

Chapter 1

Discovering the Best of Maui

In This Chapter

- ▶ Scoping out Maui's top-notch accommodations
 - ▶ Uncovering the top dining establishments and luaus
 - ▶ Marveling at Maui's most unforgettable places and experiences
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In Maui, every day can be a slice of paradise. Here, everybody can feel like royalty: A simple beach apartment can be your castle; a fresh papaya and a cup of robust Maui-grown joe, your princely breakfast; a joyous aloha shirt, your royal robe.



Each of the places and experiences listed in this chapter are bound to have you exclaiming, “*No ka oi!*” (“It’s the best!”). This chapter gives you a sneak peek at the absolute best that Maui has to offer — the cream of the crop. Skim them all and whet your appetite. And keep your eyes out for the Best of the Best icons throughout this book.

The Best Luxury Accommodations

Even if you want a different type of accommodations, such as a luxury condo or bed-and-breakfast, Maui's luxury scene can accommodate you. The following are a few of my favorite luxury accommodations:

- ✔ **Fairmont Kea Lani:** Not only is this fanciful Moorish palace on the sand one of the finest, most romantic, and most relaxing hotels in the islands, but it gives you much more for your money than Maui's other luxury resorts do. For the same price as a standard hotel room at other places — and sometimes less — here you'll enjoy a large one-bedroom suite with a luxurious living room, a complete entertainment system (including stereo and DVD player), and a huge marble bathroom. And there's hardly a better place to unwind. See Chapter 10.
- ✔ **Four Seasons Resort Maui:** This resort isn't my favorite on Maui — the Grand Wailea is grander and the Fairmont Kea Lani is a better

value in the luxury category — but there's no arguing with the star power of this ultradeluxe hotel. The guestrooms are oversized, service is exceptional, and don't be surprised if you recognize a famous face or two lounging by the pool. However, beware of those "oceanview" rooms that overlook the driveway — they can put the kibosh on your island-perfect mood. See Chapter 10.

- ✔ **Grand Wailea Resort & Spa:** Many tout the reserved understatement of the neighboring Four Seasons, but I'm underwhelmed. Instead, I prefer this grand beach palace, with its exclusive, tropical, theme-park vibe; playtime ambience; and over-the-top treats at every turn. Hawaii's best pool complex awaits your (very lucky) kids, and you can indulge in the islands' finest spa. The ultradeluxe Napua Tower offers extra amenities, such as personalized concierge service. See Chapter 10.
- ✔ **Hooilo House:** Perched on a breezy hill above the West Maui coast is this elegant Balinese-style bed-and-breakfast, with six custom-designed suites and graceful open-air public spaces for romance-seeking couples who can afford to enjoy them. I have a few quibbles — why no hot tub? — but there's no denying the tranquility of this intimate, romantic retreat. See Chapter 10.
- ✔ **Hotel Hana-Maui:** Rejoice, for the Hotel Hana-Maui is glorious once again. After years in the doldrums, this breathtaking resort at the end of the heavenly Hana Highway has been reborn as a luxurious haven of genuine Hawaiiana, thanks to the folks behind Big Sur's Post Ranch Inn. This easygoing yet elegant hideaway on 62 expansive oceanfront acres is reason enough to cruise to the remotest end of the island. Book a Sea Ranch Cottage for a few days if you really want to slow down and recharge. The intimate Honua Spa only adds to the ecstasy. See Chapter 10.
- ✔ **Kaanapali Alii:** Luxury condo living hardly gets better than this high-rise beachfront condo complex — and with princely sizes between 1,500 and 1,900 square feet, the whole family can make themselves at home. Prices are high, but so is quality; and you'll get far more luxury for your money than you would if you and the kids are shoehorned into a pricey hotel room or two. An excellent choice for families and couples alike. See Chapter 10.

The Best Good-Value Beachfront Accommodations

Maui is full of wonderful expensive hotels on the sand. However, you can also find plenty of good-value beachfront accommodations on this diverse island:

- ✔ **Kaanapali Beach Hotel:** This charming, older, beachfront hotel is the last hotel left in Hawaii that gives you a real resort experience

at a moderate price. The resort brims with genuine aloha spirit and good value — and the on-the-beach location can't be beat. See Chapter 10.

- ✔ **Koa Lagoon:** This delightful condo complex just may be the top bargain of the Kihei coast. This midrise building has 42 units — all with a breathtaking oceanfront setting, with views that most visitors have to pay much more to enjoy. See Chapter 10.
- ✔ **Mauian Napili Beach Hotel:** This family-run hotel may not be fancy, but it sure is a great deal for the money. And there's no arguing the quality of the location — on a fabulous half-mile-long stretch of white-sand beach with great swimming and snorkeling. See Chapter 10.
- ✔ **Napili Bay:** These petite studios on the sand are among Hawaii's best beachfront bargains — and they're an even better deal considering their prime location. The beach is gorgeous; the snorkeling, prime; the units, thoughtfully outfitted; and the value, even better. See Chapter 10.
- ✔ **Noelani Condominium Resort:** This top-notch, oceanfront condo complex is both an excellent value and a really enjoyable place to stay. Every unit boasts an ocean view and all the comforts of home. See Chapter 10.
- ✔ **The Whaler on Kaanapali Beach:** This well-maintained, 1970s luxury condo complex sits front and center on golden Kaanapali Beach, making it the ideal island home for travelers who want home-style comforts. The individually owned condos are comfortable, quiet, and wonderfully located, and a much better value than your average oceanfront hotel room. See Chapter 10.

The Best Restaurants

The increasingly sophisticated Valley Isle rivals Oahu as the fine-dining island of choice for vacationing gourmards. Whether you want a casual burger or a lavish meal with fine wine, Maui's got just the ticket.

The island's waters are so pristine that the wealth of fabulous seafood on Maui's menus should come as no surprise. What you may not have expected is the degree to which Maui's chefs celebrate the bounty of this fertile island, showcasing its fresh produce and tropical fruits.

Maui's location at the crossroads of the Pacific also guarantees that you can enjoy an incredible culinary adventure, sampling an authentic taste of Japan, China, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia.

Whether you're looking to celebrate a special occasion or mapping out a culinary calendar for the length of your stay, don't overlook these fabulous restaurants:

- ✔ **Hailimaile General Store:** Star chef Bev Gannon, the queen of Hawaii Regional Cuisine, continues to deliver one of Hawaii's finest all-around dining experiences — top-quality, island-style cooking joyfully presented in a refreshingly casual and pretension-free setting. A delight from start to finish and well worth the drive Upcountry. See Chapter 12.
- ✔ **Lahaina Grill:** This Lahaina mainstay still shines as one of most glorious dining experiences in the Hawaiian Islands. Lahaina Grill gets it all just right, from the pretty sophistication of the dining room to the beautifully prepared, generously portioned dishes to the first-rate service that perfectly fuses personal warmth and professionalism. Special-occasion restaurants hardly come finer than this. See Chapter 11.
- ✔ **Mama's Fish House:** My absolute favorite choice on Maui is this delightful seafood house, which offers a magical combination of food, ambience, and service. Sure, prices are high — but the tiki-room setting is an archetype of timeless Hawaii cool, the beach-front setting is glorious, and fresh island fish simply doesn't get any better than this. See Chapter 11.
- ✔ **Roy's Kahana Bar & Grill/Roy's Kihei:** Nobody should miss the opportunity to eat at one of the restaurants of Roy Yamaguchi, king of Hawaii Regional Cuisine. This liege is still at the top of the heap in the Pacific culinary world, and his food still shines. No matter which dining room you choose, you'll find a casual ambience, friendly service, and an oversized menu of dim sum, appetizers, *imu*-baked (underground luau-style) pizzas, and creative main courses that allow you to eat as special-occasion or affordably as you want. See Chapter 11.
- ✔ **Sansei Seafood Restaurant & Sushi Bar:** Maui chef D. K. Kodama's two superstar sushi bars offer some of the finest dining in the islands. Choose from an adventurous sushi menu, or opt for family-style dining on a slate of D. K.'s palate-stimulating, Euro-Asian, signature creations. Best of all, the restaurants are casually comfortable, service is always a delight, and it's easy to keep the bill within reason. You can't go wrong with Sansei. See Chapter 11.

The Best Beaches

Maui boasts an array of wide, breathtaking beaches — more than 80 in all. Luxurious, golden sands stretch beside calm, turquoise waters, while palm trees sway in the wind. These settings are what make great vacations. Even in the most crowded months, you can easily stake out your own little slice of paradise.

And not that you need any more incentive, but Maui's best resort coasts face west, so you can mosey over to a beachfront bar right on the sands and conclude your day by toasting a Technicolor sunset.

- ✔ **Baldwin Beach Park:** This off-the-beaten-path beach is the perfect place to spend the day away from the crowds. Pick up a picnic lunch, bring a blanket, and stretch out on the sand — you’ve found the perfect place to bask in the Maui sun. Heed the lifeguard warnings, though — the surf can get rough here, especially in the winter. See Chapter 12.
- ✔ **Hamoia Beach:** This remote, half-moon-shaped beach near the end of the Hana Road is one of the most breathtakingly lovely in all of Hawaii. The beach is generally good for swimming and wave-riding in the gentle seasons, but stick close to the shore because you’re in open, unprotected ocean. Stay out of the water entirely in the winter. See Chapter 12.
- ✔ **Hookipa Beach Park:** Come to watch the world’s best windsurfers pirouette over white-capped waves at this glorious North Shore beach. Surfers have eminent domain in the mornings; the colorful windsurfers take over in the afternoons. The action is equally breathtaking at any time of day, especially when the winter waves are in top form. See Chapter 12.
- ✔ **Kaanapali Beach:** This fabulous, crescent-shaped beach is reminiscent of the Waikiki of yesteryear, before the entire world made it their destination of choice. There’s something for everyone here: crystal-clear snorkeling, thrilling wave-jumping, golden sands inviting hours of sunbathing, even beachfront bars for that perfect, middle-of-the-day mai tai. See Chapter 12.
- ✔ **Oneloa (Big) Beach:** *Oneloa* means “long sand” in Hawaiian, and locals call it Big Beach. It comes by both names honestly, for this gorgeous crescent of white sand is 3,300 feet long, more than 100 feet wide, and is a beautiful spot for swimming, sunbathing, surfing, body-boarding, or just hanging out and strolling along the picture-perfect shoreline. See Chapter 12.

The Best Activities and Attractions

The sheer variety of watersports available — diving, surfing, body-boarding, kayaking — is astounding. What are you waiting for? Go on, get out and explore the great blue ocean.

- ✔ **Diving Molokini:** This sunken volcanic crater is one of Hawaii’s top dive spots thanks to calm, clear, protected waters; an abundance of marine life — from reef dwellers to manta rays — and exciting viewing opportunities for every level of diver, even first-timers. You don’t dive, and you’re not ready to learn? No worries — Molokini offers excellent viewing for snorkelers, too. Molokini is only reachable by boat, so see Chapter 12 for recommended outfitters.
- ✔ **Driving the Heavenly Road to Hana:** Hawaii’s most spectacular drive is well worth a day of your vacation. For 52 winding miles,

this blissful highway takes you past flowering gardens, spectacular waterfalls, and magnificent ocean vistas. Start early and keep in mind that it's all about the drive, not about getting to the end of the road. Rent a convertible for maximum effect. See Chapter 13.

- ✔ **Exploring otherworldly Haleakala on horseback:** The best way to experience this desolate, otherworldly canyon — painted in hues of blue and green and red — is to delve deep into the crater with **Pony Express Tours**, which leads excellent and informative trail rides along Sliding Sands Trail into the heart of the volcano on well-trained and well-cared-for horses. See Chapter 13.
- ✔ **Exploring Upcountry Maui:** Discover the Valley Isle's bucolic side on the slopes of Haleakala, where beaches, condos, and tourists give way to verdant fields dotted with purple-flowering jacarandas and grazing cattle; rambling, plantation-style ranches; rural towns; and friendly, local-style warmth. You can experience the inner workings of Maui's agricultural heartland at such Upcountry attractions as Alii Kula Lavender Farm and Surfing Goat Dairy. See Chapter 13.
- ✔ **Getting a bird's-eye view:** Touring Maui by helicopter gives you a whole new perspective as you swoop over the island's otherwise inaccessible heartland, where nature has been unspoiled by modern man. You'll scale the desolate peak of Haleakala National Park and enjoy a breathtaking view of the road to Hana that takes an hour instead of a day. It's expensive but worth it. See Chapter 13.
- ✔ **Hitting the links:** If you love golf, don't miss the opportunity to play at least one of Maui's premier courses. Glorious Kapalua is the best, but you have a bounty of quality courses to choose from, duffers. See Chapter 13.
- ✔ **Learning to surf:** Believe it or not, surfing is easier than it looks — and there's hardly a feeling finer than conquering a wave. A number of good surfing schools guarantee that you'll be hanging ten in a single two-hour lesson. My Maui favorite is the **Nancy C. Emerson School of Surfing**. See Chapter 12.
- ✔ **Saying “aahh . . .” at the spa:** What's the icing on the cake of any vacation? A pampering spa day, of course. On Maui, nobody does it bigger and better than **Spa Grande**, a temple to the good life, where the hydrotherapy circuit is reason enough to come. For something different, try the petite but magical **Maui Spa Retreat**, a hidden Upcountry gem that made me finally understand the magic of aromatherapy. See Chapter 13.
- ✔ **Shopping the Valley Isle:** Maui has become a premier shopping destination, especially for those who eschew traditional chains for boutiques that are artful, offbeat, or unique. The charming, funky surf town of Paia and sophisticated, cowboy-infused Makawao are best for creative spirits, while Kaanapali's Whaler's Village and the Shops at Wailea offer creative choices and art-filled galleries in elegant, open-air environments. See Chapter 14.

- ✔ **Snorkeling:** Even if you're not usually the sporting type, you don't want to miss the chance to try snorkeling on Maui. The waters off-shore are so clear that snorkelers are guaranteed to see clouds of tropical fish in every color of the rainbow, and possibly even a green turtle or two. You can see a stunningly beautiful underwater world. See Chapter 12.
- ✔ **Visiting Haleakala National Park:** The massive, 10,023-foot-high dormant volcano that sits at the heart of the Valley Isle is Maui's biggest natural attraction. Its crater looks like a barren moonscape; no wonder NASA's astronauts have used it for space-exploration training. Haleakala is best known for its mystical sunrise vistas, as crowds of visitors arrive in the dark at predawn hours to watch the spectacle of dawn breaking over the crater. But take heed, early-morning-phobes: You can enjoy this wondrous park at any time of day. See Chapter 13 for details.
- ✔ **Whale-watching with the Pacific Whale Foundation:** Whale-watching is a premier activity in the islands from mid-December to mid-March; in some lucky years, the great humpbacks remain in Hawaii's warm waters into April. Boats are available to take you whale-watching, but I love the Pacific Whale Foundation for its excellent naturalist guides and its commitment to protecting these gentle giants. The foundation also operates a **Whale Information Station** on the road to Lahaina, where you can spot humpbacks from shore, with an expert, for absolutely free. The Pacific Whale Foundation can also take you out on terrific snorkel cruises year-round, even when the whales aren't in town. See Chapter 12.

The Best Luaus

The best luaus are in high demand, so book your spots before you leave home to ensure access:

- ✔ **The Feast at Lele:** The folks behind the Old Lahaina Luau (see the following bullet) also operate this interesting twist on a traditional luau. The Feast at Lele is an excellent alternative for romance-seeking couples or anyone who would prefer a luau with a more upscale demeanor, a more intimate setting, and/or a fine-dining twist. The multicourse meal and thrilling performance troupe reach beyond the Hawaii tradition to celebrate the food and culture of the South Seas as well, and the beachfront setting can't be beat. See Chapter 11.
- ✔ **Old Lahaina Luau:** Hawaii's most authentic and acclaimed luau is justifiably celebrated and a real treat to experience. Come early to watch craftspeople at work in the lovely oceanfront setting; you can also watch as the luau pig is unearthed from its underground oven, where it's been slow-cooking all day. The live hula show is dazzling. You simply can't do better than this. See Chapter 11.