

TRAVEL

› BY KATHLEEN GURNETT



Maui: Beyond the Beach

With cattle ranches and lavender farms, Maui is more than your average tropical island

WHAT'S TO KNOW ABOUT MAUI? You've got your palm trees and your sandy beaches, right? It's beautiful and you can surf, snorkel, drink a mai tai or two (or three) and it's all very romantic and there's nothing else you need to know.

Then friends said I should visit a lavender farm or a winery. "Silly people," I thought. "I'm going to Maui, not Greece. I know what to expect."

Okay, so I was wrong.

My base camp was at the Westin Kaanapali Ocean Resort Villas, a "vacation ownership resort." Vacation ownership is one of the hottest trends in long-term getaway planning. Though similar to the old time-share deals of the 1980s, vacation owner-

ship has now been undertaken by some of the biggest names in the hotel industry, allowing owners a chance to trade points with other sites around the world.

The resort offers all the amenities you'd find in a luxury hotel room, from plushy robes to a private terrace with views toward Molokai and Lanai. It also has a program where guests at the Westin Villas can enjoy perks at the sister properties of the nearby Sheraton and Westin hotels.

The first lesson in the diversity of Maui began the morning we drove up the slope of Haleakala, the highest peak on Maui—10,023 feet. A dormant volcano, Haleakala receives around 12 inches of rain a

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Left: Alii Chang greets visitors at Alii Kula Lavender Farm.

Below: The Pacific is just a few steps away at the Westin Kaanapali Ocean Resort Villas.

year on its western slope, a dramatic contrast to the 390 inches the West Maui Mountains get annually.

In this arid climate thrives the Alii Kula Lavender Farm, where Alii Chang has created paradise from more than 45 varieties of a plant usually associated with the Mediterranean. The farm offers culinary lunches with fantastic views across the isthmus of the island, guided tours and a gift shop full of delights such as soap and jams, all made by local artisans using the farm's lavender blossoms.

Coming down the mountain, we passed cacti and cattle ranches on our way to Tedeschi Vineyards for a taste of its famous pineapple wines. Situated 2,000 feet above sea level, the winery's tasting room is in a cottage built for King Kalakaua, who visited from the Big Island of Hawaii in 1874. It boasts not only a tasty Maui Brut but also an 18-foot bar cut from the trunk of a single mango tree.

One night was spent at *Ulalena*, a spectacular dance/music/acrobatic performance that opens with a chant from Hawaii's creation myth, the Kumulipo. In the Kumulipo, "ulalena" is the name of the twilight wind that comes down off the slopes of Haleakala. Spirits of fire and water share the stage with villagers and Europeans in a magical retelling of Maui's legends and history.

Maui is also known as the Valley Isle. The best way to visit more-remote forests is to book

IF YOU GO

The rates at the Westin Kaanapali Ocean Resort Villas change seasonally with a range of \$345 to \$820. The resort has begun a two-year expansion project, so you may encounter some dust and noise if you visit between now and 2007. For more information, visit westinkaanapali.com or call 808-667-3200. Eco-tours can be arranged through Maui Eco-Adventures at ecomauui.com; 877-661-7720. Other visitor information can be found at visitmaui.com.



with an eco-tour company, as such businesses have made arrangements with private landowners and can get you past locked gates and “NO TRESPASSING” signs.

The path we took on our tour varied from a wide road to a couple of stones poking out from a stream. A suspension bridge made of wire and old boards let me imagine I was in an Indiana Jones movie, a handy flight of fancy that kept me from peeking down at the river 30 feet below. At the end of the hike was a waterfall—not the sort that tumbles hundreds of feet from the peaks but one made from an agricultural channel. While the high ones are picturesque, our guide said, the force of water falling from such heights can kill you if you try to swim in their pools. Even if the waterfall was tinier than expected, the water was clear, cool and a treat after the long trek.

Another day, I went into Lahaina, an historic whaling village that once served as the port of call for sailors around the world. Lahaina attracts landlubbers in the form of tourists and offers the usual fare of T-shirts and coffee mugs. But the old town can be seen by pausing at the old fort and visiting small museums—such as the 1834 Baldwin Home—that preserve the early days of missionaries and seamen. That night, I had drinks at the Sheraton and watched the cliff-diving ceremony off Puu Kekaa, the rock where Hawaiians once believed the souls of the dead dove to the spirit world.

Early the next morning, I walked down to the beach. The clouds on Molokai were just turning pink when I saw something surface close to shore and then disappear. Then another appeared, then vanished. They were sea turtles, making their northward journey.

I wanted very much to go with them—because I realized I had not even scratched the surface of Maui, that there was more to it than palm trees and postcard perfection. I had questions, and right then, as the sun rose, it seemed the turtles knew the answers. ■