

ARK & TENT



Uniting people & animals...through travel

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FOCUS ON FUN

Free-Ranging on the Island of Kauai

By Sandy Sims

Stepping out of the Lihue airport in Kauai late in the afternoon, my husband and I received a raucous welcome: "Caw! Ca ca! Cawwww!" A rooster, sitting on the airport fence and plumed in bright reds, blacks and browns, with elaborate white tail feathers, peered over at us. He was a beauty.

But, wait a minute...don't those guys crow at dawn?

Driving away from the airport in our rental car, my husband pointed to a hen and four baby chicks alongside the road. And then, a rooster. And another. And another.

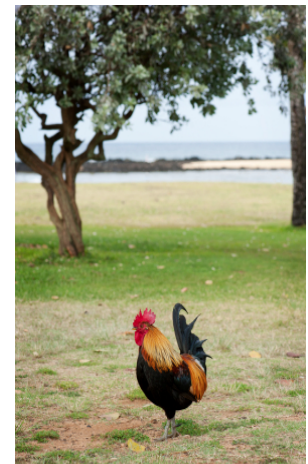
What was up with all these chickens?

We forgot about them as we clucked at each other about where the heck our hotel was in Kapa'a, and when we finally settled into our room at Resort Quest, we stood on the patio marveling over our view of the ocean.

A rooster crowed from the property next door.

They were everywhere. We even heard a rooster on the radio, since a country music station had adopted one for its mascot.

Because it was our first trip to Kauai, we decided to take a tour of the island. Our guide, Lisa (a talkative, Texas transplant), explained to us that the island's chickens are the main source of food for many locals. But the chickens had always been kept on farms and in cages - until Hurricane Iniki struck Kauai on September 11, 1992. This category-4 hurricane blew apart 90% of the island's buildings, and ... well, the chickens flew their coops.



"You can imagine," Lisa said, "there was no way to corral them back into the coops." Since then the fowls have run amuck, giving new meaning to the term 'free range.'

And they have multiplied.

“We say, ‘If you feed ‘em, you take ‘em home,’ ” Lisa said laughing. But she warned that the ones in the state park are protected. She says she likes the chickens because Kauai has big centipedes, and chickens eat them.

The other Hawaiian Islands don’t have a poultry problem because they have mongooses, natural predators of chickens. Legend has it that when the only shipment of mongoose arrived at Kauai’s Nawiliwili Bay, one of them bit the harbor worker. He got angry and dumped the entire load in the bay.

But Hurricane Iniki didn’t just free the fowl; she obliterated sugar, pineapple and macadamia nut plantations. Because of the long harvest time (three years for sugar cane, two for pineapple and five for macadamia nuts), they were never replanted. Instead, they’ve been replaced by coffee plantations.

The famous Coconut Grove Hotel, once the heart of Kauai’s entertainment where scenes from the 1961 Elvis movie *Blue Hawaii* was filmed, sits sadly in its Iniki ruins along the island’s main Highway 56. I’m sure chickens have taken up lodging there, too.

Kauai’s famous Dirt Shirts are also a direct result of Iniki. The hurricane blew a company’s white T-shirts into the island’s impossible-to-get-out-of-anything red dirt. So they washed all the shirts in red dirt and sold them as Red Dirt Shirts.



Later in the week, we stopped to look over the mystical Waimea Canyon - a gorgeous gash in the earth filled with swirling red cliffs shrouded in green. And there on the lawn by the parking section, a kingly rooster stood atop a tree stump posing, his feathers flame-red, rust, and teal-blue, his tail a lush fountain of shimmering blue and

black. He was definitely not your barnyard rooster. He had to be a descendant of gamecocks, strong and aggressive.

Before Iniki he’d likely have been cooped up somewhere. Now, he was definitely the ‘cock of the walk’ - and he looked every bit as regal.

FAST FACTS

Kauai Visitors Bureau Information Hotline

(800) 262-1400

www.kauai-hawaii.com

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Posted December 2010 (ArkandTent.com)

