



NEWS RELEASE

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GOING TO THE CHAPEL... AND WE'RE GONNA GET MAUI'D...

MAUI, Hawai'i - Not every Maui wedding is a beach wedding! This is good news for the majority of destination wedding couples who prefer to wed in a church.* With Maui's more than 100 churches, temples and synagogues countywide, there are plenty of places to tie a traditional knot. Houses of worship are woven into the tropical landscape, testimony to Maui's strong spiritual nature and diverse religious history. Humble missionary-built chapels in classic white-steeple-style, solemn rock-hewn churches framed by coconut palms, or gigantic Buddah staring serenely out to sea all showcase Maui's abundance of religious, and often historical, island churches.

Early Hawaiians observed *kapu* (strict religious and social guidelines) enforced by the kings and their gods, and built enormous *heiau* (temples) for religious practices. Their faith centered on a deep respect for the 'aina (land). Only *ali'i* (chiefs) had marriage rites. But with the abandonment of the *kapu* system, the arrival of Christian missionaries and the eventual religious conversion of the royal family, the face of Hawaiian religion would change forever. The first Christian marriage ceremony was in 1822, just two years after New England Protestant missionaries reached Hawai'i. In 1823, Maui's first church was established. Queen Ka'ahumanu embraced her new Protestant faith by forbidding Hawaiian idols, *heiau* and *hula*. For a while, non-Christian marriages were illegal. However, increasing conflicts between established Protestant ministers and Catholic newcomers prompted King Kamehameha III to declare religious freedom in 1839.

Religious beliefs further diversified after 1850, when Maui's sugar and pineapple

plantations attracted workers from around the world. The Chinese introduced Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Later, Japanese, Puerto Ricans, Koreans, Filipinos, Portuguese, Russians, Germans and Scandinavians would all arrive, each bringing their own faith and religious practices. Today, marriage ceremonies in Maui reflect a multitude of ethnic customs, including the Filipino “money dance,” the Japanese tradition of folding 1,001 origami cranes, Chinese fireworks and Hawaiian *lei* exchange. Maui’s diverse religious culture is also depicted visually in churches’ array of architectural styles.

Most churches with active congregations open their doors to destination wedding couples for a stated donation. Brides and grooms are advised to plan ahead for the necessary approval, paperwork, counseling and other requirements that individual churches may require.

If you’ve ever listened to The Eagles’ song “The Last Resort,” the lyrics allude to a landmark neon sign: “Jesus Coming Soon” crowning Lāhaina’s **Jehovah’s Witness Church**. The sign is still brightly lit today! But Lāhaina’s historic and memorable churches go back even further to its busy port days, when tussles between missionaries and whalers led to occasional riots.

Waialua (Wayne’s) Congregational Church in Lorain is Maui’s first Christian church. Despite a turbulent history, referenced even by James Michener in his novel *Hawaii’s*, today’s Waialua Church stands proud after many resurrections. Built by Hawaiians in 1823, it was Lorain’s first stone building and it took three years to create a two-story structure with a purported 3,000-person capacity. Unfortunately, 16 years of relentless winds quickly deteriorated the structure, requiring a complete overhaul by the congregation. This would not be the last time. Kaua‘ula Valley windstorms wreaked havoc again in 1858, bringing down the steeple, bell and part of the roof. Repairs were laid to waste when the church was torched by royalists protesting Hawai‘i’s annexation to the United States in 1894. From the ashes, Wainē Church was rebuilt yet again, but a 1947 fire damaged it. Then in 1951, it collapsed completely under the impact of 80-mile winds hitting its weakened structure. A rebuild and rededication in 1953 included the addition of a social and dining hall and the new name “Waiola” (water of life). Today, the church remains a Lāhaina favorite for weddings, supported by a resilient congregation. Adding to its *mana* (spiritual energy) are numerous Hawaiian *ali‘i* (royalty) laid to rest in the adjacent cemetery.

Another popular wedding site is Lāhaina’s **Holy Innocents Episcopal Church**. This modest one-room chapel features beautiful arched wooden doors, traditional pew seating, open beam construction and is most remembered for artist DeLos Blackmar’s 1940 paintings of colorful endemic birds, plants, rainbows and a Hawaiian Madonna. Episcopal missionaries built their first church in 1862. The church was later relocated across the street to its present site (once the residence of Queen Lili‘uokalani). This area is close to the sacred Hawaiian ponds of Moku‘ula, once the spiritual and political power center for all of Hawai‘i, now filled in as a county park. An active congregation sings Tongan and Hawaiian hymns, runs a preschool in outlying buildings, and is host to frequent weddings.

Lāhaina Jodo Mission Cultural Park is an exquisite site for larger gatherings, handling up to 500 guests. Built on the sacred grounds of Pu‘unoa Point (which means “the hill freed from taboo”), in a residential neighborhood near Lāhaina’s Mala Wharf, the Jodo Mission features the largest Buddha statue outside of Japan (3.5 tons, 12 feet high). The glistening

bronze Buddha was installed in 1968 to mark the 100th anniversary of Japanese in Hawai‘i. The Buddha sits high on a stone platform above the spacious manicured garden crowned by the West Maui Mountains. A 90-foot tall copper-roofed pagoda and traditional Buddhist temple complete the compound. Inside the temple, paintings by famed Japanese artist Hajin Iwasaki adorn the ceiling and walls. The garden’s natural tranquility is further augmented by its palm-tree beachfront setting and gorgeous views of Lāna‘i and Moloka‘i. A sand-strewn graveyard next door adds to the solemn beauty.

The **Maria Lanakila Church**, in the heart of Lāhaina Town, was built in 1873 on the foundation of Maui’s first Catholic church established in 1858. Today’s majestic stone church is a larger replica of the original adobe building. A splendid interior offers vaulted ceilings along with beautiful paintings said to be gifts to the church from Hawaiian royalty. A soaring bell tower, grassy and palm tree-studded grounds, and the church’s proximity to hotel and restaurant reception sites make this a fabulous wedding selection.

Another monumental Catholic church is Upcountry Maui’s **Holy Ghost Mission**. Dubbed the “wedding cake church” because of its silvery white octagonal shape topped off with a cupola bell tower, it graces the slopes of Haleakalā overlooking the island’s lowlands. The church’s unique design was created by Father Beissel and said to be inspired by churches he had seen abroad or an attempt to replicate the queen’s crown. It was built by Kula’s growing Portuguese Catholic community - sugar plantation contract workers who chose to stay on as farmers and ranchers. The land was donated, and local ranchers funded construction by holding weekly cattle auctions and volunteering their labor. In 1894, it was complete. An elegant interior of pale pink sets off the specially commissioned hand-carved Stations of the Cross and intricate altar by noted Austrian woodcarver, Ferdinand Stuflesser. Now listed on both the Hawai‘i Register of Historical Places and the National Register, restored with a 1994 renovation, the Holy Ghost Mission makes a supreme romantic setting for an Upcountry wedding.

In central Maui, the **Kepaniwai Park’s Heritage Gardens** at ‘Īao Valley offer a gorgeous, multicultural wedding site with several “chapels” to choose from. Created in 1952 as a tribute to Maui’s diverse ethnic heritage, replica 1850s-style Asian, Caucasian and Hawaiian architecture include a Hawaiian grass shack, a Chinese pagoda and moon gate, a Japanese teahouse and garden, a Filipino bamboo house, a Portuguese villa and outdoor oven, and a New England salt box. These are set in lush Hawaiian landscaping around ‘Īao Stream, creating a lovely tropical backdrop popular with wedding photographers. While not technically churches with active congregations, any of these buildings can play host to a religious ceremony. The valley site leading up to the dramatic ‘Īao Needle rock formation is significant spiritually and historically for Hawaiians. It was here that a bloody battle was fought, as Kamehameha I drove Maui’s warriors up into the hills to achieve victory and domination over Maui.

Located in the small-town county seat of Wailuku, **Ka‘ahumanu Congregational Church** is a New England-style church that honors Queen Ka‘ahumanu for her conversion to Christianity. Set on grassy lawns under shady monkeypod trees, adjacent to Maui County’s administrative buildings, the church fronts a small missionary museum. Built in 1876 by Edward Bailey, the church features beautiful steps, a tall steeple and landmark chiming

clock. Visitors and residents often remark that Wailuku is the best representation of real, local Hawai'i. Weddings here are guaranteed to be cooler, and also offer close proximity to 'Iao Valley for further picture taking.

In the lush rainforests of Maui, at the end of the notoriously winding Hāna Highway is the town of Hāna, offering one general store, a small grocery store, gas station and restaurant. Yet Hāna's population of approximately 2,000 residents supports more than 10 churches, including Mormon, Buddhist, Catholic and Congregational. The town's remote location is favorable for smaller wedding parties seeking anonymity and peaceful surroundings. Guests usually choose to stay at the luxurious Hotel Hāna Maui, a 96-room resort and spa at the center of town. Right across the street is the historic **Wananalua Congregational Church**. In 1838, missionaries symbolically built their New England-style church over a ceremonial heiau as an end to paganism. Constructed from local volcanic rock, coral and koa wood; today's Wananalua Church embraces the Hawaiian culture and language in their services.

Just past Hāna and the pools at 'Ohe'o Gulch (a popular day hike destination) is the quaint whitewashed **Palapala Ho'omau Congregational Church** perched on a beautiful ocean bluff. Many historic churches appear to be in remote, tropical locations today, but were originally built in close proximity to thriving Hawaiian communities. This serene, humble church constructed of rock and stucco displays a painted depiction of Jesus Christ enrobed in the yellow and red feather cloaks worn by Hawaiian royalty. Palapala Ho'omau Church is most noted for the 1974 gravestone of famed aviator, Charles Lindbergh, who lived in Kīpahulu.

Another church that once supported a population of 75,000 Hawaiians in 1853, today borders the scattered Huelo community of just over a hundred residents. **Kaulanapueo Church** is a plain square church, with three-foot-thick stone and cement walls, gray tin roof and plantation green steeple. Yet despite its simplicity, it is surprisingly pretty. Surrounded by a finely groomed lawn, coconut palms and well-tended graveyard, the Calvinist-style church makes an ideal wedding venue. Red *ti* plants protect the perimeter (said to ward off evil spirits), and the interior is essentially unchanged from its early days with wooden benches and pulpit, and no stained glass or ornamentation to distract from worship.

It doesn't get any more charming than **Keolahou Hawaiian Church** in North Kihei. Picture perfect for small weddings, this truly Hawaiian-feeling chapel is painted plantation green with white trim and matching white picket fence. Classically simple with a front porch and small bell tower, beneath a few palms on a trim lawn, Keolahou is located across the street from a white sand beach in a bustling commercial and tourist community.

Kihei is also home to the **Beit Shalom Synagogue**, one of Maui's larger Jewish organizations. Traditionally, Jewish weddings take place under a *chuppah* (or *huppah*), an open-sided tent or flowing cloth held by four poles above the bride and groom. Representing the home the couple will make together, and reminiscent of nomadic ancestors, these romantic canopies are widely available in Maui. Fairly portable (although some synagogues offer permanent structures onsite), the *chuppahs* are often set up on the beach or a grassy oceanside lawn.

Probably the most posh wedding venue in Maui is the non-denominational **Seaside Wedding Chapel at the Grand Wailea Resort & Spa**. Centered in the resort's meticulously planned and landscaped grounds, in the middle of a peaceful lagoon, this sought-after New England-style chapel is rich in detail and Disneyland-like miniature perfection. Four enormous Hawaiian - themed stained glass windows, integral to the façade, depict rainbows and island scenes; Italian crystal chandeliers hang from its vaulted red oak ceiling; mahogany walls and cherrywood pews deck out the inside. A soaring steeple ornamented with a clock encases chapel bells, rung to announce nuptial celebrations. Unlike many of the island's historic open-air churches, this chapel has air-conditioning! An adjacent tropical flower garden and gazebo provide additional photo backdrops, cake-cutting and toasting locations. Plus, the resort has a grand spa for pre-wedding pampering, as well as ballrooms and gardens for after-parties.

Hopping over to the island of Lānaʻi, a picturesque wooden church called **Kalokahi o Ka Mālamalama Church** is the best place for a traditional church ceremony. Like the rest of Lānaʻi City, it was constructed in the late-1800s plantation era to serve the pineapple laborers. Surrounded by tall Norfolk Pines atop a grassy knoll, this lovely little church offers services spoken in Hawaiian. A gazebo at the **Four Seasons Resort Lānaʻi, The Lodge at Kōʻele** is another popular chapel-like option.

Lānaʻi was once the designated stronghold for the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**, but today only a commemorative plaque on the road between Mānele Bay and Lānaʻi City honors the City of Joseph, established in 1854. The community struggled with environmental hardships and eventual loss of leadership when Mormon missionaries were called back to the mainland for the 1858 Utah expedition. When Walter Murray Gibson arrived here in 1861, he consolidated 26,000 acres in the name of the church, but the settlement was soon disrupted with Gibson's excommunication. In 1865, the LDS church reestablished itself in Lāʻie, Oʻahu, where its membership flourishes today. On the island of Molokaʻi, churches abound, numbering upwards of 30, some attributed to Father Damien who cared for the lepers banished to the peninsula. **Saint Philomena Church** in Kalawao is one such church. Started as a small chapel built by Brother Bertrand in 1872, this became Father Damien's first home when he took shelter sleeping under a nearby *hala* tree. Eventually, with the assistance of Kalawao's residents, they expanded the church and brightened the inside with a rainbow palette. Other churches include Father Damien's second Catholic church, **Our Lady of Sorrows** (1874), and **St. Joseph's Church** (1876).

Couples in search of the perfect chapel to stand as witness to their sacred wedding vows will have no shortage of options in Maui Nui!

**85 percent of marriages take place in a church or synagogue, according to Hallmark.com.*

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