

This Hawai'i Island Family-Run Farm is Perfect for a Day with the Keiki

The Iranon 'ohana offers family fun and lessons in living simply.

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The Iranon 'ohana. Photos: Courtesy of Lili House Farm/Tricia VenturaThe Iranon 'ohana.

It's a rainy day in Hilo, but I pack my three kids into the mom van and make the 45-minute drive to Volcano with a hopeful heart and a quick prayer for sunny skies over the Lili House Farm, a petting zoo, country tea time spot and agricultural oasis that has become one our family's favorite destinations for adventure.

Many people travel to this part of Hawai'i Island to explore the world's most active volcano, Kīlauea. Besides lava tubes and crater rim hikes, however, the surrounding area has other exciting stops, including an art center, winery and petroglyph field.

And if you have animal lovers in your pack, like I do, the Lili House Farm should be on your list.

On this day, the weather clears the farther south we get from Hilo and we all let out a little cheer as we drive through Volcano Village and see nothing but white clouds and blue skies ahead.

Part of the charm of the 20-acre farm is its location in the pasturelands of Volcano, where country is still country and neighbors honk hello and wave as they drive by. The owners of the farm are just as charming: Kainoa Iranon, who was born and raised in Volcano; his wife, Danielle; and their six children live on the farm, care for the animals and work the land together.



Aurelius Iranon with Lili, the farm's resident cow.

Three of them are waiting for us when we arrive. "Come this way," says 9-year-old Aurelius, ushering us from the driveway and around the side of the house. While Danielle sets up tea time near the outdoor fireplace, we head to the petting zoo, our first stop. Aurelius is the perfect host, holding a big red gate open and directing us inside with a wave of his hand.

This is our third visit to the farm—this time, we're here on the Deluxe Farm Tour—and my two boys don't hesitate, running off in different directions to their favorite animals. We are greeted

first by Mr. Tom and Lady Tom—two resident turkeys—as well as a dozen chickens pecking the ground. One of my sons makes a beeline to the sulcata tortoise enclosure, while the other searches for his favorite Nigerian dwarf goats, Peaches and Cream. On our last visit, I discovered these goats like to cuddle and take selfies.

“Here, hold this chicken,” the Iranon’s youngest son, 5-year-old Valor, says to my daughter, 11. He plops the chicken into her arms without waiting for an answer, but it’s just the warmup she needs.

We are introduced to newcomers Arthur, a miniature donkey, and two calves, just 3 weeks old (yet to be named). They are half the height of my sons. “Want to feed her a bottle?” Kainoa asks. Holding the bottle, my 8-year-old smiles from ear to ear. “She’s playing tug of war with me and the bottle,” he says, laughing. “Baby cows are strong!”



Legend Iranon feeding the chickens and ducks.

My daughter has disappeared into the rabbit enclosure. She’s quietly hanging out with her favorite Holland Lop rabbit, Onyx, who just gave birth to six kits the night before. The tiny hairless bunnies are resting in a nest made of Onyx’s fur. “I can’t believe the mama pulls out all her fur to make a nest for her babies,” she tells me.

Life on the farm is always changing. A new tortoise named Kupa has caught the eye of one of my sons, who has been following him around for a good 20 minutes feeding him elderberry leaves. Some of the

animals are donated and others are born right here at Lili House Farm. Off to one side is the serene Children's Garden, a project Danielle is working on with her kids. "What's better in life than having butterflies, flowers and children in one area," she says.

Work is also underway on a vegetable garden in hopes that guests will be able to leave with flowers and produce, in addition to eggs, jams, fresh butter and bread. "It's what you would want to leave with when you go to a farm," she says, "but it's also inspiration for self-sustainable living."

My own children could have spent all day running back and forth between the enclosures, which are set up like an animal neighborhood with a communal area for socializing. Turkeys, pigs, tortoises, chickens and goats roam together—a rambunctious menagerie.

We are called back to the outdoor fireplace for tea time and sit at a long, wooden table shaded by a tarp. Linens and china are set out, flanked by two glass-domed cake stands filled with blueberry scones and freshly baked bread by Danielle. Her signature bread is served with her strawberry-rhubarb jam, hand-shaken butter, local honey, and tea or coffee. It's turned out to be a picture-perfect day, with a slight chill in the air and a gentle breeze—and sunshine to spare. My daughter eats three scones, leaves the table, then comes back for more because they are that good. I sit and talk with the Iranons, while the kids run off again to play.



Tea time at the farm.

It took the family a year after moving to the Big Island in the summer of 2017—after a decade spent on O’ahu as pastors—to develop the outdoor fireplace, walkways, gardens and animal enclosures. Just about everything you see here is made from scrap wood or donated materials to which the Iranons gave new life. Kainoa was raised on a 1,000-acre working ranch in Volcano, but he learned most of what he knows about keeping animals as pets from the Internet.

Country living has always been a dream of Danielle’s, and the Lili House Farm has turned out to be the fulfillment of all those country-life imaginings.

“We wanted it to be a family business, so everybody contributes,” explains Kainoa. “We are teaching our children how to live in community. I feel keiki these days need to have the experience of how to plant a garden, of being outside instead of inside, and the responsibility of taking care of something other than themselves.”

The Iranon children have been busy all afternoon, showing my keiki the ropes and letting them experience a bit of daily life on the farm. But now, it’s time to go. My happy, tired bunch piles back into the van, rosy-cheeked from playing in the fresh air, chattering all the way home about goats and bunnies and tug of war with baby cows. Now keen on farm living, they daydream aloud about the possibility of having their own farm one day.

Katie Young Yamanaka writes from her home on Hawai’i Island where she enjoys adventuring with her husband and three wild and wonderful children.