



Where Mauna Kahālāwai (West Maui Mountains) Meets the Ocean

One of the most significant archaeological sites in Hawai'i lies beneath a baseball park in Lāhaina. The residence of Hawaiian high chiefs from the 16th to 18th centuries, the site, called Moku'ula, was surrounded by a large, natural spring-fed pond where taro patches and fishponds thrived. Today, in a significant cultural, archaeological and environmental program, a group of citizens called Friends of Moku'ula is working to restore the site and spread the word about this valuable pre-western resource.

Moku'ula lies near the shoreline in West Maui's Lāhaina, directly in line with a steep valley that cuts through Mauna Kahālāwai, the West Maui Mountains. While Lāhaina faces west, 'Iao Needle, on the other side of Mauna Kahālāwai, faces east – the dawn. On Summer Solstice, the sun comes from the east through the middle of the valley and illuminates West Maui, where it sets beyond its shores.

Mauna Kahālāwai covers 52,000 acres and is home to hundreds of rare Hawaiian plants, animals and natural communities. At any time of the year, the drive to West Maui is a visual spectacle on both sides of the road. While the eye wants to rest on the ocean, Mauna Kahālāwai seduces the viewer with its series of sculpted valleys that seem always to be veiled in rainbows. Hidden in those valleys are hundreds of waterfalls, including the second tallest cascade in the United States. Along the shoreline, bays and beaches have names that ring like an ancient litany: Honokōwai, Honokeana, Honokahua, Honolua, Honokōhau and Hononānā.

Parts of West Maui are so rugged that they have never been explored, or are inaccessible. The summit of Mauna Kahālāwai, Pu'u Kukui, is the largest private preserve in the state, a remote bog and cloud forest with a summit at 5,788 feet. Nearly 300 known species of native plants, including seven on the national Endangered Species list, live in the ecosystems of Pu'u Kukui.

These fragile habitats are the other side of the West Maui coin, eons away from the vacation activity that thrives along the coast. Along the coastline, the hotels and holiday condominiums of Kahana, Honokōwai and Nāpili attract visitors who return year after year to soak up the Maui sun. The nine miles between Lāhaina and Kapalua are dotted with the hotels, private homes and condominium villages of Kahana and Nāpili. This area offers moderately priced accommodations, shopping and dining opportunities, and beautiful bays and coves.

Dominating the West Maui coast is Kahakuloa Head, the "tall lord," 60 stories of wind-sculpted rock that appears to be a stranger to Hawai'i. It looks more like the



lonely coast of Ireland – wind-scoured, haunted and tufted in gray, mauve and sage green brush. Great seabirds make it their home: koa`e, shearwater and the prehistoric-looking frigate bird with its daunting, angular wingspan.

At Nakalele Point the rocky shoreline is eerie, otherworldly, with giant geysers shooting up through old lava tubes and the ocean moaning below. Everyone calls it Hobbitland.

And West Maui is surfer's paradise. The best of the bunch test their skills at Mokolē'ia Beach, popularly called Slaughterhouse. The colorful tropical reef fish at Honolua Bay are so plentiful that the bay has been declared a marine life sanctuary by the state of Hawai'i. The waters of West Maui are ideal for water sports, including diving, snorkeling, swimming, sailing, parasailing, surfing, and windsurfing. Experts give lessons and reinforce skills.

In Honokōwai, West Maui's top value, there are no hotels, just motels and condominiums in the low to moderate price range. This is where sun-starved visitors from colder climes pick up groceries, dine on their lanai, and listen to the sound of the surf. What a perfect spot from which to watch the sun make its final splash of the day.