



In its Museums, Maui's History Comes Alive

Wherever you are on Maui, you will encounter the richness of culture and tradition. Centuries-old heiau in the open air, 19th-century storefronts, ancient churches, restored archaeological sites – Maui's cultural treasures are abundant and accessible.

But it's the museums that are the most faithful protectors of Maui's cultural heritage. One good place to start is Lāhaina Town, Maui's National Historic Landmark, crammed with living history. You might say that the town itself is the biggest and most famous museum in Hawai'i. It was the capital of the Hawaiian Islands during the monarchy (1795-1843), and for many hundreds of years earlier, it was the playground of choice for Hawaiian kings and aristocracy. When the whalers arrived in Lāhaina, it became the center of the bawdy Pacific whaling industry, much to the chagrin of the disapproving missionaries.

After whaling died out in the 1860s, Lāhaina turned into a sleepy sugar plantation town, only to be awakened once more by the modern boom of tourism.

Today Lāhaina's 31 historic sites provide visitors with a compelling tapestry of Maui's past. Among the highlights are the Courthouse, the Fort, the Prison, the Pioneer Inn, the Hongwanji Temple, Hale Pa'i, the Wo Hing Temple, and the Baldwin Home Museum.

The Hale Pa'i – literally, "House of Printing" – dates to the mid-1830s. It was here that the first newspaper in the state of Hawai'i was published and the way was paved for the establishment of Hawaiian as a written language. Today it houses a working replica of its original press and intriguing exhibits of early printing.

In 1912, the Wo Hing Temple was a "Tong House," run by the Tong Society, which provided aid and comfort to Chinese immigrants. It is considered to be the finest surviving Tong House in Hawai'i, a meticulously restored museum. There's also a quaint old cookhouse next to the temple that shows films of Hawai'i made in 1898 and 1906 by none other than Thomas Edison.

Beneath the rough-hewn ceiling beams of the Baldwin Home Museum are the wonderfully preserved memorabilia of the Rev. Dwight Baldwin and his family. In this, the oldest building in Lāhaina, the world of the reverend is revealed in sometimes-frightening detail. He was a medical missionary, and one look at his professional tools gives one a keener appreciation of the origin of the term "sawbones." But the gentler side of missionary life is also on display – the Baldwins' grand piano, the four-poster bed made of Hawaiian koa wood, the



family's fragile chinaware, and paintings and portraits that bring to life another time and culture.

The Bailey House Museum in Wailuku is another "must-see" Maui museum. Operated by the Maui Historical Society, the museum, the 1850 home of a missionary family, is dedicated to both pre-contact Hawaiian artifacts (the best and most complete collection on Maui), and post-contact missionary life. The house itself is also noteworthy, with heavy sandalwood beams in the ceiling and stone walls that are nearly two feet thick. The grounds also include a flourishing tropical garden, an authentic Hawaiian outrigger canoe, and a seminary building.

A few minutes away by car from the Bailey House, set in the lush 'Īao Valley, the Kepaniwai Park is an outdoor museum that educates visitors about Maui's cultural heritage. The charming, pastoral setting is enhanced by oriental gardens, arched bridges, a taro patch, and the 'Īao Stream gurgling in the background. In strolling through the grounds, you'll discover a Portuguese villa, a New England "salt box" with white picket fence, a thatched Hawaiian hale, and a type of bamboo house popular among the early Filipino immigrants, among other cultures represented there. The park is the site of a decisive battle in which Kamehameha I defeated the army of a Maui chief in 1790.

Pu'unēnē, near Kahului, is the home of the Alexander & Baldwin Sugar museum. Its displays illuminate the history of Maui's sugar industry and plantation era. Photographs and documents show the quality of life in the cane fields, how the workers lived on the plantations, and the workings of a sugar mill as displayed in a model. Across the street is the active, authentic version, the real thing, showing how the cane is processed. The exhibits give a glimpse into a once-thriving industry that left its mark on Hawai'i, and then declined. While the rest of Hawai'i's sugar industry has shut down, the industry on Maui has displayed a remarkable resilience in its struggles to survive.

With its roots firmly planted in Native Hawai'i values, East Maui's Hāna is a living example of the Hawaiian cultural resurgence. Intimate, true and endearing, the Hāna Cultural Center & Museum is the town's official repository of artifacts. The center's modest size and scale allow you to get close to the stone tools, hand-stitched quilts, photographs, wood crafts, and old Hawaiian games that residents have preserved through the years.