

# Been to this big retreat?

**HAWAII** Sun-kissed beaches, aqua-blue waters and snorkelling... But, this archipelago offers much more — an unimaginable variety of food, a historic park, waterfalls and gardens. **GEETA PADMANABHAN** goes wow!



**EXPLORATION UNLIMITED** The crater; the National Historic Park

The immigration officer at San Francisco airport looked at my visa status — ‘tourist’ — and raised an eyebrow. California, year-end was bitterly cold! “On my way to Hawaii,” I announced. “Wow”, he nodded. And, wow was to be my reaction too over the next nine days on the Big Island of the Hawaiian archipelago — if you’d discount Aloha and Mahalo.

The island chain of Hawaii is lavaland — a million years ago molten liquid from within the ground exploded on to the ocean and cooled into islands that drifted apart. In a world of disappearing coastlines, Hawaii’s land mass is expanding. With oozing lava. And, you can see it.

At Halemalu, a quaint bungalow on a hilly property on the Kona side of Big Island, we’d have expected holiday crowds to wear colourful skirts and flowers, to pick at barbecued food and dance with a drink in hand. Ha, but no! With owner Eric, we devoured ripe guavas and figs, and picked, roasted and ate hundreds of macademia nuts. Gorged on delicious varieties of fruit, fresh bread, cereal

and coffee. Kids got to plant papaya and pineapple saplings, paint stone plaques, make fruit jam, bake cookies, run around the hillside...

**Beach-bound**

Loaded with beachwear, shoes (lava stones!), umbrellas, towels, float noodles, snorkels and snacks, we splashed about in the beaches. We braved the choppy waters on a high-speed boat for exceptional snorkelling in the calm waters near Captain Cook’s monument in the Kealakekua Bay. Dolphin sightings and a detour to lava tubes and water caves were a bonus.

Shortly, we hit Honaunau and its National Historic Park. The stone wall built without mortar, the well-preserved village, and remarkable wood carvings tell how ancient Hawaiians escaped the myriad ‘kapu’ laws (men and women couldn’t eat together, commoners’ shadow couldn’t fall on the king) and death penalty by sailing to this city of refuge.

A must-see — for its history and the sea turtles sun-bathing on the shore. So is the char-

**POINTS TO BE NOTED**

- From the Californian coast, fly Alaska or Hawaiian airlines. It’s a six-hour flight
- If you’re vegetarian, carry food
- Wear a pair of sensible walking shoes
- Snorkelling is fun; buy good snorkelling equipment
- Don’t pick up black sand, pebbles, shells, plants as souvenir — ancients will curse you, moderns will fine you
- Oh, and find out why you cannot pluck a Lehua blossom!



ming, painted church with lovely murals and the replica of Pieta (statue) in its yard, off the highway.

We headed south, stopping to wade at many wayside tide pools. We kept our eyes peeled for the monkey-pod tree planted by Mark Twain, stopped at the Na’alehu Stand for Ka’u oranges, and just after the 56-mile marker, found the Puna-lu’u. We stood and gaped — at the glittering pitch-black sand washed by a deep blue sea. Here, freshwater streams out of the ocean floor — a gift

ancient Hawaiians collected in dried, hollowed-out gourds.

**Volatile volcano**

From the Jaggar Museum, we watched Halema’uma’u, one of the most active volcanoes, throw grey clouds into the sky. That was inspiration to do the unthinkable — the four-hour hike across Kilauea Caldera.

We walked through lush rainforest, and stepped down into the top of the crater. This, we crossed, watching steam-spewing vents, Hawaiian petro-

glyph, just-formed lavaland, stones of all shapes, and incredibly, flowers in bloom.

We trudged, feeling the ominous heat underfoot, and prayed to fire goddess Pele.

Back on the road, we stopped to inspect bark-textured lava trees created by lava hardening around wet trees. We were ready for Hilo on the eastern side. It gets a lot of rain, bursts with giant hibiscuses and incredible orchids.

We also saw the dramatically-changing Rainbow Falls, the Banyan Drive, and the Tropical

Botanical Garden.

And, then we ate. And, ate — everything macademian, divine Thai food, heavenly pizzas, Hilo’s home-made ice-cream, Big Island candies... And, shopped at Hilo’s Hana Hou.

But, we weren’t leaving without a look at the lava ‘flow’. We had to take the ‘expensive’ helicopter ride.

It flew so low over Mauna Lua that we instinctively drew in our feet, as he closed in on the bubbling orange river.

Expensive, yes, but, we’d pawned jewellery for that ride!

**Wine cruises**



Amawaterways that provides river cruise vacations, presents exclusive wine cruises.

It comprises six itineraries that highlight Europe’s acclaimed wine regions along the Rhine, the Mosel and the Danube. The cruises will be hosted by wine experts and Amawaterways executives. Each cruise features onboard lectures, wine tastings, special wine pairings at meals plus wine-themed shore experiences.

‘The Vineyards of the Rhine and Mosel’ is a seven-night Amsterdam-Luxembourg cruise from \$ 1,999 a person. Three nights in Paris come at \$ 780 a person. The U.S. departure is on October 13 and November 9.

‘The Romantic Danube’ is a seven-night Vilshofen-Budapest cruise from \$ 1,999 for a person. Three nights in Prague come for \$ 690 a person. The U.S. departure is on November 10 and 20.

‘Melodies of the Danube’ is a seven-night Vilshofen-Budapest cruise from \$ 1,999 a person. Three nights in Munich comes at \$ 690 a person. The U.S. departure is on November 10 and 20.

‘Magnificent Rivers and Wines’ is a seven-night Nuremberg-Amsterdam cruise from \$ 1,999 a person. Three nights in Prague comes at \$ 690 a person. The U.S. departure is on November 9.

‘The Enchanting Rhine’ is a seven-night Basel-Amsterdam cruise from \$ 1,999 a person. Two nights in Zürich and Lucerne each for \$ 920 a person. The U.S. departure is on November 7 and 18.

‘Europe’s Rivers and Castle’, a seven-night Nuremberg-Luxembourg cruise from \$ 2,099 a person. Two nights in Prague and three nights in Paris for \$ 1,240 a person. The U.S. departure is on November 3.

For details, visit [www.amawaterways.com](http://www.amawaterways.com).

getaway



# Wild encounters

**ADVENTURE** There was no tiger spotting. But, the birds, a crocodile and a resort make up for it at the Satpura Tiger Reserve

With a superb driver for a friend, it was a good time as any to take off on a road trip to the Satpura Tiger Reserve near Bhopal.

Our drive took us 840 km along the Mumbai-Agra Road (NH3) crossing over from Maharashtra to Madhya Pradesh, and then along MP’s State Highways 26 and 15. Winding past green pastures and forests and through villages where markets were in full swing, these unbelievably smooth State Highways were a happy look into vibrant rural India.

We arrived at Reni Pani Jungle Retreat at 8.30 p.m. Owned by brothers Faiz and Ali, the place strives to provide a seamless experience between the place you stay and a visit to the park. Away from the clatter of keyboards, the ringing of phones or the whine of the coffee machine, listen to the cracking of a dead branch as an animal stealthily steps over it or to the soothing notes of a flute as the wake up call or to the urgent call of a monkey when he’s spotted a leopard. “The leopards don’t really recognise the park boundary,” we were told, and at 5.30 the next morning, we were asked to keep an eye on the road because leopards were often spotted just outside the retreat.

A lake marks the boundary of the Reserve, and we got into a boat to get across, just as the sun was coming up. It was magical because we stepped into the boat at dawn, and crossed



**AN EXPERIENCE TO REMEMBER** Surprises at Satpura Tiger Reserve PHOTOS: RISHAD SAAM MEHTA

across into day over waters washed orange, yellow and gold by the rising sun.

**Natural splendour**

The Reserve is lovely. But, be warned — if you’re here to see just the tiger, you’ll be disappointed. So, look for India’s precious wilderness, and you’ll be very gratified. What we saw that morning were sloth bears, deer, the gaur and flocks of birds, including painted storks, Indian rollers and vultures.

We headed back to Reni Pani, and after a brunch, lounged by the pool with a stack of interesting books from the in-house library and reading room — watching monkeys often leap across branches overhead and birds gracefully touchdown by the side of the water.

That evening we opted for the boat safari rather than the jeep safari through the reserve. This was even more fun than the morning’s drive because we could get close to many birds, and very close (too close, perhaps!) to a mean old crocodile that



● For details, visit [www.renipanijunglelodge.com](http://www.renipanijunglelodge.com)

was lazing in the sun. As we approached, he sprang up, spun around and slinked into the water with speed that belied his size.

We spent three days at Reni Pani, enjoying the retreat as much as the reserve, thanks to the roomy cottages, the outdoor shower dinner at surprise locations in candle lights!

RISHAD SAAM MEHTA

# An islet of treasures

**LEISURE** At Krabi, a resort vies with Nature’s timeless beauty, and almost wins...

It was difficult to tell which the biggest allure of Amari Vogue was. The Thai resort provided the perfect balm for metro-jangled nerves, satisfied the fussiest of foodies, and wowed Nature-lovers and design-buffs alike. For us, the draw was the soothing ambience and the breathtaking views from this picturesque beach-front property, located in one of South-East Asia’s most stunning destinations.

**Visual treat**

Seated on the secluded beach of Amari Vogue Krabi, we spent hours gazing at the sea, soaring limestone cliffs and the islands beyond — especially at dusk and dawn when the sea and sky were bathed in an incredibly beautiful deep blue, even as the lapping of the waves added to its natural rhythm.

A boat-ride to Hong Island and the lagoon nearby offered spectacular views of the white-sand beaches, rocks much-sought-after by rock-climbers and trekkers, and the rather shallow, crystalline, wonderfully blue waters. A short walk into the island’s Than Bok Khorani National Park led us to sightings of exotic birds, and a couple of reptiles.

Further inside, there were sobering reminders of the power of Nature — the ruins of boats; wreckage from the 2004-tsunami.

Actually, most beaches in Krabi offer easy access to the numerous islands around, for, the town is barely 20 km from the bay.

During low tide, it is possible — in a few cases — to reach one island from another by foot! So, if you love caves, you can make your resort the base-camp for forays into several caves that dot the island. The craggy limestone cliffs



**UNWIND** Dining on the beach; the Thai touch at Amari Vogue Krabi PHOTO: ARUNA CHANDARAJU

of Phra Nang area made for perfect photo-ops for a friend’s spanking new camera. She had made off alone with a local guide to the Ao Phra Nang Peninsula on a long-tail boat. And, we spent the evening checking out the incredible pictures, shot in perfect light that had eluded us during our trip to Hong.

**Exotic art**

Returning to Amari, we spent time gazing at the resort’s Thai-style architecture and interiors with many touches of exotic Lanna art.

The 57 luxurious rooms and suites as well as the Lotus Restaurant, bar-lounge, lobby, and Sivari Spa — all dotted with vases holding gorgeous orchids and lotuses — are accessorised with richly colourful motifs of flowers, animals, and scenes from daily life. The profusion of natural greenery,

especially the palms, ensures that the resort blends smoothly with its natural surroundings.

Lotus Restaurant specialises in ethnic Thai specialties, and we had most of our meals here — after all, when in Thailand, it makes sense to eat as the Thais do, we figured.

At the Sivari Spa, I chose the Balinese Massage — nimble fingers of the therapist worked magic, as I slowly drank in the delicious aromas of lavender and tea-tree oil. I almost feel asleep. But then, there were miles to go, and I reluctantly checked out of Amari Vogue, a slice of heaven.

**How to get there**

There are regular flights to Krabi from Bangkok, which is connected to all major Indian cities. For details, visit [www.amari.com](http://www.amari.com)

ARUNA CHANDARAJU