

## Travel: Maui

Author: Karen Jones | Published: Wednesday, February 24, 2010



*Secret beach in Makena by Maui Visitor's Bureau*

The minute you touch down on the Hawai'ian island of Maui, it is clear you are somewhere special. Romantic, exotic and welcoming, Maui offers sun-drenched beaches, lush rainforests, steep volcanic craters, historic towns, posh resorts and plenty of "Aloha Spirit." Here American culture is infused with traditional Hawai'ian, Polynesian and Asian cultures creating a foreign yet familiar experience for "malihinis" (newcomers). It is an enchanting combination and it will not be long before you slip on a lei, order a Mai-Tai and kick back and enjoy.

Maui has distinct geographical sections, each offering visitors something special. The western and southern regions are mostly dry and sunny year-round and it is here that you will find the majority of the beach resorts. Lahaina, the former whaling town that has spent over 200 years showing visitors a good time, is the fun and funky hub of West Maui. It is a good area to stay in if you want to be close to a variety of restaurants, nightlife, shops, galleries and boating activities.

Along Front Street, Lahaina's eclectic main drag, high-end boutiques share space with t-shirt joints, while art galleries intermingle with trinket stands—but somehow it works. There are all manner of eateries, from fine dining to tiki-huts, serving up regional favorites including plenty of fresh seafood. With its cultural mix, Hawai'i put culinary fusion on the map so don't be surprised to also see Spam sushi, macadamia nut pancakes and elk burgers. Do try the shave ice though, which puts mainland snow cones to shame.



For a special dining experience, there is the upscale Lahaina Grill where the sautéed mahi-mahi and the tequila shrimp are a culinary delight. For something more casual, try the traditional Lau Lau (pork with Hawaiian salt wrapped with taro leaves) at Aloha Mixed Plate and there is always the “original” Cheeseburger in Paradise.

Lahaina Harbor is where you book fishing charters and sightseeing trips but from December through May, make sure you schedule a whale-watching trip with the Pacific Whale Foundation. Every year, thousands of endangered Humpback whales and their calves winter in the warm waters off Maui. Their return is celebrated island-wide and if you are lucky you will see one of these gentle giants in full breach.

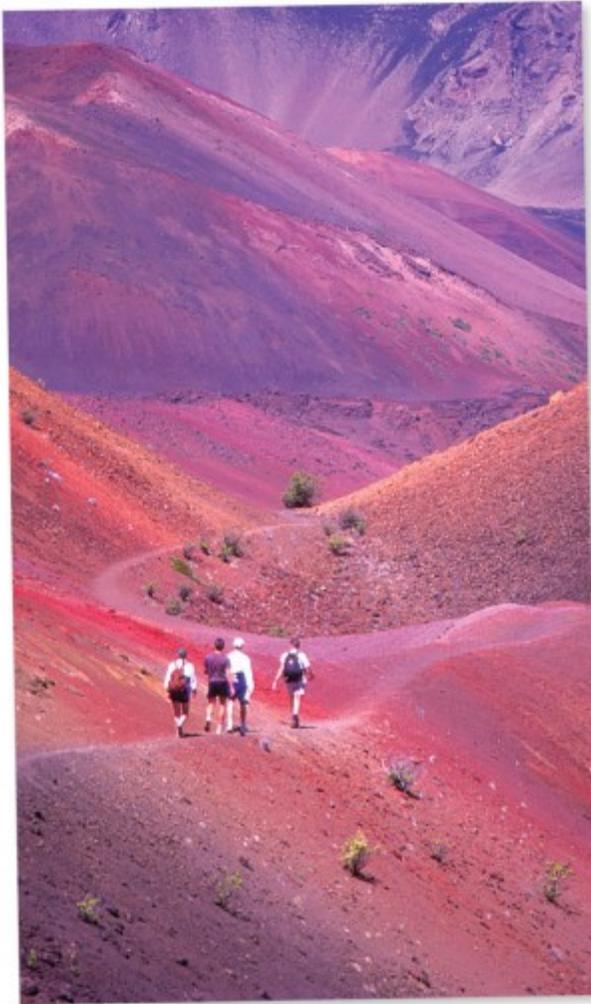
Lodging in town includes a few B&Bs and historic inns, but if you want an indulgent vacation experience, stay in the upscale beach front resort area of Kā'anapali just to the north. Hotels here pull out all the stops including the Westin Maui Resort & Spa whose stunning lobby features a cascading waterfall, live flamingos and parrots. There are five beautifully appointed pools, including one for adults only, and watching the sun slowly sink into the Pacific at Tropica Restaurant & Bar is sublime.

Meanwhile, the Hyatt Regency Maui hosts a full-fledged nightly luau, “Drums of the Pacific,” featuring Hawaiian, Samoan, Tahitian, Fijian, Tongan and Maori songs and dances—including some pretty fancy fire dancers. And don't miss the nightly cliff diving ceremony off of Puu Kekaa (Black Rock) at Kā'anapali Beach. It commemorates the ancient Hawaiian belief that Puu Kekaa was the “jumping off” place to the next world.

Needless to say water sports and activities abound in Maui from surfing, windsurfing, snorkeling, kite boarding, parasailing, sport fishing, kayaking, diving and more. Along the South Shore are some of the best beaches you'll find anywhere, and the town of Wailea offers high-end shopping and three legendary golf courses. If you have kids in tow, stop at the Maui Ocean Center, The Hawaiian Aquarium on the way to Wailea. It's a first class family attraction and try the "Shark Dive" if you dare.

When you are ready for adventure rent a car and journey back in time along the fabled "Road to Hāna." A full day's excursion on the North Shore, the Road to Hāna is only about 50 miles in total but includes 600 hairpin turns and 54 narrow bridges. It takes on average three hours each way, but you will see some of the most spectacular scenery ever from wondrous waterfalls to tranquil rainforests and steep ocean cliffs. This is a slow drive through unspoiled Maui, so relax and shift into "Hawai'i time." Note: Set out early in the morning to beat the crowds and make sure you fill up the tank in Pā'ia, the official start of the journey. There are no gas stations along the way, but plenty of fresh fruit stands and opportunities to stop and explore.

No vacation is complete without visiting Haleakalā National Park in East Maui, home to the mighty 10,023 foot Haleakalā, the world's largest dormant volcano. You will be treated to an otherworldly experience if you time your ascent to the summit just as the sun rises.



The fertile area to the west of Haleakalā is affectionately called “Upcountry” and don’t be surprised if you run into “paniolos” (Hawaiian cowboys) working the vast cattle ranches. While Upcountry make sure you visit Ali’i Kula Lavender an utterly charming spot where you can sip lavender-infused tea and take a leisurely tour of this lovingly managed farm featuring 45 varieties of the flower.

Spend any length of time on Maui and the “Aloha Spirit” will become part of your psyche. Bring it back to the mainland but think to yourself “Ā hui hou” (until we meet again). For all the information you will need to plan your trip [visitmaui.com](http://visitmaui.com) is the webspot of choice. Aloha!

# Lanai “The Pineapple Island”

By Karen Jones

Island hopping is easy throughout Hawaii but if you want to experience really laid back, unspoiled “Old Hawai’i” take a 45 minute water ferry from Lahaina over to the tiny island of Lāna’i (18 miles x 13 miles). A former pineapple plantation, over 98% of the island is privately owned. It has few paved roads, one small village, Lāna’i City, and only 3,000 inhabitants all of whom live in Lāna’i City. However, it does have two lavish resorts, Four Seasons Resort

Lodge at Kō’ele Bay and Four Seasons Resort Lāna’i at Mānele Bay each with acclaimed golf courses and all the amenities. A shuttle runs between both resorts and stops in Lāna’i City, which is little more than two streets with small gift shops, quirky art galleries, a few eateries and a park, but it has a low key charm. Case in point: Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates chose Lāna’i for his 1994 wedding and bought all the hotel rooms on the island to keep the press at bay.

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A Long Island native, Karen Jones, is a freelance lifestyles journalist who has covered travel, food, technology, arts & entertainment and non-profits for over ten years. Her byline has appeared in The New York Daily News, Newsday, Super Lawyers, Parade Magazine, Reader’s Digest and more.

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