



## When on Moloka'i, Be a Molokaian

The Moloka'i experience – which, no matter who you are, is a total escape from life as you know it – begins even before you board your flight. It begins when you walk away from the main terminal, with its jet noise and nervous lines, and cross over to the commuter runways.

In Honolulu, the room where you wait for your flight to Moloka'i is huge and relatively empty. You can actually hear the flight announcements. The attendant has time to walk around and answer questions.

If you depart from Maui, you stand in the breeze at the edge of the runway.

Your plane has two propellers. It doesn't scream; it chuggles. And there's no cattle chute – you walk across the tarmac, just like Elvis boarding one of those Pan Am Clippers. You fly along the tallest sea cliffs in the world, cloaked with wild greenery and sliced with amazing canyons – one of the earth's natural marvels – and your neighbors are talking about their kids.

When you come to Moloka'i, you become a Molokaian. As one island native put it: "People try to tell us, oh you could have this, you should do that. But no sense try to change us. We want *you* to change."

On Moloka'i, with a little more than 8,000 residents, everyone knows everyone else. They don't get many outsiders. When they see one, they might slow down and wave you through the intersection. Or they'll stop and ask if you're okay. They might stare a little – till you break the ice, and then they melt. Conversations are direct and honest. They don't have a "tourist industry." But they're happy to have visitors.

Visitors experience Molokaian simplicity from the moment they step into Moloka'i Airport – which is small enough that you can just about fill out your car rental form with one hand and pick up your luggage with the other.

If it so happens that your bag is delayed until the next flight, don't worry. Someone will bring it. Someone else will lend you a pair of shorts. The next step is to drive into town for supplies.

"Downtown" Moloka'i is two blocks long, crowded with stores on either side. Built during the '30s, the town looks something like the movie set for a Western that never got made. Your first reaction might be: "My gosh, there's nothing here!" But the opposite is true; you can find everything in Kaunakakai. This fact is invisible from the street but

obvious the minute you step into any one of the shops, which are crammed with the essentials of Moloka‘i life.

There are two fully stocked grocers, Misaki’s and Friendly Market, plus a smaller place called Oviedo’s that specializes in Filipino food and serves the best roast pork in the state. Take’s Variety supplies everything from hammers to hose bibs, from Boggle games to bike parts. Moloka‘i Drugs is a full-service pharmacy where people take the time to talk with you about your prescription. And there are several places to buy made-on-Moloka‘i gifts, including Moloka‘i Fish and Dive, which is packed to the rafters with fishing and camping gear, hats, tee-shirts, and curiosities. Moloka‘i Wines ‘N Spirits is a total surprise – a great place to pick up a top-rated Cabernet, a 10-year-old Madeira, or a block of Roquefort cheese. The wise visitor will do the food shopping immediately. The town is essentially closed on Sundays, some places close mid-day on certain weekdays, and all of Moloka‘i goes to sleep every day at sundown. Most accommodations assume that you’ll adopt this rural tempo – that you’ll set up a temporary home in an isolated location and wrap yourself in the splendid stillness of the island.

But you don’t have to become a recluse when you visit Moloka‘i. You can dine out for every meal and scarcely repeat yourself in a week.

Kaunakakai’s main street, Ala Mālama Avenue, offers many options for a “local style” lunch. Oviedo’s is an authentic Filipino eatery. Kanemitsu Bakery serves diner-style breakfasts and early lunches (and their bakery counter stays open all day except on Tuesdays). Big Daddy’s is good for Filipino lunch, poke (a popular “salad” of raw fish, chopped and seasoned), and shave ice (island-style now cones).

At one end of the street, the tiny Sundown Deli offers made-to-order sandwiches and good soup; at the other end, Outpost Natural Foods provides organic, vegetarian dishes at its daytime window. Nearby Moloka‘i Drive Inn does fast-food service with Hawaiian-style “plate lunches.”

The town also has two good sized restaurants that stay open through the dinner hours. Moloka‘i Pizza Café is a bright, friendly place, no alcohol, with an extensive menu – not just excellent pizzas but also chicken and ribs, sandwiches and pies. Hula Shores at Hotel Moloka‘i offers comfortable seaside dining, breakfast-lunch-and-dinner every day. This is a great place to hear live music. The weekly Aloha Friday Sunset Celebration is one of the island’s best traditions, filled with live music, tales of island lore and culture, a torch-lighting ceremony, artisans, hula dancing and plenty of aloha spirit. Visitors will want to soak up this experience of Hawai‘i “as it was.” Outside of town, your eating choices get rarer, but they’re just as diverse.

The east end of the island has defied civilization. It’s a place for hiking, horseback riding, and hunting for castaway beaches. Out here, when your appetite starts to howl, you head for the Manaе Goods & Grindz near mile 16. The service window features burgers and teri chicken, saimin and plate lunches, floats and shakes.

North of town, in the upland area called Kala`e, you have two choices. Coffees of Hawai`i is a great stop for a light lunch or snack – bagels, croissants and salads along with 100% Moloka`i coffee. A block away, the popular Kualapu`u Cookhouse serves hearty island food for lunch and dinner.

In short, you won't go hungry on Moloka`i. Better yet, no matter where you eat, from Hula Shores to Manae Goods & Grindz, you'll be mingling with the people of the island. Over half of them are native Hawaiians, and all of them are unreservedly proud of being Molokaian.

They're proud of their rural community and proud of their freedom from the noise and ambitions, the buildings and appliances of modern life. They're notoriously friendly, but not outgoing so much as simply curious. After all, if you're on the island, they're going to make one assumption about you – for the time being, even if only for a day, you're a Molokaian, too.