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!

-ESCAPE-



EXPLORATION UNLIMITED The crater; the National Historic Park

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 Ma-

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

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 on the shore. So is the char- of the ocean floor - a gift

he immigration officer at 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

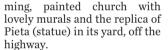
Shortly, we hit Honaunau and its National Historic Park. The stone wall built without mortar, the well-preserved village, and remarkable wood carvings tell how ancient Hawaiians escaped the myriad 'kapu' laws (men and women couldn't eat together, commoners' shadow couldn't fall on the king) and death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

A must-see — for its history

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

Oh, and find out why you cannot pluck a Lehua blossom!



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 56mile marker, found the Punalu'u. We stood and gaped – at the glittering pitch-black sand washed by a deep blue sea. and the sea turtles sun-bathing Here, freshwater streams out

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 steamspewing vents, Hawaiian petroglyph, just-formed lavaland, Botanical Garden. 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

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



mawaterways that provides mawater ways carriver 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.

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

ith 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

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 wakeup 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, 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





across branches overhead and birds

across into day over waters washed orange, yellow and gold by the rising after a brunch, lounged by the pool with a stack of interesting books from the in-house library and reading **Natural splendour** room — watching monkeys often leap

The Reserve is lovely. But, be gracefully touchdown by the side of warned — if you're here to see just the tiger, you'll be disappointed. So, look That evening we opted for the boat for India's precious wilderness, and safari rather than the jeep safari you'll be very gratified. What we saw through the reserve. This was even that morning were sloth bears, deer, more fun than the morning's drive the gaur and flocks of birds, including because we could get close to many painted storks, Indian rollers and birds, and very close (too close, perhaps!) to a mean old crocodile that

• For details, visit www.renipanijunglelodge.com

was lazing in the sun. As we approached, he sprung 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...

t 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 rockclimbers 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 posreach one island from another

by foot! So, if you love caves, orchids and lotuses — are acyou can make your resort the base-camp for forays into several caves that dot the island. The craggy limestone cliffs

Exotic art

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

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 eve-

ning checking out the incred-

ible pictures, shot in perfect

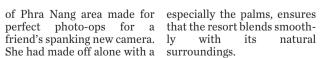
light that had eluded us during

our trip to Hong.

UNWIND Dining on the beach; the Thai touch

at Amari Vogue Krabi PHOTO: ARUNA CHANDARAJU

The 57 luxurious rooms and suites as well as the Lotus Restaurant, bar-lounge, lobby, sible - in a few cases - to and Sivari Spa - all dotted with vases holding gorgeous cessorised with richly colourful motifs of flowers, animals, and scenes from daily life. The profusion of natural greenery,



Lotus Restaurant specialises in ethnic Thai specialities, 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.a-

ARUNA CHANDARAJU