



The Many Cultures of Maui

Maui people describe their ethnic diversity in just two words: “Chop suey.” They do this with great affection, for racial diversity is cherished on Maui, where interracial marriages approach fifty percent. This rate is among the highest in the nation.

The happy heirs of many cultures, the children of Maui are a golden blend of East and West. When asked about background, many a Maui beauty will proudly reel off an ethnic list that may include Hawaiian, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Irish, Portuguese and German. Islanders happily celebrate each other’s holidays, wearing flowers on Lei Day, donning kimono and honoring ancestors during the Japanese Obon season, and flying the Stars and Stripes on the Fourth of July.

Maui lifestyles are equally eclectic. Some people choose resort living year-round, settling into a sort of endless holiday along an emerald golf course. Others are happy in their old homes under the palms, along the ocean. Pockets of Beverly Hills pop up in unexpected places. Many islanders prefer the rural charm of small towns such as Ha’ikū or Hāna, where families have known each other for generations. In old Hawaiian settlements like Kahakuloa and Ke’anae, people fish, raise taro and let the commotion of the world pass them by.

Fans of the old plantation lifestyle remain snug in their own time warp, in tiny homes with tin roofs, front porches and overwhelming gardens, while their offspring might choose the new suburbs of Central Maui with bright new kitchens, baths, and a two-car garage.

Upcountry, traditionally a farming and ranching community, is trendy and fashionable in many ways, drawing artists, writers, families and recluses to its cool climate and green beauty. Because Upcountry farmers once shipped food to the miners during the gold rush, the area was dubbed Nū Kaliponi or New California. With the new crop of hot tubs, herbal healers, book stores, art galleries and espresso shops, the name still seems to fit.

The Paniolo (cowboys) who ride across volcanic meadows know each hill by name and can count the kinds of wind and name the types of rain that fall upon the mountain slopes. They know the many Hawaiian names for rain – the slanting rain, the short rain, the light rain, the drenching rain, the chilly rain – and some even know the name for the red-hued rain that can only be seen from below Haleakalā, and only in the late afternoon. The paniolo still call out their commands in Hawaiian as they ride herd and round up the animals.



Maui is inclusive. It makes room for a fascinating variety of lifestyles, all clearly visible and accessible. Every Saturday and Sunday, the real estate sections of local newspapers advertise “open house,” homes for sale that are open to the public for viewing. It’s an opportunity for visitors to glimpse Maui’s many lifestyles, and perhaps end up calling Maui home.