

Maui for Active Travelers

Maui is an interesting place. The island of Oahu is a big city on an island; Kauai extremely quiet. Maui has nightlife and seclusion, activities and relaxation, population and tropical paradise. Sounds biased? Of course it is... after six years of vacationing to Maui we bought a place that we could call our own tropical escape.

If you are going on vacation for a change of pace and want to actively experience Maui, then here are some ideas to consider. I do not sell vacation activities, so this is not a sales pitch. A few links will be provided to help you find more information on specific listed activities. A much more extensive list of web-links can be obtained via the web search engines.

Maui Snorkeling

If you read my article "Maui with Kids" you will recognize this as a repeat item. Maui provides excellent opportunities for snorkeling both from shore, and on paid tours.

The most popular of the snorkeling trips (locations) is the Molokini Crater Ocean Preserve tour. Molokini is a half-moon volcanic caldera that provides spectacular sea life. There are several catamarans that offer tours with full snorkel gear, scuba, snuba, and lunch or breakfast. Search the web for "snorkel Maui" for a variety of options. Here is one site to get you started: http://adventuremaui.com/molokini_snorkel.htm.

We typically take our own snorkel gear (or buy as necessary) and hit some of the locations around Maui's coast. If you wish to venture out on your own, here are a couple of the popular places you can drive to for snorkeling for free.

Northwestern Maui – Honolua Bay (see <http://www.sportfishhawaii.com/honolua.htm>)

Southwestern Maui – Kanahena (Past Makena beach toward the end of the road).

Hiking Hana

Hana is a full day away, but if you are up for truly paradise hiking, that is the destination. There are a number of trails in and around Hana that take you along scenic coastal areas, or through tropical jungle to waterfalls. On the extreme side there is even a multi-day trail from the top of Haleakala to Hana via the base of the volcano.

Getting to Hana is an adventure in itself as the 50 miles from the airport takes you through over 600 turns and multiple one lane bridges (see this link for more info: <http://www.sunsetmaui.com/articles/Maui-hana-coast.htm>). If you wish to seriously hike the area you may consider staying 1-2 nights in Hana.

Sea-Kayaking

There are a few sea-kayak companies that operate tours on Maui. Some of the major hotels will also provide kayaks for padding around close to shore.

We regularly travel south past Wailea for snorkeling and see the van for the kayaking tours parked along the road. Depending on wave conditions the tours often venture out from just south of Makena beach and follow the coastline to the more remote areas along the lava flows (<http://www.golf-maui.com/Activities/Kayaking.htm>).

Surfing Lessons

Looking for a change of pace? There are a number of beaches along Kihei that are regular spots for vacationer surf lessons. Generally the waves are one or two feet so there is enough to ride with the larger boards without getting in over your head.

One of the nice things about surfing is you can get a board and lesson, and actually ride a surfboard within your first time out. Other water sports as listed below are less forgiving and may take days, or weeks, before your learning really starts to pay off.

Again, the search engines will return pages of results; here are a couple of the sites: <http://www.mauisurf.com/> and <http://www.maui.net/>.

Cycling the Volcano

Good news – it's all downhill from here! Downhill cycling is one of the popular tourist activities on Maui. The cycling tours take you to the top of Maui's 10,000 foot Haleakala volcano, and you ride from there to the ocean 38 miles away.

There are a few trips to choose from depending on how much sleep you are willing to sacrifice, some trips start as early as 2-3AM! The early trips put you at the top of the volcano for sunrise.

During your trip you will tour the national park at the top, stop for breakfast along the mountain descent, ride through Paia, and out to the ocean.

Scuba and Snuba

As with snorkeling, Molokini is the first choice for Maui underwater tours. Many of the tours will offer snorkeling, scuba, or snuba (breathing tube to the surface). If you are not scuba certified you can make arrangements for diving with an instructor.

There are also dive options from shore as well. In many locations they walk in straight from the hotel beaches and swim out.

Horseback riding

"This is not your ordinary 'trail ride'. This is an adventure! A rare and unique opportunity to experience firsthand, the unspoiled beauty of Maui, Hawaii!" – Adventures on Horseback

There are a number of companies that offer horseback riding in Maui. Most of the ranch land is upcountry (on the Haleakala hillside), but tours are offered in different locations. The company listed above (http://www.mauihorses.com/maui_horseback/index.html) offers trail rides along the coast and in to waterfalls where you can stop for a swim.

Piiholo ranch located outside of Makawao offers rides in ranch lands at an elevation of about 2000 feet. This is a working ranch, so if interested you can make arrangements to join the real cattle drives. (<http://www.piiholo.com/>)

Haleakala on horseback (<http://www.haleakalaonhorseback.com/>) offers trail rides into the volcano including narration on island history, plants, and geology.

Body Surfing & Boogie Boarding

Maui's bodysurfing and boogie boarding is a great way to enjoy the outdoors. While many of the beaches are excellent for these sports, not all are so choose wisely.

If I had to choose the best beach for body surfing/boogie boarding, I would recommend the public beach by the Grand Wailea. The waves can range from small to significant, and generally break offshore and flow onto the beach. On the other end of the spectrum is the Makena beach which has large waves that break straight into the sand providing a particularly hazardous situation.

For families with kids the waves at the beaches between Kihei and Maalea are general smaller as there is an outer reef that protects the beach. There are also a number of beaches between Maalea and Lahaina that offer light break for surfing or boogie boarding.

Windsurfing & kite-boarding

OK, so this may not apply to too many readers, but as an avid windsurfer this had to make my list. If you have not windsurfed or kite-boarded before, Maui offers lessons and gear. The instructors are excellent. Conditions can range from mild ideal learning conditions to challenging depending on swell and wind.

Both of these sports are challenging so do not expect much sailing in a couple days of vacation play. If you have been interested in learning to sail Maui may provide a nice introduction to the sports.

Deep-sea fishing

Is fishing really a sport...? Had to debate the merits of including this in an activities article; it does require interaction and classifies as adventure so I thought I'd keep it in.

Like all other tourist activities there are a number of companies supporting deep-sea fishing off of Maui. Rather than list these out I'll just provide the following link to a site with some useful information. This site (<http://www.fishmaui.com>) answers many questions including types of fish, seasonal catch, and provides a list of charter services available.

Golfing

Maui offers some incredible golf courses including those in and around Kaanapali, and toward the other side of the island at Wailea (Makena courses). I came across about 15-20 different courses listed on the web for Maui.

Maui golf rates range from about \$50 at Sandalwood to just under \$200 for the high end course in Wailea. Many of the courses offer reduced rates after about 2PM. The following link provides a fairly comprehensive lists of the available courses (<http://www.alternative-hawaii.com/activity/msrgolf.htm>)

Summary

After years of traveling I have found the trips I remember most are those with activities that make the vacation unique. Whether you choose the ride down the volcano,

horseback riding or surfing lessons, be sure to get out and enjoy Maui's tropical adventures.

This article is provided by Mr. Marc Elpel and SunsetMaui.com. Mr Elpel has been an avid activity based traveler for years with extensive travel in the Hawaiian Islands. Please contact melpel@sunsetmaui.com for free republishing of this article.