

THE WILD ONE

Hawaii, a land of waterfalls, rainforests and volcanoes,
has drama written into the landscape

By HELENA DE BERTODANO

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEN HUANG



I flew in to Maui as the sun rose on New Year's Day – on a tiny nine-seater plane that cruised so low I could see not only the slumbering volcanoes, the sugar plantations and the golden beaches, but also, incredibly, a whale soaring up out of the ocean beneath us.

Our Mokulele Airlines pilot epitomised the Hawaii spirit. Wearing a crumpled T-shirt and jeans, and looking as though he'd come straight from a New Year's Eve party, he turned up shortly before take-off at the dark, empty shed that passed for an airport on Big Island. After joking with us for a few minutes, he walked over to the plane and reappeared in full pilot's garb – one of my sons was

so surprised, he couldn't help blurting out: 'Are you flying the plane?' His laconic reply was hardly reassuring: 'I guess I am.'

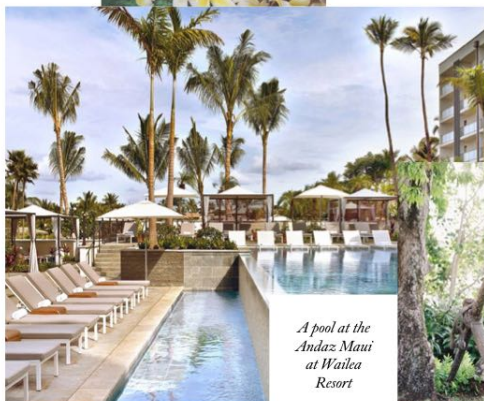
Everyone in Hawaii is similarly laid-back and laconic. Nothing is a hassle. 'You're in Hawaii now' is the mantra, so you can just relax. When we arrived at our destination – the Andaz Maui at Wailea Resort, the first of its kind from a brand known for its luxurious city hotels – we were greeted like old friends. 'You flew Mokulele?' they said, laughing in surprise. 'They landed a plane on the highway outside the other day.'

Walking down the bridge of glowing Ambrato stone into the hotel proper, our gaze was drawn over the three infinity-edge cascading outdoor pools towards the sea. Telescopes are trained on the water, but even to the naked eye, the pods of humpback whales were visible, disporting themselves in full view of the *lanai*, or balcony, of our elegant villa. Just to be sure we weren't imagining things, we later took a whale-watching tour on a catamaran, getting so close that our boat rocked as the whales swam underneath.

Hearing that my sons love fishing, one of the pool attendants furnished them with bamboo rods and took them to a rocky outcrop of the beach, where they promptly caught four fish. Learning of this feat over our lavish mid-morning breakfast, the chef offered to send some seasoning and salads to our villa so we could cook them that evening on the state-of-the-art Weber grill on our *lanai*. So when we returned from an exhilarating day



The volcanoes loom in the distance, shaping the island and also the local spirit



A pool at the Andaz Maui at Wailea Resort

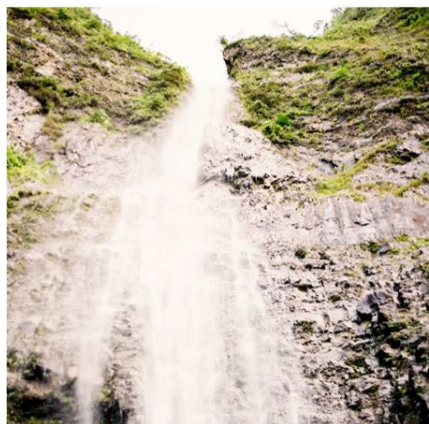


zip-lining over the island – forest and streams twinkling in valleys far below – salads were waiting for us alongside the filleted catches.

Early one morning we took a guided outrigger-canoe tour, dipping our oars in carefully to avoid the large green sea-turtles, their backs occasionally visible above the surface. They are one of Hawaii's many endangered species – the islands' physical isolation means that there are more rare beasts here than almost anywhere else on Earth. Most famous is the nene, Hawaii's state goose – which we only glimpsed once, not roaming free but in a special enclosure at the Hilton Waikoloa Village, where we stayed on the neighbouring Big Island.

We spent three days on Big Island, home to Hawaii's only active volcanoes, and took a guided tour at nightfall to see a hidden lake of molten rock, burning red beneath a cloud of steam, in Halemaumau Crater. Nearby we visited a lava tube – a cave formed by flowing lava moving beneath a hardened surface. Underfoot we could feel the hard spikes of solid lava, while ice-cold globules of water dripped on our heads. We did not linger. Even if you never strayed from the exquisite beaches, you would still be aware of the volcanoes. Pitch-black lumps of hardened lava are strewn over the sand and the volcanoes loom in the distance, shaping the island and perhaps also the local spirit. Where else would the injunction 'live for the moment' be so piquant?

In Maui we drove up through fog and rainbows to the top of Haleakala, another volcano, and when we stepped out into the brilliant sunshine and biting cold, it felt as though we had landed on another planet. At over 10,000 feet high, with the clouds spread out beneath us, it was hard to believe that earlier in the day we had been snorkelling in the warm waters far below. Almost as striking as the view was the sepulchral silence: the air up there is so clear, dry and still that it has become one of the most sought-after space-observation platforms in the world. The trip to the summit has become a rite of passage for travellers to Maui, and most visitors come at sunrise. But sunset is just as spectacular and you have the place almost to yourself.



PHOTOGRAPHS GETTY IMAGES; JEN HUANG; ERIN PARIS; RICK POON



This page and opposite: the natural beauty of Hawaii



We drove all over the island, often down tiny country roads that, apart from the occasional splash of a tropical flower, could almost have been in the Cotswolds. As we edged around switchback corners, we'd sometimes glimpse a group of horses galloping over the hills. One day we took the celebrated road to Hana – a winding narrow highway over little bridges and through lush rainforest, waterfalls on one side, sweeping ocean views on the other. Although we had considered staying the night in Hana, the pull of the Andaz was too great and we returned, stopping off in the quaint plantation-style town of Paia, where you can pick up crystals and souvenirs. Just outside Paia is Mama's Fish House, a restaurant in a coconut grove overlooking one of the loveliest beaches in Maui. We ate Kalua wild boar and sashimi, served with a fingerling lime.

HOW TO GET THERE

There are several flights daily from London to Hawaii via Miami with American Airlines (www.aa.com). Mokulele Airlines (www.mokuleleairlines.com) flies between the islands.

WHERE TO EAT

Ka'ana Kitchen or Morimoto Maui at the Andaz Maui hotel; otherwise, Mokapu Market, a 24-hour deli off the lobby, or Mama's Fish House in Paia (+1 808 579 8488; www.mamasfishhouse.com).

WHERE TO SHOP

Paia, a beach town selling antiques, clothing and jewellery.

WHAT TO DO

Zip-lining at Pi'iholo Ranch Adventures in Makawao (+1 800 374 7050; www.piiholozipline.com). Whale-watching with Sail Trilogly, based in Lahaina (+1 808 874 5649; www.sailtrilogly.com). The Twilight Volcano Adventure on Big Island with Hawaii Forest & Trail (+1 808 331 8505; www.hawaii-forest.com).

