

## Hawaii Calls for Horse Lovers

**The Big Island is best explored from the back of a horse.**

08-13-2007

Hawaii's Big Island is a horse-lovers paradise, and its diverse landscape and rich culture are best revealed from the saddle. Believe it or not, the equestrian culture has been part of Big Island life for more than 160 years. Waimea, for example, celebrates its horsey heritage throughout the year with festivals and rodeos. Drive through Waimea, and it's clear you're in horse country. Some stop signs say "Whoa," and beautiful equines of all breeds stand regal in lush pastures.

The best way to explore Waimea is atop one of these fine mounts, of course. At the 150,000-acre Parker Ranch, one of the largest cattle ranches in the United States, visitors can ride the range on guided tours. With Mauna Kea as a backdrop, riders learn how Parker Ranch was founded by British ex-sailor John Palmer Parker, who jumped ship, found favor with King Kamehameha, and married a princess, all within one generation of the arrival of Captain Cook.

Guests at Parker Ranch can also visit the visitor center, go on guided walking tours of two historic homes and gardens, and shop in the gift shop. ATV excursions, riding and dressage instruction with Waimea Riding Academy coaches, wagons rides, hunting, annual rodeos and special events are all part of the Parker Ranch experience.

But Parker Ranch isn't the only way to see Hawaii on horseback. There are numerous ranches and stables that cater to equestrian tourists, each offering their own style of island hospitality coupled with riding adventures. From the mysterious jungle valleys and black sand beach of Waipi'o Valley, to the cool upcountry pastures of Waimea and North Kohala, all the way to the rugged ranges and ocean scenery of South Kona, Hawaii's Big Island has a diverse stable of paniolo-style adventures. (Paniolo is the Hawaiian version of a cowboy) And of course, each of the resorts features excellent spas for the saddle-sore!

Does a tropical vacation sound good right about now? You don't have to leave your boots at home. Visit [www.BigIsland.org](http://www.BigIsland.org).