



## **Central Maui, a Bridge for Many Cultures**

The broad green plain between the magnificently sculpted Mauna Kahālāwai (West Maui Mountains) and the massive slopes of Haleakalā gave Maui its nickname, “The Valley Isle.” The Hawaiians called the isthmus Kulaokama‘oma‘o, “The Land of Mirages.” Two of Maui’s principal towns, Kahului and Wailuku, lie three miles from each other but are eons apart in ambience.

Wailuku, Maui’s county seat, is the older of the sister cities – sleepy, picturesque and full of local charm. In ancient times it was guarded by two temples, Pihanakalani and Haleki‘i, that still afford spectacular views of the city and surrounding countryside. Both are on the National Register of Historic Places, as are many buildings in the center of town. Wailuku is the birthplace of some of Maui’s most famous citizens, from Keōpūolani, the favored, sacred wife of Kamehameha the Great, to Jesse Kuhaulua, the sumo champion known as Takamiyama.

The Bailey House Museum, an 1833 missionary home, has a wonderful collection of landscape paintings done by Edward Bailey from 1866 through 1896. In a setting of gracious gardens and fine missionary architecture, the museum offers cultural and arts programs to complement its Hawaiian and missionary artifacts. Its Hawai‘i-themed gift shop brims with items of authenticity and discriminating taste.

Neighboring Kahului, much younger and unencumbered by history, was built in the 1950s by the plantation company Alexander and Baldwin. It was hailed as a “Dream City” to provide affordable housing for plantation workers. Its tidy streets fan out on the plain. With subdivisions and shopping malls, it has become Maui’s major population center and boasts the island’s only deep-water port for shipping, as well as Maui’s principal airport.

As the jets descend to a landing at Kahului Airport, passengers are greeted with their first vision of Maui. They see clouds billowing on dramatic mountain tops and fields of green sugarcane stretching to the distant hills. The scene is repeated from new and breathtaking angles as they leave the terminal.

Behind the sister cities, the land narrows and curls into the mountains, forming the most magnificent valley on the island, ʻĪao, Maui’s Valley of the Kings. Few places in Hawai‘i are more sacred. Mark Twain, in a euphoric moment, called ʻĪao “The Yosemite of the Pacific.” The chiseled peaks of the valley are visible from most parts of Kahului, even from shopping mall parking lots, and serve as a reminder of the sheer visual power of the West Maui Mountains.



Most visitors drive past the plantation houses in the valley, view Kūka`emoku, Maui's famous 'Īao Needle – what looks like a 2,250-foot green monolith but is actually the razor edge of a narrow ridge – and then leave. Those who do are missing the real splendor of the valley, carved over the course of 10,000 lifetimes by the forces of wind and water and the flow of 'Īao's waters.

Moonstones sparkle in the streambed and wild orchids cheer the banks. Hiking trails lead through stands of giant tree fern, ti and `ōhi'a. At the head of the valley is a natural amphitheater, the caldera of the original volcano that formed Maui. At the head of the valley, 10 miles long, four streams collectively known as Nā Wai 'Ehā merge into 'Īao Stream.

Two hundred years ago, while still a Big Island chief, Kamehameha fought one of the most famous battles in Hawaiian history in this valley. By conquering the forces of the Maui chief, Kalanikūpule, Kamehameha added Maui to his expanding Hawaiian nation. Kepaniwai Gardens, named for the battle, are actually a collection of peaceful ethnic gardens and pavilions representing the various groups that have settled on Maui over the centuries. Included are Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, American and Korean gardens.

At the Maui Tropical Plantation, near Wailuku, visitors are introduced to Maui's commercial crops, including coffee, sugarcane, macadamia nuts, guava, bananas and more. There are tram rides, a coffee roasting room, lei hut, demonstrations, restaurant and a well-stocked gift shop.