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LA JOLLA

The Baker-Baum Concert Hall at The Conrad

Authentically Hawaiian

Mauna Kea Beach Resort sets the stage for purely magical Big Island memories BY DEANNA MURPHY



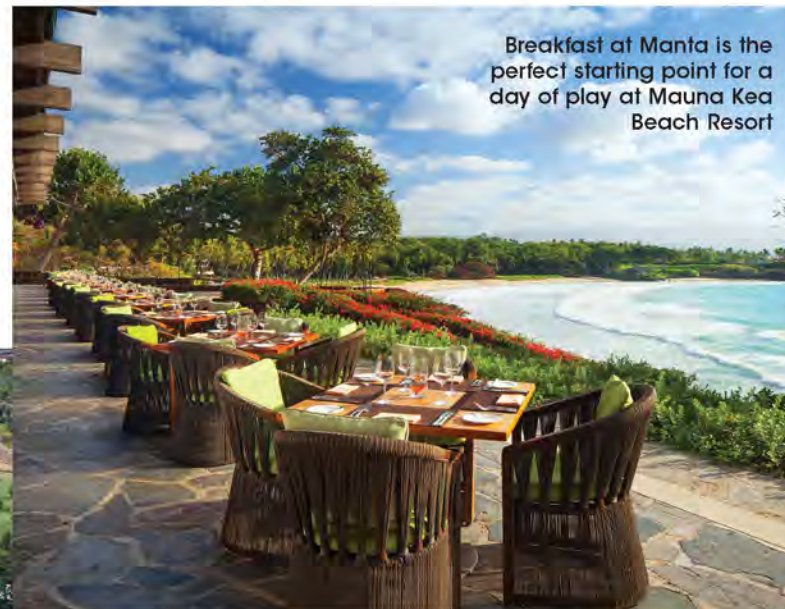
Mauna Kea Beach Resort overlooks the beautiful Kauna'oa Bay on the Big Island's northwestern coast

MY SISTER AND HER husband spent a portion of their honeymoon a decade ago on Mauritius, an island country off the east coast of Africa. I anticipated reviews of an unrivaled and exotic tropical beauty upon their return, but instead, I was surprised when my brother-in-law told me that though it was incredibly beautiful, “It was an island in the middle of the ocean. We could have been anywhere.” I was reminded of his account after talking with my daughter, who joined me on a recent visit to Mauna Kea Beach Hotel on the Big Island of Hawaii. When I asked what stood out to her most about our trip (my stoic child, a seasoned visitor to the islands, actually cried when we had to leave), she told me that she

loved how special the hotel was with its Hawaiian authenticity, art, and beautiful rooms, but also the lava rock-laden, quintessentially Hawaiian landscape surrounding it. She said, “I loved it because you knew you were in Hawaii and not just on any beach.” It was a pretty incredible observation for a 15-year-old, but it was also spot-on.

Mauna Kea's history is widely known. Developed by billionaire businessman, philanthropist, and conservationist Laurance Rockefeller, the property opened in 1965 with an attention to detail that encompasses everything from the building's paint color, chosen to match the sand of the perfect arc of beach between Mauna Kea and Kauna'oa Bay, to the tile floors of the vast lobby — blue, an ode to Hawaiian waters — to a highly curated, globally

HOTEL PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF MAUNA KEA BEACH HOTEL. VILLA AND RESIDENCES PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF MAUNA KEA RESIDENCES



Breakfast at Manta is the perfect starting point for a day of play at Mauna Kea Beach Resort



Hapuna Beach Residences offer more private accommodations

sourced art collection and a stunning display of authentic Hawaiian quilts and textiles. But possibly the most important history is more personal; that of the innumerable people who've been coming to Mauna Kea, year after year, for generations. It's a thread that's repeated in nearly every encounter with guests at the resort, and the result is a true sense of family among guests and staff, relationships forged over decades, and also of home, the welcoming familiarity and comfort that can only come from a long-nurtured relationship with one place.

On my first morning at Mauna Kea, I took part in Mauna Kea's E Ala E beachfront sunrise ceremony, led by the property's Aloha Ambassador Healani Kimitete Ah-Mow. She greeted the other guests who joined us like old friends, welcoming them by first name and with warm hugs. One of the women, Katie, had been coming with her mother monthly since early this year. She told me that after her mom's cancer diagnosis, the two came to the island as a respite mid-treatment, only to learn that her counts had dropped significantly when they returned. As a result, her mother's oncologist told them, “Whatever you're doing, keep doing it.” It was a prescription they were happy to fill, and it fostered an even deeper connection for them with the healing powers of the island. The sunrise ritual we took part in consisted of a beautiful Hawaiian chant toward the ocean, heavy with respect for its power and gifts to Hawaii and its people, and even to a skeptic, the spiritual element was undeniable. The ritual and Ah-Mow's work to educate visitors on the relationship that Hawaiians have with their land and its waters are a prime example of Mauna Kea's intent to not just be a premium tourist destination, but to connect everyone more deeply to the island at its heart. (Side note: by

the time I met Katie and after their multiple returns to the island, her mother's cancer numbers were near zero.)

By now, we've all heard a lot about the hospitality world struggling in this semi post-COVID era, and Hawaii has been no exception. As recently as last month, I have friends and family who've been disappointed in the level of service at even the most exclusive destinations. At Mauna Kea, however, I never experienced an issue with service, whether it was with housekeeping, dining, or amenities. Even in April, as the pandemic still dominated the world's focus, I enjoyed a spectacular massage at the resort's Mauna Kea Spa by Mandara, a perfectly maintained room, and incredible dining experiences both on site and at Mauna Kea's sister property, the Westin Hapuna Beach Resort. There, featured restaurant Meridia delivered exceptional regionally infused Mediterranean fare, led by its very talented Oahu-born Chef de Cuisine Junior Ulep. Approachable and gregarious, Ulep seemed to delight most in visiting his guests at their tables, ensuring that everything was to their liking. With a Hawaiian sunset as its backdrop, and complemented by a Meridia Spritz (sweetened with house honey), a meal at Meridia is truly one to remember.

For those seeking options beyond the walls of the hotel, fear not. The resort's more private offerings, the Mauna Kea Residences and Hapuna Beach Residences, offer luxurious one- to seven-bedroom options between the two, from townhomes to true estates, with top-of-the-line appliances, beautiful décor, spacious rooms, and stunning views, many with additional amenities like private pools and barbecues. All enjoy resort privileges at Mauna Kea and the Westin Hapuna, and make for an ideal multi- or extended family base on the island. >>

« Getting to Hawaii has gotten much easier as COVID travel requirements have loosened for vaccinated travelers, and while the cost for COVID testing (at press time still required for those unvaccinated) still hovers around \$150 per person, at least airfares have come down significantly from the early summer spikes. One thing that remains a challenge is the rental car market, so it's advisable to either book a car early if you plan to explore the island beyond the Mauna Kea Resort property, or reserve a service to transport you to the hotel (we used Anuenue Rainbow Tours).

Traveling to Hawaii has always been a commitment — it is, after all, one of the most remote island chains on the planet — and the additional hoops the pandemic has presented do make a trip to the islands one that's not for anyone lacking determination. But when Mauna Kea Resort, with its own history and that of the guests who've embraced it over the past 55-plus years, awaits you at the end of a long journey, it is more than worth it. It's what will keep you coming back for generations. maunakeabeachhotel.com 



Hau Tree is the spot for daytime lunch and libations or toes-in-the-sand dinners



Huihui at Ka'anapali Beach Hotel

HUIHUI: PHOTO COURTESY OF KAA'ANAPALI BEACH HOTEL

Meanwhile, on Maui

A beachfront classic gets a gorgeous update

Billed as "Hawaii's most Hawaiian hotel," The Ka'anapali Beach Hotel has sat proudly on a famous stretch of Maui's coastline since 1964, drawing generations of loyal repeat guests who come for the property's consistently authentic Hawaiian experience, eschewing the competition's newest and flashiest offerings. There is a deep sense of pride rooted in every corner, a devotion to delivering the true essence of the islands, and it sings in the traditions the property maintains.

Recognizing traditional doesn't have to also mean dated, in 2020, the hotel embarked on a \$75 million renovation. In this first of a multi-phase project, 264 of its 432 rooms were beautifully updated, and Huihui, an absolutely stunning restaurant at the property's beachfront border, was created to serve not just guests of the hotel, but the thousands of visitors seeking an upscale and — yes — authentic dining experience in Kaanapali. Only a short walk from the bustle of Whaler's Village where there are, though admittedly good, only a couple options for sit-down dining, Huihui presents a bright opportunity for Ka'anapali Beach Hotel to dazzle anew, helmed by its steadfast and talented Executive Chef Tom Muromoto. A sleek interior that pulls elements of the islands, the water, and Hawaiian culture into every aspect of its décor is a perfect setting for Muromoto's signature traditional Hawaiian cuisine to shine. kbhmaui.com