
Maui County :: Maui History, Climate, Tourism and Vacation Activities

Welcome to VisitHi.com. We invite you to explore the endless possibilities of your next Hawaiian Vacation. We will start your tour with Maui, or should we say Maui County, which includes 4 Hawaiian Islands. Let's examine what each has to offer and you'll understand why Maui is the #1 destination for many travellers.

Island of Maui, and Surrounding County which includes Molokai, Lanai, & Kahoolawe

It's hard to describe Maui as anything short of the stuff that dreams are made of. This tropical treasure is one of the most sought after vacation destinations in the world — and rightly so. Its emerald green lushness beckons discerning travelers with a sensual island draw. In Maui, romantics fall in love, adventurers become energized and all visitors leave with a sense of having experienced perfection. The magnificent volcano, Mt. Haleakala, dominates the island from over 10,000 feet. Its lush slopes are home to some of the rarest wildlife and exotic birds on the planet. But it's the island's rewarding balance of seclusion and sophistication that steal your heart. The crystal clear waters have their allure as well, with surfers and watersport enthusiasts coming from all across the globe. Maui's culture also delivers great delights, with museums, galleries, delectable dining and rich history. Be sure to visit Lahaina, a quaint 19th century whaling village that illuminates one of the most inspiring periods in the island's history.

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The island of Maui is the second-largest of the Hawaiian Islands at 727.2 square miles and is the 17th largest island in the United States. Maui, part of the state of Hawaii, is the largest island in Maui County. Three other islands, Lanai, Kahoolawe, and Molokai, also belong to Maui County. Together, the four islands are known as Maui Nui. In 2000, Maui had a population of 117,644, the third-largest of the Hawaiian islands, behind that of Oahu and Hawaii. Kahului is the largest town on Maui with a population of 20,146. Wailuku is the seat of Maui County.

Native Hawaiian tradition gives the origin of the island's name in the legend of Hawaiiloa, the Polynesian navigator attributed with discovery of the Hawaiian Islands. The story relates how he named the island of Maui after his son who in turn was named for the demigod Maui. According to legend, the demigod Maui raised all the Hawaiian Islands from the sea. The Island of Maui is also called the "Valley Isle" for the large fertile isthmus between its two volcanoes.

Maui's History ::

Polynesians, from Tahiti and the Marquesas, were the original peoples to populate Maui. The Tahitians introduced the kapu system, a strict social order that affected all aspects of life and became the core of Hawaiian culture. Modern Hawaiian history began in the mid-1700s. King Kamehameha I took up residence (and later made his capital) in Lahaina after conquering Maui in 1790, during the bloody Battle of Kepaniwai.

On November 26, 1778, Captain James Cook became the first European explorer to see Maui. Cook never set foot on the island because he was unable to find a suitable landing. The first European to visit Maui was the French admiral Jean François de Galaup de La Pérouse, who landed on the shores of what is now known as La Perouse Bay on May 29, 1786. More Europeans followed: traders, whalers, loggers (e.g., of sandalwood) and missionaries. The missionaries began to arrive from New England in 1823, choosing Lahaina because it was the capital. They clothed the natives, banned them from dancing hula, and greatly altered the culture. They tried to keep whalers and sailors out of the bawdy houses. The missionaries taught reading and writing, created the 12-letter Hawaiian alphabet, started a printing press in Lahaina, and began writing the islands' history, which until then existed only as oral accounts. Ironically, the work of the missionaries both altered and preserved the native culture. The religious work altered the culture while the literacy efforts preserved native history and language for posterity. They started the first school in Lahaina, which still exists today: Lahaina Mission School. The Mission school opened in 1831 and was the first secondary school to open west of the Rocky Mountains.

At the height of the whaling era (1843-1860), Lahaina was a major whaling center with anchorage in Lahaina Roads; in one season over 400 ships visited Lahaina and the greatest number of ships berthed at one time was about 100. A given ship tended to stay several weeks rather than days which explains the drinking and prostitution in the town at that time. Whaling declined steeply at the end of the 19th century as crude oil (petroleum) replaced whale oil.

Kamehameha's descendants reigned in the islands until 1872. They were followed by rulers from another ancient family of chiefs, including Queen Liliuokalani who ruled in 1893 when the monarchy was overthrown. One year later, the Republic of Hawaii was founded. The island was annexed by the United States in 1898 and made a territory in 1900. Hawaii became the 50th U.S. state in 1959.

Maui was centrally involved in the Pacific Theatre of World War II as a staging center, training base, and for rest and relaxation. At the peak in 1943-44, the number of troops stationed on Maui exceeded 100,000. The main base of the 4th Marines was in Haiku. Beaches in Kihikihi were used for practice landings and training in marine demolition and sabotage.

Modern Development of Maui ::

The island has experienced rapid population growth in recent years with Kihikihi one of the most rapidly growing towns in the United States. The growth is occurring because many people, having visited Maui, decide to move or retire to the island.

Population growth is producing strains, including growing traffic congestion on many of the major roads. There is concern about the availability of affordable housing and access to clean water. Property prices have risen to levels such that families on average incomes find it difficult to afford renting or buying a home. Property developers have insufficient regulatory or financial incentive to build less expensive homes. The Maui County Council is currently seeking ways of amending this situation.

There have been long-standing concerns about the reliability of Maui's potable water supply; droughts have been declared in most recent years and the Waiau aquifer is being drawn from at what some believe are unsustainable rates of above 18 million U.S. gallons per day. While the long-term situation remains unclear and reliable supply has not been secured, recent estimates indicate that the total potential supply of potable water on Maui is around 476 million U.S. gallons per day, many times greater than any foreseeable demand.

Sugar cane cultivation once used over 80% of the island's water supply. One pound of refined sugar requires a ton of water to produce. The water used for sugar cultivation is taken mostly from the streams of East Maui, routed through a network of tunnels and ditches hand dug by Chinese labor over a century ago. Controversy exists as to whether the sugar companies have a right to monopolize water from ditches dug on leased public land transporting public water. In 2006, the town of Paia successfully petitioned the County against mixing in treated water from wells known to be contaminated with both EDB and DBCP from former pineapple cultivation in the area. Agricultural companies have been released from all future liability for these chemicals.

There is a great deal of discussion about the meaning of "smart development" and the way to achieve it.

There clearly exists a tension between economic growth and urbanization on the one hand, and the wish to preserve the beauty of Maui and a relaxed way of life on the other.

Maui's Diverse Agriculture

Coffee, macadamia nuts, papaya, tropical flowers, sugar and fresh pineapple are just some of Hawaii's premium exports and are a great example of their diversified agriculture. But Maui Land & Pineapple Company and Hawaiian Commercial and Sugar Company (HC&S, a subsidiary of Alexander and Baldwin Company) dominate agricultural activity. HC&S produces sugarcane on about 37,000 acres of the Maui central valley, the largest sugarcane operation remaining in Hawaii. The cane is irrigated mostly with water drawn from aqueducts that run from the windward (northern) slopes of Haleakala that receive considerable rainfall. A controversial feature of Maui sugarcane production is the harvesting method of controlled cane field fires for nine months of the year. Controlled burns are performed to reduce the crop to bare canes just before harvesting. The fires produce smoke that towers above the Maui central valley most early mornings, and ash (locally referred to as "Maui snow") that is carried downwind (often towards north K+hei).

Maui's Geology & Topography ::

Maui's wide variety of landscapes have resulted from a unique combination of geology, topography, and climate. Each volcanic cone in the chain of the Hawaiian Islands is built of dark, iron-rich/quartz-poor rocks, which poured out of thousands of vents as highly fluid lava, over a period of millions of years. Several of the volcanoes were close enough to each other that lava flows on their flanks overlapped one another, causing several volcanoes to merge into a single island. Maui is such a "volcanic doublet", formed from two shield volcanoes that overlapped one another to form an isthmus between them.

The older, western volcano has been eroded considerably and is cut by numerous drainages, forming the peaks of the West Maui Mountains. Pu'u Kukui is the highest of the peaks at 5,788 feet. The larger, younger volcano to the east, Haleakala, rises to more than 10,000 feet above sea level, but measures five miles from seafloor to summit. The eastern flanks of both volcanoes are cut by deeply incised valleys and steep-sided ravines that run downslope to the rocky, windswept shoreline. The valley-like Isthmus of Maui that separates the two volcanic masses was formed by recent lava flows and erosion of material from the steep slopes of the volcanoes. This prominent topographic feature is the reason why Maui is known as "The Valley Isle".

The last eruption occurred around 1790; two of the resulting lava flows are located at Cape Kina'u between Ahihi Bay and La Perouse Bay on the southwest shore of East Maui, and at Makaluapuna Point on Honokahua Bay on the northwest shore of West Maui. Although considered to be dormant by volcanologists, Haleakala is certainly capable of

further eruptions.

The island of Maui is one of the four main Hawaiian Islands that formed the much larger island, Maui Nui that submerged about 200,000 years ago, and is now about 1,650 feet (500 m) below sea level. The other three islands that made this prehistoric island are Lanai, Molokai and Kahoolawe.

Maui's Climate ::

The climate of the Hawaiian Islands is characterized by a two-season year, mild and uniform temperatures everywhere (except at high elevations), marked geographic differences in rainfall, high relative humidity, extensive cloud formations, and dominant trade-wind flow (especially at elevations below a few thousand feet). Maui itself has a wide range of climatic conditions and weather patterns that are influenced by several different factors in the physical environment:

- * Half of Maui is situated within five miles of the island's coastline. This, and the extreme insularity of the Hawaiian Islands themselves account for the strong marine influence on Maui's climate.

- * Gross weather patterns are often determined by an area's elevation and whether it faces into or away from the Trade winds (prevailing air flow from the northeast quadrant).

- * Maui's rugged, irregular topography produces marked variations in conditions from one locality to another. Air swept inland on the Trade winds is shunted one way or another by the mountains, valleys, and vast open slopes. This complex three-dimensional flow of air results in striking differences from place to place in wind speed, cloud formation, and rainfall. When irregular topography is combined with variations in elevation, marked differences in air temperature are the result.

- * Windward Lowlands – Below 2,000 feet on north- to northeast-sides of an island. Region is oriented roughly perpendicular to direction of flow of prevailing trade winds. Moderately rainy; frequent trade wind-induced showers. Skies are often cloudy to partly cloudy. Air temperatures are more uniform (and mild) than those of other regions.

- * Leeward Lowlands – Daytime temperatures are a little higher and nighttime temperatures are lower than in windward locations. Dry weather is prevalent, with the exception of sporadic trade winds showers that drift over from the mountains to windward and during short-duration storms.

- * Interior Lowlands – Intermediate conditions, often sharing characteristics of other lowland sub-regions. Occasionally experience intense local afternoon showers from well-developed clouds that formed due to local heating of the land during the day.

- * Leeward Side High-Altitude Mountain Slopes with High Rainfall – Extensive cloud cover and rainfall all year long. Mild temperatures are prevalent, but humidity is higher than any other sub-region.

- * Lower Mountain Slopes on Leeward Side – Rainfall is higher than on the adjacent leeward lowlands, but much less than at similar altitudes on the windward side; however, maximum rainfall usually occurs leeward of the crests of lower mountains. Temperatures are higher than on the rainy slopes of the windward sides of mountains; cloud cover is almost as extensive.

- * High Mountains – Above about 3,000 feet on Haleakala, rainfall decreases rapidly with elevation. Relative humidity may be ten percent or less. The lowest temperatures in the state are experienced in this region: air temperatures below freezing are common.

Rainfall on Maui :: Showers are very common; yet while some of these are very heavy, the vast majority are light and brief – a sudden sprinkle of rain and it's over. Even the heaviest rain showers are seldom accompanied by thunder and lightning. Summer is the warmer season; with an overwhelming dominance of trade winds, it is the season when widespread rainstorms are rare. Throughout the lowlands, summer is the drier season in terms of average monthly

rainfall. At one extreme, the annual rainfall averages 17 to 20 inches or less in leeward coastal areas, such as the shoreline from Maalaea Bay to Kaupo, and near the summit of Haleakala. At the other extreme, the annual average rainfall exceeds 300 inches along the lower windward slopes of Haleakala, particularly along the Hana Highway. If the islands of the State of Hawaii did not exist, the average annual rainfall on the same patch of water would be about 25 inches. Instead, the actual average is about 70 inches. Thus, the islands extract from the air that passes over them about 45 inches of rainfall that otherwise would not fall. The mountainous topography of Maui and the other islands is responsible for this added water bonus.

Daily Variations in Rainfall – In the lowlands, throughout the year, rainfall is most likely to occur during the night or morning hours, and is least likely to occur during mid-afternoon. The most pronounced daily variations in rainfall occur during the summer because most summer rainfall consists of Trade winds showers that most often to occur at night. Winter rainfall in the lowlands is the result of storm activity, which is as likely to occur in the daytime as at night. Rainfall variability is far greater during the winter, when occasional storms contribute appreciably to rainfall totals, than during summer, when trade-wind showers provide most of the rain. With such wide swings in rainfall, it is inevitable that there are occasional droughts, sometimes with severe economic losses. The real drought years are the ones where the winter rains fail, when there are only a few (or even no) significant rainstorms. Droughts hit hardest in the normally dry areas that depend on winter storms for their rainfall and receive little rain from the Trade wind showers.

Natural history ::

Maui is a leading whale-watching center in the Hawaiian Islands due to Humpback whales wintering in the sheltered Auau Channel between the islands of Maui county. The whales migrate approximately 3,500 miles from Alaskan waters each autumn and spend the northern hemisphere winter months mating and birthing in the warm waters off Maui. The whales are typically sighted in pods: small groups of several adults, or groups that contain a mother and her calf. Humpbacks are an endangered species protected by U.S. federal and Hawai»i state law. There are estimated to be about 18,000 humpbacks in the North Pacific.

Maui's Humpback whales are facing many dangers more recently due to increased levels of pollution, high speeds of commercial vessels, and military sonar testing.

Maui Tourism ::

Maui County welcomed 2,207,826 tourists in 2004; 2,263,676 tourists in 2005; and 2,405,257 tourists in 2006 with total tourist expenditures of US\$3.5 billion for the Island of Maui alone. While the Island of Oahu is most popular with Japanese tourists, the Island of Maui tends to appeal to visitors mostly from the U.S. mainland and Canada: in 2005, there were 2,003,492 domestic arrivals on the island, compared to 260,184 international arrivals. The big tourist spots in Maui include the Road to Hana, Haleakala National Park, and Lahaina.

The Road to Hana is a highway that runs along the east coast Maui which curves along many mountains and beaches. Even though the drive is very long and curvy, the beautiful waterfalls and black sand beaches are well worth it. Haleakala National Park is home to one of the most beautiful sunrises in the world. Drive up the cold, dormant volcano to view the sunrise, but be sure to bring some blankets because it is much different from the weather during the day at the beach. The temperature from atop the summit can be as much as 32 degrees colder than the resort areas. Lahaina is one of the main attractions on the island with an entire street of shops and restaurants which lead to a wharf where many set out for a sunset cruise or whale watching journey. Snorkeling with exotic underwater creatures can be done at almost any beach along the Maui coast.

The main tourist hotel and condo areas are West Maui (Kaanapali, Lahaina, Honokowai, Kahana, Napili, Kapalua), and

South Maui (Kihei, Wailea).

In April 2008, Hawaii suffered a major loss in tourism due to the bankruptcies from both ATA and Aloha Airlines. The increased demand on the remaining airlines forced prices up, making travel to Hawaii less desirable. We are able to book exception rates to and from Hawaii. Please call us today, we are happy to assist with any of your Hawaiian Travel Plans. Wilcox World Travel and Tours / American Express Agents are awaiting your call, Toll Free :: 800.294.5269