

HAWAII'S UPCOUNTRY

Writer **Leslie Forsberg** savors the small towns,
ranches and farms of Maui's countryside

The horses in Maui's
Upcountry region
dine in paradise.

DAVID OLSEN/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

MAUI'S CHARMS draw me back again and again, but once I've spent a few days at the beach, I'm eager to get out and explore, and Maui's hilly Upcountry, on the slopes of Haleakala, is made for exploring. The quaint towns of this pastoral region are filled with art, its farms yield delicious taste sensations, and there are adventures aplenty, from horseback riding and windsurfer-watching to stargazing. The historic town of Makawao, 12 miles southeast of Kahului Airport, is at the heart of Upcountry, and it makes a great starting point for excursions in different directions.

CREAM PUFFS and other treats await visitors to T Komoda Store and Bakery, a local favorite in the *paniolo* (cowboy) town of Makawao. Below: View of Maui's western coastline from the town of Kula.



Makawao is an extraordinarily creative outpost with a variety of shops.



TREE/COAST: MANUEL BALESTERIA/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; STORE: PHOTO RESOURCE HAWAII/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

This tiny hamlet on the slopes of a crater retains its sense of history with heritage wood-front buildings topped by tin roofs. It was once a supply center for Hawaiian cowboys and ranchers, and it still has a country feel today, complete with a Fourth of July rodeo and parade.

As I step inside T Komoda Store and Bakery, I feel as though I've stepped back in time. This century-old mom and pop establishment makes coconut Danish pastries, cream puffs and lots more, but it's especially beloved for its doughnuts on a stick. The bakery turns out 1,000 of these dreamy treats every day.

Makawao is an extraordinarily creative outpost, with a e variety of shops selling everything from clothing to jewelry. Among my favorites: Haku Maui, where exquisite one-of-a-kind leis are fashioned

from fresh flowers and foliage; Holoholo Surf, which offers beautiful surf-culture themed garments and many accessories; and Kulua, with gorgeous all-natural clothing that's designed, printed and crafted by hand.

Just north of downtown, the stately Hui No'eu Visual Arts Center features up to eight exhibitions annually. Its gallery shop displays arts and crafts made by more than 75 local artists.

RURAL ROUTE

Traveling the 16 miles of Highway 37 from Pukalani, (just south of Makawao) to Ulupalakua, it's easy to spend the day exploring the area's farms and sampling delicious local foods. Saturday mornings, the Upcountry Farmers Market is in full swing, adding a community feel.



UPCOUNTRY SHOPS
offer local goods
ranging from clothing
and jewelry to leis.

Six miles south of Makawao, at Maui Bees, I learn the fine art of beekeeping and then sample the wares: The bees' summer honey is mild and amber colored, and comes from the pollen of *wilelaiki* trees. The winter honey is darker, with a slightly caramel flavor; it's from the eucalyptus that grows here.

Four miles farther south, Kula Country Farms' stand sells fresh local produce, jams and jellies. If you visit in spring,

you can fill cartons with ruby red strawberries available for U-pick.

Nearby, O'o Farm has a Breakfast & Coffee tour that includes insights into coffee's historic roots, accompanied by steaming cups of coffee grown and roasted right here.

At Ali'i Kula Lavender, which grows 20 types of lavender, I'm surrounded by heady fragrances. It's a full-on sensory experience. I enjoy people-watching as

moms pose their kids for photos amid a sea of purple.

At Ulupalakua, the turn-around spot for this route, I stop in at MauiWine to sample estate-grown wines in the historic King's Cottage, built for the last reigning king of Hawaii, King Kalakaua (the brother of the nation's last queen). It's a lovely setting, with a massive camphor tree, surrounding gardens and a view of the ocean beyond.

SHOPS: RON NIEBRUGGE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

PINEAPPLE: DON WHITE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

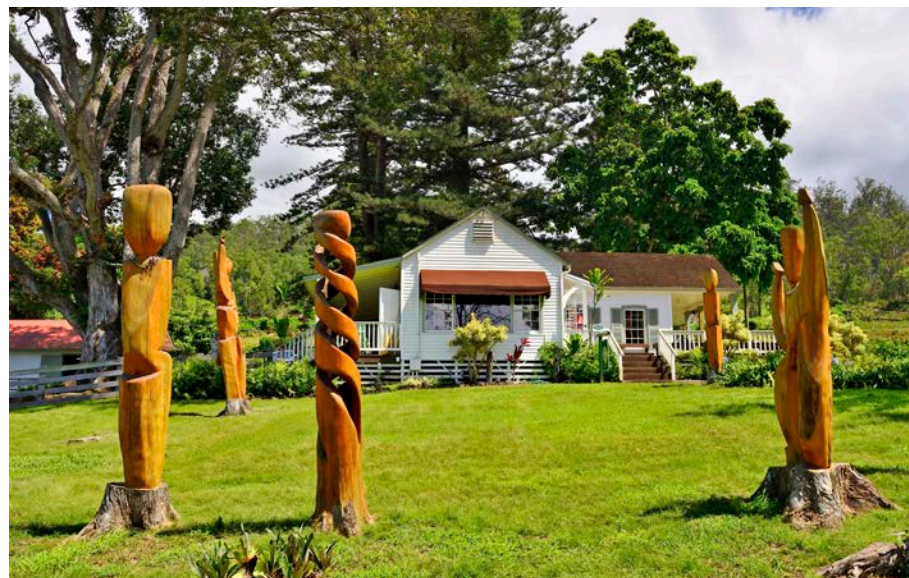


PINEAPPLE 101

Pineapples are cliché in Hawaii. But that didn't stop me (and it shouldn't stop you) from going on the highly entertaining Maui Pineapple Tour. Personable guides explain the life cycle and cultivation of the plant as you're driven through pineapple fields with ocean views. Our guide did a Ninja warrior trick, carving up pineapples into perfect bite-size chunks in the blink of an eye. We were all fed sweet, juicy pineapples until we couldn't eat any more. They were quite simply the best pineapples I've ever had; Maui Gold pineapples are known for low acidity and high sweetness. At the end of the tour, everyone received a pineapple packed for flight. maupineapple.com

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FOODIES DELIGHT
their taste buds at
Maui's many farm
stands and restaurants
as well as MauiWine
(right). Opposite:
Haleakala crater at
sunrise (below).



All these farms owe a tribute to the volcano known as Haleakala.

My daughter would love an open-range horseback tour at nearby Triple L Ranch, but I'm flying solo today, so I rest in the shade at a picnic table outside the rustic Ulupalakua Ranch Store & Grill before tucking into a juicy hamburger made from beef cattle raised right here.

At day's end, almost back to Makawao, I detour to Surfing Goat Dairy, just west of town, to buy some goat cheese for a charcuterie board. This is always one of my favorite stops. There's a surprisingly wide variety of cheeses, and the pasture outside the shop is an entertaining play space for goats.

HOUSE OF THE SUN

All these farms (there are about 800 on the island) owe a tribute to the volcano known as Haleakala. Ancient lava flows broke down over the eons to become the

fertile soil that grows a wild profusion of plants and crops.

Haleakala, which means "house of the sun," is much more than a place to rush to along with the throngs to watch the sunrise; sunset is less crowded and just as exciting.

Climbing the road to Haleakala National Park, I leave behind green and gold fields and enter a landscape of dry scrub and rocks shrouded by thick fog. My windshield wipers swish as the engine strains around steep blind corners. Finally, just before the summit, I break through the cloud cover.

Here, at 10,023 feet above sea level, a steady, chill wind blows strands of mist

and whips visitors' jackets, making a rumpling sound. Beyond the viewing area, the bright sun illuminates a vast landscape of brown and rust slopes inside the walls of the crater.

The volcanic crater is home to several endangered species, including the rare 'ua'u (Hawaiian petrel) that nests on cliffs below the visitors center, and the otherworldly silversword plant, which glimmers in the sunshine like a metallic pincushion.

At this altitude it's downright cold. And it's even colder at night, when lucky visitors get to watch nature's trifecta: the sun melting into the ocean, followed by an intense papaya-colored sunset and

LANDSCAPE: ROBERT BUSH/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; WINERY: ANGUS MCCOMISKEY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



UPCOUNTRY EATS & SLEEPS



FROM THE SEA

Mama's Fish House, in a coconut grove on a white-sand beach in Paia, is a dreamy destination-dining establishment. Entrees, featuring local produce and many seafood options, are elaborately crafted and beautifully presented. (Book early; the reservation list is often months long.) mamasfishhouse.com

DOWN-HOME DELICIOUS

Stop by Makawao's historic Haili'imaile General Store, Maui's first farm-to-table restaurant, for elevated local fare—including a sublime coconut fish curry. hgsmaui.com

RELAXING RETREAT

Most lodging options in Maui's Upcountry are vacation rentals. One exception is Lumeria Maui, a Makawao retreat center surrounded by beautiful gardens, with a labyrinth and spa. Daily class offerings include yoga, meditation, healing arts and more. lumeriamau.com



then bursts of stars in the inky darkness. Far from light sources and at this high altitude, it's easy to see the Milky Way spread across the heavens. (Be sure to bring warm clothing to fully enjoy this awe-inspiring spectacle.)

PEACEFUL, EASY FEELING

There's something about Paia (6 miles northeast of Kahului Airport) that gives a tranquil, peace-out vibe. Maybe it's the Paia Peace Stupa with its prayer wheel or the shops selling Bohemian-style beachwear. Or maybe it's just the fact

that Paia is the gateway for the famed road to Hana, but whenever I'm here, I slow down and savor everything.

After prowling through several cute boutiques filled with women's fashions and jewelry, I step inside Maui Hands gallery to feel joy made manifest in colorful, soulful works by Hawaiians; the shop represents 300 local artists.

With a fast-dripping cone of Surfing Goat Dairy's *lilikoi* (passion fruit) quark gelato in hand from Paia Gelato, I head 2 miles northeast to Ho'okipa Beach, which puts the thrill in the chill of this

laid-back town. Windsurfers from around the world come here to play with the surf and constant winds. Stepping out of the car, I join a small crowd of spectators watching windsurfers perform amazing, gravity-defying feats, leaping high into the air and turning on a dime. These athletes were clearly born to float on air.

After days spent on the bucolic back roads of Maui's Upcountry, sampling foods, admiring the creativity of local artists and taking in sweeping views, I can truly say that the windsurfers aren't the only ones floating on air. ●

WIND AND WAVES
along Ho'okipa Beach
make it a world-class
windsurfing destination.

MAMA'S FISH HOUSE: GILLIAN MOORE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

WINDSURFERS: DEBRA BEHR/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO