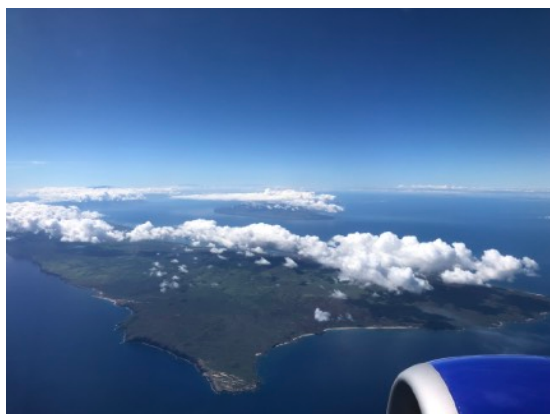


Hawaii Journal

6/21/2019-7/5/2019

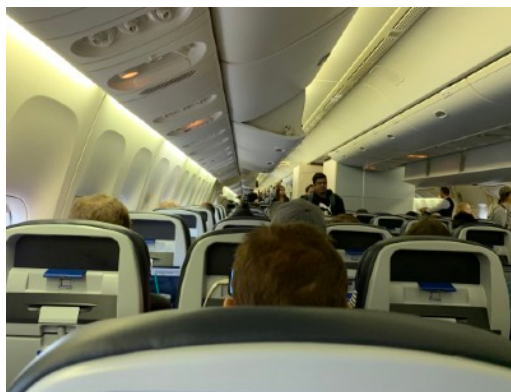


Editor's Note - I have to admit that we filled all of our days to the fullest on this trip, so this is a post-trip journal. I'll try to document the memorable moments so I don't lose track of them in my sieve of a memory, but I've probably lost things already. Chalk it up to the quote "in capturing the moment, you've lost it." I didn't want to over-document. Don't get me wrong, I'm taking pictures, but it's not all I'm doing. Enjoy the moment!

Jun 20-21, Travel to San Francisco!

I drove home from work in Philly (after seeing Saj, who I was able to have dinner with while he was in town! Got home around 9 pm, loaded up the car, and started our journey, an overnight Luxurious hotel by the Newark Airport. Actually, it wasn't too bad, and it helped us make our flight on time the next morning at 8 am. The downside was that the plane was delayed 2 hours, but not the end of the world, there would still be plenty of time to spend in San Fran with the kids as per Hilary's master plan.

We had the largest 777 I've ever seen. I guess I've never been so far in the back of the plane to see the entire length of it before. It was nice, though because the seats were each 2 and 2 that far back, and I got plenty of room for my legs and the boys could each sit with one of us! :)



When we landed, we went to baggage claim, got about 3 of our bags right away, and then the baggage carousel shut down ... about 1/3 of the (very full) plane all let out a collective “what the hell” sound of their designation, and we all crowded the poor, unfortunately employee of the baggage area that day. He said that it was on the plane, but not being transported from the plane to the baggage carousels for some reason. He was working like a fiend, picking up the phone, typing, yelling over intercoms, etc. I felt for the guy. People were actually giving him a hard time, which I also get, but if the guy is trying, you gotta let the man work, right? We think that it might be chalked up to the fact that we were a few hours late and it messed up their scheduling. We didn’t want to leave the airport without it, because it was Hilary’s and we weren’t convinced that they would deliver it to the hotel before we had to leave for the airport the following morning. We ended up waiting an additional hour for that last bag. Because of the other delays, though, most of our San Fran itinerary was thrown out



the window. I felt so bad for Hilary, because she wanted to do so much with the kids and had planned it out so well (the master plan is called the master plan for a reason, you know).

But we did get to do a few things in San Francisco! Our cab-driver was very friendly and he told the kids jokes and riddles as he drove us to our hotel.

It was 4:30 PM local time (PST) by the time we got to the hotel and checked out Fisherman’s Wharf.

We saw the seals at the pier 39, and the kids loved them. They are so great to watch them play, sleep, challenge each other for prime space on the rocks, and the boys kept imitating the seals and remembered in Finding Dory how the seals kept saying “Get OFF Get OFF” to the other seals challenging them for positions on the rocks.



The highlight of the visit was the dungeonus crab! We had to order it with the extra garlic butter, and Ben was a definite fan.

Jake had the pasta, I believe, though, which was okay by us! The kids were starting to feel jet lagged by this point, so we quickly checked out the rest of the wharf. It’s kind of luck a boardwalk vibe back



home. They had a carousel and Jake begged me to go on with him, so had to! :) It was the most excited Jacob was all day. We had to get on the “spiny one!” (kind of like a tea cup ride on a carousel).

Jun 22, Travel to Hawaii! Arrive at Kihei

We had a very uneventful (read “great”) Southwest flight to Kahului Airport in Maui, Hawaii! It’s amazing how much more helpful Southwest was than United. We have a recurring problem with the way the tickets were booked, so every time we have to go to the counter to get it fixed, but with United, they pushed us to kiosk after kiosk (literally 5 times) and Southwest just helped us on the first try!

Anyway, this isn’t a journal of our travel reviews! On with Hawaii!

We stopped off at Costco to pick up some groceries, and recommendation on how to get great local food (like Poke) without spending a ton of money! I waited in the car while Hilary took the boys in because we had been warned not to leave luggage in the rental car unattended.

After we got the groceries we were on our way! We got this app that narrates our drive and points out interesting things to do along the way. The trouble is, the narrator repeats himself if we drive the same road more than once. So there were some often-traveled segments that we could recite from memory at this point. Did you know that the Hawaiian alphabet only has 13 characters and one of them is an apostrophe! Sorry ... tour-guide mode.

Anyway! This isn’t a review of app store apps - it’s a travel journal!



So we got checked into our Air BnB at Kihei Ali Kai, which was a block from the beach. It was a one bedroom with a few fold-out beds for the kids in the living-room area. But it had a nice kitchen and we were able to unpack our groceries and have a home-made dinner courtesy of Costco (and Hilary, of course).

After dinner, we went on a walk to explore the town a bit, dip our feet in the pacific ocean (for the boys for the first time ever)



We got some ice cream from a local gelato place and called it a night. That ice cream must have been fairly crunch, though, because he lost a tooth on the trip! The tooth fairy had to make a trans-pacific flight, which must have been why the dollar he received was all tattered.

While I was taking out the trash (or trying to figure out where the trash room was, for that matter, I caught the most amazing sunset.

This beach was only one block from the place we were staying. Everyone gathered around to watch and just sit there, some kids still playing in the surf. The trees swayed in the warm breeze as the sun kissed the ocean goodnight.



Jun 23, The longest, highest day

Well, it's just about Summer Solstice, so it's fitting that the longest day of our trip was today. This was on purpose, because in the Master Plan, Hilary figured that we'd be still jet-lagged, so why not take advantage of that and get a sunrise tour of one of the volcanic mountains of Maui, Haleakala. Don't worry, it's been dormant for the last 800 years, and even then it was more of a lava trickle.

So we all got up at 1:30 AM Hawaii time and took a van ride to breakfast with a very tired group of people, all in blue jackets (on loan from the touring company), because even though it was 77 degrees at 1:30 in the morning, at the top of the mountain (at nearly 10,000 feet), it would be much colder (around 40-50 degrees) and we didn't pack jackets. Some of the others were doing different tours, like zip-lining, or bicycling down mountain with a motor-cross style helmet the whole way down switchback roads. It didn't seem very safe to me.

Anyway, we took a ride in a van piloted by our fearless tour guide, Glenn, who was once in a band in the 80s, got married, moved out to Hawaii, had kids, got divorced, got remarried and has been happily giving these tours for the last 10 years. Honestly, he gave more information about his life than the mountain, but I guess there's only so many facts you can talk about a volcanic mountain. We did learn that it was the tallest mountain on the island of Maui, though.

Jake got a little sick with no warning, and we didn't have our patented Puke Bucket™. So he got a little sick all over himself and all the ginger candies in the world weren't going to help him. Glenn was driving very carefully, but we still had a ton of switchback roads to get from 0 - 10,000 feet of elevation. Actually, we were slightly below 10,000 feet because we didn't go to the summit. Glenn informed us that we didn't want to go the additional 500 feet to the summit, because there's no bathroom, and the view isn't as good. Also, they don't allow commercial tours up there, which might have had something to do with it.



When we got to the top of the mountain observation area, it was still before first light, and we found a bathroom to clean Jake up. But by the time that was done, the prime spots were all taken, but we did find a nice corner. Also, we had to watch where we stepped, there were rock garden looking areas, where the guides and rangers were all yelling at people to stay off, because they were protected. There are some species of spiders and other animals that only exist on this one mountain in all the world. People still stood on the rocks to try to get a better view. The rangers were furious. I'm happy to say that our family was not the offenders of possibly wiping out an entire species of ancient

spider.

We arrived in time for first light (before sunrise) and native Hawaiians sang a chant at the top of the mountain, saying that this sunrise was our sunrise (at 5:41 am). It sounded like a native Hawaiian chant, but I didn't know for sure. It was a great experience and so beautiful how the

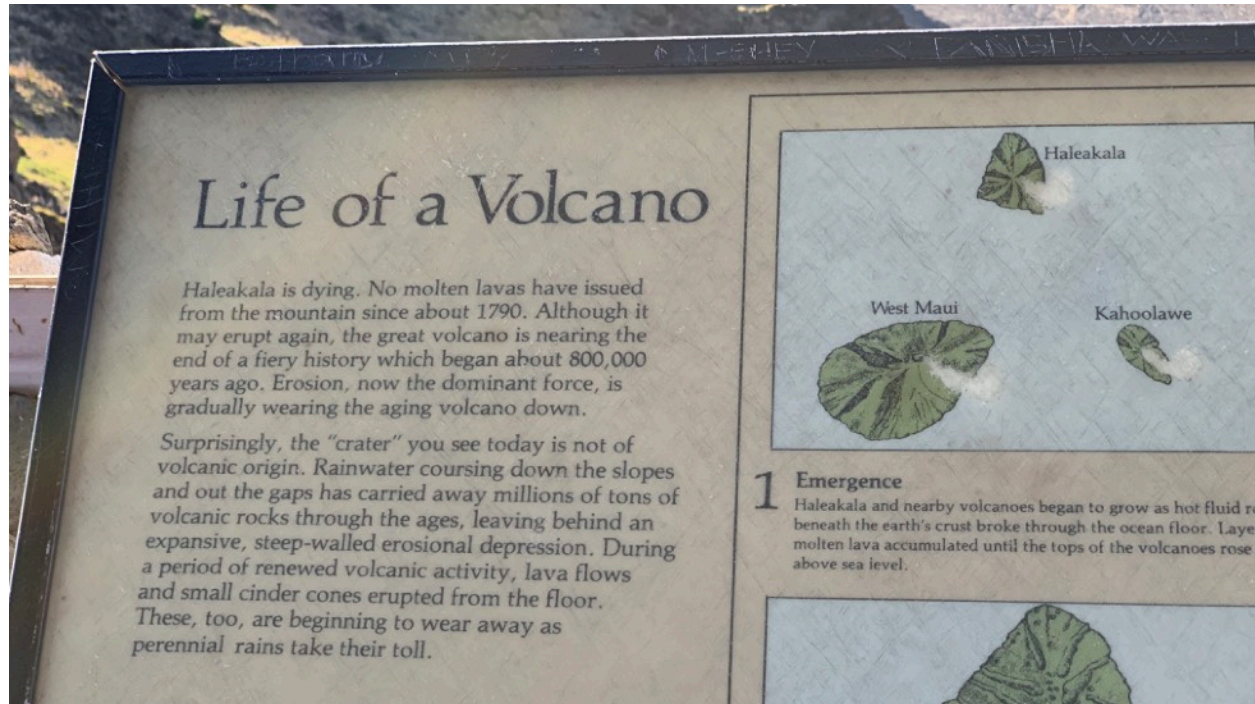


sun lit up the clouds above and the valley below. Once we could see, we could tell that we were on the rim of the Haleakala volcano, but it actually is a volcanic Valley because the other side of the caldera was eroded into a valley.

We stayed on top of the mountain for a while longer and worked our way down the way we came up (Jake only threw up one more time), but this time we were prepared. Glenn had the Cadillac of air sick bags.



When we drove down, we saw the most amazing views of what was the inside of the old volcano. There were other smaller cones in the middle of that cone. And Glenn told us that even though these are fairly old (800 years+), and the rock is porous, but because the cone is protected on all sides, it doesn't get rain or wind eroding it, so it's actually very rare to see.



After we got down the mountain halfway, there was a nice spot we ate at as part of the tour (The Kula Lodge) and we sat with a Mother and her Daughter from near Portland, and the daughter doesn't like coconut! Can you believe it? Anyway, they had hawaiian bread-french toast, so we all had that smothered in coconut syrup (except for our new friends from Portland).



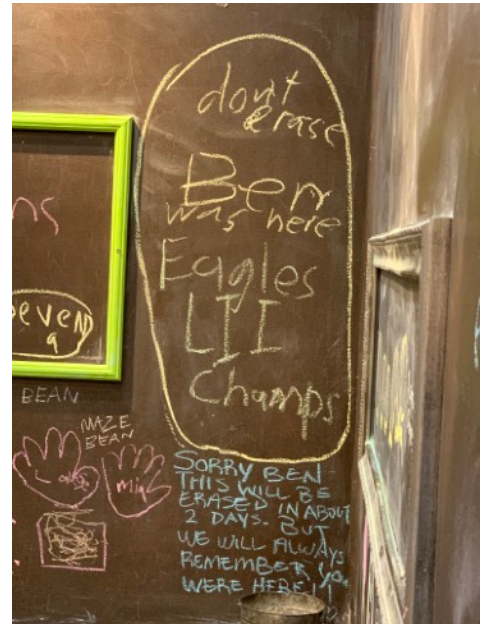
After we made our way down the mountain and ended our tour, and we handed in Jake's long since puke-stained coat, we spent the rest of our day on the beach by our rental unit in Kihei. The water was so warm! It had to be 80 degrees. So we took it easy; the boys played in the surf, I made a sandcastle with some of the beach toys from the rental, and Hilary chilled under an umbrella; it was a wonderful day!

We topped it off by stopping at our Maui-favorite ice cream

spot next to our condo, and had some tropical flavors. Jake has been having nothing but chocolate since we've been here. I think he's making a stand. That's the only flavor he's having, dammit! :) Actually, something very sweet (no pun intended) happened at the shop: there was only a little bit of ice cream left, and Jacob wanted a chocolate shake. Ben ordered first, but didn't realize they were almost out of chocolate, so he stopped the woman placing his order and said, "wait, you're almost out? Chocolate is my brother's favorite. Could you give it to him for his chocolate shake? The woman behind the counter almost cried she was so touched by Ben's thoughtfulness. She actually found a different chocolate flavor, made the shake with that, and made it a double on the house for Ben's thoughtfulness. We were so proud.

They had a chalk board in the place where you could leave messages or make drawings, so of course, Ben writes "Ben was here. Eagles LII champs" and "Don't erase".

So we come back to find they replied, "Sorry, Ben, this will be erased in about 2 days, but we will always remember you were here."



By that point, it was late 7 PM and we had been up since 1 am! So, besides getting a record number of standing hours on our apple watches, we were exhausted.

Jun 24, Day of the Best Snorkel Tour Ever

We woke up on the early side (the boys got up at 5 am on their own because of the time difference here (6 hours behind). We set out with our trusty automated tour guy in our rented Ford Explorer and went on our snorkel excursion with Trilogy tours.



We launched from Kaanapali and met at this really nice resort (the Ka'anapali Beach Hotel) with well-manicured lawns and tiki bars and the like. We boarded the catamaran-style boat close to the shore, so

we wanted for the waves to be not too high and ran up the latter that they dropped for us. When Jake and I were ready to go on, a rouge wave got us and our bag as we got on board, but it's okay! We're on a

snorkel boat, so we're going to get wet.

We got underway, and Captain Mike gave us a quick and well-rehearsal talk about the safety and what we'll do on the day aboard the Trilogy 3.

We sped out to our first snorkel location, got our fins and goggles on, and went off the back of the boat (much more stable). We were worried Jake would get sick, so we went to the "VIP Section" of the boat and had some nice fruit and juice while in transit.



Anyway, we got into the water at this first bay and it was absolutely gorgeous. There were so many reefs and fish and even a few sea turtles (called Honu's here). We got so close, yet the reef was a good distance below our feet so we didn't feel like we were going to crash on the reef. We spent an hour or so snorkeling at this first location and then we saw smoke on the boat. Oh no! We weren't concerned the boat was on fire; we were going to miss lunch! Captain Mike had a grill on the back of the boat and he was grilling up chicken, along with rice, salad and more. Everything was delicious, and we noticed there was a good amount of ginger in the cooking, and Jake had seconds. Jake was fine the whole day! He didn't ... well ... feed the fish ... once on this day!

When we got to the second site, we saw more turtles almost immediately! And it was even clearer than the last location! There weren't as



many reefs and fish here, but it was still amazing and beautiful. There was an on-board photographer who got some professional shots - one of Hilary and Ben with the turtle in the foreground. She was editing the pictures on her laptop while we were on the boat. She got an entire boat's worth of people (there must have been 30-40 of us) and their pictures organized, edited, and ready for purchase. Impressive workflow, for sure.

Even more than the photographer, though, I was impressed with Jacob! He did so well! He jumped right in with his swim belt goggles and fins, and he was floating around looking excitedly at all the fish, reef and turtles like a pro! We didn't know how he would like being in water that was about 20 feet deep in sections, but like I said, he did great. He wanted to hold my hand the whole time, which was also adorable.

We had some Mai Tai cocktails (just Hilary and I) on the way back and I was definitely happy by the time we got back to shore. Captain Mike even cut the motor and put up the sails at one point to sail on the open water! It was perfect! What was also great was that the tour validated our parking for the day, so we got to spend the day at the same beach as the resort! Score! We had packed the beach stuff from the rental unit, too, so we had all the gear to enjoy a fine and relaxing day at the beach (until we got chased out by the man of war jellyfish).



After changing our beach gear to Hawaii wear in a dirty bathroom, we walked to a place owned by Dukes that was overlooking the beach, with live, chill music. We enjoyed tropical smoothies, appetizers, fish tacos, and even a gigantic ice-cream pie that was amazing, but never share dessert with Ben ... you have to remind him to take turns. :)



We drove back to our rental and saw a decent sunset on what we now were calling our "home beach."

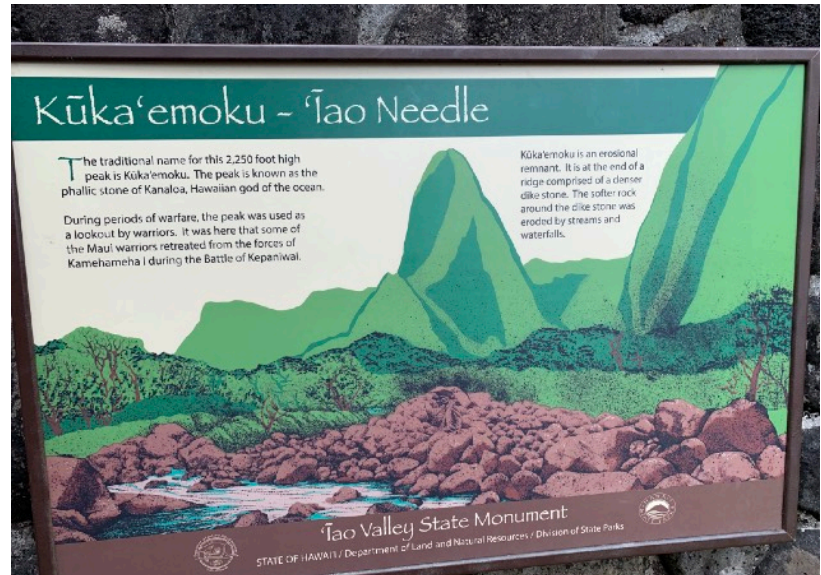
Jun 25, Tour of Land and Sea



We're starting to get more used to the time, waking up a little later (6 am) now. We made our way out to the Iao Valley State Monument, which is a mountain spire that was left behind has the rest of the mountain eroded away over time. It was very pretty and was nice to hike a bit (over 130 stairs!) And the kids didn't complain too much, either.

People claim it looks like a ... well ... phallic stone (even on the official plaque at the park, but I'm not sure I see it. Ah well.

Next, we stopped by a park called Kepaniwai Park. It was very pretty and they had some smaller banyan trees, and



they had different sections that represented the different cultures that immigrated to the island over time, which was nice. Some sections were in disrepair, though. We kept moving!

Next stop was the Maui Tropical Plantation, where we took a trolly tour of the plantation, and they gave us a great demonstration of how to husk a coconut on a pick-axe! And we learned how pineapples grow. Honestly, the rest of the tour was a bit of a bore, and the kids were getting antsy, so we left there (after sampling some pineapple, of course). By this point, it was lunch time, so we wanted to find a hole in the wall place called "Tin Roof" which is a takeout only restaurant, but it was owned by a master chef, so it gets a lot of buzz. We ordered ahead, (thank you Hilary and the Master Plan), got our food of soups, asian chicken, and noodles and went to a local park to find a picnic table to eat. The food ... not the picnic table ... Anyway!





The weather wasn't looking too great, so we went to the Maui Ocean Center aquarium. It was great! It was a little place, but it had a scavenger hunt, and Jake got



really into it, running from place to place to make sure he got all the rubbings from the stations. We saw barracuda, turtles, sharks (through a shark tube you walk through) and a 3d iMax-style presentation on the humpback whales, which are known to migrate through the area (not during our visit unfortunately). But it was fascinating learning about this amazing and huge creatures. I want to see some whales, now!



While we were in the area, we drove up to Lahaina, which is a little more built-up, so it reminded me of a little bit of an up-scale boardwalk, with art galleries, souvenir shops, and eateries. And in touring through the town, we found a couple of interesting finds (ok, I admit, Hilary knew about them already, but she researches things!). There's a large

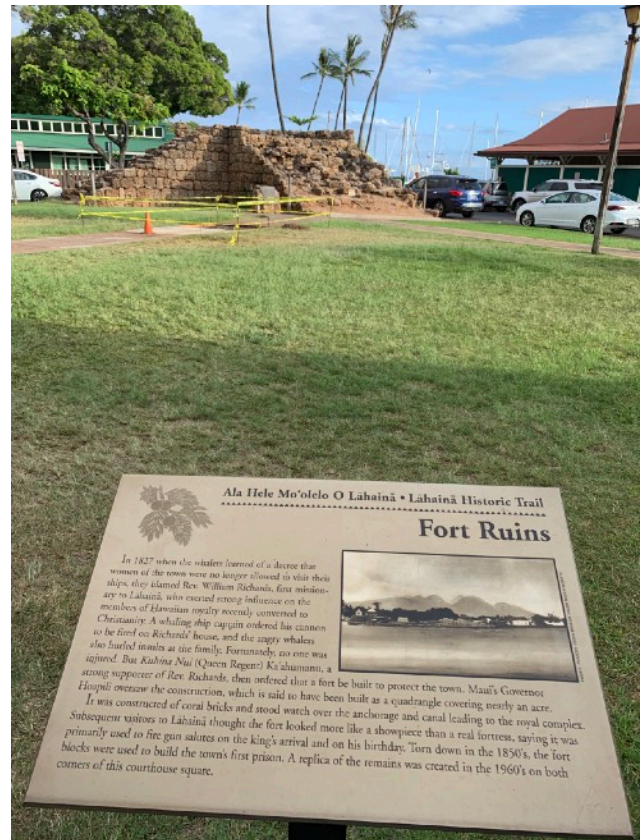
Banyan tree in the center of a park there that's the largest I've ever seen, and it might be the oldest or largest, if I recall correctly. (remind me later to ask Hilary). The root system of this tree spans other trees and fills the entire park with shade. It's hard to describe, but each tree in the system was connected through branches to the other



parts. Kinds were swinging and climbing on it (right past the signs that said “no swinging or climbing.”

We also checked out an old fort which was recreated (in parts), but the interesting part about the fort was that whalers would like to stop in to Maui for all the prostitution, remember that these were all-male ships which were out to sea for 18 months at a time. In the 1820s, missionaries came to Hawaii and convinced them that this shouldn't be allowed, so the sailors blew up one missionary's house (Rev. William Richards' house), so they built a fort to protect the town from unruly, horny whalers. The whole story is summed up nicely on this plaque (to the right).

We also saw the remains of the Brick Palace of King Kamehameha 1, which was a western style building, built in 1798. The king built it for his favorite wife, Queen Ka'ahumanu, but she preferred her grass house nearby. The remains were just a brick outline of the house, so the kids liked running around inside the brick footprint of that building.



After our tour, we had some of the best shaved ice ever! It was pillowy soft! Also, the “snow cap” is key. That's when they pour condensed milk over the top of the shaved ice. Otherwise, you might as well be eating a Kona ice back home!



Jun 26, Lazy Beach Day!



We took a day to relax on the beach (partially so the kids would not revolt and form a mutiny aboard the Ford Explorer). So we hung around the beach by the rental property and it was just a great beach day! We built a sandcastle on a naturally-formed sand ledge that showed up that morning, we enjoyed the waves and even got some bogey-boarding in! A nice boy from came up to us a few days ago and offered to give us his bogey-board since he was leaving the next day. So we donated it to the sand toy closet of the rental property!

And Jacob wanted to keep going in the water with me. It was so sweet. We went

back to the rental, and while we waited for showers I took the boys to the pool / hot tub and they loved playing in there. Ben was inflating his swim shirt until it was filled with air and he looked like a body builder, and we played a little marco polo, but the boys cheat so bad!

Afterwards, we went to a local restaurant called "coconuts" and got some tacos (pork for me and the boys, fish for hilary) and they were so good! We ended up at ... you guessed it, our favorite ice cream place. We had gone there so often, we got one of those loyalty cards. The only downside is we filled it up, but it was our last day in Maui. So we left the card on the counter of the rental with a note. Hopefully someone got to enjoy a free small ice cream on us.

Overall, the island of Maui is just gorgeous. The flowers, trees, grass, sand, water ... all of it adds up to a wonderful tropical paradise, and I feel so blessed to be able to come here and experience it with my family. The good news is that the trip isn't over yet. We're going to Oahu next, and the boys are counting down the days until we get to the Disney resort, Aulani. I try to tell them that there is plenty to look forward to before that. I hope we get to come back to Maui someday, but if not, I'm glad we had such a wonderful time.



Jun 27, Oahu and a Cultural Center

Today we woke up on the early side to catch a 40 minute flight to Oahu! We turned in the old Ford Explorer, and we got a Nissan Rouge, which is surprisingly similar to the CRV and got some crazy gas mileage (over 30 mpg for a mid-sized SUV). But this is not a review for Car and Driver! Back to the Hawaii journal!

We drove to our new Air BnB, which we lovingly called the “Shack in the Back.”. Everything is a little more expensive on Oahu, so for the same price as the Maui place, we were getting what looked like a mobile home with a very thin roof and cinderblock and wood paneling for a roof. But it was dry, and comfy! The kids complained a bit about their foldout beds being a little too hard, but that’s supposed to be good for you, right? I told them that if you think about it as if we were camping, this would be a luxury camp ground! Plus, we were only going to sleep there. :) Oh, and they had better internet connectivity than I have at home! 200 MBS down /100 MBS up!

Sorry, back to the journal.

We stopped at a great shrimp stand on the side of the road called Aloha Shrimp and it was amazing! I had spicy garlic shrimp and the rest of the fam had the garlic shrimp. The guy could barely speak english and we had to pay in cash. It was phenomenally tasty. You might be thinking, “hey, they stopped on the side of the road. That must have been a spontaneous find! Good job being adventurous, guys!”. But no ... this was all part of the Master Plan. Thanks again, Hilary!



After lunch, we went to the Polynesian Cultural Center to learn about all the different cultures of Polynesia. They have a world showcase-like setup like Epcot has, but it’s set up only as Island nations in the pacific. Samoa, New Zealand, Fiji, etc...

We saw the river boat show, which was extremely cheesy, but the kids seemed to like it. The best part was when one of the rowers fell into the water. They told the story of Maui, the demi-god, and how he raised the islands from the water and harnessed the sun to make the days longer, etc... It’s funny how many of these stories made their way into the movie Moana.



We took a tour of the different cultures. Samoa



was our favorite. The guy started a fire in a few seconds using nothing more than a few sticks and the husk of a coconut. And he had a great patter that was very funny. He husked a coconut in a few seconds using a sharp stick. And he had a friend who climbed a coconut tree to show how they used to climb coconut trees to harvest and trim them. He said "now he will

jump to the next tree!" and the guy just paused looked down and screamed, "Are you NUTS?!" It was great. The kids were laughing hysterically. He would have these off-hand comments like "I left Samoa to find a better life in Hawaii, so I wouldn't have to do this anymore. ... and now I do it even more than before."



Next, we visited New Zealand (the showcase, not really new Zealand) ... the boys threw some sticks at each other, which was part of a traditional game they play there, but they just turned it into how hard can we throw sticks at each other, so that ended badly.

We had a Luau, which was great! We got drinks inside pineapples, as much Hawaiian punch as we could drink (non-alcoholic, of course), a full buffet including poke (or sliced tuna and salmon), pork and purple Taro Rolls, which tasted delicious! After a bit of a show, with live music, singing, hula dancing and a 9-year-old fire dancer ... they brought us over to the ground oven, and showed how they take out the pig and brought it into the back, cut it up and served it! It was delicious! We took a few pictures and then had a few hours to kill before their big show ("Ha") - not meant to be a laugh, but rather Hawaiian for "breath of life." On paper, it

was a very nice story depicting the circle of life across the various cultures and how they experience love, loss and even over-protective older siblings, but it was very late for us, and we were fading fast. Also, much of the show was not in English, and we couldn't tell what was going on, even with reading the synopsis. So we left early to get back to the shack before 9 pm. We've still been gettin up on the early side, so we fade pretty fast after sunset, which is around 7:15 - 7:30 here.



Jun 28, Pineapples, Pearl Harbor, and Pfireworks

(sorry ... was really going for an alliteration, there)



We started our day at the Dole Plantation! Hilary and I went here about 17 years ago for our honeymoon, so it was great to relive those memories from that long ago with our children! And at the time I recall it seemed like great fun for kids, so ... perfect activity for the family! We took a tram ride through the tour and we learned again how pineapples grow, but it was very interesting to hear the history of the Dole plantation itself, as well.

Next we took a break to get some Dole Pineapple whip! Hilary and I shared a

humongous waffle bowl of it. We saw a lot of wild chickens everywhere, too! Or as the kids now call them, "BOAT SNACK!" (because of the Moana movie). We went through the largest maze in the world and formed two teams. I took Jacob and Ben and Hilary went together. They finished about 4 minutes faster than we did, BUT we were using the stencil cards, and not the phone app, so they were faster since they didn't have to wait for people to finish stenciling all the waypoints. It's a very contested victory.

Afterward, we quickly took our picture out front (selfie style) and rushed to the car to drive to Pearl Harbor. We took the audio tour (narrated by Jamie Lee Curtis and had the voices of Pearl Harbor survivors), which was very informative and really helped us all feel the enormity of that day's events.



We couldn't go to the memorial itself because they were fixing the dock there, so we could only get a boat ride past it. It's a shame, but we were able to talk to the kids about when we went the last time we walked on the memorial and how we could see the gun turret and the oil comes up as if crying black tears until the last survivor is underground.



After the tour, we all took another self-guided tour of the USS Bowfin submarine museum. We got to climb aboard the submarine. Man, I am not made for submarines. I kept hitting my head on everything and could barely fit through the bulkhead doors. The submarine was nick-named the Pearl Harbor Avenger and sank many enemy vessels in the pacific front.

After Pearl Harbor, we went to Waikiki, to

show the kids how most of the population of Hawaii (even including all the islands) are all concentrated here. It was also our first stop on our honeymoon, so we showed them where we



stayed. We got a few “why can’t we stay here, then” remarks, but we’re trying to keep costs down, so for now ... it’s the shack in the back! We went right to Marukame Udon for dinner and OMG, I have never had such good udon! They hand stretch it, and the broth is delicious! We even got some tempura, which is always good. :)

After dinner, we took a stroll down the Waikiki beach to watch the sunset and evening fireworks! The beach was Packed with wall to wall people. We could barely walk.

After the fireworks let out we walked back to the car, which was farther than we thought and there was much complaining. But we made it and Jake passed out in the back seat

almost immediately.



Jun 29, Hanauma Bay Snorkeling with a Seal to getting “bitten by the shark”

spoiler alert - everyone is fine and no real sharks were involved

The next morning, we awoke bright and early and headed down to Hanauma Bay (the trip narrated by our Oahu app). This bay was another ancient remnant of a volcano, which made a



beautiful protected beach. We rented snorkel gear the day before so we could go ourselves. We watched a brief and mandatory orientation video to instruct us not to stand on the reef and we headed down the steep path to the beach!

We got there nice and early and already it was pretty crowded (even by New Jersey shore standards), but this is one of the most popular places to snorkel in the entire world. We went into the water and saw so many fish! We noticed right away that it was MUCH shallower. In some cases we were only had a foot of clearance between us and the reef. And that was kind of nerve racking because you don't want to be the guy the beaches himself on a living reef.



So we're snorkeling in this paradise, when all of a sudden everyone goes nuts, which usually means there's a turtle nearby. But this just looked like a little girl with black hair who was swimming in the water with us. But then we realized, "wait a minute ... that's a Hawaiian Monk Seal!" so we were just swimming with an endangered species! Luckily, it just lazily flopped onto the shore and immediately started to take a nap. The lifeguards put up cones to warn people to stay back and let the seal sleep. But people still almost tripped over the thing. They eventually had to put a ranger assigned to the spot to remind people to stay back. People who saw the thing were good,

it was the people who didn't even think that there could be a seal taking a nap on the beach with them who would almost trip over the thing.

So that was a big highlight! I went snorkeling a few more times with Ben and just myself, but eventually, it got so crowded, all you could see was the stirred up sand from the bottom.

So we packed up and went out to get a picnic lunch for atop a scenic lookout, stopping first for donuts at Leonard's bakery truck! They were so amazing, it was like biting into a sugary cloud!



We drive up to the scenic overlook and we can see all Waikiki beach all the way to diamond head!

Afterward, we head to Matsumoto's shaved ice and the line was around the block! It took about 20 minutes to get shaved ice, which doesn't seem that long, until you see everyone in line walking by with a delicious, icy treat while you're sweating in the sun. But we got it, and it's was delicious, but (controversy ensued) because I thought the one we had a few days prior was even better, but Hilary and the boys disagree. I got outvoted on that one.

We only had a few more hours of daylight left, and we missed our time slot for Waimea waterfall park, so we went to a free beach called Shark's Cove, not because there are sharks, but because the rocks look like sharks.

So I take the boys down to the shallow water, but we have to walk across the rocks to get there, and Jake slips and falls and lands on one of the volcanic rocks palm first, and got a cut on his hand that wouldn't stop bleeding (thus getting bitten by the shark in a poetic sense, you see?), so we rush the boys off the beach and try to find a place to potentially get stitches, and someone who was passing by recommended a fire station across the street, and we were able to clean it out, get some bandaids and were able to stop the bleeding, so that was a big relief!





It took an hour and a half to get back that evening because we were in rush hour and there were a few accidents, so when we finally got cleaned up and went out to dinner it was almost 9 pm. We found a great place to eat that was featured on the food network, and the curry fish was amazing!

Also, Ben wanted to make sure I documented this story. While we were waiting for dinner, we conducted a series of staring contests. When we were up to the title bout—Ben vs. Hilary— things were getting tense, beads of sweat were starting to form on brows; you could hear a pin drop. Ben takes a sip of root beer. In hind sight, this wasn't perhaps the best timing I could have chosen to make a crazy face with my tongue hanging out and slowly moving towards Ben's profile. My thinking was, "I'll help Ben out with an assist here. He can't see me, but Hilary will, and she'll laugh." Unfortunately, I underestimated Ben's peripheral vision. Remember that sip of root beer he took earlier? Well, that sip now left Ben's mouth a fine mist projected directly at Hilary's face. And she had just showered!



We were all laughing so hard we were crying. The tables around us must have thought we were drunk, crazy or both. The good thing we had a table outside. They must have chosen to put us there after sizing us up: "They look like a family that will spit root beer on each other. I'm going to put them outside."

We ended up closing the restaurant and were the last to leave, and we had 10 minutes left on the coin-operated parking meter, so overall, minus the bloody gash in my son's hand, it was a great day!

Editor's note from the future: Jacob is fine now. The kid heals like Wolverine.

Jun 30, Where Movies are Made, a Buddhist Temple, and the Beach

This was perhaps one of the most different days on our trip. Today, we switched things up and went to where many hollywood movies film on location in Hawaii. While we were waiting for our tour time slot, we checked out the Chinaman's Hat Island. There were a bunch of people camping in this park overlooking this beautiful Hawaiian landscape. We were musing that if we were to go camping, this would be a great place to go! Weather is warm, there's no worry of bears, and the sound of the ocean lapping against the shore would instantly make me fall asleep like my very own surround-sound white noise machine.

We also did some hollywood trick photography with the panorama feature on my iPhone to make Ben look like he was waving to himself:



We went to Kualoa Ranch, where films like Jumanji, Jurassic World, Jurassic Park, Lost, 50 First Dates, Kong: Skull Island and many more. The tour guide, Troy was great! He showed us clips from the movies that were filmed on location right in the tour van, and even though there were a lot of twisty, muddy roads, Jacob didn't throw up! Yay, Jake!

The views in this place were just gorgeous. You can tell why it's used so often to film. We started off by visiting the place where Jurassic World had a helicopter landing pad sequence. They even built the landing pad in real life! But they since have removed it because it blocked too much of the view. There was also a place where they filmed the iconic shot where they had that prehistoric shark eat the other shark as bait, like Sea World.

Then we pull around the corner and there is this huge enclosure they used for the Indominus Rex in Jurassic World. They built the whole thing! well .. half of it. The other half just went

into the jungle and they made it look like an enclosure in the movie. The claw marks were real, as well, but the stone-looking walls were all styrofoam! We took a touristy shot to try to recreate the tension of the moment they went into the enclosure.



We even got to see the overlook they used for filming, but it wasn't air conditioned, so we made that quick. :)

There were other iconic shots like where 50 first dates was filmed, but the cafe they made for the exterior shots was torn down, so it really wasn't that recognizable. They showed us the dock where much of Lost was filmed (specifically the submarine shots). They said that the lake where they were filming was only 1.5 feet deep, so they only put the top of the submarine on a double-canoe platform.

One of the coolest things we saw was (as Troy described it), the world's most famous log. It was the log that the family hid behind during the original Jurassic Park movie. It was actually the only scene from Jurassic Park that was filmed here. The rest was all filmed on Kauai, and



it look like we were being attacked.

It started to rain at this point so many of our pictures didn't come out, but it was very interesting to see these shots.

One movie we didn't see, but it had an impressive set pieces was Kong: Skull Island. We pulled around a corner and saw all these gigantic kong skulls! We posed near a bunch of them. They were in a bit of disrepair because the cows on the ranch would use the teeth from the skull as a back scratcher.



was later mostly destroyed by a hurricane. But the log on this island survived. It's a real log (not Hollywood plaster).

Troy took a lot of pictures of us here: one for the Christmas card photo, and one silly shot where he took a toy t-rex and put it in the foreground to make



A few other well-worn jokes Troy told us were that this was an active ranch, so we have to watch out for Cow Pies from the "velocicraptors."

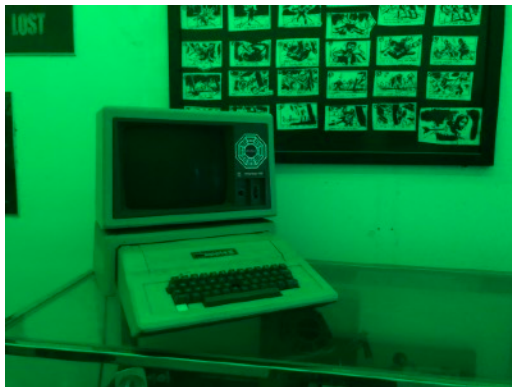
Also, in Hawaiian, a cow is called a "Pipi" (pronounced "Pee pee") which got a big chuckled from the boys. Also, an appetizer in hawaiian is called a "pu pu" (pronounced "Poo Poo") — another chuckle. So if you want some beef appetizer, it's a "Pipiu pupu" which made the boys bust out laughing.

To wrap up the tour we stopped at an old army bunker. It housed a lot of the props from the movies. There was a large room with original props from the TV show Lost, including the computer they had in the hatch, the submarine top, and more.

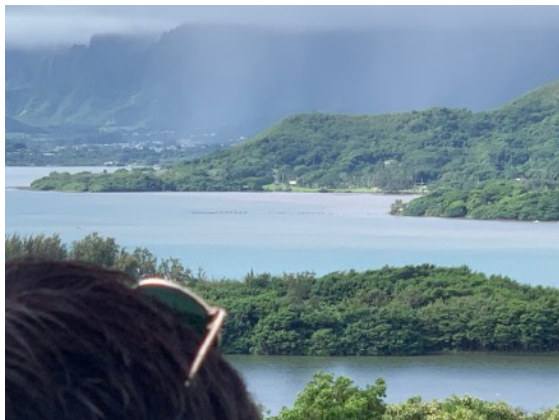
As a surprise, there was an animatronic dinosaur in a room as we passed by to scare us. And there as a 6-wheeled vehicle that was actually owned by the ranch, but the producers of Jurassic World liked it so much, they used it in the movie, so now it's a photo op!



Ben was driving a little crazy here!



The lost computer



The dock Drew Barrymore ran across in 50 first dates.



Look at the size of that rib cage (from Kong)



Jumanji was filmed here, too!

One other story Troy told us was that during filming of Jumanji, Dwayne Johnson's knees are shot from wrestling and football, but his character had to be really fast, so they used a stunt man when they showed him running, and for close-up shots, they had him on a treadmill being towed by a truck to make it look like stuff was zooming by him when in reality he was just running in place!

Troy also told us that the sequel Jumanji was just finished filming 6 weeks ago right around the corner from where we were (Waimea falls!). He mentioned that most of the movie is being shot in Georgia, though, because apparently, it's really cheap to film there right now.

After the tour, we checked out the gift shop, and got lunch down the road at the Waiahole Poi Factory. I was still so full from the tour (Troy provided popcorn and M&Ms), I only had a little pork. It was perfect!



After lunch, we were feeling adventurous and we had nothing planned but the beach today, so we figured we'd drag the kids to the Buddhist temple in Valley of the Temples Memorial Park. It's a beautiful area, and the temple was built to commemorate the 100 year anniversary of the first Japanese immigrants to Hawaii. We heard a lot about the temple from the virtual tour guide app, so we decided to make a trip of it!

We all rang the Sacred Bell (Ben almost wrung it off its hinges, which wasn't the point, but ah well). According to the plaque, ringing the bell is supposed to "clear the mind of negativity, impart deep peace and bring happiness, blessings, and a long life."

After we rang the bell, we entered the temple (having to take off our shoes first) and saw the Lotus Buddha, sitting among fresh flowers. It was quite a sight, but we didn't stay long because there were many people waiting to get in.

After we cleansed our chakras and rang all the bells, we went to spend the rest of the day on the beach near the shack!



It was such a great beach! Perhaps our favorite of the trip. It wasn't as close as the other one in Maui, though. We had to carry all the beach stuff (without a cart) a half mile walk. It wasn't too bad for me and Hilary, but the boys were definitely not having it. We did make it eventually, though.

There were a few sticks you had to watch out for on the sand, but overall the sand was very soft and the water got deeper gradually. All the other beaches had very steep drop-offs. So Ben and I were able to boogie board all day. We were able to make great sand castles. Ben made his own and Jake and I worked on one together. Jake added a volcano to the castle, which was a nice touch, and we built a wooden fence around the front with all the drift-wood and sticks that we found.

We even saw a few kite surfers go up and down the beach. At one point, we thought one of them was going to sail all the way to the next island, but he came back. The weather was

looking like the sky was going to pour on us any minute, so we decided to call it a day.

To make things easier, I walked back to the shack and drove to the beach to pick the beach things up (and the wife and kids, too). On the way out of the parking lot, we saw a rainbow! It's the first one we saw in Hawaii.

So we got cleaned up and went out to someplace different! We went to the Hawaii Pot Shabu Shabu House! This place was great! You got to pick your broth and then you'd bring it to a boil with a built in burner on



your table. There was a "super market" area with fridges where you get your veggies and fish, and you could put as much as you want in the bowls. We even got chicken, steak, sausages, and more to put in there. Jake loved it! He was so excited to be cooking his own dinner. It was cute that the boys were counting to 60 Mississippi to make sure their food was done. After a while, they got the hang of what to look for and was able to cook more in their bowls at the same time and not have to count every time.



It was our last day in the Shack and I think the boys were excited to get to Aulani, the Disney Resort and Spa. Tomorrow, we're going to get up as early as possible to get the full day there.

Jul 1, Onward to Aulani!

So we said goodbye the shack this morning. It treated us very well while we were in Kailua, but we were ready for our final leg of our Hawaiian vacation, at the Disney version of a Hawaiian resort, Aulani! Hilary has been dreaming of staying here since it opened, and now I see why. This place perfects paradise!



We didn't know what to do first. We drove up to the check-in area, where they valet park your car (we could have self-parked, but it would have been the same price anyway), they removed all the bags for us, and said they'd deliver them to our room when it's ready. Okay, then! Bye, bags! We turn and there's a welcoming staff to give us Leis and pineapple infused water to welcome us. Okay, then! Thank you for having us!

wonderful, (like fresh cookies, and vanilla, and flowers), and there was a breeze through the lobby because it was all open, and the view opened up onto the premises to see a lush, green grounds, and the ocean in the background.

After going through some of the logistics of checking in, we were able to quickly start to relax and enjoy the resort! First stop is hitting the pool area to check out the lazy river! The boys insisted, and frankly, I was curious, so we got some towels, found some chairs to put down our stuff (more on this later), and Jake and I went through the lazy river while Ben and Hilary went themselves. This was the lazy river to end all lazy rivers. Besides being a fairly long, windy river, it was surrounded by beautiful, hawaiian trees to offer shade every so often.

We walked into the lobby and it just smelled



Independent of each other, both boys found a way to weaponize the lazy river by pushing us into every waterfall and fountain the place had to offer. There were even some menehune statues (like a Hawaiian elf) lining the river to spit water in your face if a person from the bridge pushed the right button in their app.

After committing Hilary to having to wash her hair that evening, we went to the ocean to check out that scene.



It was a little crowded, but there were way more chairs available. We relaxed and floated there for a while, and I took a few pictures. I'm not a betting man, but I'm pretty sure I know the picture that will be the cover of our 2020 calendar this year.

We returned back to our chairs and found that the towels were folded on our seat backs! It turns out, you are only allowed to be out of your seat for 1 hour. After that, the staff will collect your things and you get out of their version of the impound lot, free of charge. It was kind of like how they chalk your tire to figure out if you are parking in a spot too long. Actually, we liked this rule. No

towels were allowed on any chair prior to 8 am, and if anyone "camped" out and reserved an ungodly amount of chairs all day and then left them, they'd be freed up for others if they weren't being used. No big deal. Every time we left our chairs, we set a timer on our watches for 1 hour to go back and mess up our towels. Plus, usually at least one of us was on the chairs at any one time anyway. They didn't seem to enforce it during the lunch hours, as people were likely to be away from their towels for a while. The place that we found was the best was a quiet, shady spot behind the children's play area. The boys were both too big to play on it, but we didn't mind. It was easier to find 4 chairs next to each other.

The next challenge was to find as many snacks as possible with mickey ears on them. We found a shaved ice stand which offered shaved ice with Mickey ears! Score!



After snacks, we hit the water slides. They have a two, one with a tube and one without. We started with the one without, and it was pitch black the whole time until you got to the end. It was very fun. The slide emptied into the pool's "grotto" area, where there was a fake cave for extra shade. I wiped out and Hilary and the boys were waiting for me at the bottom.

We went and found an entire separate infinity pool that also had a cave that looked like an exposed reef with an attached hot tub. We stayed there for quite a while. The infinity effect on the pool was lost on the kids who were playing there, because it turned into a splashing game on how much water they could push over the edge.

After a while of hanging out and relaxing on the resort, our room was ready, and it turns out we got an upgrade! Our original room was supposed to overlook the parking lot (not a big deal. we wouldn't be spending too much time in the room anyway), but this room overlooked the hills and ocean! It was just too beautiful for words. Luckily, I took over 1400 pictures on this trip to help capture the moments. (Remember how I said I was just going to live in the moment? Yeah, that didn't work. I kept having to take pictures. It was just too beautiful here.)

We also had a towel folded like Mickey ears with a flower behind one ear to offer the



Aulani flair.

We got cleaned up and went to dinner. It was a character dinner! We took our picture with Donald on our way in, and we were treated to the best buffet I've had in a long time (if ever). Crab legs (pre-cracked for you), shrimp (peeled), crab claws (also cracked), prime rib and ham carving stations, sashimi and sushi, mussels, and they even had pasta with meat sauce, tortellini, and hawaiian pizza for Jake (although he opted for the pepperoni and mushroom option).

While we ate, we got told a story from "Uncle" about the menehune, and sang songs all the while disney characters came by to say hello and take a picture. Goofy, Chip and Dale stopped by this time. It was a little sad because at one point, Uncle asked for volunteers to come up and dance and the boys were not having it. They are getting too old for some of these activities. But, they all smiled nicely for the characters!



After dinner, we tried to finish up before sunset, but we just missed it, so we didn't get a professional picture of us on the beach. It was still very beautiful, and we managed to get a stranger to take a picture of us. We'll try against tomorrow!

We walked around to the lawn where they typically have luaus, and we saw a movie under the stars! The movie was Moana, of course! It was perfect! It was so warm out, we just sat on woven matts and enjoyed the whole experience.

More character shots:



Jul 2, More Aulani!

Most of today was very similar to yesterday, so I won't bore you with repeating, unless there's something different about today.

Hilary and Jake snuck off downstairs while Ben and I were still sleeping and got coffee and hot chocolate for us! We sat on the balcony as we drank it and looked out over the ocean.

After getting dressed, we went to breakfast at "Eggs N Things" off property. We broke out of "the bubble" to save a little dough. I couldn't believe I could eat breakfast after last night's buffet, but here we are, and yes I did!



We got an ungodly amount of food and did pretty good devouring most of it: Pancakes, crepes, eggs, pork chop and pineapple, and more.

We hit up the lazy river (again with me getting soaked in the waterfall portions) and spent time together in the infinity pool. We did take some naps, as well.

For lunch, we ate at Mama's Snack Shack again on property, and I had the best coconut shrimp ever! Also, we got the refillable soda mugs so we didn't have to worry about soda cost. I must have had about 20 strawberry

flavored sodas. They had those "pick your flavor" automated soda machines. Hilary's favorite was "cherry lime-ade" and mine varied from "Strawberry Diet Creme Soda" and "Peach Diet Dr. Pepper." I also got my favorite dessert, the Mickey ice cream bar! I swear ice cream tastes better with Mickey ears.

At one point we split up and Ben and Hilary stayed on the beach and Jake and I hit the lazy river about 3 times and then took a break on the chairs. At around 5 pm I got worried I hadn't heard from Hilary in a few hours, so we went to find her and Ben. They were still in the ocean! We stayed on the beach for a while longer, then headed up to our room to get cleaned up and watch the sunset from our balcony. Oops. We missed the photo op at sunset. Ah well, we'll try again tomorrow.



And for dinner, we went off property again to a little taco place called "Just tacos" and had a wonderful Mexican meal. I got the Molcajete, which was like a pool of melted cheese

with chicken, steak, and shrimp sticking out of it. It was glorious! You put the cheese and meats in a corn tortilla and enjoy! Hilary got the shrimp tacos and there was only one shrimp per taco, so it wasn't that great. I enjoyed it, though!

Jul 3, Last (full) day in Hawaii



Hilary and I woke up on the early side, and left the boys in the room while we went downstairs and picked up donuts and coffee (and more hot chocolate). We enjoyed some alone time downstairs in the open seating area. It was remarkably quiet around 7:30 am, so we just sat and enjoyed the quiet while we ate our donuts. (Mine was a double chocolate, and Hilary had a maple bacon).

Generally, there was a sadness in the air that it would be our last day. Usually, after a long trip, you're ready to head home to where things are familiar. Get back into the swing of things. On this trip, we'd be perfectly happy staying even longer! :)

I think it's because of the way Hilary planned it, making the most relaxing days toward the end of the trip, helped us enjoy it more. Trust in the master plan, after all!

When we got up to the room, the boys didn't want to pack up and leave the room. We would be able to stay the whole day, but we had to get out of our room in the morning. Ben grabbed on the corner of the bed and wouldn't let go! Eventually, we pried the children off the furniture, got the bags packed and checked out.

We stayed on property to enjoy more of Aulani before we left, though. I thought paddle-boarding looked like a great way to relax and see any fish down below. So we rented a paddle board for an hour. Ben seemed interested, as well, so we both went and took turns! I tried it for about 15 minutes and even was able to stand up a few times. But man, it's difficult to stay standing! It was like a lake in the water this morning, and I was straining to stay balanced. I fell in a few times (which Hilary and the boys were very happy they caught on camera), and



Ben was pretty steady on there. I later find out that taller people tend to have a rough time on paddle boards. And that I found out that it's actually a strenuous exercise to keep balanced on the board standing up. Ben did great! He didn't fall in once. He stumbled forward onto his knees a few times, but he recovered. After about 40 minutes, though, the staff came in the water and told all the paddle boarders to return the boards because the surf was



going to be too rough. They scared us a little bit because they said if the undertoe catches the fin of the board, it could drag you out into the open ocean! So I'm glad they recovered the board from Ben. The best part was that because we didn't get the full hour, they refunded the entire rental!

Oh, and speaking of the rental, I rented the board from a woman named "Miki" (Pronounced Mickey), so I asked if I could get a picture with Miki? She nicely let us take a picture, so now I can say that I have a picture with Mickey from Aluani!

At the pool, the boys got a big kick out of the people who had that scavenger app, because



tag with the kids in the pool, and then before we knew it, it was time to leave. :(

We went to the lounge, which was a great setup for last day folks! There were nice showers and changing areas / lockers. We were able to enjoy the last day! There was even a nice attendant who was working in the lounge who gave us tokens to dry our bathing suits.

What's even better was that when we were done getting cleaned up, we spotted a photographer heading to the beach! So we followed him and were able to get a decent portrait on the beach! It wasn't sunset, and we weren't in our aloha wear, but it still sums our family up pretty well, star wars and "double doink" tee shirts and all.

So mission accomplished on the beach photo front!

We packed up our car and headed on our way to dinner at a place called Sushi Bay, where the sushi comes around the bar in front of you on a giant conveyor belt. It was close to closing, so



when they got to the pool area, they could make this hidden waterfall of water appear. Ben would pretend to be surprised and the kids around him really thought that was hysterical.

We relaxed more poolside for the rest of the day, hitting up the lazy river, water slides, and wave pools some more, had lunch at Mama's snack shack again (for another round of coconut shrimp for me), more mickey-ear-shaped snacks, cocktails, a rousing game of





we noticed the same sushi going by over and over again. We were able to order what we wanted, though and had plenty of food. At the end, they just counted the colors of the plates and paid for that.

Then we headed back to our new hotel close to the airport so we could fly out early the next morning on our two-day trip home!

July 4-5, Our Travel Home



We got up on the early side and made our way to the airport to start our two-day trek home. There were no hiccups on the flight to Oakland. We got in, ate dinner at the hotel because everything else was closed for the 4th of July. We watched the Bad News Bears in the lobby of the hotel, continued it up in the room and tried to fall asleep early, but even though the bed was comfy, I kept tossing and turning, even though we were only 3 hours off now.

The next day, we took another early(ish) morning flight from Oakland to Newark, and the boys were very upset about having to go home. I'm glad they enjoyed this vacation together. It could have gone another way and they could have said "no, I can't wait to go home" which would have broken our hearts after all the

planning we did (read "all the planning **Hilary** did").

We had a wonderful trip, and I feel blessed to be able to go back to Hawaii. After our honeymoon, I never thought I'd be able to go back again, let alone being able to go back with our kids. Thanks to Southwest for making flights to Hawaii affordable! :)



I can't stress enough how thankful I am to have Hilary for a wife. She loves planning these trips. I'm okay at planning, but when it comes to vacations, I don't have the patience for it. Without her, I wouldn't be going to all these places I've been in my life. I write these journals to remember ever piece that I can, so that the vacation can live on in my memory better, and so I don't have to ever be too far from the memories of Hawaii.



First Day of Vacation



Last Day of Vacation

~ The End ~