



Even adrenalin junkies can relax in this Hawaiian paradise

By Lucas Aykroyd

Photos: Ann Cecil Photography (harbour); Fotolia/Tomas Del Amo (beach).

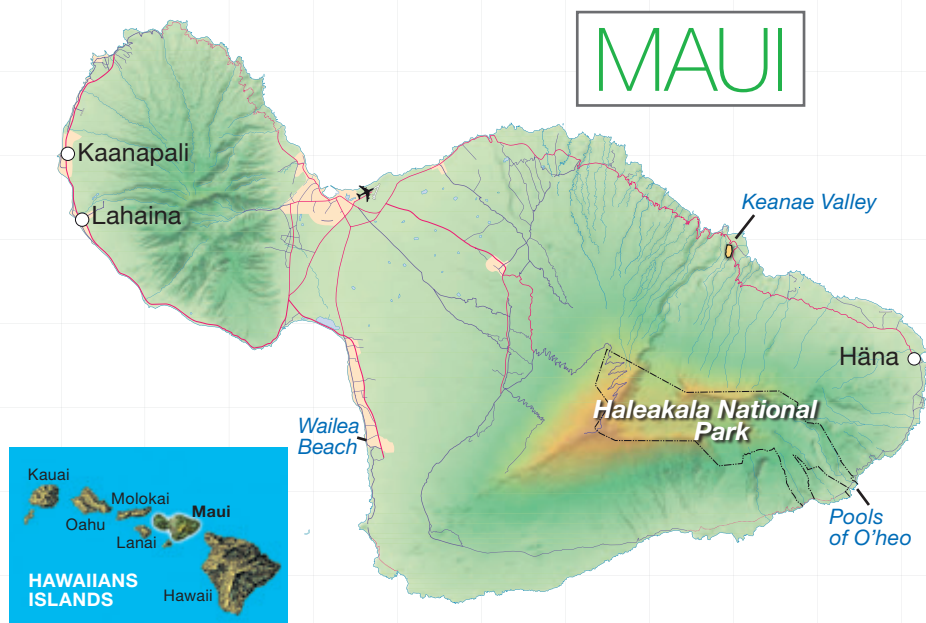


Near Kaanapali Beach.



Lahaina Harbor.

Maui's Mellow Magic



Eyes closed, I luxuriated on a massage table in a traditional thatched Hawaiian hut by the ocean at Four Seasons Resort Maui as soothing hands administered a relaxing 50-minute massage. I was being spoiled like King Kamehameha the Great, the 18–19th-century Hawaiian monarch who united the Hawaiian islands. And yet I thought, My God, what has happened to me?

Normally, I'll simply relax on vacation. Instead, I'll raft over a 23-foot waterfall in New Zealand, bang up my ribs while kiteboarding in Puerto Rico, or stare down a charging polar bear in Manitoba. So I spurned Hawaii for years. Based on the TV ads and glossy travel brochures I'd seen, all that people appeared to do in America's 50th state was get married, get mai tais, or, yes, get massaged.

Recently, however, I rediscovered James Michener's *Hawaii*. Arguably the late historical novelist's masterpiece, this 1959 tome brims with drama. From the arrival of canoe-navigating Polynesians more than 1,500 years ago to the 1820s' clash of traditional Hawaiian gods with austere Congregationalist missionaries, from naked women swimming out to meet whaling ships to the riots and epidemics that hit Maui in the 19th century, it's never boring.

The colour and passion of Michener's storytelling sold me. Finally, I'd splurge on an action-packed Maui week. Still, I'd be reasonable. I didn't want to die in Hawaii. It was time to take a bite out of the second-largest Hawaiian island's soft adventure scene.

Hang Loose

Maui offers a pleasing compromise between the urban amenities of Oahu—home to Honolulu, the state's most populous city at 390,000 inhabitants—and the abundant, unspoiled nature of Kauai and Hawaii, also known as the Big Island. Kayakers, golfers, kiteboarders, and surfers alike flock here, but the diverse geography means the adventures they seek are just the tip of the iceberg. Covering an area

Canal Cruises

Rideau Canal & Trent-Severn Waterway

Cruise Ontario's magnificent heritage canals along 568 km of scenic lakes, rivers and locks.

Enjoy the comfort of the 45 passenger "Kawartha Voyager" riverboat with dining room, lounge and twin lower berth cabins with private facilities.

5 DAY VOYAGES

1-800-561-5767
– Free Brochure –

Ontario Waterway Cruises
Box 6, Orillia ON L3V 6H9
www.cruiseontario.ca

Would your friends like to come?



Kaanapali resort area with parasailer.



Lush vegetation at Lao Needle.

of 1,883 square kilometres (727 square miles) with nearly 200 kilometres (120 miles) of coastline, Maui was formed eons ago by the lava flow of two overlapping shield volcanoes. Lush valleys burgeoning with waterfalls, banana trees, and bamboo contrast with rocky oceanfront outcroppings. Maui has more than 20 microclimates, meaning that you can experience completely different weather just down the road. Being from Vancouver, I was ready to get rained on, although naturally I was hoping for sunshine galore.

Even though it was a little cloudy, I was full of excitement when I woke up on my first morning in Maui. I loved the west-facing view of palm trees and the Pacific Ocean from my palatial Honua Kai Resort suite in Kaanapali, but I wasn't planning to just loll on my balcony and swig the Maui Brewing Company's CoCoNut PoTeR and Mana Wheat ale all day.

Instead, I breakfasted on an \$8 "Maui sunrise smoothie" with mango and passion fruit at the on-site Aina Gourmet Market. Then I hustled off to the nearby Moana Athletic Club for a stand-up paddleboarding lesson on Kaanapali Beach.

Sporting a red baseball cap, instructor Frank Forbes enthusiastically showed me how to hold my paddle before we got into the water. "When you paddleboard, the board follows your eyes," the ex-New Yorker told me. "Keep paddling or you'll fall off."

With light, warm rain falling, I grabbed my paddleboard, waded in, knelt down on the centre, and cautiously stood up. Frank joined me on his board as I wobbled on small waves. I realized that this experience would be more challenging than my previous paddleboarding outing on a placid lake in British Columbia.

At Frank's urging, I bent my knees and grunted like former tennis star Monica Seles with each stroke to engage my core more efficiently. Ludicrous-sounding, but it worked. Soon I was gliding smoothly along the shoreline.

At lunchtime, I drove to the chic Whalers Village shopping mall and dined beachside in 24°C (75°F) weather at the open-air Hula Grill, decorated with rare koa wood canoes. I chatted with then-executive chef Chris Schobel while munching on coconut calamari and ahi tuna. "Once you're out here, Maui gets into you," the one-time New York commodities trader said. "It's very mellow."

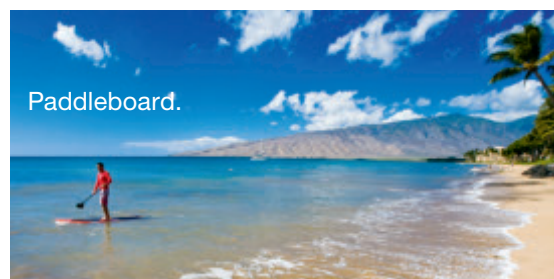
Hmm. Could I learn from all these Big Apple transplants?

I strolled over to the Whalers Village Museum. The brown 1980s décor and signage didn't match the Michener-worthy displays: harpoons, killing irons, carved whale teeth, and an impressive model of the 19th-century whaling bark *Sunbeam*. A small theatre showed a video with huge cetaceans frolicking to Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." Only when my mind wandered to the defunct Hartford Whalers NHL hockey team did I decide that it was time to go.

That evening, I tackled my fear of relaxation head-on in the former whaling port of Lahaina. (As it turned out, I was drawn back repeatedly during my trip to this picturesque town of 11,704, which served as Hawaii's capital in the early 19th century.)

At the Old Lahaina Luau, a popular outdoor dinner show featuring Hawaiian culture, I received a purple orchid lei and a double mai tai upon entry. Dangerous stuff.

Things became more challenging.



Paddleboard.



Whalers Village Museum.

Moored yachts and a pink sunset confronted me. A buffet featuring pork, taro salad, and salmon enticed guests, while a band with ukuleles and steel guitars played "What a Wonderful World." There was liberal use of the *shaka* sign, the traditional Hawaiian "hang loose" hand gesture with the thumb and pinky extended.

What a fiasco! People relaxing everywhere!

The traditional dancing, fortunately, pumped me up. Illuminated by blazing torches, the stage erupted with wriggling hips, warriors blowing conch-shell horns, and high-pitched whoops as the legend of the fire goddess Pele unfolded.

Other segments spotlighted the *ote'a*, the traditional festive drum dance of Tahiti, and the modern hula made famous in 20th-century Hollywood films. The 11 grass-skirted female dancers and their four shirtless male counterparts earned my hearty applause.



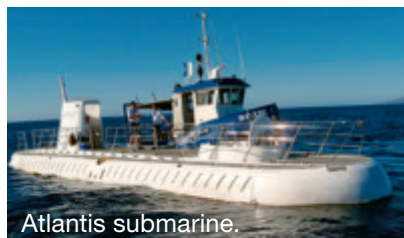
Lahaina.



Lahaina at night.



Old Lahaina Courthouse.



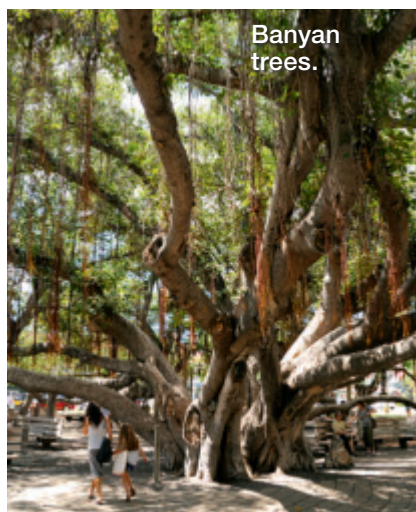
Atlantis submarine.

1988. The 48-capacity, custom-built passenger sub wasn't as scary as the one in *The Hunt for Red October*, never diving much deeper than 100 feet.

As the *Hawaii Five-0* theme played, I goggled at a school of blue-lined snappers swimming past my porthole. Naturalist Steve McGee waggishly described a poisonous, pouty-lipped pufferfish as "the Angelina Jolie fish." He also pointed out a predatory big-eye emperor fish hovering over the wrecked *Carthaginian*, a 1920-built German boat sunk in Lahaina Harbor to create an artificial reef.

Oddly, the tour felt simultaneously exciting and mellow. Perhaps this was Hawaii's winning formula, I mused as I disembarked nearly two hours later. I was eager to learn more.

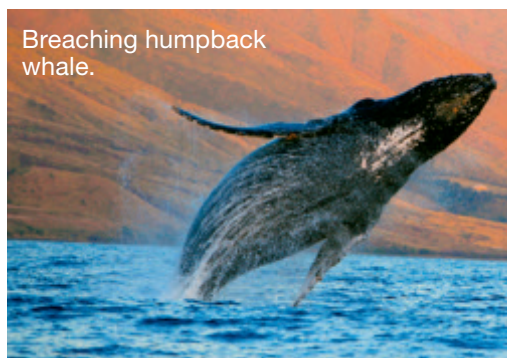
I entered the nearby Old Lahaina Courthouse, outside which the Hawaiian flag was lowered and replaced by the Stars and Stripes on August 12, 1898, when Hawaii became an American territory. Today, it serves as the town's visitor centre.



Banyan trees.

Growing Serenity

The following day, I took a morning tour of Lahaina Harbor with Atlantis Submarine Adventures, which has taken more than 13 million passengers on dives since the company was founded in



Breaching humpback whale.

Chatting with a local historian, I learned about the myths that have formed Maui's culture. The island is named after a demigod chief, who reputedly pulled the island up out of the sea with a fish hook, lifted the sky, and slowed the sun down to get more daylight hours. I also learned that the Hawaiian alphabet has only 18 letters—and that just eight of them are consonants. No wonder that, to anglophone observers, Hawaiian place names can often seem similar to one another.

Maui was truly beginning to engage me. After a casual lunch of *ono* fish tacos (*ono* is a relative of the King Mackerel) and fresh hibiscus juice at Cilantro, a contemporary Mexican café, I made a pilgrimage to Baldwin Missionary House on Front Street.

The 1834-built, four-room missionary home sits steps away from the spectacular sprawl of Hawaii's biggest banyan tree, where thousands of myna birds roost daily at sunset. Timber-framed, Lahaina's oldest house has two-foot-thick walls made of coral, sand, and lava rock.

My interest in missionary doctor Dwight Baldwin, whose quarantine and vaccination program halted an 1853 smallpox outbreak on Maui, stemmed from his depiction in Michener's *Hawaii* (as "John Whipple"). Inside the cool-blue-shuttered house, I



Waianae Church.

checked out Baldwin's handwritten American passport and vintage medical instruments. What put a lump in my throat was viewing his family's blue willow china—the same pattern as in my grandparents' house, where I first read *Hawaii*.

There's a romantic story about the china pattern: the two turtledoves depicted at the top of the design are, according to legend, two Chinese lovers who were transformed by the gods when a vengeful Mandarin was about to have them put to death. Learning this story here reminded me of how much of a cultural crossroads Maui is.

Afterwards, I wandered over to the historic Waianae Church and photographed missionary graves outside. Even in the midday heat—"Lahaina" means "merciless sun"—I felt a growing serenity.

That feeling persisted during my evening dinner cruise on the huge *Teralani II* catamaran, launching from Kaanapali Beach. I'd expected a boozy sit-down affair. Instead, it focused on celebrating humpback whales.

On deck, my group spotted more than 10 whales as the sunset paved a watery golden path towards the cloud-crowned island of Lanai. One 15-metre (50-foot) specimen slapped its tail nearly 20 times. It was awe-inspiring. Devouring rotisserie chicken and brownies was a nice bonus.

The next day, while ordering an avocado wrap for breakfast at a Lahaina deli, I noticed a counter sign quoting Paul Theroux: HAWAII IS NOT A STATE OF MIND, BUT A STATE OF GRACE. Was the universe telling me to chill out before driving the ultra-twisty road to Hana on Maui's north coast?

If so, the message served me well. Calmness was key. The 219-kilometre

(136-mile) round-trip drive was very smooth—except when I had to pull over to let local yahoos in black pickup trucks zoom past. (With apologies to *The Wizard of Oz*, I couldn't help thinking, Hawaiians and tigers and bears, oh, my!)

Narrow stone bridges, sudden switchbacks, stunning waterfalls, and roadside stalls selling banana bread and coconut candy commanded my attention during the day-long expedition. Shortly before reaching Hana, an isolated former sugar town, I barely avoided squashing a brown mongoose that scurried in front of my rented Chevy.

The thoughtful voice on my GPS did a great job of reminding me to be careful when she cooed at one viewpoint, "Please be careful when sitting on the guard rail for a photo with the falls, as it is lower than it appears and some have plummeted to their death on the rocks below."

Excitement and relaxation merged again at the Pools of O'heo, my final late-afternoon stop before zigzagging back to where I'd begun. I hiked down to this oceanside series of waterfalls and swimming holes. Huge whitecaps provided an intense yet meditative backdrop to strange rock formations.

Surrender

I bracketed my next soft adventure with two sumptuous meals. First, I feasted with a visiting friend at the breakfast buffet at the Westin Kaanapali Ocean Resort Villas. Later, I lunched on exquisitely flaky mahi mahi fish and chips at the Paia Fish Market, a corner eatery with communal tables that are always packed.

Happily, my pattern of constant conspicuous consumption didn't put

Good Times

CANADA'S MAGAZINE FOR SUCCESSFUL RETIREMENT

TO SERVE YOU BETTER

As a *Good Times* subscriber, you can expect unequalled customer service. And that's exactly what you'll get each and every time you need help with your subscription. That's our promise to you.

SPEEDY, EASY, AND SAFE SERVICE

24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Visit our online subscription services at www.goodtimes.ca/customer to subscribe or renew your subscription, make a payment, inform us of a change of address, or check your account.

SUBSCRIPTION EXPIRATION DATE

You will find the subscription expiration date included on your mailing label. To make sure you don't miss a single issue, please allow for a period of 6 to 8 weeks for your subscription renewal or address change to take effect.

BILLING AND RENEWAL NOTICES

We process bills and subscription renewals one week before mailing them. Taking delivery schedules into account, your cheque (or renewal order) and our subscription notice might cross paths in the mail. If this happens, kindly disregard our renewal notice.

By mail:

Subscription Services
Good Times
P.O. Box 11002, Anjou Station
Anjou QC H1K 4H2

OUR PRIVACY POLICY

From time to time we share our list of subscribers with reputable businesses whose products or services may be of interest to you. However, if you prefer we not share your name or address (postal or e-mail), please let our subscription services know in writing. Kindly include one of your magazine mailing labels. Our full privacy policy may be viewed at www.goodtimes.ca.



The road to Hana.



Ocean view on the road to Hana.



The pools of O'heo.



Haleakala crater.

me over the 291-pound weight limit (per person) for my Blue Hawaiian helicopter tour over Maui. I relished the super-smooth surge up over Kahului Airport, with Kenny Wayne Shepherd's "Blue on Black" playing on my headset.

Soaring around the deeply carved, 10,022-foot-high volcanic peak of Haleakala, pilot Tim Perry briefed me and three other passengers on every detail of the cinema-worthy scenery below. When we weren't gaping at the Haleakala crater's oxidized red earth, we were soaking up a flourishing panorama of white ginger flowers, eucalyptus trees, and sugar cane fields. Tim even pointed out the long private driveway leading to Oprah Winfrey's ranch.

Adrenalin mounted up when we hovered in the deep, romantic Keanae Valley next to waterfalls and spotted two humpback whales swimming together just off the coast. Still, Tim's cool steering of the super-quiet Eco-Star helicopter made it all pretty Zen.

My anti-relaxation resolve continued to erode when I checked into Four Seasons Resort Maui, nestled beautifully next to Wailea Beach, to wrap up my week.

Instead of catching a hard-hitting

NHL game on my big-screen TV that afternoon, I found myself munching pineapple slices on my balcony while watching for more whales. I flipped through a visitor's guide and realized there were umpteen festivals and events that could bring me back to Maui throughout the year, such as the Great Maui Whale Festival (February), the Ki Ho'alu (Slack Key Guitar) Festival, the Lanai Pineapple Festival (July), and the Maui Marathon (September).

I drove back to Lahaina that evening to attend the acclaimed Warren & Annabelle's variety show, which has been entertaining audiences since 1999, and was wowed by dexterous magician Warren Gibson. (I still have no clue how he hid two bowling balls inside an empty hat.)

The pre-show dinner—with traditional Hawaiian pork wraps, spicy crab cakes, and key lime pie—was delicious and satisfying but included its own mysterious element: an invisible "ghost" piano player who took requests for Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" and Frank Sinatra's "Young at Heart."

Perhaps it was the music that prepped me for my final push. That night, I pumped iron at the Four Sea-

sons gym and then rose at 5 a.m. for a four-hour high-speed boat tour with the Kihei Blue Water Rafting company. Insane fun ensued.

At sunrise, the *Pineapple Express*, propelled by two 225-horsepower Honda outboard motors, was swiftly surrounded by spinner dolphins leaping joyfully alongside our 20-passenger group. We went bouncing over the waves with Def Leppard's "Photograph" and Poison's "Nothin' But a Good Time" pumping on the boat's stereo.

We backed up to a lava tube nestled in the menacing-looking basalt cliffs, which, due to compressed air, suddenly blasted us with spray like a sea monster clearing its throat. When we paused for snorkelling, the tropical fish and graceful, surreal sea turtles I observed were trumped only by the humpback whale that shockingly swam right next to our boat.

But all that rocking and rolling took a toll. And that's how I came to be getting rubbed down by Rita, a charming masseuse from Portland, OR. It was here that I finally surrendered to Hawaii. I was, in fact, relaxing. I was surprised, but I wasn't sorry. ■