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# West Hawaii Today

## Diverse Landscapes, Agriculture & People Define Honokaa

by Andrea Jasper  
West Hawaii Today  
[ajasper@westhawaii.com](mailto:ajasper@westhawaii.com)  
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With stark turquoise water, bright blue skies and rolling emerald hills marking its landscape, the brilliant colors of Honokaa are as vibrant as the people who comprise the community.

Bustling sugar plantations were once at the heart of Honokaa, but when Hamakua Sugar Company closed in 1994, resilient residents looked to diversified agriculture, tourism and other trades to ensure life in the community would continue to thrive. Living in Honokaa has advantages not found in many areas of the state and long-time residents are committed to stay.

Wide-open spaces, friendly neighbors and the incredible Waipio Valley define this area. And with diverse real estate options at prices lower than most other Hawaii communities, purchasing a home in Honokaa is a distinct possibility for many families.

"You get more for your money here," said Stacy Disney, RS, with Lava Rock Realty, a Hawaii native who lived in Waimanalo on Oahu and in Kona and before moving to Ahualoa four years ago. She said residents can typically purchase a home in this area for the same amount they may already be paying in rent. And many residents born here plan to stay right in Honokaa.

For as little as \$199,000 a buyer can purchase a fee simple house. Sprinkled throughout the area are small camp homes that are placed on "postage stamp" sized lots, but many of these homes offer incredible views and lie near tracks of beautiful open land. Many modest homes are available in the \$300,000 range, and options are available over \$1 million for a luxury estate. Some unique properties are also on the market including a bed and breakfast, a ranch on 86 acres, and a goat dairy.

Newcomers have a lot to learn about the area and about local issues. One of the biggest is access to water because some areas are too dry for catchment tanks and the county is not issuing new water meters at this time, said Disney. Proximity to rooster farms, rainfall, wind and temperature also need to be considered. Disney said many buyers are new to the area, and about half are searching for their perfect retirement home. Because each North Hawaii community is different, Disney enjoys giving clients tours to point out distinctions.

Kukuihaele, a tiny, artistic community overlooking Waipio Valley tends to be sunny and calm with lush tropical vegetation. Wind and rainfall increase as one travels the 9-mile road towards Honokaa town. Mauka areas surrounding Kalopa State Park are cool and rainy, and this forested land is reminiscent of the Oregon coast. Rural Paauilo is comprised of agricultural lots that are 5-acres and larger, and is home to farms and rolling green pastures, one-lane bridges and amazing views of Mauna Kea. This area, not Kona, was the first place in Hawaii where coffee was grown, and that crop thrives here today. With rich, fertile soil and ideal rainfall, Ahualoa is home to many specialty farms, and it offers ideal temperatures and the shortest drive to Waimea. Housing tends to be a little higher here than in surrounding communities.

Agriculture has always been central to the Honokaa area. Just a few successful crops and livestock include pigs, goats, roosters, tilapia, coffee, mac nuts, vanilla, tea, honey, herbs, eggs and more. Drivers are familiar with forests of eucalyptus trees along Hawaii Belt Road that will eventually be sold for lumber and pulp. Many of the area's specialty farms produce organic crops and focus on wise environmental stewardship, and a variety of tours are open to the public.



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The community celebrates its agricultural roots in many ways. One of the most visible is the Honokaa Western Week that includes a rodeo, an old time market, country dance party, BBQ, cowboy parade and other community events.

Neighbors enjoy these times when the community comes together, but Disney said a slower-paced lifestyle of Honokaa affords residents opportunities to stay in touch regularly.

"It's like going back to the 60's and 70's when people take the time to stop and talk," she said. "If you don't wave, you're not from Honokaa."

Disney said the people of Honokaa tend to be family-oriented, and the town rallies around its youth. Sports teams are well supported, and citizens and organizations work to help youth in many ways. Hamakua Youth Foundation recently opened a free center where kids gather after school to socialize, play pool and work on homework with the center's computers. A designated safe zone is deemed child friendly, and community members enforce such rules as no spitting and no swearing in this area. With three children of her own, Disney said she values living in a community-minded town where her family feels safe.

"It's the one town I feel my kids can be home alone," she said, noting that no gated communities exist near Honokaa.

This rural area doesn't even need a stoplight, but residents do find everything they need right in their community. Amenities include a grocery store, post office, library, public school, feed store, medical care, hardware store, churches, and schools and even a community owned golf course.

"It has everything you need," said Disney. "You don't need to leave Honokaa."



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Those who do shop outside Honokaa take a short drive to Waimea, or travel about an hour to either Kona or Hilo. Others take a bus to work at the resorts, or drive to Hapuna Beach to play on the weekend.

The local beach lies amidst one of the most magical and scenic spots in all of Hawaii, Waipio Valley. Known as the Valley of the Kings, this place was once home to Kamehameha the Great, and many kings are buried in secret caves that lie in the valley's steep cliffs. Experienced drivers with 4-wheel drive brave the white-knuckle ride down a steep 25 percent grade one-lane road that winds to the valley floor. Towering waterfalls rush over rugged 2,000-foot cliffs, lush tropical foliage engulfs simple homes, and a muddy road leads to an outstanding, yet dangerous black sand beach where first-rate waves awe surfers and pound the shoreline. This valley that drew kings still fascinates visitors and residents who admire its beauty and gather in this magnificent place.

"What makes Honokaa so beautiful is the contrast between the green and the blue," said Disney. The brilliant colors and unparalleled beauty of the area are accentuated because wind patterns tend to blow away vog that is more prominent on much of the island.

The people of Honokaa also reflect the beauty of this magnificent area, where varying landscapes and climates are as diverse and fascinating as those who call it home.