

What Makes Ma

Standing high above the island coast, you see breathtaking views in every direction. There are forests and farms. Maybe you can see a few rooftops. The beaches are inviting, stunning even. Are you on Jaya Peak, Papua, Indonesia? Mt. Popomanaseu on Guadalcanal? Haleakala on Maui? Or, is this Nasorolevu on Fiji's Vanua Levu? Sugarcane fields stretch for miles along the coast. So, this must be Nasorolevu? You know better. You know this is Maui, but if you had only the view-planes of a tropical paradise to judge by, you might guess you were on any of dozens of islands in the Caribbean, the Pacific or elsewhere.

What makes Maui so special?

Maui is surely the most famous "sun, sand and surf destination" in the world and probably the most emulated. It has been called the "best island in the world" by the readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* magazine for twelve years running, and is currently also the "top travel destination" in that annual poll. Terry Vencel, executive director of the Maui Visitors Bureau, said of the announcement in October 2005, "To win 'best island' during any given year is remarkable. To capture the title for a dozen years running is nothing short of extraordinary."

In short, as surveys of travel agents, magazine readers and travel writers confirm over and over, Maui is a unique wonder. How is it unlike, and better than, other islands? Why does Maui consistently rank higher even than other Hawaiian islands?

The thing that distinguishes Hawai'i from all other islands is Hawaiian culture—from the greeters with beautiful flowers lei to the lu'au entertainers, from music and foods to museums and markets, right down to tiny details of language and custom in the hotels, resorts and shops. What Maui adds to that Hawaiian culture recipe is an attitude that is increasingly serious, respectful, authentic and accessible.

Rita Ariyoshi reported in *Endless Vacation* she had discovered from resort managers that "without Hawaiian culture, their guests feel cheated, as if they had gone to Disneyland and found that Mickey and Donald had retired." On Maui, no one wants any guest to feel "cheated," but it was Native Hawaiians, not resort managers, who urged Maui to rediscover and revitalize the island's cultural past.

Hawaiian culture has been in dire danger of being erased time and again. Kamehameha II abolished the kapu (taboo) system at the heart of Hawaiian religion, law and social order, in 1819. The ensuing riots might have resulted in—well, anything, including the destruction of the culture. Wise kupuna (elders) saved the day and put the culture back on track, but they couldn't fill the space previously held by the gods.

The very next year, New England missionaries began arriving, prepared to fill that gods-shaped hole in Hawaiian culture with Congregationalist Christianity. If only they had stopped there, Maui would never have needed to resurrect its original culture.

For over 100 years, hula and the Hawaiian language and everything else associated with what had become the host culture to uncounted foreigners deteriorated under pressures of all sorts. It was all abused till it was nearly lost. Native Hawaiian hearts ached over the losses, and they probably broke no less painfully when Hollywood falsified Hawaiian culture in one film after another.

Then lightning struck.

Long-simmering disquiet and heartache blossomed into a reawakening of the concerns and values that define all things truly Hawaiian.

The first big, newsworthy moment in the Hawaiian renaissance was literally launched on Maui. The now-legendary push to reclaim the uninhabited island of Kaho'olawe began in 1976 with a flotilla of small boats out-racing the Coast Guard from Ma'alaea Harbor to a successful (but illegal) landing on the bomb-target island.

A recent photo exhibit at the Ritz Carlton Kapalua commemorated the event.

Since then, Maui has struggled to discover and honor its Hawaiian reality, and has done so with a sincerity unmatched in the island chain. The record hasn't been an endless parade of right actions and appropriate behavior, but it has been good and it is getting better.

The Hawaiian renaissance has become a revolution benefiting Maui's visitors and residents alike. It has made Maui unique, provided respectable careers for Maui's Native Hawaiian people, and given genuine Hawaiian values and traditions a world in which to thrive and be passed along to future generations.

Maui's visitor industry and its resident housing boom were both in their infancy when those men landed on Kaho'olawe, inspiring their own generation and the ones that followed to believe that Hawaiian culture could be saved.

Maui's first luxury resort, The Sheraton Maui, was barely over a decade old at the time.

Infused with this new spirit of Old Hawai'i, Maui turned a corner that has made all the difference. Resorts, starting with the Ritz Carlton, have cultural advisors to keep them on track. Businesses and nonprofits almost always have traditional Hawaiian blessings at their openings. Developers even want their property blessed at groundbreaking. La'au lapa'au, the science of Hawaiian healing, flourishes, and hula halau,

Maui No Ka Oi

By Joseph W. Bean

Hawaiian cultural schools, are in every community.

Maui County is home to Keali'i Reichel, Raiatea Helm and many others of the most important Hawaiian musicians, including the Ho'opi'i family. It is also where the resort recognized as the state's "most Hawaiian hotel," the Ka'anapali Beach Hotel, is found. O'ahu celebs come to Maui to host and M.C. cultural events. Maui is where the remarkable musical 'Ulalena developed and where almost every visitor attends a lu'au.

The lu'au has a long history of entertaining travelers and residents alike. It served that purpose, under various names, centuries before the first Westerner arrived in these islands. On Maui, The Old Lahaina Lu'au developed with an iconoclastic idea. They would not include non-Hawaiian show-stoppers like fire- and saber-dancers. That took courage, but it's paying off with the perennial popularity of the Old Lahaina Lu'au.

Now Michael Moore and his Old Lahaina Lu'au crew have pushed the envelope again with the introduction of their breakfast lu'au, Ho'omana'o. While they let a little of Tahiti's exotic costuming and South Pacific dancing into their regular evening show—because Tahitian voyagers settled in the islands—everything is all-Hawaiian in the morning show.

An all-Hawaiian entertainment would be groundbreaking enough, but the introductory hula show is nothing compared with the main event.

Visitors are directed, after a breakfast that pleases the Western palate without breaking the Hawaiian theme, to go to three different kulana, or stations. One kulana is dedicated to teaching about the ahupua'a, the ancient Hawaiian land-use system. This is a kind of home-and-hearth presentation. It includes the making of kapa (bark cloth), the growing of kalo (taro), and the pounding of poi. One Hawaiian presenter gives a demonstration of fishing with a throw-net. Then this very patient lawai'a (fisherman) also gives one-on-one net-throwing lessons.

People taste fresh-pounded poi, and find they like it. They handle the silky cloth called kapa. They get a sensual and visceral experience of Old Hawai'i, and they still have two more kulana ahead of them.

At another kulana, the subjects are ancient Hawaiian warfare and weaponry. No food or fish nets here—nor anything non-Hawaiian. Everyone tries a hand at spear-throwing. Fortunately, visitors are aimed at a banana stump before they start flinging spears. Ua Bradshaw and his partner throw their spears at one another and, like Kamehameha the Great in the





Photos by Joseph W. Bean

Mahie Pokipala teaches Ho'omana'o visitors to make hula music. Then she or one of her friends dances hula to the newly learned music.

famous drawings, they catch the spears in midair with their bare hands.

The final kulana is all about hula. There's nothing silly about hula in this forum as there often is in evening lu'au shows, but it is great fun. The kumu hula explains the ancient Hawaiian dance form more frankly than even Maui people are accustomed to, then each participant has an opportunity to learn a hula instrument. Instantly, newcomers become the band, playing for a beautiful island girl who dances as if the music were perfect. Watching dancer Mahie Pokipala, you know that hula is the easy part for her, while making guests feel they are doing well is—for the moment—the important thing.

This twice-weekly breakfast lu'au, Ho'omana'o (remembrance) is not just unusual. It's revolutionary. It puts Hawaiian culture at the fore in an unprecedented way.

While Ho'omana'o resurrects a realistic picture of the lives of pre-contact Hawaiian people in general, another recent innovation recalls the place-specific history of West Maui. Because West Maui and the Ka'anapali Resort area were already more than a decade into luxury development when

the Hawaiian renaissance became a noticeable movement, it began as a typical, world-class resort. Visitors might have chosen Ka'anapali over Fiji or Aruba because it was American, freshly luxurious or more easily accessible, but not because it was Hawaiian. So, history crumbled under bulldozers for some years.

Then, around 1990, Native Hawaiians on Maui turned their attention to the west coast of the island and stood together to defend Hawaiian burial grounds on the site of the new Ritz Carlton. The developers heard the message shouted at them by the renaissance revolutionaries, and they resituated their buildings, providing protection rather than destruction to the sacred Hawaiian place.

In the ensuing decade, the historic walking tour of Lahainatown was perfected and redeveloped. The whaling town that became a whale-watching capitol gave voice to more than two centuries of the mingling of Hawaiian and Western cultures with admixtures of people from all over the world. The new addition to the living library of West Maui history, however, looks further back to unalloyed Hawaiian history and comes nearer to our time by recalling the original West Maui airstrip on the beach at Ka'anapali.

The Ka'anapali Historical Trail & History and Legends Tour is a deeply respectful walking tour of nearly-lost tales and sites. Since it is marked with clear signage on large (weatherproof and false) boulders, visitors—including Maui residents visiting the resort—can guide themselves through the antiquities, just as they can stroll through the historic district of Lahaina without a storytelling leader.

Until the Ka'anapali Historical Trail & History and



The chants, songs and hula at the beginning and end of the Ho'omana'o experience are purely and perfectly Hawaiian.



Women of old Hawaii spent many hours pounding wauke (mulberry) bark to make the finest “cloth” in the Pacific. The process is demonstrated by a Ho’omana’o performer.

Legends Tour opened this year, not much of old Hawai‘i could be seen between the resort towers and golf clubhouses. People eager to learn and be touched by the culture, legends and history of Maui found the resort area was more a magnificent wasteland than the great living museum it is now becoming.

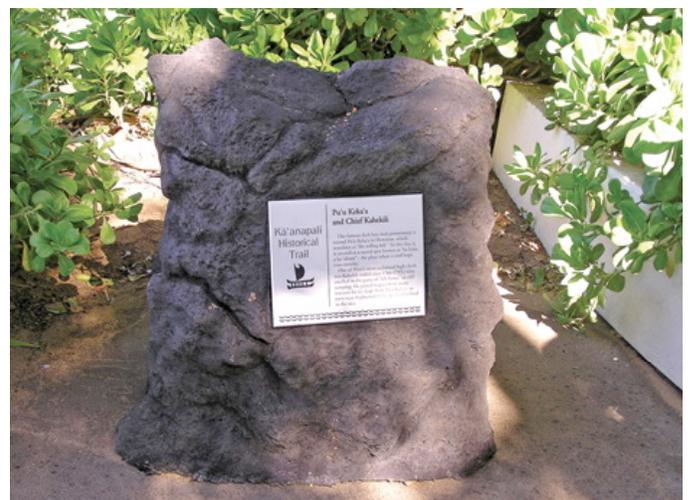
To get the most out of the Ka’anapali Historical Trail & History and Legends Tour, people—particularly Maui residents—might prefer to join an early morning guided ride-and-walk.

Guides for the tour are carefully selected and thoroughly trained. Better yet, they are people who genuinely want to be doing this job. They admit getting “chicken skin” just standing there reciting the history many of them learned only as they prepared for the task of leading groups of visitors. Their personal histories, family backgrounds and bloodlines connect them to the tour script, so they insert personal stories and express themselves emotionally, making the experience all the more affecting.

According to Karee Carlucci, executive director for Lahainatown Action Committee, the idea for the tour took shape during a talk story session around a dinner table several years ago. “It was in 2001,” she said, “that we dreamed up that this could be possible.” Four and a half years later, there are ten interpretive sign-markers distributed along the resort coast.

Many people and many hours were devoted to discovering, distilling and preparing to present this cultural history of

West Maui. The resorts themselves have participated, and the guided tours are led by resort staffers. In addition to the original group of dreamers and the individual resorts, the partnership that created the Ka’anapali Historical Trail & History and Legends Tour includes the Ka’anapali Beach Resort Association (KBRA); VITEC, the continuing education program at Maui



Markers like this one—photographed before it was placed at a site from which Black Rock can be seen—guide visitors through the Ka’anapali trail.



Seeing how poi is made often leads Ho'omana'o participants to taste and enjoy the Hawaiian staple, even if they believed before that they disliked the taro paste.

Community College; The County of Maui Office of Economic Development; the Hawai'i Tourism Authority and other entities.

Shelly Kekuna of KBRA said, the money from the Hawai'i Tourism Authority meant, "we were able to take the tour up like 10 notches." MCC's Flo Wiger added, "I think this is going to bring a whole new level of knowledge and understanding to the west side of Maui."

Stops on the tour are brilliantly devised to capitalize on both what is still visible and what can be inspired in imagination. It begins at the old Ka'anapali air strip. Many Mauians still remember that place, and especially the infamous Windsock Lounge there. As the guides speak of growing up with the Windsock, you may envy their memories. The rest of the tour plunges into more ancient times very quickly.

The next site commemorates the farm on which pigs were raised to feed plantation workers, giving the guide the opportunity to also speak of still more distant times and of the Keka'a Village—Keka'a being the Hawaiian name of Black Rock. Other sites refer to legends of aumakua, the demigod Maui, and the Keka'a Landing pier, a bit of which can still be seen. Speaking of Keka'a also brings up stories of the famous Maui Chief Kahekili, and being in West Maui guarantees there will be legends of Chief Kaka'alaneo and his son Kaulula'au who cleared the ghosts from Lana'i and made it habitable.

Recent and ancient history blend rather than jumbling as the guides point out the sites of a horseracing track in West Maui, the bloodiest pre-unification battle in Hawai'i history, and Ka'anapali's traditional taro patches, or lo'i kalo.

If you choose to do the Ka'anapali Historical Trail & History and Legends Tour on your own, on foot and in a car, parking in the right places may be a little tricky, but you'll have

an eye-opening, very Hawaiian day that you will not soon forget. Joining a guided tour, however, means you'll experience the joy the guides feel in sharing their mana'o, their thinking and knowledge, and their mana, their spirit, with you.

Maui Mayor Alan Arakawa is fond of saying, "Maui is the best place to live in the world, bar none." The world seems equally eager to say, "Maui no ka 'oi," Maui is better than all the rest. What the Valley Isle has to make it so special is a growing reverence for Hawaiian culture.

Terryl Vencl said, "Hawaiian culture is very important. Among surf, sand and sea areas, that's what keeps us head and shoulders above other destinations. Especially, now, after 9/11, people have kind of changed their attitude... the kinds of things that people want are the things that 'plug us in' to home, family, roots, culture and what we are, rather than thrill rides."

If Vencl is correct, and the evidence says she is, Maui is way ahead of the game, having spent the past three decades learning to honor the Native Hawaiian host culture and to bring it out of the shadows so everyone can see and learn from it. **REMS**

Ka'anapali Historical Trail & History and Legends Tour

For more information or to make reservations to join a guided tour, call the Ka'anapali Beach Resort Association at 661-3271.

Ho'omana'o at the Old Lahaina Lu'au

For private individuals and groups, reservations are made by calling 667-1998. Agents should call 667-6998.