



## NEWS RELEASE

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### OCEAN IN THE BALANCE

Maui embraces conservation, education, and play

MAUI, Hawai'i – In the near-shore waters of Maui, pairs of delicate butterfly fish and moray eels dart swiftly, endangered sea turtles bob gently, myriad colorful organisms make their living above and in reef crevices. Even the reefs themselves are formed by tiny animals – layers of coral in all different shapes, sizes and colors, living structures which the entire, complex ecosystem of the ocean depends. In the vast expanse of water surrounding the islands, thousands of invertebrates, whales and monk seals, fish and turtles, even sharks, maintain a fragile balance with each other – all sustained by the reefs.

Myriad marine life may be overwhelming to first-time snorkelers. Dazzled by the beauty swimming by, snorkelers often do not realize that one fourth of the fish in Maui's coastal waters are not found anywhere else in the world, or that the reefs on which the fish depend are threatened by pollution, anchors and even well-meaning visitors.

Fortunately, an increasing number of mindful activity outfitters and marine conservation agencies are sharing the delicate marine ecology of Maui with visitors through exciting "ed-ventures". Coral Reef Alliance, a nonprofit organization, has been working with marine recreation providers, community members and agencies to create voluntary standards for ocean activities to ensure the health and sustainability of the reefs.

Humpback whales are a perfect example of what conservation efforts coupled to education can do. Once swimming in ever smaller numbers, today thousands of humpback whales visit Maui Nui's waters every year from November through May. At



the Kīhei headquarters of the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary you can fill your heart and mind with knowledge about these gentle giants of the Pacific. Under federal auspices, the Sanctuary recently completed a new multipurpose educational center to expand its research and visitor programs, offering an ever growing number of exhibits and informative talks.

In its Discovery Center in nearby Mā‘alaea Harbor Village, equipped with extensive studies concerning the humpback whales, dolphins, and coral reefs of Maui County, the Pacific Whale Foundation has developed an award winning program for visitors as well. The nonprofit also offers eco-adventures, including whale watching around Maui, snorkeling at Molokini, one of Hawai‘i’s most famous mid-ocean reefs. And a Lāna‘i wild dolphin eco-tour; its vessels are high-tech catamarans powered with biodiesel produced on Maui.

Dedicated to fostering understanding, wonder, and respect for the marine life of Hawai‘i, the Maui Ocean Center in Mā‘alaea opened in 1998 and remains one of the most advanced aquarium facilities in the world. Visitors encounter hundreds of endemic animal species, engage in interactive displays, or wander through exhibits such as a 750,000-gallon open ocean display – by way of an acrylic tunnel. Animals at the Center are gathered right off shore, in compliance with strict government permits. Many, such as the green sea turtles, the rays, and the sharks, are merely temporary guests. Maui Ocean Center honors its host culture as well, by showcasing the myths, language, and history of the Hawaiian Islands.

Want to get in the water right away? Long before others spoke of eco-adventures, marine biologist Ann Fielding started to show visitors the rich beauty of the marine life of Maui with personalized tours, and she is still doing so today. Formerly with the University of Hawai‘i, Fielding has formed her own company, Snorkel Maui. She and her two trained marine-experts act as guides to ensure that you meet the ocean’s creatures as wondrous, interdependent individuals. Snorkeling turns into a thrilling experience when you recognize the cleaner wrasse nibbling parasites off other fish, who line up for treatment. It’s cool to know that the coral a parrot fish chews eventually resurfaces as sand. You’ll explore shallow water sites right at the shoreline, no experience is needed, and Fielding provides all the gear.

Several other snorkeling adventures are available in Maui Nui, including sailing and kayak tours that pause at Molokini. Hawaiian Sailing Canoe Adventures takes visitors along the Wailea Coast in a Hawaiian outrigger canoe offering an introduction to ancient Hawaiian culture and history over and above snorkeling. Maui Eco Tours has been blending kayak adventures with snorkeling since 1993 and is thoroughly committed to the well-being of animals. They offer full vegetarian or vegan lunches on



its tours. Keli'i's Kayak Tours takes groups of eight or fewer people in low impact vessels with guides taking their time to teach about paddling as well as nature itself.

Moloka'i provides fascinating opportunities for shoreline exploration. Located just a ferry trip or plane hop across the channel from West Maui, its waters are great for kayaking. Guides from Moloka'i Fish & Dive accompany your kayak right from the wharf of historic Kaunakakai and have you paddle through tropical mangroves frequented by Samoan crabs.

On Lāna'i, the marine environment of Hulopo'e Bay belongs to the world's most spectacular, and kayaks are available at the resorts or in Lāna'i City. Trilogy Excursions, founded in 1973 and is the oldest sailing company on Maui, uses well-equipped sailing catamarans for sunrise and sunset Lāna'i discovery tours departing from Lāhaina.

There is so much water around Maui Nui, the list of water adventure companies is large; some outfitters offer scuba diving. The best companies invite visitors to become aware of the complexity of the vibrant marine environment before plunging in – before they go on their own to marine conservation areas. It's good for the ocean and makes the ocean experience so much more rewarding.

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