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Magical Moloka'i

A verdant island of magic, culture and exploration.

BY SUSAN B. BARNES

As is custom, my arrival into Moloka'i's Halawa Valley is announced with the echoes of a conch shell. Upon my entrance, my host, Anakala Pilipo Solatorio (Uncle Philip) greets me with a chant, in his native Hawaiian tongue. My guide responds with her family's chant, and we are welcomed onto Anakala's taro farm with an exchange of *ha*, or the breath of life.

Of all the Hawaiian Islands, Moloka'i may be the one wherein traditions and customs are still observed in everyday life. Instead of five-star hotels, spas and restaurants, as well as throngs of people, visitors to the Friendly Isle discover a quieter, more authentic Hawaiian experience. The 30,000 annual guests who make the journey are forever changed.

Back in the Halawa Valley, Anakala, his son Greg and young grandsons demonstrate the ancient tradition of making *poi*, a staple food in Hawaiian cuisine made from the sustainable taro plant, or *kalo*. When Anakala was five years old, he was chosen to be the cultural



Above: Kalaupapa National Historic Park is open by invitation only; each day, only 100 visitors enjoy the park—often by mule—which includes nearly 30 federally listed threatened and endangered species.

Left: Known for its towering sea cliffs, Moloka'i is the fifth largest of the main Hawaiian islands.

practitioner to carry on his family's traditions. Greg was subsequently chosen, as one of his sons will be chosen too. Continuing the tradition of *poi*, the three generations use a *poi* board and stones handed down from the previous seven generations.

As Anakala says, the Hawaiian traditions are "sacred, not secret," and he was taught by his grandfather to "teach, take, show and touch," and wants to share his knowledge with island visitors. "Seek out a source; look for someone born in the area if you really want to learn," Anakala says. "There's always someone carrying on the legacy."

The story of Kalaupapa is moving, and another tradition that is "sacred, not secret," told openly and honestly by the guides at Kalaupapa National Historical Park. A former exile colony for the more than 8,000 Hawaiians who




Above: Created by two shield volcanoes, Moloka'i offers unparalleled views via kayak. Left: Moloka'i's pristine landscape, environmental stewardship, rich Hawaiian traditions and visitor-friendly culture have been noted by National Geographic.

gradually descending 2.9 miles down the highest (1,700 feet) sea cliffs in the world, offering spectacular views of the north side of the island.

Moloka'i's topography is not conducive to many of the water activities found on the other Hawaiian Islands, but it is perfect for kayaking and stand-up paddle boarding. In fact, two iconic stand-up paddle board races take place from Moloka'i: The M4 Moloka'i (Maui to Moloka'i, July 19, 2015) and Moloka'i to Oahu (July 2015). For a quiet beach day, head to Papohaku Beach Park; the waves may be high, but you may not see another soul on the three miles of golden sands.

Staying on Moloka'i is stress-free. There are just a few options to choose from in regards to accommodations: a sprinkling of luxury homes and condos for rent, such as those found at Wavecrest Resort, and one oceanfront hotel, Hotel Molokai. Dining on Moloka'i is simple too. Restaurants are über-casual. For more of a fine-dining experience, private chefs, such as Gene Pike from COTIGA, are available for in-rental dining.

The people of Moloka'i welcome visitors to their island to learn about their culture and traditions, and they do so with open arms and hearts. And when it comes time to leave, there's one last Hawaiian tradition to note. Instead of saying goodbye, the locals say, "Until we meet again," or a *hui hou*. After a visit to Moloka'i, you'll certainly want to meet again too. 

KAYAKING PHOTO COURTESY OF MOLOKAI OUTDOORS; SUNSET BY SUSAN B. BARNES

contracted Hansen's disease (leprosy) between 1866 and 1969, just 100 people are permitted daily into Kalaupapa, and they must be accompanied by a guide at all times. Accessible by hiking, air or mule, we visited via the Kalaupapa Mule Tour,

COMING AND GOING

Traveling to Moloka'i takes some time, but it's an unforgettable trip. When arriving and departing, you may want to spend some time on the lush island of Maui. Here are five things to see and do on the Valley Isle:

- **Snorkel Black Rock:** Some of the best snorkeling on the island is found just a few sandy steps from the rooms at the Sheraton Maui. Keep an eye out for sea turtles gliding by!
- **Hang 10:** Take surf lessons on the shores off Lahaina, or simply watch the locals tear it up from your lanai at Kapalua Villas on Oneloa Bay.
- **The Road to Hana:** This famed drive boasts breathtaking views around nearly every turn, and does take time. Plan to spend the better part of a day soaking in the beauty.
- **Hawaiian Shave Ice:** Cool off with an island specialty. My personal favorite is passion fruit (*liliko'i*), tropical punch and mango with macadamia nut ice cream at Ululani's Hawaiian Shave Ice.
- **Watch the Sunset:** Sunsets on the Hawaiian Islands can't be beat. At day's end, take a seat and watch Mother Nature show off in all her glory.

WHEN YOU GO

For more on Moloka'i, visit molokai-hawaii.com

- Halawa Valley Cultural Experience halawavalleymolokai.com
- Hotel Molokai | hotelmolokai.com
- Kalaupapa National Historical Park nps.gov/kala
- Kalaupapa Rare Adventure | muleride.com
- Kapalua Villas | kapaluvillasmaui.com
- Moloka'i Outdoors (kayaking and stand up paddling) | molokai-outdoors.com
- Wavecrest Resort molokai-vacation-rental.net