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## **IS MAUI TRULY PARADISE?**

*"The Longing for paradise is paradise itself"*

- Kahill Gibran, Lebanese poet and mystic

(Along the beach, Kaanapali, Maui)

This is the area of Maui that sophisticates like to say is "too built up" but it still manages to take your breath away. The better hotels have put up massage tables under gazebos as we walk along a garden path between the end of the hotel properties, and the Pacific Ocean.

Those walking pause to watch a young woman of some girth, work out with her personal trainer on a patch of grass at the edge of the beach. The green lawn is beautifully manicured and one starts to realize that Hawaii is really the color of Ireland with sunshine and warmth. And everywhere, vistas of calm, blue waters.

This is the spot where they film those exercise shows that appear at odd hours as you're surfing channels. Physically perfect people working out in front of a scene straight out of Michener. Those fantastically constructed human beings, whose major worry in life appears to be the location of a particular deltoid or the working of a lateral.

The swans in the huge Hyatt Regency pond raise their necks to peer out at the humans walking off their morning breakfast, a flurry of Nike wear, polyester, but mostly DKNY, on top of soundless white sneakers.

Angela is walking faster than most. She is on the prowl for an aerobics class. I am trying to explain that it is basically unhealthy to exercise while on vacation in a sunny climate given the possibilities of dehydration. I point out how much energy one can expend just signaling the cabana boy for drinks.

The right side of Maui is where few go and is, of course, the most beautiful side of the island, the lush, wet, incredibly vivid, waterfall a minute, curving road from hell, rainy side of the island where the town of Hana is the main objective.

But that's at least a full day. The left side of the island starts northwest with the lovely Kapalua area, just south of Kapalua, going down the map about ten minutes is the built-up Kaanapali area, with its own boulevard and clearly marked signs to the hotels that are one star short of perfect.

South again, for about ten more minutes is the town of Lahaina, once a whaling village, now a good imitation of Sausalito, with tee-shirt shops placed next to stores selling two thousand dollar wood carved dolphins exploding out of the water. Lahaina has lots of restaurants and a large dock area where you can go whale watching for a few hours with Captain "Bob" or take a ride over to one of the other islands.

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Lahaina also has a Safeway supermarket where the same person who stamps the prices on the cans at 7-11 stores seems to work.

If you continue south for twenty minutes or so, you come to the turnoff for the airport. If you keep going south for another fifteen minutes, or so, you come to Wailea. And, dear readers, that is exactly where you want to be.

Pulling into the beautiful roadway with the Wailea sign, which literally comes at the end of the highway, creates the feeling that one has arrived. There are fine restaurants scattered about the grounds of the community, a modern shopping center where the Japanese tourists, who, despite misconceptions, only make up about 15% of the tourists on the islands, can make their final Gucci and Louis Vitton purchases before shipping out for home the next day.

We stayed at the magnificent Four Seasons, which Conde Nast Magazine ranks just behind the Lodge at Koele on Lanai, as the best on the island.

Typically on the islands, you are looking at something like \$50 a person, per night, as the price difference between the “absolute best” and an older, more conventional high-rise hotel. There is no doubt it is worth it.

The Four Seasons has a sense of style and comfort that is unmatched by any other property on the island. Rooms are huge, with private terraces and every creature comfort. In the evening we met with famed chef George Mavrothalassitis, a Provencal, who has transformed Hawaiian cuisine in his own, Mediterranean-inspired image. The Chef, knowing that I write a bit about cuisine, asked if we would like to order off the menu or have him “bring you tastes of little things from the kitchen”. We opted for the latter and thus began a dining odyssey that took several hours and had more highlights than I could possibly mention in this space.

Here was one. The chef and his assistants rolled out a cart with a perfectly shaped and designed fish in, what looked like, cookie dough. The Chef stood over this artwork and cut a perfect square in the center of the fish, gently sliding it backward. As he peeled the dough back, it took the top skin off the Ono, revealing the soft white meat which was served with proper accompaniment. It was a truly beautiful presentation and indicative of the development and sophistication of the new Hawaiian cuisine with its Pan-Asian and French influences.

The Chef is so devoted to freshness that he makes regular pilgrimages to the small villages to speak to farmers who grow herbs for his kitchen.

The hotel has a walkway that passes the swimming pool and continues past the beautiful private homes along the water's edge in Wailea. It is, I think, the most beautiful part of Maui.

(Kapalua Bay, Maui) -

Driving out to Kapalua Bay this morning, we pass some condos that look as though they were built by one of the cookie cutters at Keebler. Our host points out a two-bedroom that just sold for \$290,000. “Of course, it needed some work” we were told.

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Angela and I stayed for two nights in a villa at Kapalua Bay, a luxurious retreat situated on some of the island's most scenic real estate. The Ritz Carlton is just next door. The Villas are privately owned and individually furnished. They are placed in a rental pool and book quickly in season. Most of the units overlook the water, some are houses that would accommodate two or three families.

Our two-story unit on the Ridge was set up high. Yet our living room looked out on a hole of the Kapalua Golf Course. Birds with crowns of orange, red, and teal, sat perched in the trees that surrounded our terrace discussing putts on the rolling green just yards away.

We had a wonderful kitchen, several tv's, a telescope for close-up golf highlights, a washing machine and dryer, and several bathrooms. We recently won an award for sending lots of folks to Hawaii and almost three out of four elect to stay in Condos and Villas rather than high-rise hotels.

Kapalua Bay only has 194 deluxe units and one of the finest beaches in the United States. It also has a quaint country store where you can buy Chinese take-out food in the back and pick up a few bags of "Kitchen Cooked" Maui potato chips. These are the ones you want - in the red and yellow bag.

Our wonderful hosts at Kapalua Bay have taken us to sacred ground. We're standing on a old stone path on the Ritz Carlton hotel property. This was where the new resort was to be built but local historians and native people rushed forward with objections This was land that had been used to bury their ancestors since the arrival of the missionaries. History is written here BM and AM. Before and after the missionaries. Near as I can guess, nothing much good happened to Hawaii in the AM.

Rather than fight a small but vocal group of locals, the Ritz people, to their credit, decided to relocate the entire resort. Standing on this promontory, with the west Maui hills to my back and to my right, enveloped by sloping grounds that wind down from the 8,000 foot peak to the sea dead ahead, one can only imagine what the hotel's architect must have thought when he got the order "make some adjustments to the architectural plan".

The pure Hawaiians always started at the mountaintop. Land was divided like wedges of pie with each piece coming down from the mountain and ending at the sea. It followed the path of the rain, and irrigation through the valleys.

There is not space here to discuss the spellbinding intricacies of Hawaiian culture. The culture is rich and more and more resorts are trying to weave Hawaiiana into their daily programs. There is a strong movement among Hawaiians, those of pure blood, to separate from the United States to maintain their own cultural identity. We must not forget that this was a culture that never really had a barter system. Goods were "given" to others as gifts, repayment was never expected. There are now fewer than 2,000 pure blood Hawaiians left, so the movement will not succeed. In fact, the entire island of Kauai, has only 46 native Hawaiian residents.

The missionaries, it appears, did more than preach.

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