. They were laughing and playing together, and I'm so glad they have a great relationship.

It's great having older kids, too, because as they played, I could relax in a chair on the side of the pool and read my book. Since I finished my book, I started “Sherlock Holmes.” I've never read that all the way through. I quickly realized as I started reading it, though, that I was exhausted, and I must have slept an hour in those pool chairs. When I woke up, and read some more, it was time to get cleaned up, so we walked back up to our room.

After we had relaxed a bit inside, I realized, “wait ...isn't it sunset?”. But I was 5 minutes too late at that point. I ran back to the Salt n' Peppa beach (which is what I call it now) and alas, I missed it, but I got a pretty picture of dusk, which counts for something!



Believe it or not, it was time for dinner already after that. We didn't have reservations but headed into town to try our luck. The restaurant we were going to had a 1.5 hour wait, so we noped our way out of there and found a “plan b” restaurant which was more counter service: “Ono Loa



Grill.” There was no wait, and they served us right away. We were about to sit outside, too and hear live music from a neighboring restaurant. I had a pork on rice dish (with an egg), and Hilary and Jacob got a burger patty over rice. Ben got a traditional burger. There were no complaints!



This area we were in for dinner was almost like a boardwalk of stores and restaurants along the beach, so we walked along a bit in search of a good shaved ice place. We found a great one called “Gecco Girlz” and man, the shaved ice was so fine and soft (not gritty or crunchy), and had macadamia nut ice cream in it too. It was so delicious. Jacob was raving about his the rest of the night. We sat down near a sand volleyball court and watched a few teams play. They were really good. Ben was giving us pointers as to what was good and bad about what they were doing since he’s been connected with his volleyball team at school.

After watching them for a while, we walked back along the water toward the parking lot, drove home, and watched Ben’s new YouTube video. We had to pack up our stuff, though, for tomorrow... we fly to Maui! The Big Island was such an adventure. I forget how much I enjoyed all there is to do here, and how far a drive everything usually is because it is, after-all, the big island.

Day 7: Outty to Maui! (Travel Day)

12/27/2022

Location: Kona to Maui

Weather: Sunny and warm! (80+ degrees)

Today was primarily a day of relaxation in the morning and travel to get settled in our new place in Maui. We got iced coffee around the corner (a short drive from our place) and skipped breakfast for the most part. I think I was still full from the late dinner last night.



We relaxed on our balcony overlooking the ocean, sipped our coffee, read our books for the last few hours we had the place in our name. We seriously locked up the door and had all our stuff out of there 3 minutes before the locks changed automatically. They made it so easy to check out. Best AirBnb we've ever stayed at. All we had to do was take out the trash. They handled everything. We even left our unopened food so the cleaning staff or next tenants could use it so it wouldn't go to waste.

After we no longer had the place, we drove to fill up the car with gas (we were well under a quarter tank by that point) - we found a "good deal" for regular gas in Hawaii of \$4.65 per gallon. The whole tank cost us about \$70.

Hilary found this great place on the way to the airport called "Broke Da Mouth Grindz" where I had fried chicken thighs (with skin) and Furikake garlic seasoning. It was like WAY better sesame chicken. I couldn't finish it there was so much there. We ate it at a park that used to be the OLD Kona airport, overlooking the water ([Old Kona Airport State Beach Park](#)). Our head was on a swivel though, because there were a lot of break-ins around the airport and all our luggage and backpacks were in the car. Our finger was on the alarm button on our keychain.



After swatting the flies in the park as we ate our food, we drove to the new Kona airport (built in the 70s to be an international airport). We awaited our 20 minute flight to Maui. The TSA pre-check line took a while, but we had plenty of time.



We sat in some good seats with seat backs outside, in the shade, and waited as our flight was delayed 10 minutes, 20 minutes, then 37 minutes .. we were getting nervous because we know how these things go. The more delayed things get, the higher the risk of there being a problem with the crew or the schedule. Luckily, we eventually boarded (about an hour late). This was all related to Southwest flights from the mainland being cancelled, which caused logistics problems for the crew being in the wrong places, and cancelling more flights, which cancelled more flights, etc... An estimated 70% of all

SouthWest flights were cancelled today, so we were very nervous ours would be, too.

Luckily, we did get on the plane, and it did fly us to Maui and it did only take 20 minutes in the air. We had a great view of the islands from the air. I took a window seat this time, which I never do!



Unfortunately, because the flight was an hour late, that triggered problems with the Avis rental car reservation. Usually, I just use the app, say "I'm here" and then find my car in the lot and drive out, no questions asked. But the app wouldn't let me, so we had to wait in line at the rental place, along with everyone else who had the same problem. They kept giving away the vehicles that were designated for us, too. So it took about an hour to get that straightened out. We finally drove out of the airport at 6 PM, so the sun had already set.



So, we skipped our evening plans and went to Safeway to buy some water and to get Ben a football to play with. Jacob and I stayed in the car (also a Kia Sorrento, but an earlier year) and tried to find some more music to refresh our Hawaii playlist. The kids were getting annoyed at the repetitive nature of the songs (Hawaiian covers of popular music).

We stopped by Tin Roof to pick up some awesome garlic

chicken (although it was very similar to this afternoon's lunch, it was even better!) We brought it back to our new place we're staying at, which is not quite as nice, but your dollar doesn't go as far on Maui as it does on the big island. So the boys are going to share a couch bed for 4 nights.

I said I wouldn't write as much, and I still managed to go on and on. Looking forward to tomorrow!



Day 8: Trilogy - Part 2

12/28/2022

Location: Maui

Weather: Warm and Sunny 86 degrees+

We woke up at 6 am and had a wonderful night's sleep. We started the day driving to an iced coffee place nearby (Kraken Coffee) and got smoothies for the boys. The big plan for today is a snorkeling tour with Trilogy tours. They were one of our highlights the last time, so we made sure to do another tour with them. This time, it was the Molokini snorkeling tour to the rim of an old volcanic cinder cone!



We parked on a bluff with waves crashing over the wall. The kids kept playing chicken with the waves while we were waiting. It was very fun. I did worry that the rental would be washed away by the time we got back, though. It's a rental!



We got right aboard, even found some good seats along the starboard side (that's the right side, correct?). It took us about an hour to get to Molokini, but it flew by because of the wonderful views of the islands, and the breakfast they served to us on board! We had cinnamon buns and fruit and juice.

After we arrived at Molokini, it was just amazing. It just looks like a small island from where we were, but if you look from above or a map view, you can tell it's an old volcano (well, cinder cone, but same idea) that was just claimed by the sea over time and half of it is still sticking out of the water. We all walked down the stairs they extended to the water, put on our fins, snorkels and floaty belts, and swam into the pacific water. It was so calm today (no wind and no waves) that we were able to see over 100 feet of visibility. It was unusual to be able to see not just all the coral and fish, but all the other snorkelers, as well.



The hour flew by because of how easy it was to see everything. I kept trying to capture it with my cell camera, but luckily, they had a professional photographer on board and he was able to get all of us together snorkeling!

After getting called back to the boat, we all climbed the stairs (after taking off our fins, of course - don't want to look like the guy who wears his skis inside the ski lodge. From there, we headed over to what they called "turtle town." because there are so many sea turtles there. We were excited to be able to go, because they said the

recent storms had kicked up so much debris that it was hard to see anything there. But it had settled enough for us to go!

So we went, entered the water the same way, and saw this old underwater volcanic flow that had since been completely covered by coral, and many fish swimming around this living marvel. It wasn't as clear as molokini, but right away, we found a sea turtle. We all (for the most part) kept our distance. A few had to be reminded not to crowd the turtles.

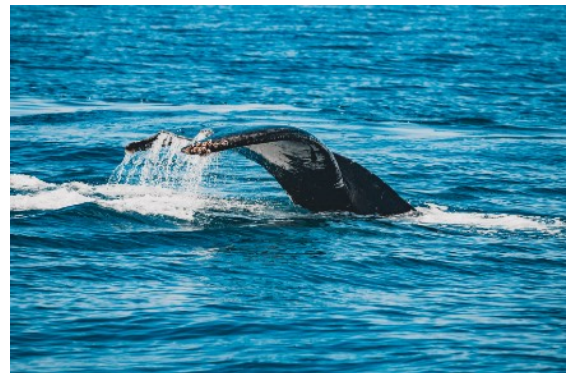


When all was said and done, we saw 3-4 different turtles there. And we even saw an octopus hunting for food with his buddies, the rock fish. The tour guide said that it was rare to see an octopus in the wild. It was hard to see as it blended so well to its surroundings!

That hour flew by, too, and before we knew it, we were being called back to the boat. By this time, we were a bit tired from the swimming. The turtle town place was quite far from the boat, so we had to swim that way. I stayed with Ben this time and Hilary stuck around with Jacob. So they headed back earlier together so they wouldn't be rushing like last time.

We got aboard and they had prepared this great lunch with chicken, salad, rice and Hawaiian rolls. They even had cocktails for the grown-ups (Rum Punch and Mule for me!). Now

that would have been enough for us to say, "what a great outing" but on top of that, we started to see a lot of whales in the area while we were boating around. The best sighting we saw was a Momma and baby whale, with her guardian / step dad to the baby. They were huge! (except for the baby, which was noticeably smaller and couldn't lift their whole tail out of the water yet.



When we saw the whale, we would cut the engines.

And this group just started swimming toward us. It was nearly the size of our boat, so that's a tad intimidating. Then we saw it come out of the water a little, and go back under, but it was so close! The tour boat was excellent with this, too. They busted out an underwater microphone and speaker so we could hear the whales start to sing. We didn't hear those whales, but we heard all the whales that were in the area. Only the males tend to sing and they are starting to think that it's a song for other males, as the females start to flee when they hear it.



So that was the icing on the cake right there. And then, they served us ice cream while we floated by the Hotel from the White Lotus tv show. We just weren't sure exactly which one was the inspiration for the show.

When we docked, we found our car still sitting there, although covered in salt (presumably from all the nearby waves crashing nearby). We drove back to our

condo and walked to the beach with some chairs and an umbrella. This beach is gorgeous and overlooks all the islands that make up Maui. Ben and I threw the football around for about an hour on the beach, and we went in the water, too. I read my book a little bit. So it was a great beach day, too!

I wasn't going to miss another sunset on the ocean. Determined, I made sure I was out of the shower with enough time to run down to the beach and take a few pictures and experience the sunset on a Maui beach. I got there just in time, and right as soon as the sun dipped below the horizon, Hilary arrived to see it with us.



We got cleaned up for dinner at Paia Fish Market nearby. It got great reviews so we waited in line for about an hour to be served. Where we parked there was a tree FILLED with birds and they were losing their mind, chirping so loud. There had to be hundreds of birds chirping at the same time in there. So after that hour long wait the food was ... just okay. I had the charbroiled Ono fish, and it was dry, unfortunately. But a cool thing that happened was a whole bunch of bikes that had adorned themselves with Christmas lights and other weird and wonderful decorations

started riding down the street next to the restaurant and cheering. We think this is something for charity, but we're still not certain.

And there was even a chicken eating with us. It was underneath our picnic table.

We got back to the condo and ate 5 pies from Leoda's for dessert. Hilary had picked these up earlier in the day. Don't worry... they weren't full-size .. just small pies and we split them all as we watched Ben's latest Youtube video and then Lego Masters Holiday special. We packed for our Luau tomorrow and then crashed into bed.



Day 9: Trilogy - Part 3 & a Luau!

12/29/2022

Location: Maui

Weather: Warm and Sunny 86 degrees+

We may have a problem: we are addicted to Trilogy boat tours in Maui. We went on another one this morning and this time it was to go whale watching. I know we saw a whole bunch of whales yesterday, but we figured we could see more! So we got up early (before 6 AM) and headed to the launch point in Lahaina Harbor. We were on the Trilogy 5 boat, which up until 2 days prior was the newest boat in their fleet. They had just added the Trilogy 7, which had to be sailed from the Bahamas to Maui with a crew of 6 people for 8 weeks to get it delivered. That must have been a crazy trip.



We got on board the boat and got a seat on the starboard side again, and there were seats for everyone aboard this time. We set sail (or motored off, really) and got some POG juice (passion, orange, guava juice) and cinnamon buns / fruit trays again, and there were no



complaints. We sailed around the giant cruise ship that had arrived an hour earlier and all the tender boats which were ferrying people from the cruise ship to the docks. Then, we were out in open water. We saw so many whales today. And I thought we saw a lot yesterday! The highlight was seeing FOUR giant whales all breach the surface of the water and splash down in front of us... all right after one another. They were still a ways off in front of us, but it felt very close. The guide aboard said that might be competitive male behavior, or just whales having fun. They don't really know why they do that. A guide on the boat dropped a microphone in the water to see if we could hear the whale songs, and we still could! We heard

slightly more yesterday because there was more boat traffic today interfering.

And as many whales as we saw today, it's not even the most whales they have in this area. They typically have the most in January / February timeframe. So these are the early arrivals. The whales come to this area to have their young and to mate, then they migrate back up to



Alaska to feed since the food here is too fast to eat. They basically starve while they are here, except for the baby whales who survive on their mother's milk while in Maui.

After having a mimosa and heading back to shore, we walked around Lahaina Historic sites including the big banyan tree! This thing is massive and I think it's the biggest in the US. We took the same picture we took 4 years ago with the boys in front of the tree.



We then walked back to our car (yay free street parking), and made our reservation for lunch at "Star Noodle" a highly-rated noodle restaurant. We must have ordered half the menu: Eggplant, garlic noodles, pork buns, and that was just the appetizers! I had an udon noodle soup bowl, which was fantastic. It had pork in there and the broth was tasty and the noodles were made fresh. Best meal we've had (next to Christmas dinner) so far. And the whole setting was overlooking the beautiful bay of Maui, featuring mountains, ocean, and beautiful clouds. Interesting side-note - their bathroom had "Borax" for soap (a powdery abrasive soap). The boys were fascinated.

We went to the beach after lunch - back to our car, and found parking at one of the resorts near Kaanapali Beach. We walked through this wonderful covered pathway to the beach, but when we got to the beach, the beach up and left. The sand was down 3 feet from where it was the last time we were there. This exposed a lot of rock in the ocean and on the shore, but there were areas where we had enough room to put an umbrella and 4 chairs.



Because of rough shape of the beach, there didn't seem to be too many people around. And because there was so little beach, there was no worry of anyone putting their stuff down in front of ours and ruining the view. So, it turned out to be a good beach day! We read, had a catch with the football with Ben, took an occasional dip in the water to keep cool. It felt hot today, so we were all huddled under the one beach umbrella we have at the rental.

When it was time to go, we packed up our things and then we saw some more whales from the beach! They were way far out, but one even jumped out of the water again (a breach). Then, while trying to see if the whale would do it again, we saw a sea turtle peak its head above the water to say hello. It was swimming right by us and we didn't see it. There is so much life here on these islands. It really is wonderful for us to be able to see so much of it.

Hilary then found some public restrooms we could use to change. We rinsed off, changed, and threw the beach stuff in the car and drove off to our Luau! This was called "Old Lahaina Luau" and it was located right next door to where we ate lunch. And it was owned by the same folks, too. So the Luau location was just as beautiful as our lunch location. On our way in, the hula girls gave us all flower leis.





The whole place was so pretty, we had to get a professional photo taken. We also checked out the Emu oven (ground oven) where they cooked tonight's pig for 12 hours! I'm not sure this was a real functioning oven because not everything seemed hot to the touch as these guys were picking up the pork and hot rocks. We went back to our seats and they kept bringing us food and drinks: everything was so good, but the steak they brought was great. They had this leaf-wrapped pork (lay lay?) and it was delicious, too. It tasted like artichoke leaves if you could eat the whole leaf wrapped around delicious juicy pork. This was a 5 course dinner, plus they gave us banana bread to take with us. (Breakfast for tomorrow, it sounds like)

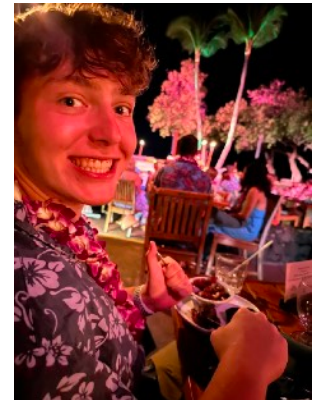


They started the dinner theater of the luau, and it started with audience participation, so that's not going to happen before we got our drinks. :)

They started the hula show in earnest after dinner was over, and it was really impressive.

These hula guys and hula girls were making like a serious

amount of costume changes (at least 10 without exaggeration). One of those costumes was with the girls in coconut bras. Ben was very happy for this. He also got to eat as much of the food as he wanted. He was the only one who had room left, so he got more ahi tuna and steak, which he happy ate while watching the hula show. And it was an open bar, so Hilary and I had 2 drinks each and the boys drank virgin versions of the drinks. Then we all switched to virgin drinks after that.



When the show was over, they had a dance off between all these different styles for their finale.



They had a live band and drums section, which was very impressive. I could have sworn it was recorded it was so professional and balanced. After the finale, we waited for the crowd to clear because the parking lot was a little crazy. All the spots were made for compact cars and exactly zero compact cars were parking in that lot. So, we took our time, made our way to the car and we drove 30 minutes or so back to our condo. It was a little late (9:30 PM) since they were up so early. So they pretty much took showers and collapsed in their fold-out bed.

Day 10: Beach Surfing

12/30/2022

Location: Maui

Weather: Warm and Sunny 86 degrees+ Cloudy and cooler in the afternoon

Today, we slept in until about 8:30 to recover from all the early mornings we've been starting with (and to prepare us for the 4:30 am wake up we have to do tomorrow). It was our last day in Maui, though, so we wanted to make the most of it.

We started the day with coffee from a cinnamon roll place. No wait .. the name of it was really "Cinnamon Roll Place.". Then we said goodbye to the creepy octopus painting in our place and hit the town. The boys had eaten their banana bread from the night before, so they were ready to go on our tour of beaches in Maui!



We drove out and parked by the side of the road near the southwest portion of Maui. We were nervous because there was broken car window glass by where we parked. Luckily, we didn't



bring anything in the car, so nothing to steal. We crossed the street with some fairly low visibility, so really we ran for dear life across the street. We walked through a wooded trail for about 5 minutes, and we came upon a beautiful black and white (salt and pepper) sand beach called Oneuli. I was laughing at Hilary pronouncing it like "One Oooo-lee". I couldn't do any better, though. I think it's "OH-nay-OOH-lee?" anyway, it was very nice, but rocky. I'm glad we weren't swimming, just passing through, because the waves were crashing 5 feet tall on dry land with rocks and shells. (Reminded me of

Long Beach Island that time). A nice family came along in a "Bye Buddy! I hope you find your, dad!" tee shirt (from the movie Elf), and offered to take our picture. Normally, I don't like people taking my phone to take my picture, but anyone in an Elf-themed tee shirt had to be trustworthy. I'm joking, but I think that was my subconscious thought-process. But it was so beautiful on that beach with a great view of the islands surrounding Maui. To think that they

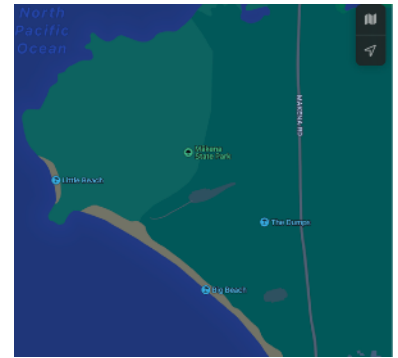


used to be connected thousands of years ago!



For beach number 2, we ran back across the street to our car, and drove to a beach called "Big Beach" in Makena State Park. Looking back on our pictures for the day, I only took one video (here's a still) and that usually means either we weren't in that beautiful a location, or we were in a colossal hurry. It turns out, only the later was true. For we found out we had parked illegally in the park and we didn't want to get a ticket or towed. This was a golden sand beach

and we saw the same beautiful islands, but it was weird ... we turned a big corner in the island, so we saw everything from a new angle by only being a few miles further south. Like Molokini crater was in the wrong place all of a sudden. This looked like a much nicer beach for swimming, but Hilary said that it's deceptive and they have to pull people out of the water fairly consistently. There were a lot of kids on boogie boards, so it seemed fine to me! :) But that's easy for me to say, as I didn't go in the water as we were questionably-parked, as I mentioned before. Plus, we were starting to run a little behind schedule. There was also a nude beach called "Little Beach" right around the corner from this beach. The kids were giggling and begging us to go, but luckily, that wasn't going to happen, and it was difficult to get to. So "no" was an easy answer to give right there.



We walked briskly back to our car, and drove next to the four seasons parking lot. We really lucked out there because they have very few parking spots for the public there, and when we got there, someone was backing out. Free parking, man! The reason we wanted to go to the four seasons is because that was where they filmed a lot of "White Lotus" Season 1 exterior shots. (calling the hotel, "the white lotus"). It was hard to tell because so many of those shots were done from high up with a crane or drone, and we were looking from down below, but you could tell that's

where it was! And it was very nice there. We used their bathroom, so ... I peed at the white lotus!

There was this nice walking trail as a scenic walk and beach access along all the resorts, so we walked a bit down past the Grad Wailea, and that hotel looked even better than the four seasons! They had a rope swing to their pool. (and a lazy river). And the beaches here



looked fantastic, but they also didn't have lifeguards and seemed to be "swim at your own risk."



It was really getting late at this point, and we hadn't had anything to eat yet, so it was time to head back to our great free parking spot, and drive back to our neighborhood for lunch. We ate at Coconuts! This place has great fish tacos that we

remembered from the last time we were in Maui, so we paid them another visit and they were still great. We mostly had fish tacos and volcano fries. And of course, everything was great.





We wanted to go to the beach near our place, but we were fighting over the shade of the umbrella the last time, so we went to Safeway to buy a cheap umbrella and it only cost \$15! Then, we went to Ululani's for shaved ice! That was the best! Even better than the one we had the other night. I had one with "POG flavor, chocolate and banana flavors, with macadamia nut ice cream and a snow cap on top.

We finished all that in no time, got back to our place and got changed for the beach, applied sunblock and all that fun beach stuff.

Now, up until this point, it was nearly 90+ degrees in the sun and we were going walking around beaches all day. Even when we went to Safeway, the weather was hot and sunny. Surely this trend would continue for our last beach day in Maui! Alas, no! The weather changed to cool, windy, and cloudy. Luckily, there was no rain, but we saw rain clouds opening up on the horizon. So we weren't able to put up the umbrellas the wind was so bad, so we just bought a 2nd umbrella (never used) for the tenants of our place as an extra thank you!

We were able to make the most of that beach day, though. I played catch with Ben, and it was hysterical because he was throwing into the wind and I had the wind at my back. So I would just gently toss the ball straight up the in air and it would soar over to him, but Ben had to throw it as hard as he could to reach me. We played a little monkey in the middle with Jacob, too. And Ben and Jacob played "Ocean is Lava!"



There were so many dogs being walked on the beach right before sunset, too. I think that's the popular time to walk them. These looked like the happiest dogs in the world, too, just walking on a sandy beach in Maui. So naturally, the boys asked to pet every dog that came along, and we met a lot of nice locals in the area.

We promised ourselves we would see a sunset on the beach, and with the clouds, it was going to be a good one, we thought. And I think we thought correctly,

So many people are gathered around to watch the sunset. It warms my heart to think that so many people want to just stop whatever they are doing and just sit down in a park and simply watch the sun go down. Bikers, homeless, tourists, newly-weds, old couples, parents and kids of all ages were all right there. Just watching the sun go down.

Before it got too dark, we packed up our stuff and walked back to the condo. It was great we were walking distance to our favorite beach. We washed off the sand from everything the best we could, put all the beach stuff away, packed up our suitcases and tidied the best we could.

We ate a late food truck dinner at "Happy Belly" where Hilary and I just picked it up as it was right up the road a short drive. We got gas, and brought the food back to the place. We were all hangry by that point because we hadn't eaten anything in hours. We managed to get one of

the best meals from a food truck. Amazing Hawaiian rice and curry and sweet buns, and sliders. We took cushions from the couch and sat on the floor, eating on the coffee table as that was the largest table / surface we could find.

We promised the boys ice cream and unfortunately all the cute local places were closed by that point. So, we found a cold stone creamery that was open! I had a sorbet because I was so full from dinner, but man, I underestimated just how much the boys can eat. We went to bed on the early side because we knew we would have an early start the next day.



Day 11: New Years in Oahu

12/31/2022 🎉

Location: Maui —> Oahu's North Shore

Weather: Warm and Sunny 83+ degrees

We woke up EARLY this morning (4:30 am) - Got everything stuffed into suitcases and backpacks, and jumped in our Kia Sorrento for the last time. (which incidentally, I was not sad about). The car was huge, like parking a boat, but I still felt like I couldn't fit in it. And the remote controls on the key would work only half the time, and it wasn't a push start, so the keys were just hitting me in the knee the whole time I drove it. I could go on, but it was not fun to drive, but especially so at 5:00 AM on the way to the airport, saying goodbye to Maui.



We made good time getting to the airport, and getting through the security lines. The ticket agent asked us if we wanted to book on an earlier flight! So we were able to get to where we were going 30 minutes faster than we would have otherwise. Score!

The flight was just as quick as the other (20 minutes) and much less eventful (as we were flying Hawaiian airlines instead of Southwest). Once we landed, we didn't want to keep our luggage in the car (even the trunk), because there have been so many break-ins for rental cars and we didn't want to lose all our stuff. So we kept it at the airport and checked in there, but it took a while and a lot of forms to do so. But we were ahead of schedule, so no worries there. We picked up our new rental car at Avis (car was just waiting there with the keys on the dash!) and we had a brand new Nissan Altima. Now THIS car, was fun to drive. And the remote key fob worked. It's the little things. :)



We drove to a nearby food truck that sells Malasadas (donuts) called "Leonards Malasadas! We made it there by 9 am! These were the best ones we've had yet. We got chocolate filled ones and coconut filled ones and split them. As we opened the box, a heavenly glow descended from the sky and I could have sworn I heard angels singing. These were good. I'm just realizing now that my journals have become food reviews. I hope this isn't going to be boring for me to read over years from now. It's these little details that may prove interesting

over the long term. Or perhaps, it will become boring details I'll scroll through with reckless abandon.

Anyway! After that food, we went to get more Pineapple-themed food at the Dole Plantation. We went on the pineapple express train and were the last ones on the train. If we had been one minute later, we would have been waiting for a while for the next one. But the tour is



a nice and cheesy, family-friendly audio-pre-recorded tour of the plantation where they grow pineapples, bananas, cocoa, and coffee. It's a great way to sit and see beautiful views. By the end, (and because we were in the last row of the last train car anyway), I was embarrassing the kids by lip syncing to the overly cheesy music they were playing on the pa system of the train. I would classify it as "Hawaiian Christian Folk Rock"? It was great because no one could see

me anyway. The songs were "Only in Hawaii" and "Live Aloha" by "Manoa DNA."



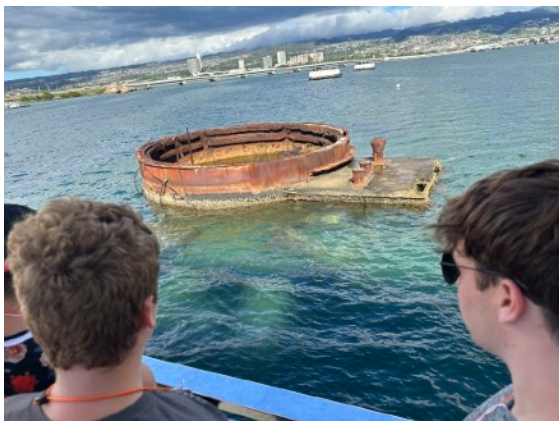
We ate some Dole pineapple whip right from the source. I had mine mixed with fresh diced pineapple. Jake actually had the whip shake we get down the shore all the time. It was really fresh! We got some pineapple lip balm and fresh-roasted Macadamia nuts (also incredible - the nuts, not the lip balm. I don't eat lip balm)

After the pineapple break, we went into the world's largest pineapple-themed maze in the world. The boys kept switching off

who was leading us all through the maze. It was cute watching Jacob and Ben pulling us along, and they were pretty good at finding where to go next. We got through about half of the pineapple maze before we had to get going. We were running a little late, so we had to leave to get to lunch before it got too crowded.

We drove into downtown Honolulu to have lunch at Marugame Udon! We parked at a parking garage at Walmart. It was weird seeing a Walmart in a city. We were also bummed to see so many homeless folks out on the streets. We did see a restaurant employee come out to one of the older women and offer her some food.

But at the Udon place, it was really delicious. We got some tempura, too. We had to get a key for the bathroom, and it was on a giant wooden spoon so you wouldn't forget to return the key. But it was behind the restaurant through a creepy hallway and behind a parking garage. It was clean, but it was weird.



After finding our car in the parking garage, we drove out to Pearl Harbor. This is just a great presentation of the horrible tragedy that happened there, but they walk the line between honoring those who perished, respecting the living, understanding that war is hell, and not perpetuating hate. We took the audio tour (narrated by Jamie Lee Curtis). I would love to see if my grandparents ever had any pictures from visiting Pearl Harbor (or Hawaii in

general to see how it changed over time). We got to go on the Arizona memorial this time, which the kids found really helpful in understanding what we were looking at and how the Arizona was preserved as a memorial and resting place for those who lost their lives on that day. One thing that was unsettling was someone nearby kept firing up fireworks (due to it being New Years Eve and all), but after learning about the explosions and attacks of the day, hearing explosions in real life was a little jarring.

We almost stayed at Pearl Harbor until closing (5 pm). We had to drive to target to pick up some items for the new rental, but I accidentally put the address for Marugame Udon into Google Maps. We were saying “wow, this place is right by where we ate lunch!” until the final turn when we realized what happened. 🤡

We pivoted and went to the airport first at that point to pick up our luggage. I was parked in a loading zone while Hilary and Ben ran in and got the luggage. Luckily, it was much faster picking it up than dropping it off. I was getting honked at by various busses.

So we went to Target (for real this time) and picked up those items, then drove back to our rental. It is so nice! We have our own bedroom again, but also, we have 2 full bathrooms, too! And the kids have a Murphy bed! They got a big kick out of it folding down from the wall. We realized it was like 6:58 at that point, which meant it was 2 mins before New Years back home! So we turned on the TV really fast and counted down to the new year and texted our families and friends.



We were starving by this point, so we found some food trucks in town that were open (well .. one food truck that was open), so we found “Da Brazilian Braddahs” food truck. I had a decent sirloin and rice. The whole time, the neighborhood was firing off huge fireworks and this stray cat kept coming up to us and asking for food. The cat was cute and all, but I like breathing.

We headed back to our place, and got ready for bed and basically passed out. Well, everyone else passed out. I wanted to catch up on this journal, so I’m caught up now about 5 minutes from local midnight, so I think I’ll stay up to watch the local countdown. Happy New Years 2023!

Day 12: 2023! Surfing, Waterfall and Turtle Beach

131/2023

Location: Oahu's North Shore

Weather: Warm and Sunny 83+ degrees (rainy and overcast in the afternoon)

We woke up at a decent time today (not too early) and got smoothy bowls from Sunrise Shack. There were so many wild chickens running around. Once our order was done, we heard the following phrase from the guy who took our order: "don't film them! Get them out of there!" and he ran into the back. I had to see what this was about. I peer in just in time to see the guy wrestling with a bunch of adolescent chicks who managed to get into the kitchen portion of the Sunrise Shack. There were feathers everywhere as he tried to shoo them out of the window. I'm just glad that our order was already made and not in that kitchen anymore.



The appeal for picking up those bowls was that we could take them up the road to the Ehukai beach on the north shores of Oahu in the winter time, when the waves are at their highest.

We watched surfers ride big waves 10-15 ft tall! And they would just keep coming one after another without rest. It was really impressive to watch them ride the pipelines those waves would produce almost every time. This was amazing because I remember the last time I was in Hawaii, Hilary telling me about the waves in the winter, and I got sad thinking that I'll never see that. There's no way we're coming

back here any time soon. That and whale watching; I wanted to see the whales and the big waves in the winter, and now we have!

Next up was to drive to Waimea Falls. Ok, I lied. This was also on my list. We didn't get to do this last time either. We wanted to swim in a waterfall! So we parked in this lovely area called Waimea Valley. It had Sunday services going on. They had these huge gorgeous trees and



wildlife, and they also had an area all the way in the back where you could swim under a waterfall! So we park and start walking to it on a nice paved road. There was a nice woman telling us all there was to see in the Valley, but really all we wanted to do was go to the waterfall. "Oh, you have to see all the different plants we have here" .. we politely nodded and said in our heads, "yeah, we're going right to that waterfall." I think a bunch of movies were filmed there, too. (Hunger Games: Catching Fire, I believe)

So we walked about a mile back to the falls and on the way there were some impressive Monkey Pod trees, some with trunks 9 feet wide. These were impressive trees. And some ferns whose fronds were almost as big as the kids. (Called a travelers tree.)

We finally arrived to near the waterfall and we saw an electric shuttle waiting to pick up passengers! We asked "could we have taken this down here?" and the guy smiled and said, "sure, but it's \$10 a passenger... one way. That's why it's always empty." And now that he mentioned it, whenever we saw that electric tram car, it was always him driving and no passengers!





So we cross a bridge next, and there the falls is, filling a 30-foot-deep fresh-water pool before the water flows on its way down stream. What made me feel a lot better about this was that they made you wear life-vests to swim in the pool, and they had lifeguards to make sure you were safe. This waterfall was just beautiful. It wasn't the largest waterfall I've ever seen, but it was one of the more picturesque. We donned our life-vests and I took pictures of the family as they navigated across slippery rocks toward the pool. Then I ran back up to put my camera somewhere dry and I

came to join them. Everyone was saying how cold it was, but I think it was just refreshing. Usually, I'm the one complaining about the cold water. We floated over the falls and touched the wall. I put my head under the falling water, and the boys were playing "keep away" as we were floating there like bobbing corks in the water. It was weird thinking that the water was so deep below us. We could see our feet, but not much further below that. Also, we had to stay away from the left side because rocks could fall on us. It sounds very dangerous, but as long as you follow the rules, it all seemed very safe. The lifeguard had to whistle at some guy who tried to climb the waterfall. He didn't get very far.



When we were done, we navigated back to the rocky entrance to the pool. I was feeling around for the rocks so I wouldn't smack my toes into them. I was able to see pretty well to the bottom of the shallow part and helped guide the family to where to get out. We dried off, and a nice family offered to take our picture. (see above)



We walked back toward the entrance and noted a few cool things as we passed the \$10 empty tram car driver again: there were huts rebuilt in the style they would have in pre-colonial times. There was a tree called a "Cannonball tree." The spherical fruit would fall and hurt people who were underneath. So they block off the path when the Cannonball fruit falls.

We drove out to Ted's Bakery for lunch. I had a bento box, which was huge and way too much food to finish. There was

Spam, Teriyaki beef, Mahi Mahi in an egg batter of some sort, fried chicken, and rice. I saved room for dessert: Pineapple Macadamia nut cheese cake and chocolate pie. There was a long line, and it was so good, and worth the wait. It was just so disorganized when we got in there. Items we were going to order were out, but the signs weren't updated, etc...



From the perspective of my food

We then drove the short ways back to our place, packed up for the beach, and walked 3/4 of a mile to get to Turtle Beach. This beach was very nice, and it was very calm because there were a row of rocks that broke up the big waves before they crashed ashore. It was decent for snorkeling, but nothing holds a candle to Molekini on Maui.



We had fun floating in the water, looking for fish using the face mask. I played some sudoku, Ben watched the 49ers / Raiders game, we played catch. There were even a few little dogs running around the beach. Overall we had a few hours like this, before Hilary and I took a walk to a rougher side of the beach to see bigger waves. As soon as we rounded the corner, we saw a huge dark set of clouds heading right for us. "uh oh ..." we thought. We did stay long enough to see some fish in the rocks of a tidal pool. But then it started to drizzle. We packed up our things, not wanting to get caught in a downpour.

We put a bunch of clothes in the washer before we left, and then the washer was filled to the brim with water when we got back hours later. It looks like the washing machine is broken, but they aren't sure how long it will take to fix, and we'll be long gone by then.

We showered up, got dressed and walked back to where we were to eat at "Roys!". I had an amazing dinner (seared ahi, rib, mahi mahi wrapped in prosciutto atop a fried rice cake. And for dessert, a pineapple upside-down cake! They did not disappoint. Since we walked, we both were able to drink, too. I had a mai tai and some of Hilary's wine. Hilary ordered some wine with dinner. After a wonderful meal, we walked back to our place and got ready for bed at around 9 pm.

We threw clothes in the dryer at least to make sure they weren't drenched from the broken washer.



Day 13: Kailua Beach and Waikiki

1/2/2023

Location: Kailua Beach and Waikiki

Weather: Warm and Sunny 83+

We started the morning prodding the children awake. We discovered my room had a giant wooden paddle on the wall. I think it's decoration, but why is it hanging on the wall? So I pretended to chase them around the place with a giant oar, and that got them up and brushing their teeth.

I was dragging a bit this morning. I think I may have been slightly hung over from the night before (either from the Mai Tai and wine or the big portions of food we've been eating. But I downed a gin gin ginger candy and felt much better after that. I then got a weather alert on my phone that there was rough surf warnings for the north shore ... that was where we are! They said 20-30 foot waves are possible!



So, naturally, we left as soon as we could to the nearest beach to see if there were big waves! We drove up to Turtle beach where we were just yesterday and there was definitely bigger and more rough waves than we saw before. It was hard to take a picture of it without people there for scale, but one thing we noticed as that the

waves were coming over the protective rock wall of the lagoon and there were some waves there today. Yesterday, it was a lake!



We picked up breakfast at a local food truck "Da Bald Guy" which was featured on the Netflix series called "Street Food.". Man, they know how to pick great places. We got the Pan Seared Ahi Tuna Poke and it was amazing. We ate it in the car because the tables were full by the food truck. Ben has been eating up a storm, too. I couldn't eat the rice I was so full, he just said "I got it!" Hilary couldn't finish her rice. Ben to the rescue, "Give it here!" I think he's getting a growth spurt or something.

We then went immediately to the local Kahuku Suprette and picked up some ahi poke for us and spam musubi (like a big sushi roll with spam instead of raw fish) for Jacob. I know what you're thinking. "Jason, you just ate all that food ... what are you getting more food for?"

Well, I'll tell you. We had to get lunch and pack it in ice because there weren't many places to eat lunch around where we were going to the beach. We wanted to drive down to the white sand beach we were at the last time we were here but got rained out. It's Kailua Beach and it was an hour away. We broke up the drive by stretching our legs



at a landmark that's called "the Chinaman's hat." I didn't name it, but it kind of does look like a wide-brimmed hat. The clouds were foreboding and the ground was wet, but we were not discouraged. There are so many micro-climates on this island, it's nuts. You just drive 30 minutes and you go from arid to tropical. After taking a few pictures and avoiding the bathroom, (It was really bad) we were on our way again.



When we got to Kailua beach we were dreading parking because it is notoriously difficult to find a parking spot. We were driving around a bit when we saw the magical sight of a car with back-up lights turned on. We put on our turn signal immediately, and we got a great spot right by the path to the beach. We carried our beach stuff up the path and onto the white / gold sand beach of Kailua.

We did the same thing we do on every beach. We played football, relaxed, took a dip every now and then. There were really no waves as this was on the protected eastern shore of the island. It's amazing how much of a difference that makes. I swam with

Jacob a lot today and he was talking up a storm and asking questions, and was treading water where he couldn't touch anymore. I felt comfortable letting him try because I was with him and I could still touch the bottom of the sea floor. We were floating along, and I was once again realizing how precious this time is I'm spending with my boys. I don't get to see them very much during the day anymore. Weekends fill up with plans, and they like playing in their room or with their friends. It's nice to just toss the ball around with Ben on any beach and just shoot the breeze with what's in his head. Or chat with Jacob about anything while we're floating in the pacific on a tropical paradise.



How to transition back to the day... ahem ... I'm not crying, you're crying.

THE SAND! Yes, the ... the sand was so incredibly pillowy soft. That was good for walking and swimming, but bad for visibility underwater. I brought snorkel goggles, but couldn't see in front of my hand, so it was no use, really. But that's what makes all these beaches special. Certain ones have advantages over others. This was not a snorkel beach. It was a swimming and boating beach. There were so many kayaks and canoes and even paddle boards around. It was great to watch folks navigate the water.

It was around this time that a guy on his phone plopped down in front of our camp on his towel. It wouldn't have been out of the ordinary because it's a public beach. Grab whatever spot you can, I say. It was just ... he was facing us. We were looking at the water, and he was facing us while he was just 5-6 feet in front of us, his legs spread as he was on the sand. Hilary was trying to watch us in the water, but it looked like she was just staring at this guy. It was very odd. He was there for about our last hour on the beach.





When it was getting close to time to wrap up our beach day, we had to find a good place to change into nicer clothes for dinner. There was a bathroom I tried to use before with Jacob, and immediately we noticed a problem: it had zero privacy. It was just a giant open room with graffiti on the walls and a mess on the floor. And you just round the corner and you are presented immediately with whoever is changing. Incidentally, some of the graffiti was very positive. One said, "Nice C&ck" and another said, "Nice A\$s." A third was perhaps the most positive as it wasn't about the physical, but the emotional: "U R Loved." Even the graffiti in Hawaii is more positive. Still, we weren't going to change in this dirty exhibition hall.

So we throw our beach stuff in the car (telling all the hopeful faces in cars pulling up to us asking, "are you leaving?" "no, sorry, not yet."). We walked to the next changing area and these were a little better, as they had some more privacy, and nooks and crannies to change in. So the boys and I changed

in the mens side and Hilary went to the ladies. We were out faster and were washing our feet off when Hilary came out looking like she had witnessed something horrible. She had to change in a stall because all the privacy areas were taken, and it was really dirty in there. We thoroughly washed our feet in that station.

We had about another 40 minute drive to get to Honolulu, so we broke it up by stopping at Sandy Beach to check out the big waves there, but it was like a lake today. Again, this side of the island gets different waves from the north shore. Right next to it was the Halona Blowhole, which was really great! We had to make our own parking spot on the side of the road, but when we got to the overlook, we could see right away the water spouting up from a hole in the rock. There were two people down there, right on the rocks, which was really bad as people have died from being too close to the dangerous surf associated with the



blow hole. Luckily, they weren't there when the big waves crashed near the rocks, so no one was hurt, but there's signs everywhere telling you not to go down there.



We hopped back in our car, pulled a 180 to get back in the right direction, and made our way to Honolulu and Waikiki beach to have dinner at the Hula Grill. We parked at the International Marketplace (like a big mall) and walked across the street to our dinner reservation. This place is owned by the same people who own and operate "Dukes" a famous water-side restaurant. The beauty of this place is that it's the same food, but a better view, as it's up on a balcony overlooking Diamond Head Crater and Waikiki beach. Hilary got us 4:45 dinner reservations, too,

which meant we were there for the sunset. So we were there, listening to live music from Dukes below us on the beach, sipping tropical drinks, watching the sun reflect off Diamond Head Crater, watching the palm trees swaying in the breeze, and seeing the sun dipping closer and closer to the water. It was so beautiful I started to tear up a bit. As my grandmother would say, “tears of joy. tears of joy!”.

Plus, the food was incredible, too. We had Honey Mac Nut Shrimp and Portobello Mushroom fries for an appetizer. For entree, Ben, Hilary and I had the Crab Topped Macadamia Nut Crusted Mahi Mahi and Jake had a great looking pasta dish. Needless to say, everything was wonderful! Every time the kids get something we want to try we yell out, “Dad Tax!” and I snag a little fork-full. Makes me chuckle every time. The kids, not so much.



Ben, from 4 years ago...

For dessert, we got 3 of the Kimo's Original Hula Pie. The kids each had one and Hilary and I split one. We had to come back because when we tried to get this dessert the last time, we only got one, and Ben and Jacob (but mostly Ben), just devoured this thing and we barely got any. We vowed on that day, if we were to ever return and have this dessert, we would not split it with the children. The waiter was even telling us, “are you sure? It's pretty big. You should be able to spit it.” and we explained what had happened the last time, and he said “I understand completely.”

We stretched our meal out as long as we could, and then waddled our way back to the mall where we parked. I bought a new Hawaiian shirt at the ABC store because the one I had was over 20 years old! Ben is wearing my other Hawaiian shirt, also over 20 years old. We found our car and drove home in an hour, and passed out (not before writing this journal entry, of course).

I am noticing that I'm remembering more of the trip by writing these things down. Even incidental stories about how bad a bathroom is or how wonderful a feeling is at a moment in time could be lost to fickle memories and hectic work schedules. It almost makes me wish I journaled more of my everyday life to capture those incidental moments that are lost to the sands of time.

Day 13: Aloha, Aulani!

1/3/2023

Location: Aulani

Weather: Warm and Sunny 80+



Hilary and I slipped out early to pick up more seared ahi tuna from “Da Bald Guy” food truck. The woman there remembered us and was flattered we came back two days in a row, but it was that good. So the minute they smelled the food, they woke up pretty fast. So we sat on the screened in porch, and ate our breakfast together.

Today we had to say goodbye to our rental on the north shore, so we packed everything up. Water still filled the washing machine, so hopefully, they can get that fixed. When I took out the trash, it was so peaceful and calm, I just had to take a moment to listen. You could hear the

ocean in the distance, the wind rustling the palm trees, the birds, and an occasional scream from one of my children. It was wonderful.

Upon leaving our place, we drove about 1 hour to stop at Leonard's for some more malasadas. There were a few flavors we didn't try yet, so we were sure to try those. It was on our way to our next stop: Aulani! After eating the malasadas in the car, we drove to Aulani and immediately was transported back. I had forgotten just how beautiful the lobby and entire grounds are in this place. Everything is sculpted, and the smell is even wonderful. It just smells clean. Oh, and there were many screaming children. Not mine, this time!



We checked in and did all the first day things. Got the parking pass, parked the car, Hilary did some laundry we couldn't do at the last place because of the broken washer, got our wristband, and found our room. The room is really nice, but we're all sharing the same room this time. I hope none of us snore.



We finally made our way down to the pool and beach area, and we had a hard time finding any chairs to put our stuff. We found one on the beach. Then, Hilary found 3 by the pool, so we moved the stuff from the beach to poolside. But there was this guy on a business call the entire time we were there. Then, we found 4 upright chairs next to each other, so we moved our things to that one. It was like a grown-up game of musical chairs! We couldn't get on the lazy river today because there were a lot of people here today. Also, there were no tubes left!

So Ben and I went down a water slide while Hilary and Ben went for a swim in the pool. That water slide went pretty fast and it was all enclosed. I wasn't prepared for that, so I screamed a little more than I realized.



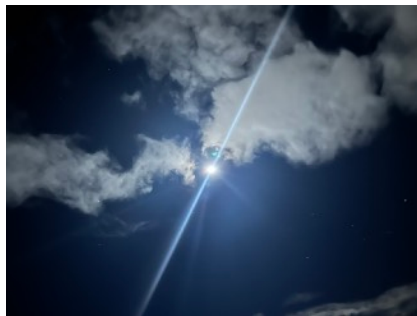
Then, it was time for (you guessed it) more food. We found the snack bar where they make Mickey-eared shaved ice with all kinds of options and flavors. Then Ben, Hilary and I went in the ocean while Jake saved our spots on our chairs.



The water was warm and beautiful! We migrated back to our chairs, relaxed and Jacob helped me solve a few Sudoku puzzles on my phone. When it was time, we peeled off, one-by-one and took showers to get cleaned up for dinner. Our reservations tonight were for "Monkeypod Kitchen." We walked across the street to get there, but when I sat down, the sun was setting right into my face. Luckily, I just waited 10 minutes and it was fine. I got a mai tai (this was a strong one) and I didn't have to worry about driving because it was just across the street and we walked there! The favorite, though, was the appetizer: Lobster deviled eggs. They were amazing, and so disappointing we could each only have one half an egg.



I had the Mahi Mahi fish and chips. We were saying, I think we've had more Mahi Mahi and Ahi tuna on this trip than for our entire lives. The kids were still hungry after their meals so we ordered another pizza for them! Then we went to the ABC store for some ice cream pints because the ice cream place was closed. But then, as we left the ABC store and rounded the corner, it was back open again as if they were never closed. It was bizarre.



We went back to the room, and ate our ice cream in the comfort of our room while we watched live tv (America's Got Talent: all stars). Jake broke like 3 spoons eating his ice cream. After we cleaned that up, we went to the Four Seasons across the way for our stargazing tour. We had to cross a few parking garages to get to it. It was

located on the tennis courts on the 6th floor garage of the four seasons hotel. The guy had this great big telescope set up and would tell us what we were looking at with a laser pointer. There were \$5,000 telescopes and he had two of them. We saw the moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Sirius, nebulas and more with these big, expensive telescopes. We even saw a "moon bow". like a rainbow in a ring around the moon as a cloud passes in front of it. I would include pictures of the moon, but you know what the moon looks like by now. It was a very fun experience, though. We were exhausted by the end of the day, though, so we crashed as soon as we came back to the room.



Day 14: Rain Rain, Go Away!

1/4/2023

Location: Aulani

Weather: ☁️ Rainy on and off all day ☁️



Hilary and I got up at 7 am and let the kids sleep in a bit more while we explored the walking trail in front of the hotels, and finished the rest of our laundry. Because the washer was so quick (30 mins) we had to keep our walk to 30 mins. So we were a little rushed, but we walked in front of the 4 seasons and that ended the trail to the right (if you face the ocean). There was a little secret beach there, too. Then we

turned around and walked

back past our hotel a little bit, but then we noticed, none of the chairs were taken yet! We could have our pick! So we walked around the place a

bit, found a few chairs in this like secluded grotto area! On a dry day, they would have been the perfect spot to escape from crowds, with a good, central location to the snack bar, drink refilling station and bathrooms.



We got four towels to secure our spots, Hilary finished switching the laundry, and the kids were awake and hungry for breakfast, so we went down to the breakfast. I had some breakfast quiche, potatoes and Portuguese sausage. And Jacob had a flatbread breakfast with what looked like eggs and peppers and onions on ... well ... a flat bread.

But as we were eating, we noticed a light spritz of rain falling. "Refreshing!" we thought, not realizing that rain was in the cards for the rest of our day. This still wasn't the

worst thing in the world because we were in our bathing suits anyway, and it was still fairly warm out. But the rain just kept coming down, and the rain itself was cold. We made the most of it, though, and spent the whole day outside, going on the lazy river (Jacob steering me into waterfalls over and over) and wandering over to the overcrowded heated pool, which was a very nice escape from the non heated pool.



I even went into the ocean with Hilary a bit, and went into the age 18 and over hot tub, where it was MUCH less crowded. And there were no screaming kids. Ben did sneak his way into that area with Hilary once today,



though. I suppose he passes for big enough to be 18 (or at least old enough where someone wouldn't question it.



Another fun thing we noticed was that we were seated by the exit of one of the faster waterslides. Some of the people who went on it made a hysterical, doppler scream as they zoomed through the echoey tunnel and shot out the other end. We had to record a few of them.



I went into that waterslide myself to see if I could scream really loud and make them laugh, but they said they didn't even hear me and I was screaming pretty loud, so whoever was making those noises must have been really screaming at the top of their lungs.

I also went on the "tube" water slide. They were both very fun and were fairly fast, so I didn't mind going on them.

After a while we went to Mama's snack stop to get some lunch, our favorite: "coconut shrimp" and some mini corn dogs. They didn't last long as we found a table with an umbrella and ate huddled under it.



Hilary tried to hang out as long as she could, but eventually she had to call it and go back to the room to get ready for our family photo on the beach she reserved. So she headed up to the room before 3 to clean up. We were left to our own devices, so we went on a quest to find mickey bars! Unfortunately, they entire place appears to be out of mickey bars. The closest thing is a tiny, overpriced hagen das bar or a mickey ice cream sandwich, but they aren't the same.

It started raining harder at that point again, so we decided to head back up to the room and at least sit on the balcony where we had some cover from the rain. It's a great place to wait while you are waiting for your turn in the shower. They have a little fountain and some nice plants and lots of privacy. We all changed into our Luau cloths one more time, but this time instead of a fancy meal, we got ready for a nice family picture Hilary had planned for us. Last time, we got a picture on the beach, we were all skuzzy from a day on the beach and we all looked like drowned rats. This time, we'd be showered, shaved, and in coordinated, but not overly-matchy matchy Hawaiian shirts. As we were sitting on the balcony, we noticed blue sky returning! So maybe the family photo could be saved.

We left for the beach in our slipas (SLIP-ahs) and met our photographer, Romeo on the beach right on time. There was a beautiful sunset with a sky full of clouds waiting for us, as well. We took a variety of angles and I learned not to pull Hilary under my arm-pit, for example. And Romeo was a pro... whenever someone would blindly walk into our shot, he would kindly say, "Excuse me, friend! Would you mind stepping a little to the side? Thank you!" in a way that



would instantly make you move without question and without taking offense. We kept taking pictures both in front of some greenery and in front of the sunset at the water's edge, and from what I've seen of the pictures so far, they look amazing! He even had us standing up to our ankles in the water, which should make for some great shots.

He's going to edit them for 2-3 days, though, and send it to us later.

(**UPDATE** - I got the pictures and they are fantastic! Over a hundred of them!)

After we were done, we kept watching the sky, and it was still so beautiful. We slowly walked back to the resort, washed off our feet, and made our way zig-zagging our way to our dinner reservation at Makahiki. It was the same place we went to last time we were here 4 years ago, but it was no longer a buffet. Still, it was a beautiful setting, overlooking the grounds and having a colorful tapestry on the walls that would change color from time to time as they lit it differently.



When we were seated, they asked us if we were celebrating anything, and we said, yes! Our 20th anniversary, and Ben's birthday, and then not to leave Jacob out, he got a birthday pin, too since his birthday is coming up in a few months.

We had a fantastic meal of rib-eye steak and delicious deserts, some of which were to help us celebrate! Ben helped us finish whatever we couldn't eat, too.

From there, we went to the lobby to get more soap, and the boys went back to the room to watch TikTok videos. Hilary and I took our time, checked out the store to see if they added anything new since yesterday (when we found the perfect new mug for our collection). We also stopped off at the main lobby to see the view of the place at night. It's really a beautiful resort and a great way to relax as the last leg of our vacation. I'm so grateful I have a loving wife who wants her family to have these wonderful experiences together. And I'm not just saying that because I know she'll read this later and go, "awww." I mean it! Okay, that's part of it, but still. I appreciate it.



Day 15: Aulani to the fullest!

1/5/2023

Location: Aulani

Weather: Warm and sunny 80+ degrees



We woke up this day determined to make the most of our Aulani resort, especially since yesterday was so rainy. We got a lot of poolside time yesterday, so today, we traded off for more beach-focused activities. Hilary and I got up super early (6 AM) to go on a walk. We were about to put on sunblock when we looked out the window and realized ... “wait ... when is sunrise?” It was not scheduled to rise for another hour or so. We walked in the dark until the sun started to peak over the horizon. we walked past yoga classes, and some yoga classes on paddle boards, which looked really impressive. We reached the end of the trail at a harbor where we saw a few fishermen with their lines in the water. We watched

the waves crash on the rocks, and airplanes approach. It really was a wonderful start to a beautiful morning.



We walked back and joined the children, who we woke up and got ready to go to breakfast at Eggs n' Things, where we had, .. eggs .. n' things! I had an omelette, and the kids had some pancakes which looked delicious but I couldn't think about it. We also had POG juice (and a decaf coffee for me, which is always a delicious treat. We ate outside, too, which wasn't an option that last time. We must have gotten there early, too, because there was no wait. And pro tip: bees really like the guava and coconut syrups they put out, so you have to be quick once you pour it. (or just sit inside).



So we finished up breakfast, and made our way to the beach. We found a few chairs right away, even some with an umbrella! We had to make sure Ben and I tried paddle boarding



again, since we were cut off the last time we tried it due to choppy water. Ben started first so if we chanted “fall! fall! fall!” then he would seem justified in yelling it back at me on my turn.

Ben did really well, but it looked like he was more wobbly than last time since he had gotten taller since then! The taller you are, the more you can wobble on these things. He even fell in a few times.

Then it was my turn, and I heard many chants of “FALL! FALL! FALL!” and I did fall a few times, (once on purpose), but I felt a lot better up there. Part of it was having a full 30 minutes on the board to get the hang of it. My thighs definitely felt it after I was done because of all the micro-adjustments I had to make while on the board. It was fun! I had to look at the horizon to help keep balanced, though. One time when I was looking down for fish, I fell right

over. A few times the kids swam over toward me, I presume to push the board over so I’d fall. A nice lady to my left on a boogie board gave me words of encouragement, though, “I think you’re doing great!” Thanks, boogie board lady!



We relaxed a bit at our beach chairs after that excitement and being in the ocean for over an hour. Relaxing usually included reading, playing on our phones, and me playing sudoku.

And after all that relaxing, we worked up an appetite for lunch! We went to the sit down restaurant, “Off the Hook” and had some salad and crab cake burgers and onion rings and spicy fries. The entrees were really good, but the onion rings and fries were just okay. The real appeal was that we could just walk into the place and get a sit down meal in your bathing suit.

We played in the water, and even went to the pools every now and then, too. After a bit of digesting, time for a snack! They were out of mickey bars yesterday and we were concerned there wouldn’t be any mickey bars. So we ordered, (you guessed it), Mickey Bars! They just aren’t the same anywhere else, and there is something special about biting the ears first.

Jacob asked Hilary if she would go on the lazy river with him since he only went with me yesterday. I knew what this meant. He wanted to push her under the waterfalls in the final bend of the lazy river. So they went and Ben and I wanted to see, so we joined them after the first lap and Hilary already looked like she was going to have to wash her hair that night. All four of us joined in, and I got a double-tube, which was a mistake because I dragged us all down as we were all linked together through the lazy river. I said we were doing our impression of cholesterol as we went through the arteries that was the lazy river. And of course, when it was waterfall time, we got soaked. And Jacob was delighted.





Ben and I then went on the “Tube” water slide! He went down and made me record him. He screamed so loudly on the way down. It was hysterical. I followed him and this time I didn’t flip over at the bottom of the slide, but it propelled me into the lane for the lazy river. I quickly hopped off as I had already been around two laps. No need for a third.

Hilary had to wash her hair, so she and Jacob went to the room early, while Ben

and I hung out in the 18 and over hot tub watching the sun set.

We definitely used our time at the resort to the fullest today. It was time for Ben and I to get cleaned up and us all to go to dinner, at “Hawaii Pot Shabu Shabu House.” This place was awesome! You get to pick your broth and they have ranges built into the tables where the broth boils and you put in what you want (noodles, meat, fish, dumplings, etc...) We got so much food! We didn’t want to waste any, but that wasn’t a problem - Ben was bottomless! We even ordered two whole more plates of rib-eye for him to cook in his broth. We cut him off before he ordered a third because we wanted some room for dessert. We drove to the ice cream place (Black Sheep) across the street from the resort, and even though it was open for another hour, they closed early due to an emergency. This place is never open when we go there! So we went to the gift shop this time and got pints from the freezer, and I got another mickey bar! (in case they run out tomorrow!) We watched some tailgating cooking competition show on tv, but I think I missed a lot of it because I kept dozing off. We’ve been going to bed early and getting up early the whole time we’ve been here, since that’s the best time to use on the island. Just a wonderful day!



Oh, and a side note - we got an alert that Kilauea has started erupting again on the big island! We can’t believe that it has been erupting for a year and a half and it just stopped for the week we were there. Hilary actually was planning a day trip back to the big island, but that’s too much. It’s just funny timing.

Day 16: Bye to HI

1/6/2023

Location: Aulani —> Somewhere over the Pacific

Weather: Hot and sunny Mid-80's but lots of direct sun ☀️

We got up early, and I got up even earlier to use the restroom. Some of the Shabu Shabu wasn't agreeing with me. I think it had something to do with the fact that we were cooking raw chicken using the same tongs as handling all the food with the same utensils.

We wanted to walk, but Hilary got some pain in her back, which was a bit of an omen of things



to come for this morning. We started to go on our walk, but then we realized there was a line at the lobby to sign up for lounge access. This would be important if we were to shower before we got on our 11 pm flight. Unfortunately, we had some bad intel and the line for this opened at 6 am instead of 8 am like we thought. So, we got in line there, and quickly found out that the only spot available was 1 pm, which was only 2 hours after our checkout time for our room anyway. So we'd have to figure out something else.

Bummed about that, we left to go on our walk, but didn't make it far. It was a beautiful morning, though. We decided to sit down and get some good pool chairs because even though it was shortly after 7 am by this point, they were starting to fill up. Now, let me explain the chairs. You can't save pool chairs before 8 am. Instead, you have to physically be there if you want to hold chairs. After 8 am, you can get towels, and once you have a towel on the chairs, they are yours. However! If you are not there in an hour, the staff folds your towel, and eventually removes it, freeing up the chairs. This prevents people from just holding chairs all day that they aren't using.

So, we got the chairs, which were wet, so we sat in soggy clothes (not bathing suits) until 8 am, got towels, hung out a bit, and then went back up to the room to get things packed. We packed up the room, checked out, and checked our luggage, and made our way back to our chairs, until we realized, there were other people sitting in them. 3 kids had taken our chairs. It had only been 45 minutes since we were there last, so we figured out they had moved our towels and just took our seats. We confronted the kids and they made up some BS story, so we got the staff involved. They said, rather than confronting guests, they will get us some new chairs, but by that point, there were no chairs to be had. We were livid. The staff was really nice (Dino hooked me up), but the best they could do was to give us 2 chairs in the sun that were covered in bird poop.

We ate breakfast at the Ulu Cafe - I got a quick sandwich, but I was bummed about not being able to sit together or having any kind of "home base" for the day. There was really nowhere to sit. And it effectively split up our family on the last day.

Eventually, the parents of the kids came down and Hilary confronted them, and their story was





inconsistent with the kids and they said some lifeguard said they could move the towels. So, even though, they admitted to moving them, they wouldn't give up the seats. Words were exchanged, Hilary was called a "Karen." and it didn't go well. So, our only recourse was to wait for Dino to help us. Even though he was very nice, he wasn't able to help us beyond those initial 2 seats.

We decided to split up. Hilary and Ben found 2 seats near the beach, and Jacob

and I went on the lazy river! We found a photographer who was able to get a rare picture of us going through the best lazy river.



Jake and I hung out a bit today and went from pool to pool, and even the kids-friendly hot tub wasn't too crowded (probably because it was a nice hot, sunny day today). We went back to our 2 seats and relaxed. Jacob looked bummed today, and he was sad that it was our last day. He said he doesn't want to go home. That's saying something! After 2 and a half weeks, and he still doesn't want to leave! :)

We all got together for lunch at Mama's Snack Shack for some fish and chips, but they were a bit dry so we didn't finish those, and we opted for ... you guessed it ... another mickey ice cream bar.

We switched kids at that point, and Ben and I kept going in the ocean to cool off and play some catch with the football. We were playing on the grass lawn! It was soft so easy to play bare footed. We even went to the pool and played a bit because there was a secret shady part of the pool, but it turns out you can't play ball in the pool. Understandable.

Then, a miracle happened: 4 people got up from their chairs. We were able to all sit together as a family after all day trying to hunt for chairs. And it was a front row seat to the ocean, which was a wonderful way to end the day.



Jacob and I did one other activity we didn't get to try yet: a scavenger hunt! They gave us a tablet and they give you clues around the grounds and you get to see something fun happen (like a rock shakes, or steam erupts from a hole or water falls from a cave, or my favorite, a flame shoots up from a hole in the mountain. It was fun, even if it was a little buggy.

After we were done, it was about 30 minutes until

sunset, so we all dried off, sat in our 4 neighboring chairs, relaxed and watched the sun set as a family. It was magnificent. With beams of light shooting up from the clouds.

We had our last meal in Hawaii at the Ulu Cafe again because it was quick. I had a glazed salmon plate, and it was actually very good!

At that point, we changed in the bathroom (no showers). I got the car pulled up front as the hotel staff got our luggage from storage. We pulled out all our stuff apart to repack for air travel home (and not for the beach anymore).

We drove to fill the rental with gas (\$4.50 a gallon this time) and return it at the airport.

And now I'm typing this up as we're about to take off to come home! I can't think of a better trip that Hilary has planned for us. What a wonderful time spent together with our kids in paradise.

To sum up, we've gone on quite the adventure. I'll never forget the sunsets, the Mahi Mahi, and all the time I got to spend with Hilary and the kids. I got to connect with both Ben and Jacob along the way; playing catch with Ben in every possible climate / setting and playing in the lazy river with Jacob, or even having him fall asleep on my shoulder on the flight back home.

Things to remember:

- * "Why are we going to Bethel road" - when I put the wrong address in the nav system and took us to the wrong side of the island.
- * Why did the volcano stop just while we were there? And then start up again a week after we left?
- * There are a lot of middle-aged white guys named "Jason" going to Hawaii
- * When Ben gets a pineapple, he makes the most of the whole pineapple
- * The family who entered the Kilauea Iki Overlook trail should just be exiting it by now.
- * Food wakes up the kids faster than giant oars.
- * Flip flops are called slipahs!



~The End~

