A young boy in the foreground, wearing a grey t-shirt, a black life vest, and a silver watch, carries a dark surfboard on his head. In the background, a young girl in a yellow long-sleeved shirt and patterned swim trunks carries a green surfboard on her head. They are standing on a sandy beach with the ocean waves behind them.

HAWAII REIGNS

FAR AND AWAY THE FAVORITE FAMILY VACATION DESTINATION IN OUR READERS' SURVEY, HAWAII HAS SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE. MAUI HITS THE MARK FOR THIS FAMILY, RAIN OR SHINE.

By Tiffany Figueiredo Photography by Susan Seubert



Surf's up: Make waves and take the family to Maui.

Driving along the coast toward dinner in the next town, the four of us are quiet, mesmerized into silence, really, by the sight of the sun turning the sky pink as it dips into the ocean, by the smell of salt air and plumeria coming through the open windows, and by the sound of waves crashing into the rocky shoreline. The reverie is broken by a question from the backseat – “What kind of money do they use here?” – followed by cracking up all around.

It is our last night in Maui, and although we’ve been here for a week, my 12-year-old son, Jack, cannot seem to grasp that this exotic, far-flung locale is part of the United States. And who can blame him? As in our past travels to other countries, Jack, my husband, Fernando, our daughter, Madison, 15, and I have flown for hours upon hours, soaked up a culture quite different from our own, tasted new and peculiar dishes, and traversed a landscape so unfamiliar that we couldn’t help but feel we were on foreign soil.

Back in January, after a busy holiday season and a tough first semester for the kids, my family unanimously voted to spend our upcoming March spring break at the beach somewhere. Of course, my husband’s and my idea of a beach vacation is to lounge in the sun all day, take a nap, then head to cocktails and a nice dinner. If we’re feeling really energetic, we might throw in a round of golf or a massage. The kids need a more stimulating experience. Hawaii, with its beautiful beaches and plethora of activities, seemed like the perfect choice.

Since our stay was limited to one week, we chose to spend the entire break on one island. After much research and querying of



experts, friends, and relatives, Maui won out. One Maui enthusiast was our friend, Tim, who takes his entire extended family to Maui every year. Other than annual trips to New York, we never vacation in the same place twice. With so many places to see and so little time, our strategy is to make a broad sweep of the world and someday return to those places we really love, so Tim's annual treks to the island impressed us. Plus, Hawaii consistently ranks among the world's best island destinations, and handily secured the top slot of readers' favorite family vacation destination in *Virtuoso Life's* Travel Dreams survey.

IT IS AMAZING WHAT A DAY SPENT PLAYING in the ocean will do for one's outlook. Once in Maui, we quickly transition from task-oriented city dwellers to laid-back islanders. As we dress for dinner on the first night, even Madison, a style-conscious, cosmetics-loving teenager in every way, throws on a simple sundress and flip-flops and lets her hair dry in the late-afternoon sun as she

Soak it all in: Beachcombing at Kapalua Bay, lei-making lessons, and scrimshaw specimens at Whalers Village Museum. Opposite page, clockwise from top left: Keikis of all ages love beachside dining at Hula Grill, hanging ten with surf lessons from Goofy Foot, hiking 'Iao Valley State Park, and learning Hawaiian history at the Old Lahaina Luau.

watches humpback whales breaching just past the Kapalua Bay 500 feet from our condo's lanai. After a sunset dinner, we go to bed early and sleep the good, deep sleep of the stress-free.

The next morning brings a bit of a scheduling problem. Today is supposed to be spent snorkeling and it is raining heavily – not on the itinerary. We decide to wait it out in the hope that this is one of those fast-moving tropical showers. During a second round of Scrabble, the kids begin losing it, arguing over whether diagonal play is acceptable (it isn't). Having flown nine hours on two planes to sit in our condo isn't acceptable either, so as the downpour turns into a cool mist, we decide to explore.

We head south to Ka'anapali's Whalers Village, an upscale, open-air shopping mall that we hope will take the kids' minds off the

rain. While my daughter and I peruse the merchandise at such stores as Blue Ginger, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany & Co., and Coach, the boys visit the free Whalers Village Museum, which houses nautical artifacts – whale bones, scrimshaw, harpoons, ships' logs – from Hawaii's nineteenth-century whaling days. We all meet up at Quicksilver, where we outfit ourselves in new swimsuits and board shorts before having lunch with a local flair at the beachfront Hula Grill. There, the waiter suggests that we embrace the rain and visit 'Iao Valley State Park, where it is always a little wet anyway.

We drive inland for about an hour, past sugarcane fields and little towns, the landscape growing ever more green and lush as we near the valley. As soon as we arrive, we're drawn to the sound of laughter coming from inside the park and follow it along a

paved walkway to a bridge overlooking a rushing stream. A small crowd has gathered to watch a group of local boys lounge on the smooth rocks below, laughing and carrying on with abandon. They are having a great time. We are, too, as we follow the easy hiking trails through the verdant park, surrounded on all sides by native plants and flowers and minimountains bisected by waterfalls. The highlight of the park is the 'Iao Needle, a rock formation rising 1,200 feet from the valley floor. It is magnificent and we leave feeling that the rain has afforded us a glimpse into a side of Maui we probably wouldn't have seen otherwise.

That evening for dinner, it's a short trip to Kapalua Resort's Sansei Seafood Restaurant and Sushi Bar, where the vibe is fun and the menu creative, with signature rolls such as panko-crusted ahi and incredibly fresh miso-marinated butterfish.

THE MORNING BRINGS A GLORIOUS SUNRISE

and two kids who cannot wait to hit the ocean. But first we have breakfast at The Gazebo, one of Maui's most popular holes-in-the-wall. The macadamia-nut pancakes with coconut syrup and sides of Portuguese sausage are just what the kids and Fernando need for their surf lessons in Lahaina.

Soon everyone is checked into the Goofy Foot Surf School and outfitted with surf booties, rash guards, and soft long boards. While the others begin their two-hour lesson on the beach with an instructor, I head for the break wall to watch them and catch some rays. Goofy Foot promises that every client, no matter his or her age, will stand on the first lesson. Even so, I am astonished to see my husband riding a wave and flashing the hang loose sign. The kids follow, catching wave after wave. Happy, exhausted, and



Take in the views of Lahaina Harbor (top), then try the signature sushi rolls at Sansei. Opposite: Watch humpback whales splash down in the winter (top) and dancers shake their stuff at a traditional luau.

INSIDER'S TIPS

Hawaii How-To

A 20-year veteran with Pleasant Holidays, Cara Rowsey shares her favorite family activities on each major island.

Oh, Oahu: Snorkeling at Hanauma Bay, hiking Diamond Head crater, visiting the Honolulu Zoo, Sea Life Park, and Polynesian Cultural Center.

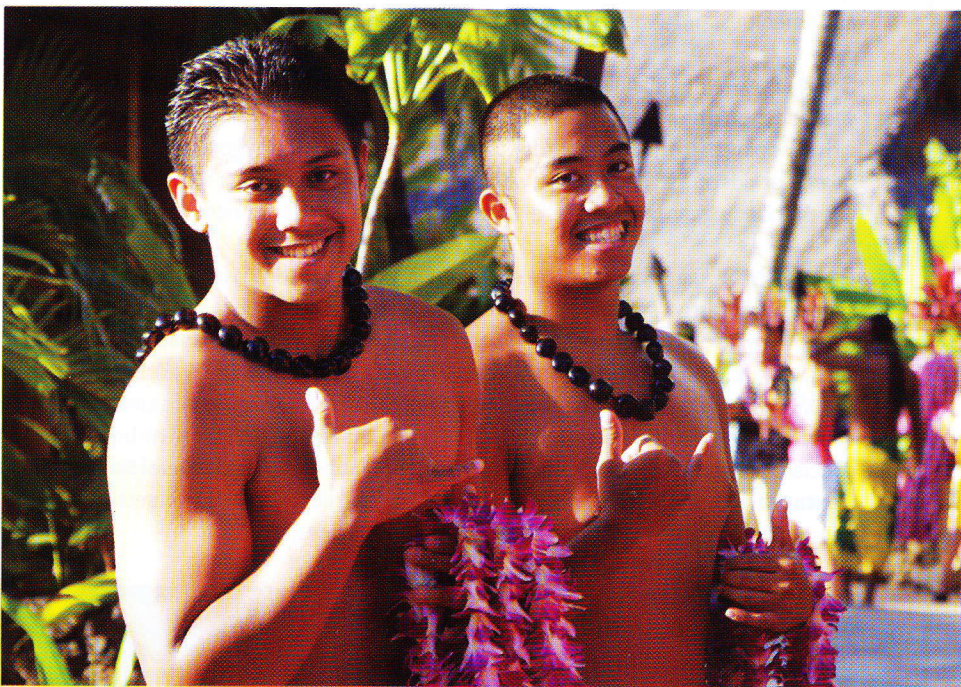
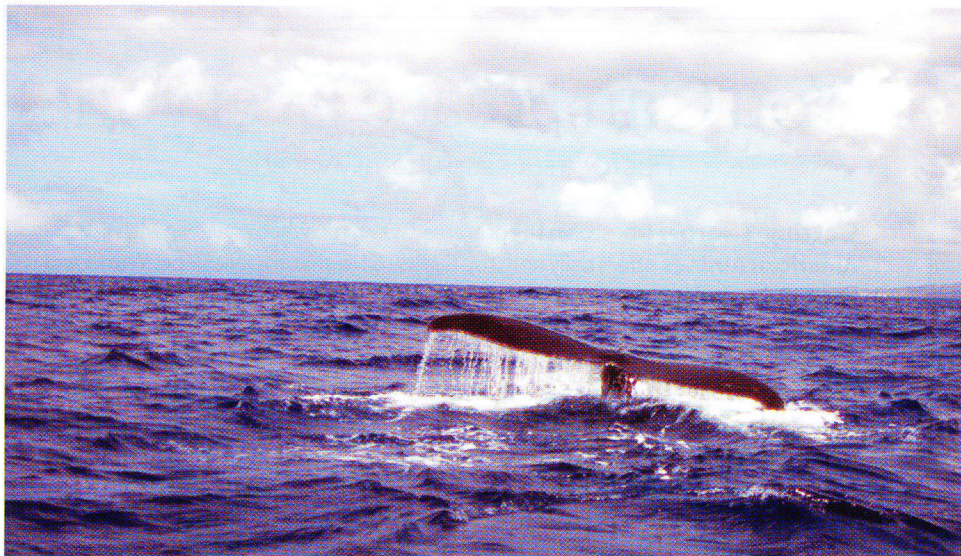
Maui, Wow: Biking or horseback riding on Haleakala crater, playing in the waterfalls and pools along the road to Hana, watching humpback whales offshore in winter.

Kauai Eco-Adventures: Hiking lush valleys, sailing along the dramatic

cliffs of the Napali Coast, cruising to the Waimea Canyon (dubbed the Grand Canyon of the Pacific) and the famed Fern Grotto.

Big Island's Best: Touring Kilauea crater's live volcanic flow (from a safe distance, of course), driving through 11 of the world's 13 climate zones.

Leisurely Lanai: Biking, hiking, playing golf, relaxing in the quiet, less-traveled environment.



with mai tais, fruit juices, and leis by a strapping, saronged young man who leads us to our seats in the front row. After the roasted pig is ceremoniously unearthed, the meal and the show begin, both of which are very good. The kids enjoy trying the ahi *poke*, *lomilomi* salmon, and kalua pork. The show, which tells the history of Hawaii through dancing and chanting, is educational, but entertaining and colorful enough to keep the kids from losing interest. Although hundreds of people are here, it feels as though we're at a dinner party in a friend's beach-side backyard.

THERE IS MUCH TO DO IN MAUI, AND ALTHOUGH

the many golf courses, the famous road to Hana, and the sunrise bike trek down Haleakala crater are tempting, this will be our only beach vacation this year and we elect to spend much of the next week ocean-side – the kids boogie boarding and body-surfing while Fernando and I relax with our books and mai tais. Since all of Hawaii's beaches are public, we are able to sink our toes in the sand at a number of them. Our favorite activity is snorkeling at Kapalua Beach. Here, the crystal waters are a veritable fishbowl of live coral, bright-red pencil urchins, yellow tang, parrot fish, eel, black, yellow, and white Moorish idols, and, our favorites, the nosey puffer fish, who, with their tiny fins working to propel their bulging bodies, swim right up to our faces as if we are the underwater attractions. We have a hard time dragging ourselves away from the water, but when we do, we are treated to the constant sight of humpback whales just offshore. After watching their mysterious antics all week, it's time to see them up close.

Maui has many whale-watching tour operators, but The Pacific Whale Foundation, the oldest and largest of its kind, has perhaps the best reputation. The 27-year-old nonprofit is passionate about marine research and conservation and offers an educational and ecologically responsible trip. Although you won't sip cocktails and sample pupus during the expedition, it's good to know that the outfit plays by Hawaii's protective

a little banged up, they receive certificates and a DVD of photographs taken of them surfing, something Jack can't wait to show his friends.

We spend the rest of the day strolling Lahaina's quaint streets filled with boutiques, souvenir shops, restaurants, and great views of the harbor. Two centuries ago, Hawaii's King Kamehameha ruled the islands from Lahaina, which later became a busy port for Chinese traders and European whalers. The town retains its welcoming atmosphere, packing an amazing number of attractions in its one-and-a-half-mile length. It is a must-stop for families, as younger kids will enjoy watching boats come into the harbor

and older kids will love exploring the town's fun shops. Everyone can meet under the massive Banyan Tree, first planted in 1873 and now stretching over a 200-foot area in the center of town.

Later, we go to the Old Lahaina Luau, a highly touted luau that I'm assured delivers a traditional experience without any hokey forced audience participation. We're greeted

DOING IT

Make for Maui with **Pleasant Holidays'** eight-day trip for a family of four. An 1,800-square-foot, two-bedroom ocean-view villa at Wailea's **Fairmont Kea Lani** means more breathing room when you're not at one of the beachfront resort's three pools or spa, or off exploring the island. Activities include a cruise to the island of Lanai, a luau, and more. Departures: Any day through 2007; from \$16,238, including accommodations, minivan rental, and breakfast daily.



whale-watching rules. We are onboard the new *Ocean Discovery* for ten minutes when we sight our first whale. The enormous creature draws oohs and aahs from everyone as it slaps its tail and pectoral fins for a good five minutes before moving on. The naturalist guide explains that the humpbacks, like any visitor, are here in Maui for a warm-weather vacation. Having made the journey from Alaska, more than 6,000 whales spend December through March in Maui's warm gentle waters, which make a perfect nursery for the many calves born here every year. We move from place to place, spotting whales every few minutes, but the undisputed highlight of the trip comes when a mother and her calf breach just off the bow. Everyone is thrilled at the sight, including the crew.

That night we cap off our Maui holiday with a delicious Hawaiian fusion dinner at the famed Roy's restaurant. Digging into a steaming chocolate soufflé, we take turns sharing our favorite parts of the vacation. Fernando says that the whale-watching trip is what he'll remember most, while Madison decides that snorkeling was her favorite. Jack, without hesitation, picks learning to surf. I have a hard time choosing my favorite part of the trip and declare that maybe, just this once, we could bend our never-visit-the-same-place-twice travel rule and come back to Maui so that I can decide. **VL**

You Can Please Everyone

Tips for a successful family vacation.

Getting There » Nonstop is the preferred way to go when traveling with kids. **American Airlines** offers daily nonstop flights to Maui from Dallas/Fort Worth and Los Angeles, and **Hawaiian Airlines** has daily flights from nine West Coast gateways.

Spread Out » Maui's many condominiums are a good choice and can be reserved through a travel consultant. For a more traditional hotel experience, **The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua**'s \$95-million restoration (to be completed by mid-December) will include one- and two-bedroom suites, and its popular Ritz Kids program includes activities such as sand-castle building, lei-making, and scavenger hunts in both full- and half-day sessions for children ages 5 to 12. In Wailea, the southern part of the island, both **The Fairmont Kea Lani** and the newly renovated **Four Seasons Resort** offer spacious accommodations complete with beachfront locales, children's programs and amenities, and a variety of room configurations.

Split Up » When planning activities, keep individual interests in mind. Although a family vacation should be a bonding experience, it's okay to divide and conquer. Mom can take the girls shopping or to the spa, while dad takes the boys to fish or play golf. Or one parent can take older kids on a strenuous hike, while the little ones visit the water slide. No one is bored, and the bonding can take place as everyone shares stories over dinner.

Eat Right » Just because you're traveling with *keikis* (children) doesn't mean you're sentenced to burgers and fries. Oceanfront restaurants are perfect for little ones who cannot sit still for long. Between courses, kids can watch whales and boats or play in the sand. In west Maui, **Pacific'O** (808/667-4341), **Hula Grill** (808/667-6636), **Sea House** (808/669-1500), and **The Gazebo** (808/669-5621) offer Hawaiian specialties along with standard fare such as sandwiches, salads, and simple seafood dishes on the beach. For special occasions, **Roy's Kahana Bar & Grill** (808/669-6999) and **Sansei Seafood Restaurant & Sushi Bar** (808/669-6286) offer gourmet experiences in settings lively enough that parents won't feel the need to hush little ones.

Get Smart » Be realistic about your vacation goals. Trying to do it all usually results in too little time enjoying each activity, exhausted parents, and cranky kids. On a trip to Hawaii, the temptation may be to see as many islands as possible, but a better plan might be to stick to one or two islands and really get to know them. The best vacations happen when you immerse yourself in a destination's culture, something you can't do in a day. Kids of all ages will cherish memories of days spent snorkeling or exploring one or two cool towns far more than they will a series of planes, trains, and automobiles with harried stops in between.

— T. F.

