

Paradise Drive

RIFFING THROUGH MAUI'S WILD BACKCOUNTRY,
HANA HIGHWAY COMES WITH ITS OWN SOUND TRACK

By **ILIMA LOOMIS**
Photographs by **SUSAN SEUBERT**

*At Maui's Oheo Gulch,
falls link countless
water holes dubbed the
"Seven Sacred Pools."*



Hana Highway delivers big smiles at the Huelo Lookout Fruit Stand (left) and during ukulele lessons and shows at the Travaasa Hana hotel (below).



windsurfers and kite-boarders practice jumps and flips.

The communities of Haiku and Huelo mark the outskirts of Maui's north shore. Beyond, bamboo and ginger plants creep out of the forest toward the road, while the highway winds deep into a dripping jungle. Carved out of the rain forest, **Keanae Arboretum's** trails course through wild and cultivated tropical plants, including sugarcane, banana, and breadfruit—"canoe crops" brought over by early Polynesian settlers. Just past the gardens, a turnoff leads to Keanae Peninsula. "This is the land where taro grows like the days of long ago," sings Eleanor McClelland Heavey in the lyrics of "Keanae." Farmers in Keanae village still grow the starchy root with hand tools, tending the same flooded *lo'i*, or taro fields, where their ancestors waded before Western explorers arrived. Usually consumed as the pastelike poi, taro nourishes more than the body. "It's spiritual," says grower Tweetie Lind. "When we take care of taro, we're in tune with the ground, the mud, the water."

And here at the edge of Maui's massive watershed, water saturates the air—drenching you in a sudden downpour, pooling as dew on skin, gathering high in the mountain to trickle, stream, and plunge to the sea. About three miles past Keanae, you can dip your toes in **Upper Waikani Falls**, with a short rocky trail to a pool fed by three

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ascades. Three miles farther, a paved walking path at **Puaa Kaa State Wayside Park** provides easy access to cascades and pools as well as restrooms and picnic tables.

As Hana nears, the road straightens. The ocean turns midnight blue; the beaches smolder black, gray, red, and white. The jade green mountain reaches high into the clouds. "This is paradise," sings Watkins in "Heavenly Hana." "Your beauty is nature's jealousy." Stop at **Waianapanapa State Park**

for a black-sand beach and walking trails. If the ocean is too rough for safe swimming, follow a path to caves with underground freshwater pools. Or pick up lunch fixings at **Hasegawa General Store** and head to white-sand Hamoa (Ernest Hemingway is said to have once proclaimed it the world's best).

About 11 miles past Hana, in the Kipahulu section of **Haleakala National Park**, Kipahulu Ohana gives tours of a working taro farm, including a chance to slog

knee-deep through submerged *lo'i* to work alongside grower Lind and her husband, John. "People feel the mud between their toes," Lind says. Take a moment to feel the winds here, too. Local lore claims each has its own name and personality, including the "love snatcher" wind credited with retrieving a fickle wife. Nearby, a chain of falls links Oheo Gulch's freshwater pools. **Piipiwai Trail** traces a stream to a 400-foot waterfall. Though the road isn't as bad as

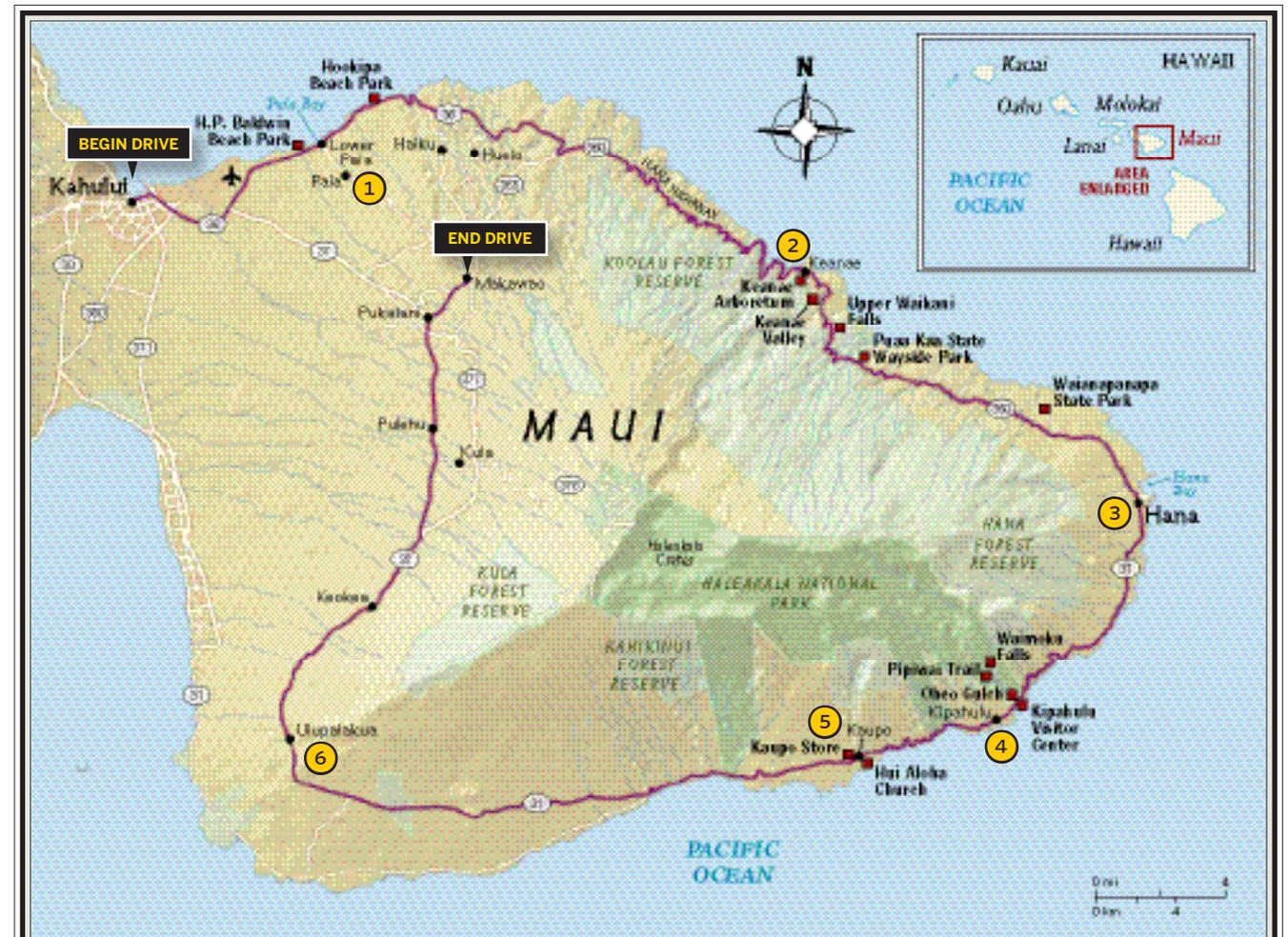
COME, LET'S GO for a car ride," invites classic Hawaiian singer John Pi'ilani Watkins in a tune with as many twists and turns as a mountain road. More than a song to sway to at a luau, his cheerful melody speaks to an island truth: On Maui, music and road trips go together like surfers and hula girls. Centuries of locals have composed love songs of thanks for the island's natural beauty, offering up chains of lyrics as flowery as a lei of aloha, says hula master Hokulani Holt. "Hawaiians are a place-based people," she says. "We know the land intimately." And for a people who love to *holoholo ka'a*—

go for a drive—few trips journey deeper into Hawaii than Maui's famed road to Hana. With more than 600 curves in just 52 miles, **Hana Highway** sets the scene for drama—and car-commercial fantasies. But it's as smooth as a riff on a Hawaiian steel guitar compared with the precipitous foot-path and bumpy steam barge that were once the only ways to reach rugged, remote East Maui. It took more than 16 years to complete the highway linking Hana village with the city of Kahului. Bolstered by ropes and lowered over cliff faces, crews set dynamite to blast the pathway and built more than 50 bridges across gulches and waterfalls. When the project was finally done in 1926, Hana celebrated with a two-day luau.

Hana Highway begins in Kahului, in

Maui's central valley and site of the island's main airport, but the real journey starts several miles east in Paia. To greet the day with a swim, as many residents do, stop at **H. P. Baldwin Beach Park**, a 1.5-mile stretch of pristine white sand on the island's north shore. Just up the road, hippies, surfers, artists, and yogis mingle in the bohemian town, where you can perk up at **Anthony's Coffee Co.** or snag an emergency bikini at local designer shops **Maui Girl** or **Letarte**.

"It's splendid to see the surfboards surfing to the sandbar," wrote songwriter Alice Johnson to describe **Hookipa Beach Park**, a few miles farther on. A cliff-top lookout above the park is an ideal perch to watch local surfers hotdog in head-high waves, while some of the world's top professional



PLAYLIST
Chained Melodies

Honolulu musician Israel "Iz" Kamakawiwio'ole's medley of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" and "What a Wonderful World" launched him (and his ukulele) onto the international stage. The first Hawaiian album to go platinum, his *Facing Future* marks its

20th anniversary next year and continues to influence local musicians. This playlist of Maui classics sets a melody to the places of Hana Highway. (Note: Lyrics are translated here from Hawaiian; songs are available on iTunes.)
① "The spray of the sea comes as a breath, rustling the leaves of the ti plants," sings Kealii Reichel in "Ka Nohona Pili Kai" about his

grandma's beachside **Paia** home.
② Now a hula master in Oregon, Pekelo Day was 15 when he wrote "Kilakila A'o Ke'anae" to honor his native **Keanae** village.
③ A master of slack-key guitar and falsetto singing, Pekelo Cosma filled three albums with original and traditional tunes about his hometown of **Hana**, including "Hana No Ka Oi."
④ Uluwehi Guerrero travels

annually to **Kipahulu** to sing its eponymous anthem in honor of his great-grandmother, who was born there.
⑤ In "Me Ka Nani A'o Kaupo," songwriter John Pi'ilani Watkins invites listeners to see the beauty of **Kaupo** but warns, "The road has many turns."
⑥ Another Watkins classic, "**Uluvalakua**," celebrates *ka home a'o paniolo*—the home of the cowboys. —I.L.

DETAILS

Distance: 105 miles, Kahului to Makawao **When to go:** Summer and fall tend to be driest. **Plan Your Trip:** See www.gohawaii.com/maui.



its reputation—all but a few miles are now paved—if you choose to drive beyond Kipahulu, expect some washboard sections, and use extreme caution around blind curves and during wet conditions.

A century ago, the back side of Haleakala was a thriving community of ranches, sugar plantations, and fishing hamlets. Today only a handful of residents remain, but you can still find welcome (and refreshment) at tiny **Kaupo Store**. Little has changed about the tin-roofed, plank-walled general store since it was built in 1925, though now it sells Hawaiian shirts and local jewelry in

The ride gets bumpier past Hana, with a sometimes unpaved road passing black lava fields (above) and stands selling Hawaii's iconic floral souvenir (below).



addition to the “Beer-Wine-Sake” on the original sign over the door. Just down the road, whitewashed **Hui Aloha Church**, built in 1859, stands on a windswept outcropping of rocky shoreline with six rows of wooden pews. A salt-sprayed graveyard overlooks the sea near wind-bent ironwood trees.

It's a long but meditative drive back to the resorts of Maui, passing through places so empty, the ruins of ancient villages are hard to spot among the scattered lava rocks. After barren Kahikinui and the hardscrabble homesteads of the south shore, signs of civilization gradually return. Cattle graze in the high, cool grasslands of Ulupalakua, where *paniolo*, Hawaiian cowboys, still ride the range. It's a working ranch and closed to the public, but the **Ulupalakua Ranch Store** deli grills up burgers made of grass-fed island beef.

The meadows become estates and then neighborhoods as the road weaves through pastoral Kula and suburban Pukalani. Finally, at the traffic light—the first since breakfast—turn toward Makawao, with its neatly tended yards and cow-town storefronts and crooked sidewalks. Now that modern life has re-emerged, Hana's memory fades like the echo of a song.

But whenever you long to return, hula master Holt says a simple melody can transport you there. Even if you don't understand the Hawaiian lyrics, she says, the feeling translates—of a sudden rain, a playful breeze, the warm greeting of a new friend. “As I'm driving along, sometimes I've got to pull over, because I'm so moved,” Holt says. “I pull over the car so I can be in the moment of this music, this place.”

Hawaii native **ILIMA LOOMIS** is a former staff writer for The Maui News.

EAT

Hawaiian Punch

In Haiku's Pauwela Cannery, family-owned **Baked on Maui** makes everything from scratch; stick your nose in a bag of bread and you can still smell the yeast. Try the *lilikoi* bars—like lemon bars, made from the tart juice of passion fruit harvested down the road. At north shore landmark **Paia Fish Market**, locals squeeze into communal picnic tables for fresh catches and island-raised beef. You choose the fish, the prep, and the presentation—wahoo fish tacos, mahimahi fish-and-chips, Cajun ahi burgers. In Makawao, **Market Fresh Bistro** makes good on its name. “Almost everything on our menu is locally sourced,” says chef Justin Pardo, who works closely with island farmers and ranchers. The braised short ribs, made with Maui Cattle Co. beef, are so popular they're on the brunch menu; other favorites are Haleakala Ranch braised lamb and French toast made with Hawaiian sweet bread and drizzled with Wailuku honey.



SLEEP

On Island Time

A plantation manager's home turned bed-and-breakfast, the **Haiku Cannery Inn** sweetens stays with a sprawling estate and generous lanais (verandas) that boast sweeping views of the ocean and Haleakala, Maui's dormant volcano. In the heart of the north shore surf town Paia, you can head out the front door of the chic **Paia Inn** to funky shops and restaurants, or take a few steps out back to a perfect white-sand beach. To extend your East Maui exploration, consider lingering at the high-end **Travaasa Hana**. The former historic Hotel Hana Maui offers hula, horseback riding, wine tastings, food talks, and dining with a Polynesian flavor (such as ahi tartare, above). And a traditional *lomilomi* massage at the spa works out kinks after a long drive. —I.L.