

Maui – Exploring the Hana Coast

Maui's Hana coast is the tropical side of the island with spectacular waterfalls, tropical rain forests, and isolated beaches. As with the saying "Life is a journey, not a destination", so to is Hana as much of the scenery lies along the long and winding road in.

Several years back I took a trip to Hana traveling with just a backpack. I set out to stay a few days in Hana, but stayed a few weeks before resuming my trip around Maui. While backpacking may not be your mode of travel, this unique adventure down the Hana coast provided many insights and adventures that otherwise would have been missed.

What to Bring

Getting to Hana and back is a full day trip. To make the most of your trip here are a few tips for things you should bring:

- **Gas, food, and water** – You can get food and gas in Hana, but there is little in between once you hit the windy stretch of road. Fill up before you go and bring some snacks so you will not be dependent on finding these along the way. Most of the parks along the Hana highway do NOT have fresh water.
- **Film** – Be sure to check your film as you will pass numerous waterfalls and coastal lookouts along the way.
- **Swimming Suit** – Many of the waterfalls drop into picturesque ponds ideal for swimming. There are also a number of beaches near Hana worth visiting.

Getting to Hana

The Road to Hana

Before you start your trip to Hana you need to know what lies ahead.... The road to Hana is windy. In a stretch of about 25-30 miles you will go through over 50 one-lane bridges and 600 turns. Years ago this trip took about four hours to cover the 50 miles from Kahului to Hana, with the majority of the time in the last 25-30 miles. I understand the road has been improved somewhat and the journey now is generally closer to three hours.

Travel Options

There are a number of options for the trip to Hana. I will provide a brief overview of the top four: driving, van tours, fly in and out, and day helicopter tours.

Driving to Hana - If you chose to drive to be sure to leave early and plan a rather long day. You may even consider getting a place to stay in Hana so you can enjoy the area before having to travel the winding roads back out.

The main road in is highway 360 from Kahului to Hana. If you are seeking a change of scenery on the way out you can continue past Hana to circle around Haleakala. The road is not paved all the way around, and car rental companies do not recommend

driving there. With this said, the road is usually travelable in a standard car. Only during heavy rains can the unpaved road become problematic.

Before you start the round trip to Hana be sure to start with a full tank and any food supplies you may want along the way. There are a few stops near the start (like Paia), and some in Hana; there is little in between.

Van Tours – There are a number of companies offering van tours to Hana. With this option you are freed from driving all day, get the inside information and are assured of hitting the best stops, and can travel in comfort. Some companies offer full packages with meals included. It's a lot of driving and long day, so be sure you are up for the trip when you book. If interest, here is a link to one activities site that books Van tours: <http://adventuremaui.com/islandtours.htm>.

Fly & Drive Hana Tour – The fly and drive Hana tours are becoming more popular. With these tours you take a helicopter flight across the island, spend some time in Hana, then take a 3 ½ hour van tour back out along the Hana highway. The obvious advantage to this package is you will enjoy the helicopter flight over Haleakala, have more time to spend in Hana, and enjoy all the sites along the Hana highway that a drive provides without having to retrace your path for hours of driving out.

Hana Helo tours – If time is a concern, and money is not, you may consider a Hana helo tour that includes the flight in and back out. While this will get you to Hana without the drive, you will miss the sites along the way. You can contact <http://adventuremaui.com/islandtours.htm> for options on private helicopter tours.

Along the Way

If you are planning a day trip to Hana plan about half of your time just for sightseeing along the way. Hana is the endpoint, but many of the truly lush areas and large waterfalls lie along the windy Hana highway.

Hookipa – Windsurfing

Near the start of your Hana trip you will pass through the small town of Paia. This is a good place to stop for any last minute supplies you may need for the day ahead. A few miles past Paia is Hookipa Beach park – a popular surf and windsurfing site. If you are fortunate enough to be there when the winds are up you will see some of the worlds best windsurfers throwing forward and backward loops high above the waves.

Not far past Hookipa the road will begin to narrow and wind along the coast.

Kaumahina State Wayside

This park is located about 28 miles from Kahului along highway 360. There are scenic views and places to take a lunch break. This is a forested area with views along the coast.

About a mile prior to this park you will have passed the Haipua`ena Falls and Pool; one of the first small waterfalls along the way.

Puaa Kaa State Wayside

There are numerous waterfalls and scenic spots along the Hana highway. Many of these are just pull-outs along the road which justify a brief break from the drive to take in the surroundings.

The next big park along the highway is Puaa Kaa State Wayside located about 38 miles in (between mile markers 21 & 22). There is a spectacular waterfall and pool.

Waianapanapa State Park

Waianapanapa State Park is 52 miles in as you approach Hana. The park offers picnic tables, camping, and day hikes along the lava flows.

Waianapanapa is a tropical area with lava flows that extend into the ocean. The erosion of the lava has created a nice black sand beach unique to the island. There are also lava caves that can be explored from the water (flashlight recommended).

On my trip to Hana I camped at Waianapanapa State Park. Maximum stay is five days, so when my time elapsed I packed my gear and moved to an open camping area past the seven sacred pools. This worked nicely for an extended stay, but ended abruptly when a fierce storm pulled up my tent stakes and left me sleeping in inches of water the remainder of the night. After that I headed back to the drier side of the island.... If interested in camping, or staying in the park cabins, see:

<http://www.state.hi.us/dlnr/dsp/fees.html>.

Life in Hana

Life in Hana is much different than other areas of Maui, and for good reason. You do not live three hours from main civilization unless getting away from it all is one of your desires. While thumbing a ride in Hana I was picked up by a father and son both with Mohawk haircuts. When asked, the father replied, "We had a bet... I lost".

There are a limited number of stores and restaurants in this area – just enough to cover the basic needs.

Hana is the rainy side of the island with over 100 inches of rain a year. While spending time there I found this generally a pleasant rain and had more than enough sunny days to spend along the coastal beaches.

Hana Beaches

Hana has an interesting diversity of beaches. As previously mentioned there is the black sand beach of Waianapanapa. There is also a red-sand beach, and the standard beaches as well.

Hana's red-sand beach is located a short walk from the end of a road in town behind Ka'uiki Hill. The red color comes from erosion of the cindercone. The trail can be slippery and dangerous, so use caution when hiking to the beach. The water can be rough, but offers good snorkeling near shore on calmer days. This is a clothing optional beach.

The Hana beach park is a large beach near town. While traveling this area I came across actor Chris Christoferson and friends at this beach racing into the waves, being plummeted onto the beach, and racing out again for more.

The Seven Sacred Pools (a.k.a. O'heo Gulch)

The seven pools are located about 10 miles past Hana. The area provides trails for hiking, and excellent scenery. Normally the pools provide a nice place for a swim, but may be dangerous during high rains. During our last trip to the islands the pools were closed due to deaths caused by flash floods at the pools.

The seven pools can be a busy place, and there is a lot to see. If interested in seriously hiking this area you need to start your trip to Hana extremely early, or plan a night in Hana and hiking the following day.

Summary

If you are going to Maui for a tropical vacation, the road to Hana is probably the place you envisioned. Your day trip to Hana will provide you with a variety of tropical scenery from waterfalls and isolated ponds, to lush rainforests, quite beaches, and beautiful hikes. If you are up for the drive, Hana will provide a memorable Maui excursion.

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