Full Detailed Itinerary - Hawaii: Island Endemics and Volcanic Lands

Day 1: Arrival in Honolulu (O?ahu)

After arrival in the state's capital you will be transferred to a local hotel for the night. The tour kicks off with a welcome dinner on this night. The birding begins the next day, close to our hotel, so if you arrive early there are areas to explore easily nearby. Night in Honolulu (two nights will be spent in this same hotel).

Day 2: O?ahu

Our birding will start right alongside our hotel, by checking in on the local resident White Terns. While in Queen Kapi?olani Regional Park to see and photograph these elegant seabirds, we will be on the lookout for other ABA-countable species like Red-crested Cardinal, Yellow-fronted Canary, Common Waxbill, Java Sparrow, and Japanese (Warbling) White-eye. This will be a busy day, with a rush of new birds, as we will also visit another place further north, Kuli'ou'ou Valley Trail for Oahu Elepaio and the beautiful Oahu Amakihi, as well as other birds of interest like White-rumped Shama and Red-billed Leoithrix. We will also be scouring coastal sites on the northern coastline for Bristle-thighed Curlew, as we will be hitting this in the perfect season for them. A second night will be spent in the same Honolulu hotel as the first night.

Day 3: To Kauai

Early in the morning we shall take an early morning flight and swap one island for another, moving northwest to Kauai. After the action-packed day of the previous one, we shall take the pace down a notch, by visiting nearby sites of Kilauea Lighthouse and Hanalei NWR. Our first major stop, at the lighthouse, will be for the subject of one of the greatest conservation success stories of the modern age, the Nene, or Hawaiian Goose. It is the official bird of Hawaii, but was reduced to a mere 30 birds in the 1950s. However, due to captive breeding efforts the population has been raised to some 2,500 birds in the 2000s. While remaining one of the world's rarest geese, its numbers appear to be more stable now. While we take in this iconic conservation emblem, we will also be on the lookout for other marquee seabirds, like Laysan Albatross, White-tailed and Red-tailed Tropicbirds, and Red-footed Booby. Scaly-breasted and Chestnut Munias also occur in the area around the lighthouse. We shall also explore Hanalei NWR on the north coast, where waterbirds such as Hawaiian Duck, Hawaiian Coot, and 'Hawaiian' (Black-necked) Stilt occur, along with Japanese Bush-Warbler. At the end of the day we will settle in for another two-night stay, this time in the small town of Kapa'a, situated at the base of Nounou ("Sleeping Giant") Mountain.

Day 4: Northwest Kauai

Today will be one of the major stop-off points of the tour, as we visit the mountains of northwest Kauia, by visiting K?ke?e State Park and Alaka'i Wilderness Preserve, which will offer up jaw-dropping endemics, like Kauai Elepaio, Apapane, Anianiau, and Kauai Amakihi. At the end of the day we will swap birds for volcanic vistas, with a trip to Waimea Canyon. This red-dirt canyon is nicknamed the "Grand Canyon of the Pacific", and stretches 14 miles long, 3600 feet deep, and is over a mile wide. After a day full of alluring endemics plus classic Hawaiian landscapes, we will return to Kapa'a for a second, and final, night.

Day 5: To the Big Island

Next up, will be a flight from the northwest of the archipelago to the Big Island in the southeast. We will arrive in Kona on the west side of the island, and make our way north to the town of Kamuela for another two-night stay. As we drive from the airport to our hotel, we will male many roadside stops, searching for Eurasian Wigeon, Pacific Golden-Plover, Gray Francolin, Rosy-faced Lovebird, and Saffron Finch, among others.

Day 6: Hakalau Forest National Wildlife Refuge (Big Island)

The pace will ramp up today, as we visit one of the key sites of the entire tour, assisted on site by one of the experienced local guides, in search of some of the state's most endangered species. The upper koa-'?hi'a forests there are an important refuge for many endangered species, namely a smart set of Hawaiian Honeycreepers (an endemic bird family), notably the blood-colored Apapane, which roams the forest in small flocks; and the brighter still, Iiwi. These radiant-red honeycreepers are complimented by the rarer still, fiery-orange Hawaii Akepa. Other honeycreepers include the remarkable Akiapolaau, which uses its unique bill (with a massively-oversized, strongly-decurved upper mandible), to probe the moist montane forest trees, much in the manner of a woodpecker. It has filled this niche on Hawaii, which lacks any woodpeckers. Hawaii Creeper is another target there, which is not a traditional treecreeper, but another, (also endangered), Hawaiian Honeycreeper. More abundant in these restricted access, upper forests, is the similar Hawaii Amakihi, and we will listen for its trills as we walk amongst the native trees. It will not all be about Hawaiian Honeycreepers though, as an endemic monarch flycatcher, Hawaii Elepaio, also dwells in the forest, and as it is named after its call, we will be birding by ear to pick out the call of Hawaii Elepaio from the forest chorus in order to track down this striking songbird. At the end of a marquee day, with many outstanding endemic birds on offer, we will return to Kamuela for another night.

Day 7: Pacific Pelagic

In the morning we will return to the town that we flew into, and take to the sea, for some outstanding, offshore birding. A full day will be spent at sea, exploring the Pacific Ocean offshore from Honokohau Harbor. The exact list of birds is hard to predict, but some of the regularly seen target birds include Great Frigatebird, Red-footed Booby, Buller's and Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, and Juan Fernandez, Hawaiian and Bulwer's Petrels. Once back onshore, we will drive east to Hilo for another two-night stay.

Day 8: Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (the Big Island)

An integral part of any Hawaii tour is to see the volcanic landscapes that have made this a firm favorite amongst domestic and international tourists for time immemorial. And, arguably, there is no finer place to see this than on the east side of the Big Island, at the well-named Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. This is home to two of the most active volcanoes on Earth, Kilauea and Maunaloa, and covers an area extending from sea level up to the summit of the latter at 13,677 feet. This might make it sound like a tough day, but this is not the case, as the famous 10-mile Crater Rim Drive will allow us to encircle the crater of Kialuea by vehicle, making strategic, scenic stops along the way. While vistas are the main objective of our visit, endemic birds may also be seen, like the rare Hawaaian Hawk, the burnt-red Apapane, and trilling Hawaii Amakihi. Kalij Pheasant also occurs in the park and is ABA countable. At the end of a day focused largely on dramatic landscapes, we will make the 45-minute return journey to Hilo for the final night of the tour, where we'll celebrate a bevy of endemic birds complimented by Hawaii's iconic landscapes.

Day 9: Departure from Honolulu (O?ahu)

After a morning flight out of Hilo back to O’ahu, the tour finishes at the airport of the capital, Honolulu, which is well connected both domestically and internationally.

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