

By Stephanie Conner

Discover the magic
of Maui through the
elements: earth,
wind, fire and water

Natural Wonders





Oahu has bustling Waikiki Beach. The Big Island has volcanoes. But ask anyone who's been to Maui about the island and they're likely to pause, gaze into the distance and maybe even sigh. This lush, varied island—referred to as the Valley Isle—is, to put it simply, something special.

Maui's drama, variety and ability to surprise reveal themselves to first-time visitors like me shortly after leaving Kahului Airport, the main airstrip on the island. Though it's taken the better part of a day to get here, all the tribulations of travel are forgotten as I tool north along Highway 30 to Kapalua: On my right are looming, jagged mountains of a deep green, shrouded in light fog. On my left is the ocean, waves crashing and the isle of Lana'i visible in the distance; dotted along the coast are the occasional surfers and boogie-boarders. It's an auspicious start to my week's stay; on Maui, I soon find, everything tastes better, looks better, feels better.

It's elemental, really. The things that draw visitors to Maui are, at their core, simple: The year-round skin-caressing temperatures (the average hovering between 75F and 85F); the tremendous variety of natural beauty (forested mountains often have rainstorms simultaneous to perfect sunbathing conditions at the shore, just a few miles below); friendly locals; and delicious food, especially succulent and super sweet pineapple, taro and sweet potato, and rich macadamia nuts (preferably chocolate-covered). But perhaps most important to the work-weary vacationer is the feeling of both calm and energy that Maui imbues. Discovering those pockets of peace and activity on the island, I find, is best done through Nature's most primal elements: earth, wind, fire and water.

earth

Maui, the second largest of the Hawaiian Islands, covers 729 square miles and is 48 miles long and 26 miles across at its widest point. That makes for plenty of land to visit: Ten state parks and 94 county parks; black-, white- and gold-sand beaches (81 of which are accessible, with more miles of swimmable beach than any Hawaiian



island); tropical rainforests and valleys; and the world's largest dormant volcano, Haleakala (at 10,023 feet, Maui's highest peak), which means "house of the sun" and gives its name to Maui's only national park.

Traveling through Maui's valleys it's easy to see how early Hawaiians believed the earth to be a living, conscious being that required care and tending. Each of the island's eight valleys, including the lush, steep-hilled 'Iao Valley in north-central Maui, feels a world apart from the sun-drenched beaches. In

'Iao, grey, low-lying clouds linger over the houses and deep-green vegetation that climbs the hills, giving this spot a feel more of Ireland than Hawaii. With such richness and diverse topography, it's no surprise to hear that agriculture remains big business: Sugar cane and pineapple follow only tourism in economic significance.

Landlubbers will especially relish the hiking opportunities. I start my weeklong adventure on *terra firma* with a trek courtesy of Maui Eco-Adventures. The mostly easy 3.5-mile hike through the Maunalei Arboretum is led by red-bearded Brian, the company's most experienced guide, and the equally capable Paul, Maui Eco-Adventures' resident mountaineer.

A short, bumpy van ride up a hillside flush with growing pineapples gives the five hikers in our group a chance to see how the fruit really grows (in a huge spiky bush) while Brian shares the secrets of choosing the perfect pineapple (the smallest ones

More Earthbound Experiences

Ulalena: This must-see theatrical performance tells the history of Maui through colorful, energetic song and dance.

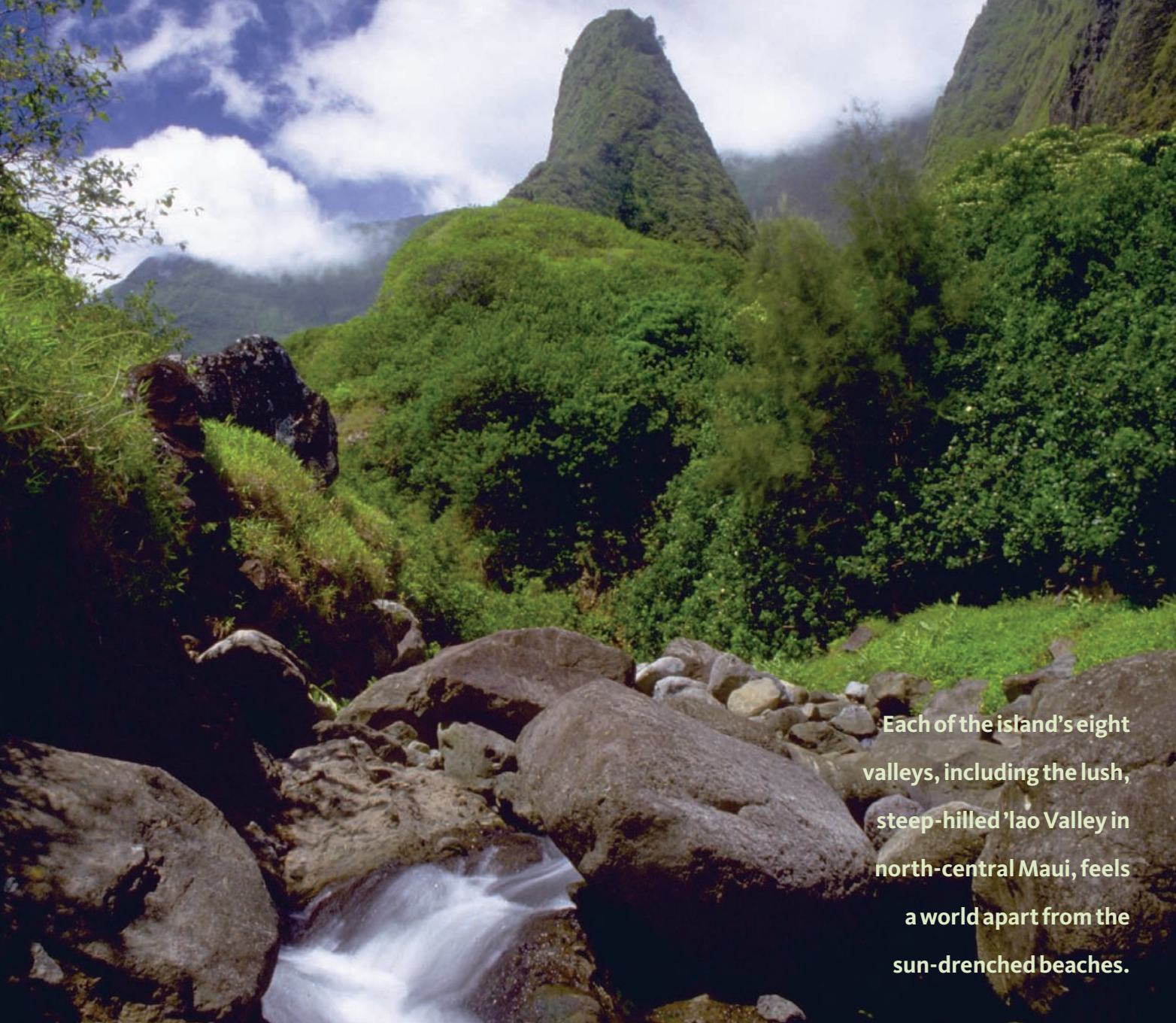
Fore Play: The three championship courses at Kapalua resort—the Village Course, the Plantation Course and the Bay Course—must be three of the most pristine, scenic courses in the world. And no worries if you're a newbie: Kapalua offers The Kapalua Golf Academy, the state's premiere teaching facility.

Grape Expectations:

Head upcountry for a visit to the Tedeschi Winery, Maui's only vineyard, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year. And before you head out for the day, check out the great accessories and perfect wine-touring attire at Michaelle's Fine Fashions at The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua.



PHOTOS BY (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT): CHRIS ROGERS • ROBERT HOLMES/CORBIS OUTLINE • DOUGLAS PEEBLES/CORBIS OUTLINE • THE RITZ-CARLTON



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There's the Rub: The aromatherapeutic benefits of flowers are the basis of The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua's signature spa treatment, "A Hawaiian Healing Experience." This 60-minute massage features one of seven exclusive blends of essential oils for Protection, Harmony, Spiritual Awakenings, Empowerment, Stress Relief or Self-Esteem.

A Horse, of Course:

Grab the reins at Piihola Ranch and travel across pastures and up to the Haleakala crater for spectacular views of the island. You'll spot plenty of wild-life along the way. Rides are offered Monday to Saturday.

are sweetest; bigger pineapples are usually shipped to the mainland for canning). After we arrive at the Arboretum's overgrown gates, it becomes clear just how unique a trip this is: Maui Eco-Adventures is the only private tour company allowed to take groups through this lush sanctuary.

From the start, I realize that this is not just a botany lesson, but rather a shorthand history of Hawaii. When the people who are now called Hawaiians emigrated from the South Pacific, they could only bring a few plants in their boats, Brian tells us, so everything that made the 2,500-plus-mile journey across open ocean had to be worthwhile. The broad, shiny ti leaf made the grade; it's still used in luaus to steam food to perfection. Another keeper was the *kukui* nut tree (sometimes called the candle nut tree); its oil can be burned for light, the sap is used as an astringent, and the nut itself has medicinal powers.

We sample a strawberry guava (sweet and juicy), find crimson coffee beans, and visit a *bo* tree (sometimes called *bodhi*, the kind of tree that Buddha is said to have sat under when he gained enlightenment). Best of all, though, is the "trampoline" tree, which spreads its thousands of thin roots for yards beyond the tree itself, winding amongst each other to form a super-strong webbing on which you can stand and bounce. As we finish up our half-day together, it occurs to me that this is also what the land does in Hawaii, if you care for it: It supports you.

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wind

Like all islands, Maui is an island in transition, with the earth and sea constantly battling each other for supremacy and shaping the land over time. The wind, too, plays a role in this elemental shift. Fall signals the beginning of Kona season, when so-called Kona winds shift to a southerly direction, sometimes bringing storms that further change the landscape.

But these winds of change are not all bad: The perfect temperature on Maui owes its consistency in part to the constant breeze that travels across the island and summer heralds the return of gentle trade winds. At Hookipa Beach Park, a couple of miles east of Paia on the Hana Highway, you'll hear no complaints about the wind: It's what world-class windsurfers have come here for. Conditions are perfect for the sport in summer, but winter—when waves grow to 16 feet or more—is the true test. Stop by the beach mid-morning and you'll see the world's very best skip the towering water again and again.

Metaphorically, too, the winds of change blow strong on Maui. Like all the Hawaiian Islands, it's in transition, working to reconcile the past with the present and future.

Says The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua cultural adviser, Clifford Nae'ole, "Hawaiians are starting to look back and appreciate our traditions. The wind that we hear is the voice of our ancestors, which is always there—we know where we're going only when we know where we've been." Through Nae'ole's unique twice-weekly program, "Sense of Place," visitors are offered another dimension to their experience of Maui and of Hawaii. In the program, Nae'ole, a native Hawaiian, shares with guests a brief history of the islands up to the present, starting with a 26-minute documentary, "Then There Were None." It is the tale of the Hawaiians' history, one rife with injustice, sacrifice and the destruction of their native culture. I'm moved nearly to tears by the film. Its title refers to the number of full-blooded Hawaiians left.

Afterward, Nae'ole offers stories from his childhood and answers questions from the audience, who are typically curious about a wide range of subjects. "They ask about Hawaiian medicine, spirituality, politics, education, health," he says. "It's like a Hawaii FAQ!" The program also includes a "walkabout" to the sacred sites on The Ritz-Carlton's grounds; on the tour you'll see a garden with plants used in traditional Hawaiian healing, a section of the Alaloa (or king's) Trail which once encircled the island, and the resting place of thousands of Hawaiians' ancestors.

"Sense of Place" is offered every Tuesday and Friday at 10 a.m. in The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua's amphitheater. Nae'ole also conducts Mai Ka Pu'uwai, an evening of sharing and discussion among local residents and hotel guests, in the amphitheater from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. the last Friday of every month.



Whichever Way the Wind Blows

Come Sail Away: Charter the Island Star, a luxurious 60-foot yacht, for excursions ranging from a half-day snorkel sail to a three-day, two-night excursion to neighboring Molokai and Lana'i. Perfect for a large family or group of friends, the seaworthy adventure comes complete with captain, crew and a private chef.

Windsurfers' Delight: Kanaha Beach Park, on Maui's north shore and not far from Kahului Airport, offers ideal conditions for learning this challenging sport. Take a 2.5-hour beginner's lesson (all are held in the morning, when winds are lighter), and you'll find the going easier here in this protected reef area. Intermediate and advanced lessons are also available, as well as surfing and kiteboarding lessons.

View from Above: Parasailing with UFO Parasailing off Maui offers a bird's-eye view of the ocean floor, the coast and the islands of Molokai and Lana'i. Takeoff and landing are gentle, and the ride is so smooth that children can do it too. Like Jet Skiing, parasailing is only allowed from May 15 to December 15, to avoid disturbing the migrating whales.

That Peaceful, Breezy Feeling:

Cap an action-packed day with the ultimate in pampering: Settle into the beachside cabana (*hale*) at The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua for an hour-long massage in the Hawaiian *lomi lomi* style (translated as "loving touch"), as the ocean breeze gently caresses your skin.



Wind in Your Hair: Rent a convertible and take to the "Heavenly Road to Hana" (route 360), one of the world's best drives, ending at the town of Hana on Maui's far east coast. It's 52 miles of gorgeous scenery, so make plenty of stops along the way. You'll discover hidden waterfalls, gorgeous flora and, if you're lucky, some native fauna as well.

Hip to Hula: You haven't really gone Hawaiian until you've taken the Hula Basics class at The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua. While hula is a lot harder than it looks, it's lots of fun (not to mention a great workout for hips, legs, arms and abs) and, with the help of an experienced teacher, you'll soon learn a bit about this ancient storytelling art.

State Bird: To see more of Maui from on high, book a helicopter tour with Sunshine Helicopters. The Circle Island Tour takes you above Haleakala Crater, Ohe'o Gulch and the Hana rainforest, as well as the west Maui coastline. Private charters are also available.

fire

The eight Hawaiian Islands are the result of some 70 million years of volcanic activity, each island formed when magma (molten rock) rose up from a “hot spot” in the earth’s mantle. Once the fluid rock surfaced through the ocean floor and erupted, over time, it formed an island. Active volcanoes, like Kilauea on the Big Island, continually reshape that island, but most of the state’s volcanoes are extinct or dormant. Maui’s Haleakala hasn’t erupted in more than 200 years and is unlikely to, as the island is slowly shifting away, a few inches every year, from the hot spot that created it. The most visible legacy of the fire and lava that created Maui is its many beaches, some colored green or garnet, owing to volcanic activity.

Today, the 30,183 acres of Haleakala National Park host thousands of visitors annually, a good many of them on two wheels. That’s because the best (and easiest) way up the mountain may be by car or van, but the best way down is definitely on a bicycle. Hence the slew of outfitters on the island offering mountain-bike excursions down Haleakala’s northwest slope—with many of



the trips scheduled to ensure you don’t miss what’s billed as a life-changing sunrise.

To meet that goal, however, requires something of a time

commitment: Cruiser Phil’s Volcano Riders picks me up at 2 a.m. for my go at Haleakala by bike. At its offices, still bleary-eyed at that hour, I sign the legal waiver and the thought crosses my mind for the first time that this may in fact be dangerous. Luckily, there’s no time for anxiety, as Leo and Dave, our fearless leaders for the day, greet our group and fill us in on the basics of riding safety and the terrain on the volcano. By about 4 a.m. we’re at the 4,000-foot-high summit (nearly large enough to hold the island of Manhattan), preparing for the sunrise in the very chilly pre-dawn. Unfortunately, the rain gods conspire against our seeing the much-talked-about sunrise, which has been described as Biblical: Pastel blues and reds start the display, and when the sun peeks over the massive cloudline below you, it’s almost possible to imagine the demi-god Maui preparing to lasso the sun. At least that’s what I hear, anyway.

Owing to rain-slickened paths and low visibility (a rare occurrence; sunrise-spotters are rewarded 89 percent of the time), we start the 38-mile ride a short drive down, out of the clouds. We’re instructed to stay in the middle of the down-bound lane (not to be confused with the middle of the road) and I soon find that—fortunately for me—this adventure requires nearly no athletic ability, other than rudimentary bicycle skills. Around every turn, the views are spectacular; we cruise from the barren top of the crater down through pale-green eucalyptus forests, peaceful pastures, pineapple fields, lavender farms and the cowboy town of Makawao. All the while, the crashing ocean is almost never out of view. By the end of the three-hour ride, the only body part that’s sore are my hands—from riding the brakes (average speed is about 20 miles per hour, I’m told)—and I’m more than ready for the gourmet breakfast with the group in the charming hippie town of Paia on Maui’s north shore.

A Cruiser Phil’s sunrise ride includes bike, helmet, gloves, wind suit, warm winter coat and breakfast; later tours also are offered, as are private charters.



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Burning to Do More?

Luau of Light: An evening at the Old Lahaina Luau—widely regarded as the best on the island—may give you a few ideas you'll want to bring home to the mainland, like greeting guests with mai tais and fresh-flower leis. Pre-dinner, be sure to visit the luau's *imu*, or fire pit, where the traditional pig is cooked for 12 or so hours before being served to guests.

Burn, Baby, Burn: Forget about mai tais: You can't leave the island without tasting a Lava Flow. Made of rum, pineapple juice, cream of coconut and bananas, with strawberry purée flowing like red-hot magma throughout, it's a decadent delight.

Hot Mama: Paul Ropp's sexy, body-conscious fashions—all made of hand-loomed cottons, rayons and silks in the most vibrant of colors—are a little dangerous, and ideal for the woman with a fashion sense all her own (at Whalers Village, Ka'anapali Beach; paulropp.com). And what does carbon become when it's "over" heated? Diamonds, of course. Check out some of the best at Hutton's Fine Jewelers of Maui (808-669-5755; hfj@maui.net).

Firewalker: By bike isn't the only way to see Haleakala. The national park offers guided hikes in both the summit area and the Kipahulu area (a coastal valley 10 miles south of Hana with freshwater pools, waterfalls and the largest intact Hawaiian rainforest ecosystem). Summit hikes include a three-hour, three-mile, moderately strenuous trek in the Waikamoi Preserve (Monday and Thursday) or a three-hour, five-mile hike, also moderately strenuous, deeper into the same preserve (one Sunday per month).



water

An island may be land, but water is its essence. And no matter where you are on Maui, you're likely to keep the turquoise-to-deep-blue waters and frosted white waves within sight—a constant reminder of just how essential, and powerful, this element is, giving the island both its rhythm and its sense of calm and stillness. But the shores aren't the only water on Maui: Inland you'll find hundreds of waterfalls (including Manawainui Falls, the third highest in the United States, on the way to Hana) and freshwater pools, including the famous-but-misnamed "seven sacred pools" (there are in fact approximately 40), about a 20-minute drive south of Hana.

I decide to take to the water the quintessentially Hawaiian way: on surfboard. Sure, I could have opted for boogie-boarding (no question it's *far* easier), but I choose to do the full-on surf experience (or whatever surfing I can manage after a two-hour lesson). Little do I know I'm about to embark on a lesson in humility. For instruction I turn to the two Island Style Adventures surf school instructors, whom I find under a green umbrella on Ka'anapali Beach; I soon learn that this is the only school licensed by the state to operate on this beach.

Renton, our lead instructor, starts by giving my two classmates and me some on-shore instruction; we lie on the boards in the sand and practice getting up on our knees and then our feet. Piece of cake, I think; I'm ready to hit the water. Not yet, Renton says. We do this again and again, so that it'll become second nature. When we finally take our boards into the Pacific we're warned not to drink too much saltwater, then it's time to start paddling out. Not accustomed to strenuous swimming, I quickly tire as my shoulders and arms struggle to carry me and my board against the current. It's a total-body workout that makes my ribs, stomach and arms sore for days after. ("The hardest part is the paddling," Cy Miyamoto, Island Style Adventures' owner and head instructor, tells me later. "Doing freestyle stroke swimming is the best way to prepare.")

Shore There's More!

Dining on the Calm Seas:

Nothing beats watching the sunset from the deck of the *Spirit of Lahaina*. The dinner cruise includes appetizers, a buffet dinner of beef, fish, shrimp and side dishes and an open bar. Or you can opt for a cocktail cruise and come aboard for a 2.5-hour sail up the coast.

Scuba-Do: For an underwater adventure, Trilogy offers dive trips to Molokini and nearby Lana'i. The popular daylong Lana'i trip includes breakfast (you won't forget the homemade cinnamon rolls), lunch, exclusive access to Hulopo'e Beach on Lana'i, one dive and all equipment.

Back at the beach, I paddle on, with Renton's encouragement, finally reaching a safe distance from shore (about 50 yards). The long, rolling waves range from two to three feet (this is measured by the "face," or front, of the wave) and are the ideal type and size for beginners. Renton and "Boom," his co-instructor, get us into position, watching the waves for one that's the right size for us three newbies and ready to break. When a perfect wave comes, they tell us to get ready and we position ourselves the way we were taught on the sand. Then, when it's time to go, they push us. I crash headlong into the water after less than three seconds. Surfing may be the most difficult thing I've ever attempted in my life.

But I'm not beaten yet. I get back on the surfboard again and paddle out to Renton and Boom. We go through this exercise a few more times and I drink some more saltwater (unavoidable sometimes). I get as far as halfway up, and am prepared to call that a success. It is not good enough for Renton, however; he's determined to make a surfer girl out of me yet. Meanwhile, I'm prepared to skip out early. I sit on the beach and catch my breath, while Renton begs me to try again, noting that the waves are bigger than on most days. Giving it one last shot (I'm almost too tired to get up), I falter before I can stand; I believe this is what's known as a wipeout. When I finally do stand, it feels like a major victory. But next time I think I'll settle for watching the pros do their stuff at Honolua Bay, just north of The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua (surf competitions are held daily between November and February). I have a newfound respect for this elegant sport.



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Whale of a Good Time: One of the most magnificent sights on Maui is the annual migration of humpback whales between December and May. The gargantuan mammals tend to linger between Maui and the islands of Molokai and Lana'i, making Maui's west coast the perfect viewing spot. The Pacific Whale Foundation offers 15 whale-watching tours daily during peak season.

Jet Set: Taking to a Jet Ski off Ka'anapali Beach is a Maui must-do. You'll need to stay within a zoned area (and there's no Jet-Skiing—or parasailing—from December 15 to May 15, when the migrating whales come to the island's warm waters), but a half-hour or hour-long ride is sure to get your blood up as you skim effortlessly over the waves.

Sub Way: Getting a front-row seat for Maui's underwater flora and fauna doesn't mean getting wet. A 90-minute submarine excursion with Atlantis Adventures' special 48-passenger submarine takes you 130 feet below the surface for an up-close-and-personal look at the abundant sealife around the island.