

Maui's paradise - sun, shopping, sightseeing

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If you've always dreamed about going to Hawaii, stop dreaming and just go.

Visiting Hawaii is like entering a different time zone. From the moment you get off the plane you are greeted by an ocean breeze, the sweet smell of more than 100 tropical flowers and the clapping of palm trees.

My husband, Earl, and I recently returned from a very relaxing April vacation in Maui, which is one of the eight islands that make up Hawaii. There are actually only six islands that are inhabited by people. They are Oahu, Kauai, Maui, Molokai, Lanai, and the Big Island.

If you are considering your first trip to Hawaii, we highly recommend Maui. We have visited this island eight years in a row, and it is considered one of the best venues for having a wide variety of activities as well as hundreds of stores for those who dare to shop 'til you drop. Maui is known as the "Valley Isle" and is famous for its beautiful beaches. If you love to sun, snorkel or catch a wave with your surfboard, then Maui is definitely the island for you.

There are more than 100 things to do on Maui, and it's proven by a popular tourist magazine that it is a must to get when you land, "101 Things To Do On Maui."

Having seen and done most everything on Maui over the past eight years, I'm going to just describe the top 10 things you should do on your first visit, and it all begins with a trip to the volcano, Haleakala.

Volcano

At the present time, Haleakala is non-active. You need to get up about 3 a.m. to take on this journey, but it is well worth it. You will catch a bus from your hotel or condominium.

The bus will lead you up the summit, 10,023 feet above sea level. It takes a little more than three hours to reach the summit, depending on where you are

Planning your trip

If you are eager to find out more about Maui there are a few web sites you should check out.

For the best view on the island, look up www.aldhainalulu.com.

There are awesome galleries on the island that are a must to walk through when you arrive on Maui, but you can get a sneak preview by checking out www.lahainaartgalleries.com.

There are plenty of ocean activities for you to enjoy with a loved one or with the entire family. The web site www.mauiactivities.com is a great site for early planning.

Finally, to help you organize your trip, www.travelhawaii.com will give you more than enough information on the best way to enjoy paradise.

staying on the island. Once you have made it to the top, you will witness an awesome sight. The sun will rise over clouds that are just barely drifting by the tip of the volcano. It's very cold up there, so make sure you bring a jacket.

Whale watching

The second thing you must do on Maui is go whale watching. Humpback whales are in abundance around this island December through April. In fact, you will actually see hundreds of these magnificent creatures a few miles off the shoreline.

The best way, however, to see the humpback whales up close and personal is to get on a boat and there are lots of charters available for tourists.

Helicopter ride

The third thing that is a "Maui must" is to take a helicopter ride around the island.

Driving around Maui is spectacular on its own, but in the air you will see unbelievable waterfalls, rain forests and the Haleakala Crater. A handful of helicopter companies offer videos of your trip, so choose wisely.

Snorkeling

The fourth event you have to take part in on Maui is snorkeling.

Again, there are several charters that are available in the morning or afternoon for this excursion. You will be taken to Molokini, a rock that is approximately three miles off the coast

of Maui. This area is great for snorkeling or diving. The water varies in depth from 10 to 50 feet. You can enjoy a nice lunch while on board as well as get a great tan.

Surfing

The fifth thing to do on Maui is visit Ho'okipa Beach Park. This is a place for only those who dare to challenge the biggest waves. Professional windsurfers arrive here daily to enjoy waves up to 10 feet. This site has been seen on various sports television channels. It is not only for windsurfing but also surfing, boogie boarding, swimming, kite surfing and sun bathing.

Golf

If you love to golf in Michigan, you will definitely feel like you are in paradise in Maui.

The sixth thing to do definitely check out on Maui are the golf courses. In fact Maui is the site for international golf tournaments - the Mercedes Championships and the Kaanapali Classic (the Senior PGA tour). These golf courses are not only challenging but breathtaking.

Road to Hana

The road to Hana is my seventh thing to do on Maui, but I don't recommend it for those who have tender stomachs. It's about 52 miles from the Kahului Airport. But the real challenging aspect of this event is the actual road to Hana. Once you approach this road, you are in for 600 curves (90 degree angles)



Take a walk: "The Seven Pools," or seven waterfalls, in Hana is worth the one-mile walk.

and 54 bridges on a one-land road. The road to Hana takes about two hours to complete, but once you reach the end, you will be basking in one of the world's most beautiful black beaches.

Hana is also known for the "Seven Pools" or seven waterfalls. You have to hike up nearly a mile to get there, but the view is worth it.

Night life

If you play hard during the day on Maui, make sure you relax in the evening. My eighth thing to do is check out the night life. Visit the popular Lahaina district for endless musical entertainment, historical movie watching about Maui, Karaoke singing and much more.

Some of the hot spots in Lahaina for music include Moose McGillycuddy's and the Maui Brews Island Bistro and Nightclub. If you like live theater, visit the Maui Arts and Cultural Center. There are also several luau's taking place around the island. Check out the Grand Wailea or the Marriott for the best luau's.

Aquarium

The ninth best thing to do on Maui is visit the Maui Ocean Center Aquarium. This park expands over three acres with 40 aquarium exhibits. If you did not snorkel or dive like me, you will appreciate this aquarium which displays the hundreds of colorful fish that can be found in the ocean. If you dare to see a shark up close, this aquarium also houses this beautiful creature along with stingrays.

Shop

Finally, my 10th "must do" activity on Maui is shop. You can't leave Maui without strolling down Lahaina and visiting the many unique stores that display all the souvenirs you want to take home or mail home. Hilo Hattie is definitely catered to tourists. You will find the Hawaiian shirts, chocolates, unbelievable Kona coffee (grown on the big island) and authentic Hawaiian macadamia nuts.

If you prefer to shop in air conditioning, the Lahaina Cannery

Mail has more than 50 shops to cater to your needs. I also enjoy strolling through Whaler's Village in Kaanapali Beach.

Make sure when you book a flight to Maui you look at all the options, including taking two different airlines versus just one. It takes about 10 hours and two or three planes to get to Maui from Michigan. Don't forget about the six-hour time difference (Maui is six hours behind Michigan). I also like to check out buying tickets on the Internet because you can often get a good deal.

When you do make it to paradise, don't try to do everything in one trip. Relax, enjoy the sunsets and sunrises. Make each second count. And don't forget to smell the flowers.

Margo Dewey is a Livonia resident and columnist for the Observer Newspapers. Tell us about your vacation. Send photos and stories for consideration on our travel page to: Keely Wygonik, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or kwygonyk@oe.homecomm.net

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