

## Rainbow Falls State Park

Directions: At the northernmost traffic light in Hilo turn onto Hwy 200 (Wai'anenu Avenue), follow the signs, and as you go up the hill veer left. You will pass Blaine's Drive-In (greasy hamburgers done their way, but worth a try all the same), and the Hawaii State Annex Building. The park can be hard to find, but not to worry. If you get lost, you can always ask a local. Even the guy walking the pit bulls was friendly.

Amenities: Restrooms, kind of grungy and rundown. I wouldn't want to be here at night, but no worries during daylight hours.

Most of the island tour operators appear to skip Rainbow Falls. I've only seen one tour bus in the parking lot in all the times that I've been here, but that might have more to do with my (or their) timing. This isn't such a bad thing. On a good day, you can have this natural wonder all to yourself, and on a bad day, you'll share it with maybe ten others.

The drive up the road from downtown Hilo will take a good 10-15 minutes, but once you are here, you can do the site in 5 minutes (or spend hours).

Want the short walk thru? Get out of the car. Walk 25' down the sidewalk. Take a picture of the falls. Ask a visitor to take a picture of you and yours, and then... What else is there?

I could go on about my personal delight in watching water cascade down an 80' tall rock face in majestic freefall, but I suppose once you've seen one waterfall, you've seen them all.

No? You say. You've traveled 3,000 miles to come to Hawaii, and you were hoping for maybe a little more? Well then, I'm happy to oblige.

I've never seen a rainbow at Rainbow Falls, but based on my limited knowledge of meteorology (and conversations with

locales), if you want to see a rainbow, come in the morning. By consensus, around 9 AM seems to be the best time.

But rainbow or not, the falls is still fun to watch. The water sprays down into a large pool that is just aching to be swum in, but don't do it. The path to the water's edge sucks, (I think that's the technical term for it), and well, it's against the law -- something about getting sucked under the current and never being seen again.

All of this, however, isn't really the best part of the stop. Once you've taken your fill at the parking lot overlook, it's time to move deeper into the park. Walk up the 100 yard long rocky uneven sidewalk (if you want to call such a path a sidewalk) to the top of the falls, and you'll see a rocky river bed -- composed entirely of hardened lava the likes of which you (or at least I) have never seen before. And then, as if that wasn't enough, if you continue on down the path (and it's really just a path at this point), you will find yourself in the midst of a balboa forest. It goes from bright sunlight to the darkest depths of Mordor (or whatever fantasy forest you happen to fancy) in a matter of feet. The way is root strewn, not even close to being ADA, but what a delight. Trust me. Just take a few strides until you are under the canopy and in the forest. Before you know it, you'll be in another world.

Inhale. Enjoy. Wonder what the Hawaiians word for elvin/pixie/prankster is? And then recall that you read somewhere (I'm guessing it was here) that the word is Menehune.

I've always wanted to have a picnic at Rainbow Falls, but I've never gotten around to it. If you are of the mind, you might want to get a bag of burgers from Blaine's and give it a go. I hear tell Menehunes are partial to French fries and are happy to share their ancient secrets with generous strangers bearing salty deep-fried morsels.

*{And that's pretty much how a review should go. I knew there was a reason I took up writing. Sometimes my stuff works... even if I have to remind myself of this simple fact at times.}*

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