



Maui Kea Lani Style

By Karen Villalpando

We needed a vacation in a big way. We had been working like we were young, twenty-somethings, pulling all-nighters, and skipping meals. But the thing is, we're not twenty-somethings and our kids missed us, and we missed them. The weather in L.A. had been overcast and rainy for what seemed like six months, and I longed for a lounge chair and an umbrella drink.

So after we published our 60th Anniversary issue, we boarded a plane for the islands, Maui and the Big Island, to be exact. With kids in tow, bathing suits and sandals, we were ready for rest and relaxation, Hawaiian style.

Our first stop in Maui was not the beach or the pool, but the local K-Mart right near the airport – our youngest had forgotten her suitcase back in L.A. That's okay, no one became upset, we were in Maui, doing things on Maui-time — that is to say we were very laid back. After purchasing the bare necessities, we climbed back into our rented convertible and made our way south to Wailea.

About 30-45 minutes later, we pulled into the driveway of the Fairmont Kea Lani, an alabaster white, domed building, with the feel of a Moroccan palace. Kea Lani means white heaven, a very apropos name for the open-aired, pearly marble entrance into the luxurious hotel.

The inside-outside lobby, as my 11 year-old called it, leads to a panoramic view of the ocean, which is

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just a stone's throw past the pool and expansive lawn. Just down the marble steps is one of 3 pools on the property. An adult-only pool is tucked behind sound-muffling hedges, and an upper swim-up bar pool with a water slide to the main lower pool is located near the Polo grill, a popular lunch spot.

After our brief tour, we received our complimentary lei greeting and guava punch, and were escorted to our villa.

The hotel boasts 37- 2 and 3 bedroom villas with spectacular ocean views, a private plunge pool located on the private patio with a BBQ grill, a well-equipped kitchen, and washer and dryer. The villas are just steps from Polo beach, and are the perfect accommodations for families.

In addition, the hotel also offers 413 one-bedroom suites with private lanais, and living room with double sofa beds and full entertainment system.

A feature my girls and I truly appreciated were the large bathrooms with a deep soaking tub and walk-in showers, and double pedestal sinks. The plush towels and robes, and the high-end bath products were both noticed and appreciated.

A sprawling lawn separates the villas from the white sand beach, with tiki torches strategically placed throughout the 22- acre property. Once you've witnessed the magnificent sunset, the torches light up the grounds, and the ocean waves gently roll in, you can't imagine a more relaxing and romantic setting.

There are several restaurants on site, including the award winning Nick's Fishmarket, one of Hawaii's premier seafood restaurants. Appetizers like the ahi poi pounder, and the tuna sashimi, exemplify how fresh the fish is at Nick's. Other items like the Kailua pig pot stickers show the chef's creativity. We selected a beautiful Syrah from their 2,000 bottle wine list, which paired well with my live Keahole Maine lobster. If you're asking, "how can it be from Hawaii and Maine?" The lobsters are born in Maine, and raised in Hawaii's coldest waters, resulting in deliciously tender crustaceans. Fresh Hawaiian fish on the menu include opakapaka, moi, and walu, and mahi mahi. Interesting preparations enable you to enjoy the same fish every night with completely different tastes. Be sure to order the flaming strawberries for dessert – it's a show in itself. The skillful waiters ignite liquor in a goblet and carefully decant it into another goblet until the flame burns down, then douse a plate of strawberries with the warm grand Marnier. Drizzled chocolate and Devonshire cream accompany the dish, of which we promptly devoured every bite.

The Kea Lani's more casual Caffe Ciao serves interesting Italian cuisine while wearing a lei – or with a Hawaiian flare. The fish dishes are fabulous, especially the walu. Twinkling lights accent the umbrella-topped tables and live musicians entertain you while dining under the stars.

For breakfast, the Kea Lani restaurant offers a sumptuous buffet, featuring fresh fruit, including local seasonal favorites such as guava, mountain apples and papayas as well as freshly baked pastries and breads. An omelet station and rotating choices of hot and cold items including pancakes, waffles, link sausage and applewood smoked bacon are also available at this beautiful open-air restaurant.

With all this talk of food, you must wonder if we participated in anything else but dining. In fact, we were quite busy, experiencing never-attempted-before activities, like snuba.

Snuba is a cross

between snorkeling and scuba diving and twice the fun! We went out with Aqua Adventures, located at Maalaea Harbor, aboard a twin-engine boat carrying about 35 people, plus a fun crew who take snuba seriously, yet have a great time doing it. During the 25-minute ride out to Molokini Crater, our snuba instructor, Marissa, gave us a detailed lesson. Basically, snuba is using a scuba regulator to breathe, while the tanks float on rafts that you are toggled to by an air hose. After five minutes of practicing breathing while hanging on to the raft, you're ready to go below the surface. You have the ability to go down 25 feet and experience the beauty of ocean life. Colorful fish, coral, plant life, and sea turtles dazzle divers. Each group has up to 25 minutes to enjoy life underwater. The first two groups explored Molokini Crater, and the last 2 ventured out to Turtle Arches, near the Kea Lani on the Makena Coast. Our family was among the last group, and we took to the experience like a fish to water, pardon the pun, and stayed down there for 36 minutes! With our under water camera, we snapped photos of us holding an anemone, swimming with sea turtles, and avoiding the sharp coral. I felt I was expe-



photo courtesy of the Fairmont Kea Lani

The Fairmont Kea Lani is family friendly offering lots of activities, including three pools, a water slide and an adult-only pool where one can find a quieter atmosphere.

riencing a dream where I could fly – only this was real and I was swimming underwater for as long as I wanted. My girls commented, “I felt so free!” Now my husband wants to take up the more-involved sport of scuba, at 51 years old. I think snuba is good enough, and he should stick to golf.

For those waiting for their turn to snuba, snorkeling was offered as well. Or if you weren't comfortable with the idea of snuba, the crew offered a snorkel –only price as well. They also had their own videographer. For \$75, you can get a DVD of your snuba experience. I can't wait to see how I look in a wet suit, er, I mean how skillful we all were underwater.

Dan and his entire crew are so friendly, humorous and genuinely interested in making sure you have a fun, safe and rewarding experience. They also serve you a light breakfast (they take off at 7am) and offer deli sandwiches and a cold beer at the end of the day. I consider this activity a must-do and the reputation of Aqua Adventures is the best. For more information and pricing, visit www.mauisnorkelsnuba.com.

Now that we have participated in some physical activity, I must tell you about one other dining experience we had in Maui. We discovered a well-established French Restaurant just north of the harbor en route to Lahaina. Chez Paul's is the oldest French Restaurant in the Pacific. Established in 1968, owner, and Chef de Cuisine, Patrick Callarec, combines French cuisine with an Island-style flair, offering French staples such as Foie Gras and Vichyssoise. However, dishes like Rack of Colorado lamb are accompanied with a paniolo marinade and exotic fruits chutney. And the traditional crème brulee dessert is served in a hollowed out pineapple. A night out at Chez Paul's is a real treat and a wonderful alternative to traditional Hawaiian style food.

Since we indulged in a marvelously rich dinner, we opted to begin our day out on the water again, and met with our Maui Cultural Host, Vene Chun, and his assistant, Hoku.

Their vessel – a six person outrigger canoe. The beauty of this experience is it is offered to Kea Lani guests as a complimentary service, and it was 100 steps from our villa's patio.

Vene and Hoku begin the Hawaiian canoe experience with native chants and blowing the sea conch in all four directions. They demonstrate how two Hawaiian warriors greet each other, preen their metaphoric feathers and ultimately become one by pressing their foreheads together. The history of the canoe and its importance to Hawaiian heritage is explained to the newbies (us), as is basic paddling techniques and what various chants mean.

We're ready to push off and climb in the outrigger. After a few minutes, we're above an active reef where the water is so clear you can see life just below the surface. Vene commands us to “Hoe” and we begin paddling again. His young sidekick narrates the history of the islands, and points out one island that seems less vibrant than the others. According to Hoku, during WWII, the island's soul was broken, its natural aura,



photo by Michael Villalpando

Our cultural guide Vene, left, and his assistant Hoku, took our family on a wild ride aboard this outrigger canoe, a complimentary service provided by the Fairmont Kea Lani. Emily and Rebecca quickly adapted to Hawaiian lifestyle and gave us a “chakra” or Hawaiian thumbs up.

due to the repeated bombings, and vegetation does not grow anymore. Native Hawaiians hope for the renewed health of the island, and pray for its return to glory. Even at 19, Hoku was emotional as he related the story as told to him by his grandfather, and I couldn't help but feel guilty and embarrassed about actions our country took all those years ago.

Suddenly, the mood changed as Hoku let out a Hawaiian shout of joy and jumped into the open sea. He invited all of us to do the same, and we immediately jumped ship. “Ahh, the cool water,” I thought, “isn't this great?” Then reality set in as I had no idea how I was going to get back into the canoe. Luckily, we were far enough from shore so no one else could see my graceful climb back into the canoe. Michael nearly pulled my arm from the socket, as my two Hawaiian canoe guides lent their muscular thighs as a launch pad. My two daughters were in stitches as they proudly proclaimed, “you looked like a walrus!” Thanks, girls.

Of course Michael's return to the canoe was just as anticipated. He had to prove his strength to the chiseled, young men, and get back to his seat in one fluid motion. I'm proud to say he got a chakra from Vene – a Hawaiian thumbs up – and we were off again, paddling back to shore.

After that exhilarating morning, I was ready for some relaxation, so Michael and I headed to the Spa Kea Lani where we enjoyed separate treatments. I experienced the Ala Lani sugar cane polish, which combines massage with a sugar exfoliation. First, the

therapist coats your skin in a rich body butter infused with essential oils, then applies the thick granulated sugar to exfoliate and energize your skin. My muscles were feeling the canoe experience beginning to set in and this was a much-needed indulgence. If you're looking for an alternative to traditional massage, this is a fabulous treatment.

Michael had the Lomi Lomi massage with Hawaiian bliss massage oils. They refer to this as the Hula massage, using long arm strokes and gentle stretching. The spa menu lists 35 different treatments, ensuring there's one that's just right for you.

Walking along the beach, catching the sunset, lounging by the pool. There are many ways and places to relax and unwind at the Kea Lani. We managed to experience them all and nearly perfected the task when suddenly it was time to leave. Our last evening at the Kea Lani was bitter sweet. We so enjoyed our villa, the hotel's spa, pool and beach, and the restaurants, yet our vacation wasn't over — we were headed to the big island. We would forever remember our Kea Lani experience and the friends we made at this fabulous resort.

Aloha, Wendy, Peter, Vene and Hoku. Until we see you again.

The Fairmont Kea Lani is located at 4100 Wailea Alanui, Wailea, Maui, Hawaii. (808)875-4100. Visit www.fairmont.com/kealani.

Next week: Golfing in Hawaii and Our Big Island Adventure.



photo by Michael Villalpando

Emily relaxes during our outrigger canoe excursion while Vene tells us about the reef-life below.

Fairmont Kea Lani

4100 Wailea Alanui, Maui, Hawaii
(808) 875-1200

Amenities and Services

- Spa Kea Lani: Open 7:30-8pm daily. Full spa services available.
- Fitness Center: Open 24 hours daily.
- Canoe Experience: Cultural recreational canoeing program offered daily
- Children's Programs: half, full day and evening programs available.
- Wailea Golf Club: Directly adjacent to the resort. 3 championship Robert Trent Jones designed courses.
- Tennis: 11 courts, 3 lit courts for night play

Restaurants and Bars:

- Nick's Fishmarket, Maui: Fresh fish
- Caffe Ciao Restaurant: Italian
- Caffe Ciao Bakery & Deli: Take out
- Kea Lani Restaurant: Outdoor breakfast
- Polo Beach Bar & Grill: Casual
- Lobby Bar: Open air cocktails

Private Dining

- Twilight Dinner: Pool-side cabana dining
- Hoku Lani: Beachfront dining under the stars
- Villa Barbeque: Villa courtyard dining