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Moloka'i Fact Sheet

SIZE: 260 square miles. It is 38 miles long and 10 miles wide.

POPULATION: 8,100

MAJOR TOWN: Kaunakakai

MAJOR INDUSTRIES: Diversified agriculture and tourism

AVERAGE TEMPERATURE: ranges from 68 to 86 degrees Fahrenheit

NUMBER OF SWIMMABLE BEACHES: Six

MILES OF SHORELINE: 106 miles

NUMBER OF PARKS: There are 15 parks on Moloka'i: three state parks, 11 county parks, and one national park (Kalaupapa National Historical Park).

HIGHEST PEAK: Kamakou (4,970 feet)

PRINCIPAL RESORT AREAS: In West Moloka'i, the principal resort area is Kaluako'i; in Central Moloka'i, Kaunakakai; and on the East End, there are several condominiums and vacation rentals.

NUMBER OF HOTELS: 1 (Hotel Moloka'i)

NUMBER OF CONDOMINIUM RESORTS: 5

NUMBER OF VISITORS ANNUALLY: 79,000

MOST POPULAR VISITOR ATTRACTIONS: Kalaupapa National Historical Park, Hālawa Valley, Pāpōhaku Beach Park, and Moloka'i Museum & Cultural Center.

AIRPORTS: The main airport is Moloka'i Airport (MKK), located in the center of Moloka'i. There is also a small airport at Kalaupapa (LUP) National Historical Park.



Moloka‘i Missed the Tourism Wagon – and That’s Exactly Why to Go

It’s dusk on the island of Moloka‘i. You pull your car out onto the main highway, heading to a restaurant for dinner. This is the busy part of the island, near the main town of Kaunakakai. Then you notice something strange and marvelous – nothing.

The two-lane highway is straight as a stick, and you can’t see a single car all the way down the road. No headlights at all in your rear-view mirror. No tall buildings or crowded luxury homes separate you from the lake-like sea, which is shining with the last colors of the sunset. The emerging stars look close enough to touch, and the sky is full of silence. You pass a huge plumeria tree loaded with flowers and, even with the windows rolled up, the sweet perfume fills the car and becomes a topic of conversation.

Yes, it’s true there’s “nothing” on Moloka‘i, lots of it – an abundance of the delicious “nothing” that busy people crave when their jobs and lives crowd them.

On a drive like this, you feel muscles unclench.

“You have to love seclusion to love being here,” says Keala Coelho, accommodations director at Pu‘u O Hōkū Ranch on Moloka‘i’s east end. “What we offer are lots of peace and quiet, and extreme privacy.”

A 14,000-acre spread, Pu‘u O Hōkū Ranch welcomes guests at two large, rustic cottages, each with a land-and-seascape that goes on for miles. Also on the east end are the Dunbar Beachfront Cottages, a pair of green-and-white plantation buildings overlooking a swimmable beach.

Along the island’s sheltered southeast shore are three modest mini-resorts. Two of them – Wavecrest and Moloka‘i Shores – are condominiums designed for home-style living: ocean-view buildings looking toward Maui and Lāna‘i, manicured lawn, swimming pool and barbecues. These are quiet places where guests can sit seaside watching the sun set – or rise. (This is one of the few places in Hawai‘i where you can watch both events from the comfort of the same park bench.) Depending upon the property, guests have access to a putting green, shuffleboard, tennis courts and one of the island’s best spots for swimming and snorkeling.

The third option is the oceanfront Hotel Moloka‘i, a cluster of two-story buildings designed like the classic South Seas longhouse. The hotel includes a very good restaurant and, on many nights, Moloka‘i musicians playing poolside. One of its newest

enhancements is a spa where guests can enjoy one of a dozen-or-so types of massages, yoga classes and beauty services.

If you crave big, hot stretches of sand, you'll find them on the west-facing shore at Kaluako'i. Three excellent condominiums take full advantage of their beach-view locations – the lushly landscaped Paniolo Hale, perched on a natural ledge; Ke Nani Kai with a newly remodeled pool, whirlpool, horseshoe pit, barbecue and tennis courts; and Kepuhi Beach Resort where every unit looks out over Kaiwi Channel toward O'ahu's landmark Diamond Head.

Two companies provide information and bookings for dozens of Moloka'i condominiums. Visitors who are planning a trip can learn a lot at Moloka'i Vacation Properties (www.molokai-vacation-rental.com) or Moloka'i Resorts (www.molokairesorts.com).

None of these getaways is taller than three stories, and all of them provide natural solitude. It's the same natural solitude you experience while kayaking along the island's reef-protected south shore, while finding an unpopulated beach, while hiking to a waterfall, while simply loafing.

Some families find this natural solitude to be a perfect backdrop for a family-bonding vacation. Moloka'i simply lacks a dozen different reasons to scatter in all directions. So families share their adventures: mountain-biking together, riding horses together, learning to kayak together. They have time to talk, to share an experience together, to push the world aside and revive the most fundamental relationships of their lives.

For couples – especially couples who love the outdoors or couples who like the simplicity of quiet conversation – Moloka'i is wonderfully renewing, if not downright romantic.

Moloka'i is not for everyone. To be frank, the vast openness of the landscape and supreme lack of urban excitement don't suit everyone's tastes. But when you get *inside* Moloka'i, the riches unfold. Says one rental unit owner: "Moloka'i attracts independent travelers who don't want to be isolated in a hotel with other tourists. They want to see how people live. They like the freedom and safety here."

For Moloka'i visitors, it's not enough to trade the stimulation of a mainland city for the stimulation of hotel lobbies, commercial lū'au, advertisements, attractions, and traffic. What about *no stimulation at all*?

What about the sweet stimulation of bird song on your morning lānai, surrounded by an island that will never interrupt such an artful quietness?

Long and narrow, Moloka'i looks insignificant next to its neighbors. If someone asked you to compare the Hawaiian islands to a paragraph, you'd have to say that Moloka'i is a quiet dash between two boisterous sentences, O'ahu and Maui. In other words, Moloka'i provides what its neighbors can't – a rich, simple "nothing."



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.



On Moloka‘i, Hawaiian Culture is Not Just Preserved – It’s Everything

In terms of native culture, every Hawaiian island is rightfully proud of its past. The Big Island of Hawai‘i, for example, was home to the great war chiefs, particularly Kamehameha. O‘ahu, of course, was where the chiefs established the capital of their kingdom. Maui and Kaua‘i have their own histories, evidenced in archeological sites and traditions. But Moloka‘i is distinct. Its Hawaiian soul is not only a thing of the past but also very much of the present.

Consider that Moloka‘i is the only island in which native Hawaiians constitute the majority of the population. Add to that the fact that Moloka‘i is almost completely rural, which means that many islanders still predominately practice traditional livelihoods such as farming, fishing and hunting.

As you drive around the island, you see evidence of subsistence living – ramshackle unpainted houses, boats in the yards, fishnets hanging from the trees, chickens running loose. In some parts of the world, sights like these are taken as images of poverty. Here, though, they are signs of freedom and continuity – signs that native culture is not so much “preserved” as it is simply lived. Hawaiian-ness isn’t saved for special displays; it permeates everyday life.

Take Moloka‘i’s Ka Hula Piko Festival, for example. Visitors are welcome here, but this is very much an event by and for the Hawaiians. It takes place every third weekend of May, on Thursday and Saturday, beginning with educational lectures and culminating in a ho‘olaule‘a, a day of celebration. The main event is held at Pāpōhaku Beach Park, an all-day party featuring dancers and musicians from all over the state performing in styles ranging from ancient to rocking, amplified contemporary.

What’s remarkable about Ka Hula Piko is that it’s not a “visitor attraction” or a “hula show.” It’s a free-of-charge renewal gathering by Hawaiians, for Hawaiians. The same holds true for the island’s Festivals of Aloha festivities in October or the traditional Makahiki events each winter. Guests, fine – but that’s not the point.

For another example, look at Moloka‘i’s ancient fishponds, called loko i‘a. The ancestors created 26 of these massive stone aquaculture pens that ornament the entire south shore. Collectively, this is one of the most amazing archeological sites in the islands. Contemporary Molokaiaians have undertaken the enormous challenge of repairing and restoring these old structures, partly out of respect for them and partly in hopes of putting them back in service to the island economy. This effort has inspired similar projects on other islands, where the Molokaiaians are regarded as experts and consultants.

There's a history to Moloka'i's uniquely contemporary Hawaiian spirit. Part of this history reaches back to 1920, when the territorial government passed the Hawaiian Homestead Act. The bill put displaced native people back in control of their ancestral lands, primarily here. Not only that, a lot of this homestead land is coastal. Moloka'i will never have its shorelines sealed off by crowds of luxury developments. The size and location of the native population has a profound effect on the look of the island and the tenor of the visitor's experience.

But this independent history goes back much farther than 1920, back to the times of legend. According to one authoritative native history, "We were a sacred line, here from the beginning of time." Molokaianians think of themselves as maoli, the true natives. When the first great war chiefs began their bloody campaigns to conquer the islands (theoretically, five or six hundred years ago), Moloka'i resisted.

Here's the story: When the invaders came, they found the people of Moloka'i standing on the shoreline, waiting for them. "They stood there as a silent army. No fist was raised. When the warriors began to beach their boats, the chanting began. It began small and became a mighty roar. The warriors threw their spears, but they fell short of hitting anyone. Men trying to come onto the beach were falling back into the surf choking..."

Calling the island Moloka'i pule o'o – powerful prayer – the warriors chose to assimilate its wisdom rather than slaughter its people. Moloka'i was always renowned for its powerful shamans and wise prophets.

In their wisdom, today's Molokaianians are trying to fend off another invasion – the force that most of us call modern life. Life on Moloka'i is so non-commercial that visitors at first might wonder, "Where's the Hawaiian stuff?" the answer is: it's everywhere. Impromptu performances at Kaunakakai's Saturday street market. A group of men standing out on the reef hauling a net together. Young girls dancing during the dinner hour at the local hotel. The baggage handlers playing 'ukulele in the lull between planes. It's normal life.

If you want to feel hopeful about the struggles of an aboriginal people in the face of escalating global change, go to Moloka'i. If you want to get past the performance barrier, and feel what it's like to live and be Hawaiian day-to-day, this is the heartland.



Ramble the Moloka‘i Wilderness, on Two Feet or Four

On Moloka‘i, people don’t spend a lot of time indoors. You can tell this just by looking out the window of your commuter plane, flying low over this rather tough-looking volcanic mountain ridge. Moloka‘i simply doesn’t *have* very much “indoors.”

The least developed of Hawai‘i’s major islands, this one’s still rural and wild. Moloka‘i has an excellent road system, but it basically consists of just two lanes and run east to west. Farming, fishing and hunting are pillars of the economy. Residents feel a sense of aloha ‘āina, fierce devotion to the land itself, a personal relationship.

As one locally written anthem puts it: “My mother, sweet Moloka‘i...makes you more of who you are.”

This devotion suggests that the land has a distinct personality – which it does, full of grandeur and surprise. Moloka‘i includes a national park, a Nature Conservancy forest preserve, a natural landscape, and great places to hike and ride horses. Travelers whose idea of a vacation is Zion or the Grand Canyon will be inspired by a week on Moloka‘i.

Although this is a small place – less than 40 miles long and only 10 wide – a week will not exhaust its potential for outdoor exploring. It will, however, provide a solid, thorough introduction to the whole personality of the island, which is certainly one of planet Earth’s most exuberant creations.

In terms of natural wonders, Moloka‘i’s chief attraction is its north shore. This whole side of the island is sealed off by a series of gigantic cliffs that plunge – some more than 3,000 feet – straight into the shimmering sea. At intervals this imposing wall is sliced by blade-thin canyons or draped by some of the tallest waterfalls in Hawai‘i. It looks as though half the island simply ripped off and fell into the sea.

In fact, geologists believe something of that magnitude did occur in past eons, sending out a tidal wave that literally rocked the Pacific. Afterwards, a small volcanic outburst created a flat peninsula, Kalaupapa, which seems to float forlornly at the base of the tallest sea cliffs on Earth.

These vertical slopes and the flatlands above them support native forests, including some of the most endangered plant and animal species in the world.

Obviously, it isn’t easy to explore such a tilted landscape on foot, but it’s doable by means of several distinct one-day adventures.

For example, the trail to Kalaupapa Peninsula begins at the top of the cliff, right next to where you park, and it descends nearly 2,000 feet to sea level by means of 26 switchbacks. It's a wide, safe trail often shaded by forest, the air full of bird song and roaring surf, the views wonderfully shocking.

You can make the three-mile trek by foot or by mule. Both choices are about equally strenuous, but mule-back provides greater opportunity to enjoy the shock. Moloka'i Mule Ride has been offering this four-footed service since 1973. Why mules? Says head mule skinner Buzzy Sproat: "Mules are a heck of a lot smarter than horses. In fact, they're smarter than most people." Whereas horses can be skittish and easily startled, mules take a calm, methodical approach to the cliff-side trail. According to Sproat, whose family has been training and working these beasts in Hawai'i for a hundred years, the mules know the route so well that they place their hoofs in the exact same spot every time they make the trip.

Whether you make it on two feet or four, the trip always includes an educational component – a narrated drive around the peninsula in the old yellow school bus by Damien Tours. Access to Kalaupapa National Historical Park is restricted to its 25-or-so residents and their guests, so you must first become a guest by having a reservation with Moloka'i Mule Ride or another activity provider that offers access to the park. If you come in on your own, the rangers will politely but firmly turn you back. You must also be 16 years of age or older.

The tour itself is fascinating, especially after a visit to the church hand-built by Father Damien – quite inspiring. And, there's something perfect about the timing of that school bus. By the time you reach it, you're eager to sit down. By the time you've finished driving around those rocky roads, you're more than happy to get back on a mule.

Even if you don't plan a day for the trail, you can walk to an overlook and do some easy hiking in the woods at Pālā'au State Park.

Another way to approach "backside Moloka'i" is through two protected preserves. Kamakou Preserve is a patch of rare undisturbed mountain forest containing more than 250 kinds of native plants – over 200 of them live nowhere else but in Hawai'i. The Nature Conservancy has built a boardwalk that runs through three miles of the preserve, including a bog inhabited by closely crowded, dwarf versions of endemic plants. The boardwalk keeps hiking shoes from sinking into the bog or treading on the plants. This and other trails run between two overlooks – topside views of two valleys that slice steeply down to the sea. These viewpoints are exhilarating. Cool, sweet-scented wind rushes up from below, and rainbows hang on long waterfalls.

The Nature Conservancy offers guided hikes once a month. Each hike event can accommodate up to eight hikers, and usually, they're booked months in advance. Sometimes the Conservancy's work parties will give hikers a lift.

The Conservancy also leads monthly hikes to Mo‘omomi Preserve, a remote beach and dune area. This is a vigorous trek, a full day of silence and solitude. You start at sea level on the south shore and cross the width of the island, rising the whole way until you stand at the top of the north shore. Hikers travel at their own risk in the spirit of wild independence.

The trails at the preserves are free and open to the public year-round; no hiking permit is required. Hikers can stop by The Nature Conservancy’s Moloka‘i office Monday through Friday to obtain a map and information. It’s recommended that all hiking gear and footwear be thoroughly cleaned before you arrive on island, to avoid bringing in unwanted weeds and pests alien to Moloka‘i.

On Moloka‘i’s east end, the road stops at beautiful Hālawā Valley, the first of the north shore’s small, steep-walled canyons. The hike up the valley is a Hawaiian classic – through lush forest and past ancient settlement sites to 250-foot Mo‘oula Falls, where you can swim in the pools. Valley residents don’t want people just traipsing through for the sake of numerous historic sites that are unmarked, and therefore, at risk of damage from unknowing hikers. But, they don’t mind if you’re led by a guide. To book the hike, call one of the island’s activity providers, such as Moloka‘i Fish and Dive.

On this end of the island, you can breathe in such panoramic natural vistas as secluded waterfalls, rainbows and the endless Pacific by riding on the wonderful horses of Pu‘u O Hōkū Ranch. This 14,000-acre ranch and organic farm acts as a benevolent steward of the rugged east end. The ranch offers guided horseback adventures ranging from a one-hour ride through lush pasturelands to a half-day ride to a secluded beach, where you might splash through gently lapping waves or stop to swim, snorkel or simply lay about.

Campers with more modest ambitions and tighter budgets can pitch tents at a couple of county-run campgrounds. The choicest of these is west-end Pāpōhaku Beach Park, a grassy campsite with showers, restrooms, drinking water, picnic tables, barbecue areas and – best of all – the near presence of the one of the largest beaches in Hawai‘i. One Ali‘i Park near Kaunakakai offers similar facilities along the quiet, reef-protected south shore. Also, the State of Hawai‘i permits free camping at Pālā‘au State Park near the Kalaupapa trailhead.

You can also explore the island on two wheels, whether for street cycling along oft-empty roads or on a mountain bike over wilder terrain beyond the pavement.

Moloka‘i Bicycle in Kaunakakai provides road and mountain bikes, car racks, jogging strollers, trailers and child carriers. For a small fee, they’ll drop off or pick up the bikes at the airport, hotel, harbor or condo, and they’re happy to provide information on camping, hiking, ocean and other outdoor activities. All bike rentals include helmet, lock, map and water bottle.

Cycling author John Alford called his experience on Moloka‘i’s east end: “Epic – a must for every adventure traveler.”

It's simply true. The island of Moloka'i is one of the finest cycling destinations in the world. And here's what makes it better – not many people have discovered yet just how good it is. No matter where you are on the island, you have all the elbow room and freedom of choice that you want.

As the Hawaiian islands go, Moloka'i has definitely followed its own drummer. It has resisted the lure of commerce, happy to miss out on what Mark Twain called “all the modern inconveniences.” As a result, it's a treasure for those independent travelers who prefer the solace of outdoor beauty over the clamor of indoor attractions. For people who love the Earth, unadorned, Moloka'i's distinct personality stamps itself indelibly in the heart.



Moloka'i by Car

The island of Moloka'i is less than 40 miles long, and it's only 10 miles wide. That means, if you got everybody off the island and started at the west end, driving your car as fast as possible, you could burn up every paved road in about an hour.

If you're in the mood to do something like that, Moloka'i's probably not the island for you.

But if you're game for tooling around where people interpret the posted speed limit as a sign of maximum recklessness – in a place with practically no traffic – this island is the one.

Moloka'i is the one because it rewards the slow driver and the frequent stopper. If you drove like mad, the place would seem to be just a long hilltop of red dirt and short grass and an incredible coastline, with the beautiful islands of Maui and Lāna'i in the offing. But the curious traveler, even the one who explores no farther than the paved roadways, will discover many delightful surprises on Moloka'i.

In contrast to the other Hawaiian islands, this one has very little finesse for attraction-making and self-promotion. Its chief strength is its genuine and distinctive personality. It's an offbeat personality, certainly. For the right traveler, through, Moloka'i is extremely endearing.

The slow driver would start by noticing that the western coastline, the one facing O'ahu, forms a bowl-shaped arc that holds Hawai'i's biggest beaches, not to mention, some of its least populated. Naturally, this is the place for Moloka'i's one modest resort area, Kaluako'i, where you can home-base yourself in a comfortable low-rise condominium resort.

Here is the site of the island's annual Ka Hula Piko Festival. Once each May, Pāpōhaku Beach Park – a great place to hang out or camp any day – turns into a high-energy music, food and artisan party where the Molokaians celebrate their island roots.

This is also the coast that launches the greatest long-distance outrigger canoe races in the world. Each September and October, Hawai'i's canoe regatta season climaxes here in the ultimate challenge – hundreds of hardened athletes paddling from here to Waikīkī across the brutal Kaiwi Channel.

On a hilltop overlooking this coast sits Maunaloa, more of a hamlet than a town, where you can mail a postcard, pick up groceries and visit its landmark attraction, the Big Wind Kite Factory. Choose a designer kite and sail it in the park next door. If you don't

remember how they work, the kite-makers will be glad to show you. Next door, the Plantation Gallery is chock-full of great stuff, from aloha shirts and books to Southeast Asian tribal art and made-on-Moloka'i gifts.

The drive to central Moloka'i is all fields and rough pastureland, hill country. Gradually the long shore to the right reveals itself, swathed in an immense shallow reef that stands nearly a mile off shore – the largest reef system in the U.S. To the left, the island's ridgeline is often capped with thick clouds.

Midway between the airport and Kaunakakai – the island's major town – there's an intersection on the left. This is Highway 470, the only major side-route on the main east-west highway. (None of Moloka'i's roads, by the way, has any more lanes than the perfectly adequate two, one for each driver.)

Drivers who make this left turn find themselves heading uphill through the orchards of Coffees of Hawai'i. You can stop here and tour the farm by foot, learning everything about coffee production from seed to cup. Or, join the Mule Drawn Wagon Tours with steadfast plantation mules Marla, Barbara-Jean and Mele. There's also the Morning Espresso Walking Tour, or the free Afternoon Hiking Adventure that goes through the coffee fields to the top of Kualapu'u Hill and its 360-degree view of the island. Call first to let them know you are coming. Coffees of Hawai'i also has a plantation gift shop offering made-in-Hawai'i crafts and the Espresso Bar & Deli serving light breakfast and lunch. A must-try is the incredible Mocha Mama! The down-home Kualapu'u Cookhouse restaurant is a block away, serving local-style lunch and dinner.

Further upslope, in the cool mountain district called Kala'e, the prominent rough-wood building set in a pasture is the R.W. Meyer Sugar Mill, fully restored to operating condition. Built in 1878 by a German engineer and his sons, it demonstrates the ingenuity that went into sugar processing in those non-motorized days. The adjacent Moloka'i Museum and Cultural Center offers tours, exhibits and periodic classes.

The road ends at Pālā'au State Park, a pleasantly cool forest. Even if you're not a "frequent stopper," you must get out of your car here and walk two very short trails. One leads to the Kalaupapa Lookout – suddenly you're standing at the brink of the tallest sea cliffs on Earth. The trade winds are pushing you back from the edge, the wall of cliffs goes on for miles, and the tragic peninsula of Kalaupapa lies below, waves smashing its shores. The sight is mesmerizing any time of the day, but try it at sunset when cloud-brimmed sunlight streaks from the side and there's no one else around.

The other trail leads to Moloka'i's curious Phallic Stones, towering rocks shaped just like...well, let's just say that women have traditionally slept up here to stimulate their fertility.

Back down the hill and left on the main road, past Kamehameha V's seaside coconut grove – a forest of shaggy-headed columns – quickly you're in Kaunakakai. Downtown. It's a block long, and everybody knows everybody except you, the visitor.

It's a primitive-looking town where you can acquire the primary essentials – for example, an inexpensive Cabernet (rated 95 by *Wine Spectator*) at Moloka'i Wines 'N Spirits. Or a loaf of the revered Moloka'i Bread – a fresh-baked must-try – from Kanemitsu Bakery. Or a cast-iron camping griddle from Moloka'i Fish and Dive. If you're extremely lucky, a Hawaiian family will be selling homemade lunches, foil-wrapped and pounds-heavy, off the tailgate of an old pickup. In other words, Kaunakakai has what you need – and that includes bike rentals, a pizza café, a natural food store, a pharmacy and grocers. All you have to do is park the car on Ala Mālama Avenue and walk through some of those primitive-looking doors. But not when the town is closed – every day after dark, and Sunday. Kaunakakai is where Molokaians stage their athletic events (in a lighted county ballpark) and where they celebrate their heritage during Aloha Week and the winter Makahiki Festival. They're the last people on earth who would ever make you feel excluded from their own events – after all, you're a visitor.

Past Kaunakakai now, you cross into the rainier east end of the island. The line is nowhere drawn, but with each mile the sense of being “east end” increases. The road starts winding, its bends full of trees. This is where Molokaians concentrated their population in the old days. Along this lake-like shoreline, they built huge stone fishponds, ancient feats of aquaculture engineering. Present-day Molokaians are restoring them. You can visit two churches hand-built by Father Damien. He deliberately placed them near the sites of old Hawaiian temples such as 'Ili'ili'ōpae Heiau. The east end is ancestral and wild.

After miles of winding past isolated beach-coves, the road rises through the green pastures of Pu'u O Hōkū Ranch. Here you can ride horses in the open countryside, down by the sea where humpback whales gather and raise their families, or up in the mountains where there are waterfalls and pools.

The road ends by dropping dramatically into Hālawā Valley, with its sinuous sandy bay and deep green canyon walls. From this point, Moloka'i's nearly vertical north-shore cliffs forbid any further passage by automobile.

Two wild areas retain some unspoiled remnants of Hawai'i's threatened native ecosystems. One is Kamakou Preserve. This dirt-road excursion requires a four-wheel drive vehicle and leads to the highest part of the island, where you can look down from above at one of the most precipitous valleys in the island chain. The sight of Waikolu Valley will have you stepping back, gasping. Trails here run through pristine areas, especially the Pēpē'ōpae Boardwalk that goes through a fragile bog habitat and ends at a dizzying overlook of deep Pelekunu Valley.

Another such excursion leads to a shoreline nature preserve at Mo'omomi. Here the coastal dunes provide habitat for many rare native plants and animals. In the old days, the Hawaiians came here to gather sea salt, to fish, and to quarry materials for their stone tools.

Both of these preserves are managed by The Nature Conservancy of Hawai‘i, and any four-wheel voyage into these at-risk natural areas should begin with a visit to the Nature Conservancy’s headquarters near Kaunakakai. At the headquarters you can let them know your plans, pick up maps and get guidance on how to behave for the cause of wilderness conservation.

Another good drive journey is the one-hour trip down from Maunaloa to Hale O Lono Harbor. In an earlier day, agricultural products were shipped from here to O‘ahu. Now it’s a quiet spot for exploring, fishing or just ending the day with a beautiful sunset.

This is the limit of Moloka‘i by car. All you can do now is turn around and drive slower.

First-time drivers here need to be warned. On Moloka‘i, people wave. When they see that you’ve got a rental car, they’re likely to slow down and make sure you get through the intersection okay. Experiences like these are liable to change the way you feel about civilized driving.

If you’re the type that would prefer to be chauffeured – so you can pay full attention to the scenery and attractions – you can take a guided land tour in the comfort of an air-conditioned van driven by a knowledgeable guide. Covering one end of the island to the other and all of Moloka‘i’s main highlights including an ancient fishpond and scenic lookouts, the tour may take a leisurely 5 to 7 hours and includes a pleasant sit-down lunch – yet another way to enjoy the Moloka‘i experience on four wheels.



Moloka'i by Sea

It's just after dawn on the beach at the Hotel Moloka'i, and the light is brilliant. The wind and the sea are perfectly matched – both are barely moving and slightly cool.

You pull your bright yellow kayak slushing across the beach, sleekly into the water, and jump in. Right away you know what to do – start paddling. It's instinctive. It's what people have been doing here for thousands of years.

If you're a novice paddler, it takes a few minutes to get the trip and rhythm. Meanwhile, during the first awkwardness, you also happen to be shooting straight out into the open sea. So you're grateful that there are no waves breaking over your hull or pushing you sideways. In fact, there are no waves at all. The ocean is amazingly calm.

The sea floor is just a few feet below you, and no matter how far you travel away from shore, it stays right there. "If you fall out," says your guide, "just stand up."

Suddenly you begin to grasp the amazing nature of Moloka'i's south coast. Now you can see that, in fact, there are waves – dead ahead. But they're about a mile away! Out there, taking the blows of the sea, is the front edge of the reef, a natural wall that wraps more than 30 miles of coastline. You're paddling the shallow, lake-like surface of the most extensive fringing reef in the United States.

Needless to say, this is a great place to kayak. In the morning, before the tradewinds pick up velocity, you can paddle this area with relative ease, investigating the ancient fishponds that line the coast. These fishponds – sea enclosures built of artfully stacked stone – give silent testimony to the skill and ingenuity of the bygone residents of this island.

Two companies provide these guided kayak excursions: Moloka'i Outdoors departs from mile marker 16 on the east end. Moloka'i Fish and Dive, a sporting goods store on Kaunakakai's main strip, departs from the small-craft slip at Kaunakakai Wharf.

The latter kayak trip goes west along the coast to explore Pālā'au Fishpond, the largest of them all and the only one containing brackish water – a mix of sea water and fresh stream water that rolls off the land into the stone enclosure. This circumstance gives the Pālā'au trip an extra kick: paddling through a dense jungle. The shoreline at Pālā'au is choked with an impenetrable forest of mangroves. (The mangrove is the only tree capable of growing in seawater. Once established, it forms a 40-foot-high thicket full of darkness, stillness, and the creaking of branches.) The guides of Moloka'i Fish and Dive have discovered that the fresh water streaming out of Pālā'au Fishpond creates a narrow channel through this jungle, a kind of kayak "trail." They take their guests on this eerie

path, which in places gets so close you have to drop your paddle and pull yourself along by grabbing roots and branches. Typically, guests will exclaim: “this is just like Disneyland!” And it is, with one important difference – this is no amusement park. It’s the real McCoy.

A kayak excursion is just one way to experience Moloka‘i by sea. The people of the island have always lived and thrived on contact with the ocean, and they like sharing this tradition with their guests.

Sportfishing boats – the 31-foot twin-diesel *Alyce C.*, for example, or the 27-foot ‘*Ahi* of Fun Hogs Sportfishing – offer the excitement of hooking up a big marlin, a mahi mahi, or an ono. ‘*Ahi* Captain Mike Holmes is one of the only fishing boat skippers in Hawai‘i who believes his guests should keep whatever they catch.

Fun Hogs will also take you to secluded areas of the reef to find the best places to snorkel and view a huge variety of Moloka‘i’s abundant reef fish. Rays and turtles are among the many graceful sea creatures that can be seen here. Or, the captain may cross over to Mānele Bay on Lāna`i, sometimes providing one-way passage for independent-minded travelers exploring Hawai‘i’s small, undeveloped islands.

Blue water sailing on a catamaran, whale-watching excursions, light tackle fishing – all are readily available on Moloka‘i, with expert guides at the helm.

Scuba diving on Moloka‘i? You bet. Moloka‘i Fish and Dive offers many kinds of land and water activities, but scuba is a particular specialty. For dive trips (and snorkeling and whale excursions), they use Captain Jim and the 31-foot Powercat *Ama Lua*. The guides are young men who are not only PADI certified but also born-and-raised island boys who know the waters as well as anyone alive. They know all the “blue holes,” the underwater caves, and places for swimming with hammerhead sharks.

All of these sea-going excursions begin and end at the Kaunakakai Wharf, on the reef-protected south shore. Along the north shore, though, where wave and wind strike against the tallest sea cliffs in the world, boating is a different experience altogether. For that you need Walter Naki of Moloka‘i Action Adventures and his 21-foot Boston whaler called *Puakea O Wailau*. Walter has unique qualifications for taking people “backside.” First of all, he’s an exceptionally competent outdoorsman – hunter, fisher, diver. Moreover, his family roots are here along this intense coastline, in now-uninhabited Wailau Valley. Walter’s grandfather was one of the last Hawaiians to leave the valley and adopt a more civilized lifestyle.

During the summer months, the trip leaves from Hālawā Valley, at the extreme road’s-end of east Moloka‘i. (During the winter, Walter departs the shore near mile marker 20.) Walter’s little boat bounces and dances over the swells as he races past the cliffs, a big grin on his face. He’s home. He points out the sights – Hawai‘i’s longest waterfall, rare seabirds with fantastically long tails, strange rock formations associated with old legends. He shoots his boat through a natural tunnel in the sea cliffs. He lets his passengers wade

ashore at Wailau Valley, where they wander around in a waking dream of lost Polynesia. It's a wild ride – “for hardy people,” says Walter. But he not-so-modestly declares his trip to be one of the two best activities on Moloka‘i (the other being the trek to Kalaupapa Peninsula). By the standard of pure exhilaration, there's no doubt he's right.

Moloka‘i Action Adventures (that is, Walter Naki) also offers customized experiences of deep-sea fishing, hunting, spear fishing, reef trolling, and even fly-fishing. Just say what you want, and we will provide – that's the Moloka‘i spirit. In the world of “package” travel, this island is always personal.

The largest seagoing vessel that you are likely to see docked at Moloka‘i is the ferry. It crosses the Pailolo Channel every day between Kaunakakai and Lāhaina, West Maui. Molokaian use the ferry to commute to jobs or to do their bulk buying on the much larger neighbor island.

Conversely, visitors to West Maui will use the ferry so that they can include Moloka‘i in their travel experiences. The channel crossing, which takes about 90 minutes, is a reasonably priced alternative to an airline ticket.

Actually, there are three vessels in the ferry fleet. The *Maui Princess* is 118 feet long, a high-speed touring yacht that carries about 150 people. The *Moloka‘i Princess* is a similar craft and almost as large. Both have been fitted with gyroscopic stabilizers that help take some of the chop out of rough channel crossings. The *Lāhaina Princess* is a 65-foot fiberglass yacht whose air-conditioned main cabin and open-air deck can seat nearly 150 passengers.

Activity providers such as Moloka‘i Outdoors offers programs that greet guests at the ferry landing and get them back in time for the return trip. This means that Maui visitors can make a day trip to Moloka‘i. But most people would agree that a few hours on Moloka‘i isn't nearly enough time. A two- or three-night stay between channel crossings makes a lot more sense.

Aside from the seagoing activities mentioned here, you'll see little else in the way of traffic on Moloka‘i's pristine and brilliant blue seas. There's no yacht harbor choked with masts, no giant glass-bottom dinner-dance cruise boats, no submarine rides, no parasails. Moloka‘i is not for everybody – and that's precisely the reason to go.



The Adventure of Kalaupapa National Historical Park

Like a Gettysburg battlefield or an Anasazi cliff dwelling, the national park at Moloka'i's Kalaupapa Peninsula tells a rich and important story about being human. But its human drama tends to overshadow another fact – one that's equally compelling. Kalaupapa is one of the most thrilling landscapes on Earth. Taken as a one-day adventure, the trek repays your moderate exertion with maximum inspiration.

In fact, you scarcely have to exert yourself at all – just walk a short distance from your car at Pālā'au State Park, and you'll get an airplane-level view of the terrain. Suddenly, you're standing at the top of the highest sea cliffs in the world. The sheer green walls, sliced with waterfalls, go on beyond seeing. So does the ocean, blue as a dark gem. White waves crash against the rocks thousands of feet below.

That's where Kalaupapa is. Down there, all alone. It's a wedge-shaped piece of runaway land that seems to have slipped out of the base of the cliff and gotten stuck. You see a few confetti-sized rooftops and a one-lane airstrip that looks as though someone rubbed an eraser on the grassy lava.

Kalaupapa gives the word "remote" new meaning.

Scarcely more than two dozen people live there, all of them white-haired. The cargo barge arrives once a year – an annual Kalaupapa holiday, when everyone gets to look at each other's new stuff and make jokes about it.

Once a day except on Sundays, right through town comes the Damien Tours bus, yellow as a dusty banana, a vintage all-metal school bus with green plastic seats and stainless-steel hang-on poles. When the bus comes through, the residents make sure they're busy somewhere else. They prefer not to be put on display.

You'd probably hide out, too, no matter where you lived. But Kalaupapa is a special place. The residents are all survivors of a well known tragedy, now very much a thing of the past, and they've been given the privilege of living out their days in peace and privacy.

Starting in 1866, Hawai'i citizens who contracted Hansen's Disease – the dreaded "separating sickness" or "leprosy" that figures so prominently in Bible stories – were sent here, virtually cast away. This was the final mission of Father Damien, now a candidate for sainthood, and other "Martyrs of Moloka'i" whose sacrifices inspired a global effort to cure the disease.

In keeping with its hard-won spirit of privacy, Kalaupapa offers no lodging, no shopping, and no lunch counter. Visits are restricted to a single day.

Actually, there's an exception to this rule. The national park has a volunteer work program with three-day minimum stays. In fact, for people who like to be outdoors and doing something purposeful, the park's volunteer program offers a startlingly original way to visit Hawai'i—preserving rare native habitat for endangered plants and animals, and working around one of the most valuable archeological preserves in the state. To get information on the volunteer application process, contact the National Park Service's Moloka'i office.

No matter how you visit, you have to be at least 16 years old and you have to be guest of one of the residents, which means you need to have a reservation for a seat on the bus and with one of the activity providers that offers access to Kalaupapa, such as Moloka'i Mule Ride, Pacific Wings, or Moloka'i Fish and Dive.

But when you're standing at the top, at the lookout, staring down the long cliff, it's natural to ask yourself – how? How do you physically get down there?

Obviously, the airstrip offers one option. Midget planes operated by charter air services will fly in a few passengers for the school bus, then hours later whisk them back to Honolulu of Maui or even to the little Moloka'i airport “topside.”

Or you can walk.

There's one trail – three miles long and 2,000 feet down. The trailhead starts not far from the lookout. Contact an activity operator to make the arrangements. Bring lunch and lots of water. And take your time. Stop to savor the impressions – the native forest that cloaks the cliff, the birds trilling, the phenomenal sea crashing below you. The trail is wide and perfectly safe. It's built to accommodate the maneuvering of mules.

Yes, you can ride a mule down the trail to Kalaupapa. Each mule trek is timed to meet with the old bus. The mules are big and brown, sure-footed and safe, as safe as your living room sofa. It's important to keep remembering that “sofa” image on your way down the cliff – when you're mounted tall in the saddle and your steed is casually clopping its hoofs around the outside edge of the trail's 26 dizzying switchbacks.

The ascent, of course, is no piece of cake, not even on mule-back. It's not easy, nudging and kicking your mulish way all the way back up the switchbacks. By the time you get topside – elated in body and mind – you know that you've had an experience. Something completely *involving*.

And when you get topside, whether by hoof or foot or even by plane, you are surrounded by something just as rare – the remarkable island of Moloka'i. The glow of amazing remoteness that you feel on the peninsula does not fade up above. The entire island is a place snatched out of time.



The Creative People of Moloka‘i Offer Heartland Authenticity

In 1997, Moloka‘i’s first recording studio, a start-up operation called Monkeypod, took a big risk. It released a CD of songs by a 15-year-old boy raised in a remote “backside” valley. Today, Darrell Labrado, the “Kid from Moloka‘i,” is a household name in Hawai‘i, whose later albums set new sales records and garnered praise from national music critics.

Another young musical genius from Moloka‘i is Raiatea Mokihana Maile Helm. Her sophomore CD “Sweet and Lovely” earned her an unprecedented Grammy nomination for solo female vocalist.

Hawai‘i pays attention to Moloka‘i.

In the 50th state, Moloka‘i is the native heartland. It’s the only island with a majority population of native Hawaiians. While tourism flourished, Moloka‘i defied commercialization. Residents, regardless of their ancestry, feel first and foremost that they are Molokaian.

In Hawai‘i, people know that anything coming from Moloka‘i will be unusual, strong, and done well.

The high quality of Moloka‘i’s creative people is evident in the fine products of the island’s artists, carvers, weavers, quilters and more.

Some of the most incredible wood workers come from Moloka‘i. Jack Ewing takes full advantage of the density and color of Hawaiian hardwoods to create bowls so thin that they glow when held up to the sunlight. Victor Lopez sculpts stunning marine art from pieces of rough wood. He learned the art of wood working from his late father-in-law, Bill Kapuni, who was revered for his deep-toned pahu drums made from 80-year-old coconut trunks and lidded wooden urns called ‘umeke.

Some artists practice skills so rare you won’t find them elsewhere. For example, Lola Spencer used a state foundation grant to learn the endangered craft of weaving lau hala, the leaves of a Polynesian coastal tree related to the yucca. Her hats are masterpieces – tight weave, lovely shapes, and a highly disciplined control of color and pattern.

Molokaian like these are true originals.

So is homeboy Rik Cooke, whose credits include *National Geographic* and a fascinating coffee-table book of island portraits. In 1989, he and his wife Bronwyn created a retreat center called Hui Ho‘olana, a gathering place for “creativity, healing and the arts.” Set in

the cool uplands of Kala'e, the Hui offers a schedule of live-in courses on subjects such as Rekindling the Creative Spirit, Quieting the Mind and Waking Up in Paradise.

Perhaps the most colorful of Moloka'i's creative souls are Jonathan and Daphne Socher. They stumbled on this outpost island nearly 30 years ago and decided to open a business that it certainly didn't have – a design shop for making kites. Today, the Big Wind Kite Factory and its Plantation Gallery Gift Shop still inhabit the same building it originally established in the tiny town of Maunaloa. The Sochers continue to design and craft their colorful flying concepts, and travel abroad to kite festivals every year, bringing back new ideas, huge dragon and eagle-shaped kites from Bali, and plenty of interesting merchandise for their gift shop, which stocks sarongs, souvenirs, jewelry, beach supplies, exotic tribal art and the largest selection of books and CDs on the island.

For three decades the Sochers have made good on their belief that Moloka'i visitors eventually, inevitably discover the essence of the island, which has something to do with the wind and more to do with play. Says Jonathan, who is as big-bearded as Saint Nicholas: "Moloka'i is for people who don't need anybody to tell them how to relax."

In short, keep your eye on the creative people of Moloka'i. The island has great power and many teachings. People who know Hawai'i are watching Moloka'i because this island has something peculiar and genuine to offer. Its residents are independent, honest folk, proud of their island home. They create in the spirit of its wild isolation.



Moloka'i Through the Year

Arrive when the community is celebrating – this is an excellent strategy for travelers who truly want to dig into and discover the culture they visit. This strategy is especially valuable when that culture is strongly distinct, deeply rooted, geographically unique, and full of people who are proud to belong.

In other words, this is especially true on Moloka'i.

Moloka'i's annual festivals celebrate two main themes – the healthy physical challenge of the island landscape, and the rich spiritual importance of its ancient traditions. However, to avoid sounding too high-brow about all this, let's point out another theme – Moloka'i people do love to pā'ina – party! Community gatherings usually involve lots of good food and live music by the island's many talented musicians.

Visitors are always welcome. But don't expect to be coddled. Join in. These events are not tourist attractions but down-home expressions of, by, and for the community. Just one caution is necessary: when this island celebrates, visitors from the other islands will throng the place. (After all, Moloka'i is Hawai'i's heartland.) So you might have some trouble finding a rental car, and you might find that Moloka'i's limited accommodations are all booked. The wisest advice is to plan ahead by at least three months. A little long-range thinking can give you an authentic cultural experience that you will savor in memory for the rest of your life.

The following paragraphs describe most of the major annual events for the island. Others arise, and the details given here can change. The best way to keep track of Moloka'i through the year is to check the website and stay in touch with the folks at Molokai-hawaii.com.

Ka Moloka'i Makahiki Festival, more than 25 years running, takes place every January. From ancient times in Hawai'i, the makahiki season has always been the most festive period of the year, a post-harvest period of peace, games and sporting competitions between the different island regions. This contemporary version, a one-day festival, preserves that tradition in the style of Moloka'i. Lectures, land and ocean activities, arts and crafts workshops, sporting competitions, a song contest and traditional ceremonies take place at the Mitchell Pau'ole Community Center in Kaunakakai.

April sees the annual Ho'omau Concert, which benefits the Pūnana Leo O Moloka'i program. Pūnana Leo is a Hawai'i-wide program dedicated to keeping the native language – 'ōlelo Hawai'i – by teaching the children to be fluent speakers. Without a living language, no culture can expect to have a future. So this all-day festival with music, crafts, food and children's games helps finance a critical cultural program.

April is also the month for Earth Day around the world. What better place to recognize the preservationist spirit of Earth Day than on one of the earthiest islands on the globe? The Moloka‘i Earth Day event is sponsored by The Nature Conservancy and is held in Kaunakakai, encompassing food, entertainment and educational displays.

Near the end of the month is the 22-mile Maui Challenge race, during which hundreds of paddlers, both men and women, come from around the state and beyond to compete in a downwind surfing run into and across the Pailolo Channel.

May sees two formidable open-sea paddling races across the Kaiwi Channel, a 39-mile crossing between Moloka‘i and O‘ahu and one of the most grueling and challenging passages on earth. The Kaiwi Challenge Relay draws people from all over to make the crossing in one-person canoes, starting at west Moloka‘i’s Kaluako‘i and ending at the Outrigger Canoe Club in Waikīkī. Later in the month, the Kanaka Ikaika (strong man) Kayak Race is the world championship kayak competition for both men and women who race solo across the Kaiwi Channel from Moloka‘i to the east end of O‘ahu.

May is also the month for a uniquely Molokaian celebration of hula. According to one ancient tradition, the essential dance form of Hawai‘i first emerged on Moloka‘i. The Ka Hula Piko Festival, a “celebration of the birth of the hula,” features free outdoor entertainment by musicians and dancers from all over the state, plus food and crafts, in an event that lasts all day at Pāpōhaku Beach Park in west Moloka‘i. Hālau Hula (hula schools) come here from throughout the state; so do electrified Hawaiian bands and comedians. Food-sellers and artisans are all from Moloka‘i. This is a great party!

In July, the Moloka‘i to O‘ahu Paddleboard Race establishes the world champion of long-distance paddleboard racing. The race kicks off at Kaluako‘i, and ends at Maunaloa Bay on the island of O‘ahu.

September is the month for the annual Nā Wahine O Ke Kai outrigger canoe race, the final event of the women’s outrigger racing season. The title means “women of the sea,” and the display of power from these highly trained all-female canoe teams will astound you. Visitors can catch sunrise and the race launch at remote Hale O Lono Harbor, Moloka‘i. Competitors work their way across the Kaiwi Channel, ending at the Hilton Hawaiian Village on O‘ahu.

Late September and early October is the season for the Festivals of Aloha, a major celebration of Hawaiian culture throughout the state. This is a great time to be on Moloka‘i, to enjoy Hawai‘i’s music, dance and history through a series of festive and fun special events.

In October, the month after the women show their stamina in the outrigger team channel crossing, the men dig in with their season-ending race. The Moloka‘i Hoe Outrigger Canoe Race is the top world event in the men’s division of this grueling team sport. The

race takes off at dawn from Hale O Lono Harbor and ends at Duke Kahanamoku Beach in Waikīkī.

Moloka‘i’s annual Food & Business Expo takes place in the fall. Top chefs from Maui, Moloka‘i and Lāna‘i dish up their best original recipes using Moloka‘i products, so get ready to taste their wares and check out what other Moloka‘i merchants have to offer. The event takes place at the Lanikeha Community Center and is sponsored by the Moloka‘i Chamber of Commerce.

The much-celebrated “aloha spirit” of Hawai‘i is not an abstract concept. It permeates the lives and customs of people who grow up close to the land, the kūpuna (elders), and the old ways. Nowhere in the islands can you get closer to this spirit than by joining the independent-minded community of Moloka‘i.