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## REASONS TO VISIT

# Maui

By Jennifer Schaefer

**D**eciding to plan a trip to Hawaii is easy, but for many vacationers, deciding which of the Hawaiian Islands to visit is not. Should you go for the excitement of Oahu, the lush natural beauty of Kauai, or the fascinating volcanic terrain of the Big Island? For more than 2 million people a year, the winning choice is Maui, a 727-square-mile piece of paradise that brings together the best qualities of the neighboring islands. Maui's sophisticated resorts, incredible natural diversity and amazing attractions make the Valley Isle the second-most visited of the Hawaiian Islands after Oahu. Following are seven reasons why you should consider planning a Maui getaway of your own.

### 1 Haleakala Crater

This deep pit at the top of Mount Haleakala, one of the dormant volcanoes that formed Maui, has a circumference of 21 miles and sits more than 10,000 feet above sea level. For an experience you won't soon forget, drive to the crater to watch the sun rise. You'll have to set

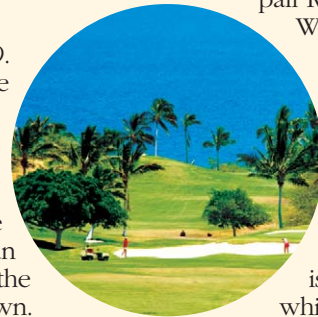
your alarm for an early hour, but seeing the famed Maui sunrise from the island's most famous vantage point is well worth a few yawns during the day. You can find out what time the sun rises the following morning by calling the National Weather Service at 808-572-7749. Be prepared for the trip to leave you breathless—not only because of the breathtaking views, but also the air at Haleakala's summit has about 20 percent less oxygen than the air at sea level. Thrill seekers can book a bike tour descent from the mountaintop or plan a hike down.

**INSIDERS' TIP** Look for the flowering silver-sword plant, which has silvery leaves that resemble swords. This rare plant can only be found in Haleakala Crater and nowhere else on earth.

### 2 Golf

With more than 15 scenic courses, Maui is recognized as one of the world's top golf destinations. Each of the island's four major resorts—Kaanapali, Kapalua, Wailea and Makena—offers a multitude of options. Each resort has two or three luxurious courses, as well as an

array of services and amenities, including state-of-the-art training facilities, high-quality rental clubs and shoes, full-service pro shops and a staff of PGA professionals. Kaanapali Resort, located in



West Maui, has two of the most authentically Hawaiian courses on the island and is also the best value. A few miles up the road is Kapalua Resort, which boasts three championship courses, including the prestigious and challenging Plantation Course. Wailea Resort, located on the island's south end, also offers three championship courses and is famous for hosting golf's most legendary professionals each winter at the Wendy's Champion Skins Game. Just south of Wailea is Makena Resort, home of two peaceful Robert Trent Jones II Courses.

**INSIDERS' TIP** Nearly every course on Maui offers stunning views of the ocean and Mount Haleakala, so tuck a camera into your golf bag.

### 3 Whale Watching



Every year thousands of humpback whales migrate from the frigid waters of Alaska to the warm waters of Hawaii. Maui is known for being the best among the islands for viewing these gentle giants. “Nothing in the world compares to seeing a humpback whale slap the water with its tail or fling itself out of the water from just a few hundred yards away,” remarks eight-time Maui visitor Marci Johnson. From November to April, whale-watching boat tours depart daily from Lahaina Harbor (as well as other areas of the island). During this period, the number of whales is usually so great that most companies guarantee a sighting. Book your tour early, as they fill up quickly.

**INSIDERS' TIP** Don't miss the Whalers Village Museum in Lahaina, which shows films of whaling history on Maui and describes how whalers changed life on the island.

### 4 Shopping

Browsing the shops may not be the first activity that comes to mind when planning a trip to Hawaii, but for those who like to shop, Maui is a great place to do so. There is a profusion of retail options all over the island, from family-run roadside stands selling local flowers and crafts to high-end malls with the latest couture. For a Maui T-shirt or another souvenir, stop into one of the dozen stores that cater to tourists along Front Street in historic Lahaina. Popular locally made products include wooden carvings made from tropical hardwood, aloha shirts, sun-tan lotion and other skin-care products. Looking for the perfect outfit to wear to dinner? All of the big resorts have multiple shops that carry a selection of island wear. Malls with major retailers include Queen Kaahumanu Center, Lahaina Center

and the upscale shops at Wailea where stores, including Fendi, Gucci and Louis Vuitton attract well-heeled clientele.

**INSIDERS' TIP** If you want to buy local, look for Haleakala. Most “Made in Maui” products are labeled with a logo of the mountain.

### 5 Molokini

Two and a half miles off Maui's south coast is a tiny C-shaped island called Molokini, a state marine life and bird conservation district. Formed by a volcanic cinder cone, Molokini's unique crescent shape acts as a fortress that provides protection from waves and currents. It makes it the perfect spot for snorkeling and diving for every skill level. The island's back wall sharply drops off to depths of 300-plus feet and attracts expert divers. The lush reef area in the center is only 35 feet deep and is a popular underwater playground for beginning divers and snorkelers. Molokini can only be reached by boat; half-day and full-day snorkel and dive trips leave daily from Maalaea Harbor and the Kihei Boat Ramp.

**INSIDERS' TIP** If you don't have time for a boat tour, Molokini can be viewed from lookouts along Highway 31 and from Makena Alanui Road.

### 6 Hana Highway

The narrow, winding road along Maui's east side, known as Hana Highway, is widely recognized as one of the most scenic drives in the world. The view from the road captures Maui's amazing natural diversity—the lush rain forests, rushing waterfalls, secluded beaches and tropical foliage may inspire you never to leave. Most travelers plan their route from Hahului (Maui's largest city) to Hana (a former sugar plantation town) and back, a 104-

mile journey that takes at least six hours round-trip. If you're prone to carsickness, the full drive probably isn't for you; the highway is known as much for its hairpin curves and one-lane bridges as for the spectacular scenery. When departing from Hahului, be sure to fill up your gas tank and pick up a map that shows landmarks along the way.

**INSIDERS' TIP** Stop for fuel (the human kind) at the Halfway to Hana stand, where the freshly baked banana bread is a local favorite.

### 7 Beaches

No description of Maui would be complete without mentioning the world-famous beaches. Year-round sunny skies, powdery sand and a water temperature in the 70s makes Maui a beach-lover's dream come true. The island boasts more than 80 beautiful beaches, all of which are open to the public. Swimmers and those with kids may want to stick to the southern and western shores, which have the calmest, sunniest beaches. The northern and eastern shores are rockier and prone to swells (although the North Shore is a during the winter months). In addition to the beaches at the four major resorts, don't-miss spots include D.T. Fleming Beach in front of the Ritz-Carlton; Napili Beach, a great place for kids and for catching the sunset; Kamaole I, II and III, three golden stretches of sand separated by lava rocks that are popular among families; and the beaches near Hana, which, although not swimmer-friendly, are worth checking out for the striking black and red sand.

**INSIDERS' TIP** Some of Maui's prettiest beaches are hidden by buildings, so keep an eye out for the blue beach-access sign that indicates right-of-way through condominiums, resorts and other private properties.



Molokini Island