



Knocking on Heaven's Door – Haleakalā and Upcountry Maui

Haleakalā is a dormant volcano – the largest in the world – but there's nothing sleepy about it. It teems with power and energy, attracting more than a million and a half people every year. Awestruck visitors have described the drive to its summit as similar to leaving the tropics and arriving on the moon. Dramatic changes in climate, mood and vegetation occur as the road winds upward for 38 miles and swaying tropical palms give way to pines, eucalyptus, and giant, shade-giving redwoods.

Haleakalā, House of the Sun, has attained mythic stature in the lore of Maui. The island's major geologic presence, it rises 10,023 feet high. Its crater looks like the moon and yawns to the sun. Its flanks form rainforest, farmland, deep gulches, vertical canyons, and sprawling acres of greened-over cinder that slope gracefully to the sea.

More than 30,000 acres make up Haleakalā National Park, nearly 25,000 of which are designated wilderness. Sunrise at Haleakalā is considered a cosmic ritual, and pilgrimage worth losing sleep over – literally. In their quest for the day's benediction, viewers bundle up hours before sunrise to make the hour-and-a-half drive from Kahului to the summit. The journey reaches a crescendo when the first rays of light ignite the eerie landscape in hues of umber, amber, rose and jade.

It was here at Haleakalā that Maui, superman of Hawaiian myth, lassoed the sun and caused it to travel more slowly across the sky, giving Hawai'i more sunshine to enjoy in a day. At night, the summit area of Haleakalā National Park provides one of the top ten "seeing" sites for viewing celestial objects, all the way up to 7th magnitude.

While appearing to be a crater, Haleakalā's center is actually an eroded valley 3,000 feet deep, 7.5 miles long, and 2.5 miles wide. This space is 21 miles in circumference. So much like the moon is this landscape that when American astronauts trained here for their lunar landing, they placed a prism on the moon and bounced laser light beams to it from Science City, a research facility atop the volcano. The roundtrip took two seconds.

Some of the wildlife and plants of Haleakalā, such as the silversword, are found nowhere else on Earth. The park has more endangered species than any other park in the National Park System, and houses a number of native species including the 'ua'u – the Hawaiian Dark-Rumped Petrel, a seabird that eats squid and regurgitates the indigestible beak outside its burrows at the summit.



Recreational opportunities abound in the park, from horseback tours and hiking to star-gazing and backpacking through the crater and staying at the few cabins and campsites that make it accessible. (Permits and advance reservations may be required; check with the National Park Service).

Many farmers on the slopes of Haleakalā welcome visitors and will ship flowers to their homes. The University of Hawai'i offers self-guided tours of their Kula Experiment Station that include a variety of vegetables, protea, roses and other ornamental plants. Upcountry botanical gardens grow everything from orchids to Christmas trees to calla lilies and protea, and a lavender garden welcomes guests for regular tours, craft lessons, and special events. The garden's gift shop is a treasure trove of lavender products, ranging from lavender honey and salad dressings to sachets, beauty products and soaps.

Agriculture on Haleakalā took a new turn when historic 'Ulupalakua Ranch planted grapes and uncorked a new era of viticulture. The ranch's Tedeschi Winery produces a fine variety of red, white, sparkling and specialty wines.

Upcountry Maui's rich agricultural history dates back to the early Hawaiians, who grew taro and sweet potato. The Hawaiians switched to Irish potatoes to supply the whaling fleets that arrived in the early nineteenth century. Upcountry farmers fed the 49ers during the California Gold Rush, and when the American Civil War broke out, the Union Army, cut off from its Dixie sources, marched into battle in uniforms of Maui cotton.

The most famous food crop today is the Maui onion, so sweet it can almost be eaten like an apple. It is prominently featured as a gourmet item on island menus.

Upcountry's Makawao, the center of ranching, is the biggest little town in the area. Cowboys still ride their horses down the rustic main street, past the art galleries and boutiques that have cropped up among what remains of the old feed, grain and saddle shops. Leading the art trend is the Hui No`eau Visual Arts Center, on the grounds of a gracious Upcountry estate, where classes, exhibits, and workshops by prominent artists are held.

One of the treasures of the area is a small white octagonal church in Kula, a distinctive and beautiful jewel. Its magnificent altar was a gift from the king and queen of Portugal to the Portuguese plantation workers of Maui.

Several fine restaurants have taken hold in Makawao, Kula, Pukalani and Hāli'imaile, diversifying the culinary landscape. But there are also some mom-



and-pop businesses still in operation today that were the mainstay of the area in its ranching and plantation heyday. Stop by for the high-calorie abandon of the legendary cream puffs made by Komoda's Bakery in Makawao.