

**Maui** stands out from other tropical hideaways thanks to a range of remarkable and out-of-the-ordinary attractions.

BY JB BISSELL



## There is a plant that grows

at the top of Haleakala National Park that you must see. It's called the silversword, and of all the things on Maui that can rightfully be described as otherworldly — Ululani's shave ice, the Road to Hana, the Pools of 'Ohe'o and, for that matter, the desolate volcanic Haleakala landscape itself — the silverswords might be the most out of this world.

Fittingly, in full bloom, it looks like a futuristic pineapple: a ball of fleshy metallic tendrils from which a flowering stalk shoots skyward. It's not hard to imagine Captain James T Kirk munching on one in an episode of *Star Trek*. The silverswords you'll see, however, are strictly off-limits. They are as rare a plant as they come — the subspecies on Maui reportedly only grows on Haleakala and above an elevation of 2,100 metres.

The coolest way to have your own silversword encounter is to hike into the heart of the park's wilderness area, a barren cinder desert that seems as though it could just as easily be Mars as it is Maui. Either way, 7.5 kilometres from the nearest trailhead on the Halemau'u Trail is a subtle detour called the Silversword Loop. For reasons we'll probably never understand, this spot is home to one of the mountain's most dense concentrations of the ethereal plant.

Although, perhaps the main reason is that it's so hard to reach. That's 7.5 kilometres *one* way. Additionally, no matter which main

entry point you choose, the walk to the natural silversword garden is essentially all downhill. Which means once you've snapped the requisite photos and puzzled over "how something so vibrant could possibly grow in a place like this", you have at least 7 kilometres of mostly uphill trekking to get back out of the crater.

I will say this: it's worth it. The downward approach from the ridgeline into the basin on the Halemau'u Trail is 305 vertical metres of mountainside switchbacks. The day we did it, we descended through a veil of wispy clouds that concealed Haleakala's stark interior, until we had nearly reached the floor.

In truth, at times the hike can be disheartening. Once we arrived at the wilderness area's depression, it was hard to believe we'd ever find what we were searching for. Simply put, the landscape seems utterly forsaken. But we walked on, and then suddenly we looked up and saw a silversword. And then another, and then more. We didn't crest a hill or come out from behind a big rock. They were just there. And discovering these singular Hawaiian plants in the middle of nowhere is special, like happening across a spider orchid in the jungle instead of seeing it at the local botanical gardens.

If a tough all-day trek isn't part of your preferred holiday agenda, though, I'll also say that you can drive to within a few metres of a couple of different silversword collections. There's a nice display at the Park Headquarters Visitor Center, and farther up the road, you'll see specimens growing about the summit area.

Tami Kauakea Whinston/PhotoResourceHawaii.com; Don White/SuperStock

## AN ICY DELIGHT

Similar to seeing Haleakala's silverswords (by whatever means suit you best), you must savour Ululani's Hawaiian Shave Ice. But first, a few words about shave ice.

If you've never been to Hawaii, you're probably thinking shave ice is more or less a snow cone — some finely crushed frozen water particles topped with two or three brightly coloured liquid flavourings that end up dripping through a paper cup — and wondering what the big deal is. Sure, they can be fun on a hot day but, all in all, they're rather unremarkable. I understand. I felt the exact same way before my first Hawaiian holiday some 17 years ago.

Shave ice, though, is another local phenomenon that defies a certain earthly logic. I had my first taste at a little shop on Kauai — and was sceptical. Until I put a spoonful of the silky-smooth, raspberry-flavoured goodness in my mouth. The key is the texture, and the only way to describe it is creamy. Yes, contrary to expectations, real shave ice has absolutely no crunch. I don't know how they get the ice so paper-thin that it transforms into a velvety consistency, but that's the trick. (And it seems as though it's only possible in Hawaii; I've tried shave ice around the world, in places that claim to be "authentic", and it's never the same — or as delicious.)

Since that first sample almost two decades ago, I've been back to each of the main Hawaiian Islands a handful of times and can report without hesitation that my all-time favourite shave ice spot is Ululani's on Maui. And thankfully, there are multiple locations around Maui so you're (almost) never too far from your next serving.

Don't laugh; the last time we were there,

while my sons' grandmas did some souvenir shopping in Lahaina, the three of us wandered over to Ululani's for a mid-morning treat. A few hours later, en route to Big Beach in Makena State Park, those same grandmas needed to make a quick stop in Kihei. We looked around and spotted another Ululani's outlet. "Round two, boys", I announced.

There are endless taste combinations, so second helpings needn't be repetitive. Earlier, I had a pineapple-orange blend, but the afternoon sunshine seemed perfect for the popular Ka'anapali mix, with grape, lime and cherry.

One more note about flavourings and ordering: When the smiling attendant asks if you want a scoop of ice cream plopped in the bottom of your cup, your answer should be an affirmative, and vanilla. This confused me the first time — ice mixed with ice cream doesn't sound right — but trust me, it's the only way to go.

## THE LONG WAY AROUND

I mentioned that you're *almost* never too far from an Ululani's on Maui. The exception is when you're travelling the Road to Hana, a stretch of narrow pavement that snakes along the island's north-east shore, providing access to countless waterfalls and beaches and rainforest panoramas. In fact, if you close your eyes and imagine Maui, whatever tropical scene your subconscious wanderlust conjures up can probably be found somewhere on the Road to Hana.

In total, the route from Paia (the generally accepted start point) to the little town of Hana is only about 69 kilometres, but on this fabled

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The Pools of 'Ohe'o is arguably the most tropically picturesque setting in all of Maui. FACING PAGE: Silversword plants can live from three to more than 90 years, but they only flower once.



**ABOVE: More than 48 kilometres of trails provide trekkers access to Haleakala's stark summit landscape. TOP RIGHT: The Hasegawa General Store business dates back to 1910 and was even immortalised in a song by Paul Weston in 1961. RIGHT: Shave ice, a uniquely Hawaiian treat, comes in all sorts of flavours.**

byway, distance travelled is hardly proportional to time invested. The drive can take upwards of four hours (it was closer to two for us) because of all the hairpin turns and well-worn bridges. By some accounts, there are 620 noticeable curves in the road and nearly 60 bridges, some of which choke down to a single passable lane.

Nevertheless, I steered us onward — and side-to-side — navigating our hired minivan through U-shaped bends and giving way to oncoming traffic when space became restricted (because that's the "aloha" way to do things). There are times on the Road to Hana when you think you're going to drive right into the jungle. Not because the highway fades into a lush horizon line of trees somewhere in the faraway distance, but because three directions of your immediate vicinity all are enclosed with those lush trees and it seems there's simply nowhere else to go. Then the pavement veers abruptly left and an exit point, in the form of yet another hairpin turn, is revealed.

The views from your car are amazing, but there are also numerous scenic stops: Twin Falls, Ho'okipa Lookout, the Garden of Eden Arboretum, Honomanu Bay, the Nahiku Marketplace, the Hana Lava Tube, Kahanu Garden and many more. These are the places where your imagined Maui comes to life.

We stopped a couple of times, but mostly drove on until we

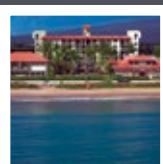
emerged from the rainforest for good at the tiny town of Hana, and made our way to Hana Bay Beach Park for a refreshing dip in the ocean and a beachside picnic. We also walked through the Hasegawa General Store, the famous tin-roofed outpost that sells packaged snacks alongside equal parts Hawaiian trinkets (watercolour prints, music CDs, hula skirts, T-shirts) for the visitors and living necessities (paper towels, wood screws, spray paint, glue guns) for the residents.

This is the final stop for a lot of people. They turn around in the Hasegawa car park and head back towards more developed Maui. But the road continues, and 16 kilometres later you'll find the Pools of 'Ohe'o (also known as the Seven Sacred Pools), which, for the record, is precisely what *my* subconscious conjures up when I imagine Maui.

Interestingly, this is actually the backside of Haleakala National Park, though it looks nothing like the volcanic crater where we spied the silverswords. 'Ohe'o is lush. And my favourite part isn't wading in the pools or scrambling over the boulders. It's standing back and surveying the entire scene — the foliage overtaking the black-rock outcroppings, the multiple cascades plunging into the natural ponds, the mystery of what the jungle might be concealing beyond our view — because it all seems so, well, out of this world. ■

Robert Harding/SuperStock, Al Argueta/Alamy Stock Photo, JB Bissell

## AREA RESORT



### Maui Beach Vacation Club (MBV)

The Maui Beach Vacation Club is centrally located, so exploring the entire island is convenient — and it's within walking distance to the closest Ululani's.

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