

COURTESY HALE 'OHU BED & BREAKFAST



MAGIC IN THE MIST

A Big Island bed-and-breakfast recalls the history of Hale 'Oahu

From Egypt, Thailand and Latvia to Cuba, China and Greece — Nicole Naughten and her identical twin sister, Gabrielle, have visited 34 countries together in addition to living together most of their lives and working for the same organization in the San Francisco Bay Area, where they were born and raised.

When they were pondering a career change, it was thus not surprising they would do it together. What the two "big-city girls" didn't expect, however, was owning and operating a historic bed-and-breakfast in Volcano, which, per the last census count, has a population of just 2,575.

"Gabrielle and I were working for the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the world's largest association of eye physicians and surgeons," Naughten said.

"We had stable jobs, but we were tired of being chained to computers and making 90-minute, round-trip commutes. We had worked at a friend's B&B and enjoyed it, so we thought running our own place would be great."

In early 2016, they began looking in earnest for available options. Their initial online searches from New York's Finger Lakes to the San Juan Islands in Washington state ended in disappointment. Then Gabrielle found a property in Volcano that included a 19th-century home built by descendants of missionaries David and Sarah Lyman (see sidebar).

"We had visited Volcano separately in the mid-1990s and had fond memories of it," Naughten said. "The property seemed to fit our needs, the price was in our budget and the historical tie was intriguing."

They did a site visit, saw its potential and began negotiations to purchase it. The deal was finalized on Nov. 1, 2016, their last day of work was Jan. 3, 2017, and on Jan. 9 they headed to their new home on Hawaii island.

Hale 'Oahu Bed & Breakfast opened six months later. The venerable Lyman house is the sisters' residence and office; a nearby structure accommodates visitors in three well-appointed guest rooms.

"Things happened quickly; once Gabrielle and I made a decision, we are pretty determined to see it through," Naughten said. "We knew the buildings were in need of updating, and we would have to put in a lot of effort to realize our vision."

But they couldn't have asked for a more beautiful setting. Before renovation work began, birdsong was the only sound breaking the



PHOTOS COURTESY J.D. WACKER

A guest strolls down the greenery-lined driveway, at top, which is reputedly the only part of an old foot and horse trail from Hilo to Volcano that still exists. Descendants of missionaries David and Sarah Lyman built the home on the property in 1886.

silence in the surrounding rainforest where anthurium, ti, orchid, bird of paradise, hapuu fern and much more flourish.

Allowing nature to take center stage, the sisters opted for subtle, minimalist decor in the guest rooms, incorporating things that had impressed them during their worldwide travels. For example, the idea for the stone floors in the showers came from an inn they stayed at in Cambodia.

Masters of creative repurposing, they transformed a redwood furo (Japanese bath) that had been in a second-floor bathroom in the house into a planter filled with orchids and impatiens. They hired a carpenter to give ohia planks from the kitchen floor new life as benches on the porch.

Little niceties make a big difference. The fresh flowers in the rooms come from Hale 'Oahu's lush gardens. Breakfast highlights include Gabrielle's homemade breads and muesli. Guests can read a book beside a koi-filled pond, stroll on a path through the rainforest or relax on a private patio with a cup of tea and drink in a view brushed with a hundred shades of green.

"Hawaii is known for its beaches, but being in a high-altitude rainforest near Kilauea, one of the most active volcanoes in the world, is a unique experience," Naughten said. "Hale 'Oahu appeals to adventurers — those who vacation off the beaten path and would enjoy the peace, beauty, history and rural life, local style, that we have come to love and are thrilled to share."

Cheryl Chee Tsutsumi is a Honolulu-based freelance writer whose travel features for the Star-Advertiser have won several Society of American Travel Writers awards.



Twin sisters Gabrielle, left, and Nicole Naughten own and operate Hale 'Oahu Bed & Breakfast. Above, the subtle, minimalist decor of the Red Ginger Room.

History of Hale 'Oahu

On March 27, 1868, Mauna Loa volcano sprung to life with molten lava, plumes of gas and frequent earthquakes at Moku'aweoweo, the caldera atop its summit. At 4 p.m. on April 2, Hawaii's largest recorded earthquake, registering 7.9 on the Richter scale, hit the district. The subsequent landslide and tsunami caused 77 deaths and the destruction of coastal settlements.

Mauna Loa's eruption intensified on April 7, with smoke blanketing the area, fountains of lava shooting as high as 1,000 feet and tephra (rock fragments) landing as far as 15 miles away. When it ended a week later, King Kamehameha V personally led a relief effort there.

Volunteers from Hilo organized by Frederick Lyman, eldest son of missionaries David and Sarah Lyman, also helped. While they were traversing a rocky trail in Volcano, described on old maps as being "two shoulders and a coffin wide," the axle on Frederick's wagon broke. After spending a rainy night sheltered beneath the wagon, the men fashioned a new axle from the branch of an ohia tree.

That area came to David and Sarah's minds when they decided to build a summer home in a cool climate. They acquired a 9-acre parcel from Kamehameha V before he died in 1872, but a house wasn't built on it until 1886, after they had passed away. The Lyman's children and grandchildren named the retreat Hale 'Oahu, meaning "House in the Mist."

In 1973, the late Gordon and Joann Morse purchased the property from Orlando Lyman, Frederick's grandson (Gordon Morse was a retired Honolulu Advertiser reporter and photographer). The Morses began operating My Island Inn in 1985, hosting visitors in the main house and a separate structure with three guest rooms that was built in 1888.

Their daughter Ki'i managed the property from 1989 to 2016, when Gabrielle and Nicole Naughten purchased it (the Morse family had previously sold 4 acres of the original parcel, so what remained was around 5 acres). In a nod to the past, the Naughtens revived the name Hale 'Oahu for their bed and breakfast. The long tree-lined driveway leading to it reputedly is the only portion of the 19th-century trail from Hilo to Volcano that still exists.

IF YOU GO...

Hale 'Oahu

- >> **Where:** 19-3896 Old Volcano Road, Volcano, Hawaii island
- >> **Nightly rates:** From \$150 for the Orchid Room and from \$155 for the Bamboo and Red Ginger rooms, including Wi-Fi, parking and daily continental breakfast. Kamaaina receive a 15% discount.
- >> **Info:** 808-731-5243, email reservations@haleohu.com or go to haleohu.com.
- >> **Notes:** Hale 'Oahu is an adults-only property. Weather in Volcano can be unpredictable; one day it might be warm and sunny, the next day it can be cool and drizzly. Pack accordingly. Quaint Volcano Village — with stores, restaurants and art galleries — is a short walk away. Other area highlights include Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, Akatsuka Orchid Gardens, Lili House Farm, Tea Hawaii and Volcano Winery.