

LIBERTY CALL

KMC tours are king of the mountain

Story and photos by
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You could say he's a regular customer. "I've been here three times and it keeps getting better," says Retired Storekeeper Chief Petty Officer Ace Warren, 81 of Lakewood, Calif., referring to the Joint Services Recreation Center, Kilauea Military Camp (KMC).

"It's restful, peaceful, the staff is great, which is why I always come back," he said.

Located on the Big Island of Hawaii at the edge of the Kilauea Caldera (on the world's most active volcano), KMC is a resort for active duty military, retired military, reservists, DoD civilians, families, and sponsored groups. For living accommodations, the camp offers deluxe cottages, apartments, dormitories (for large groups), and a variety of recreation and services.

And the tours?

"They're the best on the Big Island, no doubt about it," said Warren with a wink and a smile.

"Our drivers and guides know their facts because military personnel are not your typical tourist visiting the island," said KMC driver Jerry Medeiros. "People in the military or associated with the military are typically well-traveled and tend to ask the hardest questions. We don't let them down."

KMC scheduled tours, which are half day or full day affairs, run Monday through Friday.

Mondays and Thursdays are dedicated to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. In the morning you can take the Volcano Chain of Craters Road Tour where you can see old lava flows and craters with a final stop for a glimpse of the most recent volcanic activity. Afternoons take you on the Volcano Crater Rim Tour which includes the Volcano Visitor Center, Volcano House, Volcano Art Center, Observatory Kilauea 'Iki, Thurston Lava Tube, Halema'uma'u Crater and the Thomas A Jaggar Museum.

Tuesdays and Fridays are full day tours to Hilo and surrounding sites, including Rainbow Falls and beautiful Akaka Falls, which plunges over 420 feet

in a sheer drop over a volcanic cliff. Other stops on the Hilo tour include the Big Island Candy Factory, Prince Kuhio Plaza, Lili'uokalani Park, Mauna Loa Macadamia Nut Factory and the Akatsuka Orchid Nursery.

Another great adventure comes on Wednesdays, when KMC guests can take the "Circle Island Tour" which takes you around the Island in a day. Guests can see the Big Island's rocky deserts and lush rainforests, Punaluu Black Sand Beach, Na'alehu Bakery, Kailua-Kona, and Waimea Parker Ranch Center (in the Waimea-Kamuela district at the foot of Mauna Kea, which is the second largest cattle ranch in the U.S. and the largest privately owned cattle ranch in the world).

For the family with a tight budget, get the most for your leisure dollar by taking advantage of KMC's Wild Ginger tour package. The package includes a four-day/ three-night stay in a cottage with fireplace, great meals in the KMC cafeteria and all the tours KMC offers.

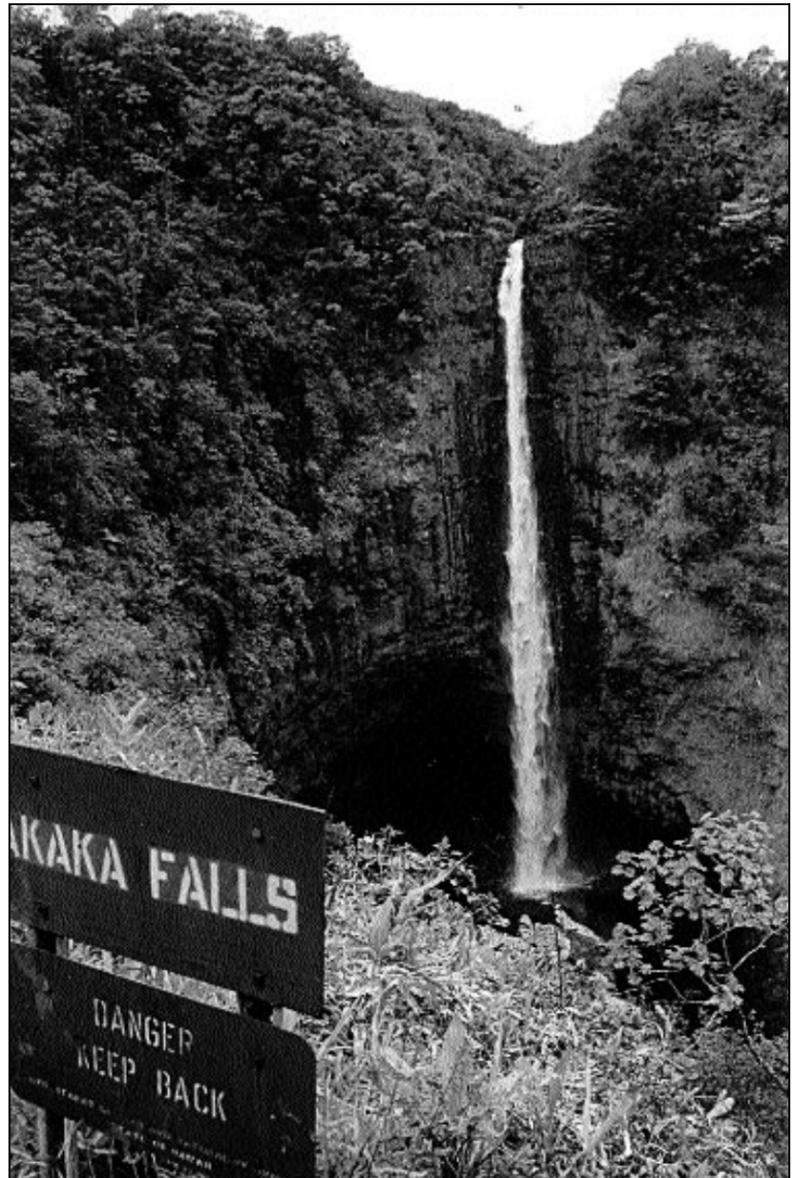
But KMC does not just focus on the family.

"We are also here to support the single Sailor," said Bruce Taylor of KMC's Transportation and Recreation Department. "We'll pick you up at your ship and show you the island. We promise you twice the fun at a third the cost, guaranteed."

Taylor, whose been working at KMC for the past 18-years, says the camp's tour program is ideal for the visiting ship because KMC will tailor any tour, day or night, seven days a week through their charter service.

"We offer the highest quality tour program on the Big Island," said Taylor. "I don't think anyone can beat us on the price."

For more information about Kilauea Military Camp, visit the camp's web page at www.kmc-volcano.com. Commercial phone is (808) 967-8334. From Oahu: 438-6707, Fax: (808) 967-8343 or write KMC Lodging, A Joint Services Recreation Center, ATTN: Reservations Office, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Hawaii 96718



Retired Chief Petty Officer Ace Warren (above) talks shop with local wood carver Iwalani Kalei, while significant other, Elsa (far right) admires the handiwork during KMC's Hilo Tour. Rainbow Falls (right) is a regular stop for KMC tour enthusiasts. The Hilo tour is offered every Tuesday and Friday.



A marker at Panaluu Black Sand Beach (above) is on the way to Kona during KMC's day-long Circle Island Tour.