



Families Discover Maui's Cultural Treasures

“Proud To Be Hawaiian” says the bumper sticker. It’s a sentiment that runs deep in the hearts of the people of Maui – those who are Hawaiian and those who cherish the native traditions that they have adopted.

There are so many reasons to visit Maui that people sometimes forget about its unique indigenous culture. But travelers who like to include learning as part of their global explorations – especially families with school-age children – use their visit to Maui as a chance to discover the arts, language and beliefs of a thriving native people. Hawaiian culture is part of everyday life on the Magic Isle, and its roots run deep into the landscape. It’s readily available to the visitor, and yet it is absorbingly mysterious, too.

One could begin learning about the culture by searching out the archaeological reminders of ancient times. In Hāna, for example, Pi‘ilanihale Heiau seems to have lost none of its “mana” or spiritual authority in the 400 years since it was built during the era of King Pi‘ilani. This is an enormous temple platform, the largest piece of pre-discovery architecture in the state. The heiau is still protected and maintained by Hawaiian families of the region. The way to see it is to take a self-guided walking tour of the site, which includes a federally funded ethnobotanic research station called Kahanu Garden. The station is part of the National Tropical Botanical Garden.

Two other major heiau structures can be visited at the Haleki‘i Pihanakalani Heiau State Monument near the Central Maui town of Waiehu. One of them, Pihana, was a luakini heiau – used for human sacrifice.

Visitors can also find reconstructions of ancient homes – thatched compounds called kauhale. The two most authentic are at opposite ends of the island – at the Hāna Cultural Center on East Maui and at Hale Kahiko (“old house”) at the Lāhaina Center. Hawaiian culture on Maui, though, is not so much a matter of buildings as it is the active business of everyday life.

There are always opportunities, both formal and informal, to see someone dance the hula, to hear the sound of Hawaiian slack-key guitar, to learn lei-making, to watch a canoe regatta, or to get one’s first taste of poi. In fact, there’s an encounter with native culture somewhere on Maui every day of the year.

One good place to go for this is Bailey House Museum in Wailuku, a well preserved missionary era home that is headquarters for the Maui Historical Society. Bailey House offers a constantly changing program of craft lessons, lectures, and performances. Other places to look are hotels and shopping centers



throughout the island, which offer activities that bring visitors in contact with island artisans, performers and elders. Two of Maui's hotels are at the forefront of sharing Hawaiian culture through programs for visitors – The Ritz-Carlton Kapalua's "Sense of Place" Series and the Kā'anapali Beach Hotel's Po`okela program – but many others offer engaging and authentic cultural experiences, from dance to traditional crafts and ocean experiences.

No matter what the performance venue – whether in Maui Arts & Cultural Center's luxurious 1200-seat Castle Theater or on a temporary stage in a local shopping center, Maui's musical talent is definitely worth seeking out. Whether it's hot stars like Keali'i Reichel or Amy Hānaiali'i Gilliom or living cultural treasures like Uncle Richard Ho`opi'i, local musicians are held in high esteem, and their music expresses much about island life.

Many annual events on Maui showcase native culture and perpetuate Hawaiian tradition. Each spring, for example, the people of Hāna dedicate a weekend to the East Maui Taro Festival, which includes a program of learning activities and a day of music, food, and crafts at the town's ballpark. Every Easter weekend, The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua hosts its "Celebration of the Arts," dedicated to Hawaiian culture. May 1st is May Day in the islands – a traditional day to celebrate old Hawai'i in pageantry and flowers. May is also the month when The Fairmont Kea Lani Maui in Wailea presents its annual lei festival, and the town of Lāhaina welcomes Maui's signature cultural heritage event, the "International Festival of Canoes." June is the month for Kamehameha Day and Lāhaina's annual King Kamehameha Parade and ho`olaule`a – a Hawaiian style gathering celebrating the accomplishments of the islands' greatest ruler. That same month sees a "Slack Key Guitar Festival" at the Maui Arts & Cultural Center. In December the island celebrates Hawaiian melodies at Kā'anapali's "Nā Mele O Maui" youth song contest.

But visitors don't need to plan their trips around special events; they only need to look in the paper and ask around. For Hawaiian culture on Maui is not something locked away in museums or performance halls. It's available to all, and visitors are always welcome – because Maui people are "Proud To Be Hawaiian."