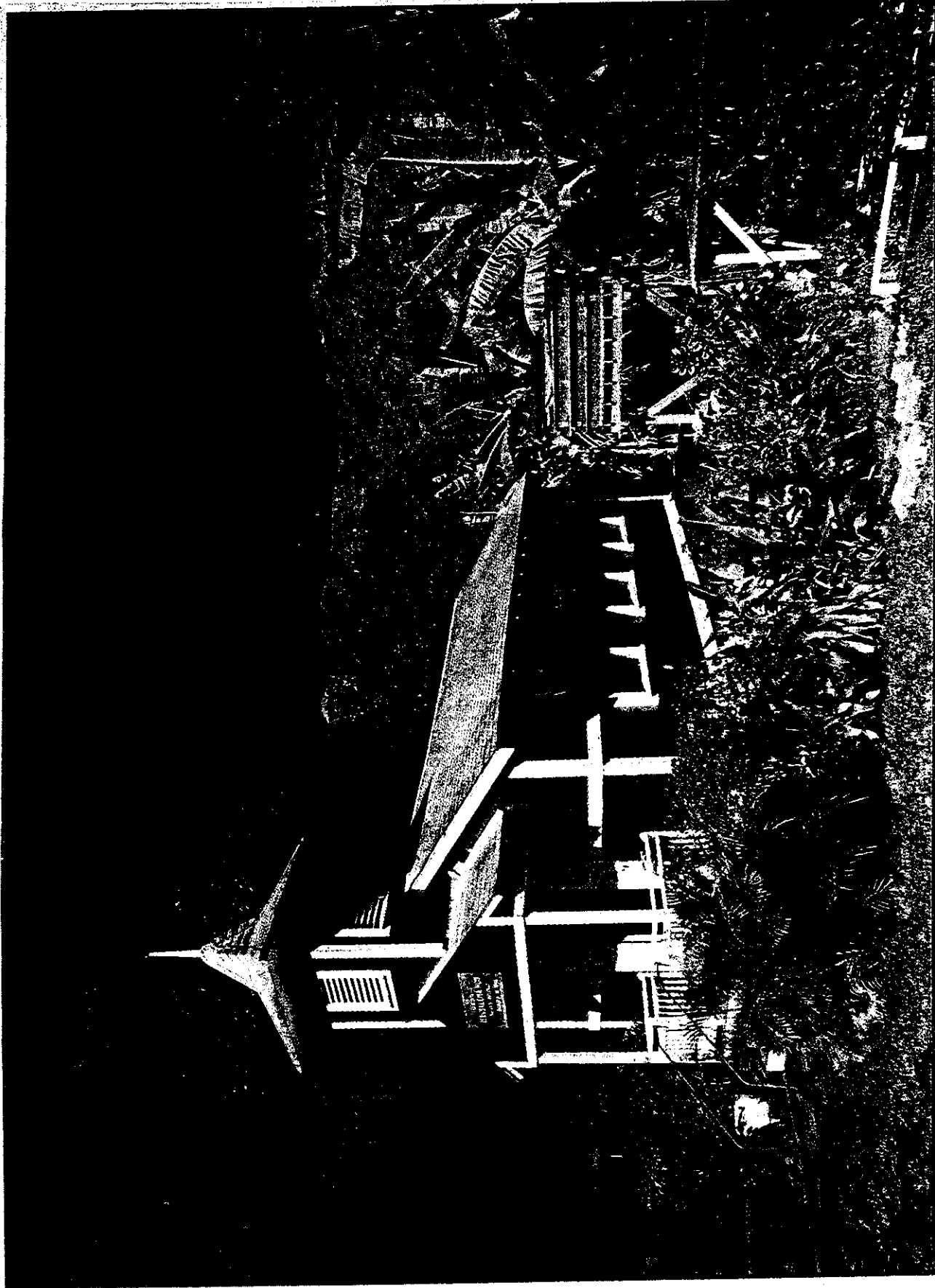


HAWAII



TRANQUILLITY: The modest Halawa Ierusalem Hou Church reflects the uncluttered spirit of Molokai, contrasting vividly with nearby, more developed Maui.

KARL LEHMANN Lonely Planet Images

TRANQUILLITY: The modest Halawa Ierusalema Hou Church reflects the uncluttered spirit of Molokai, contrasting vividly with nearby, more

Molokai likes it lonely

People of 'the last Hawaiian place' want controlled tourism, and they know the kind of visitor they prefer.

By BEVERLY BEYETTE
Times Staff Writer

HERE on the sleepest of the major Hawaiian islands — the one that calls itself the "Friendly Isle" — a sign on the door of Friendly Market Center says, "Aloha spirit required here. If you can't share it today, please visit us some other time. Mahalo."

It's not that this family-owned market in Kaunakakai's "downtown" — a three-block stretch of low wood-front buildings — doesn't want business. It just doesn't welcome certain mainlanders.

"The visitors have been getting more rude and demanding," said Crystal Egusa, one of the managers. "They push to the front of the line screaming and yelling because things are not going their way. One visitor made my cashier cry by belittling her. We don't need that kind of business."

Locals are fed up with people who come to Molokai to get away from it all, then grumble about lack of conveniences. "Wherever they come from, they're used to having everything then and there," she said.

Things don't work that way on Molokai, where Kaunakakai is the main town and the island's population of about 7,000 is stubbornly fighting to preserve its laid-back lifestyle.

Islanders point to their more glamorous neighbor Maui, just nine miles southeast across the Pailolo Channel, as the epitome of everything they don't want to become: an island where high-rise hotels and condos have sprouted like palm trees and Wal-Mart, Costco, KFC and the Hard Rock Cafe have arrived.

What Molokai does have is the tranquility of an unspoiled rural island with natural beauty — mountains and waterfalls and the lovely Halawa Valley. It can lay claim to being "the last Hawaiian place."

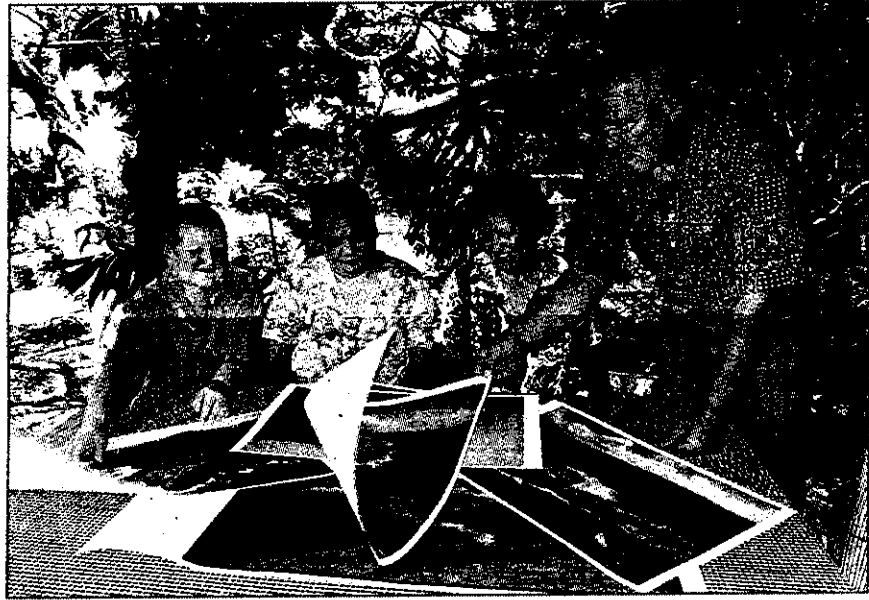
The island has only two hotels: the Polynesian-style, 54-room Hotel Molokai, which is decidedly less than deluxe and is partly a time share; and the upscale, 22-room Lodge at Molokai Ranch, which also operates a seaside camp of 40 rustic beachfront "tentalsows" on the island's west end.

So it's not surprising that Molokai attracts the fewest visitors to Hawaii, only 76,000 in 2006. Maui averages 2.2 million annually.

It's not that Molokai doesn't want tourism — it took an economic hit when the pineapple industry pulled out in the '80s — but, like the Friendly Market, it wants them on its own terms. And those don't include fancied-up faux luaus and other attractions staged for outsiders.

Indeed, last year the island, best known as home to Kalaupapa, the isolated former leper colony, adopted a responsible-tourism initiative based on community input. The goal is to develop a five-year plan that will increase jobs and small-business opportunities but at a level that's acceptable to residents, protective of natural resources and respectful of native Hawaiian culture.

Davianna Pomaikai McGregor, professor of ethnic studies at the University



BEVERLY BEYETTE Los Angeles Times

GROWTH: Cheryl Corbiell, left, and fellow islanders look over photos of an area targeted for development. Corbiell leads a panel on responsible tourism.



BEVERLY BEYETTE Los Angeles Times

OPPOSITION: Anti-development signs are posted on the island.

of Hawaii and a part-time Molokai resident, pinpointed the island's dilemma. "Tourism is declining so badly here," yet locals are "very stubborn, tenacious about their land" and more resistant than those on the other islands to outside influences.

"Some call it the 'not-so-friendly isle.' If you could separate tourism from sale of real estate, I think tourism would be more warmly embraced," McGregor said.

The islanders' widespread resentment is focused mostly on mainlanders, who have snapped up prime real estate and built vacation mansions. These newcomers, McGregor said, often have a "me-first, me-only" attitude that offends locals. "They come here to live in a rural community," then set about changing it to suit them.

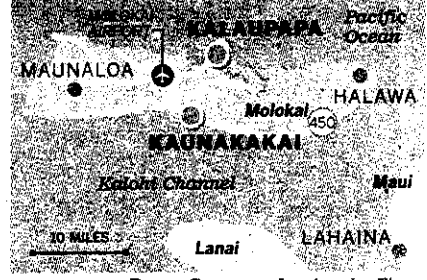
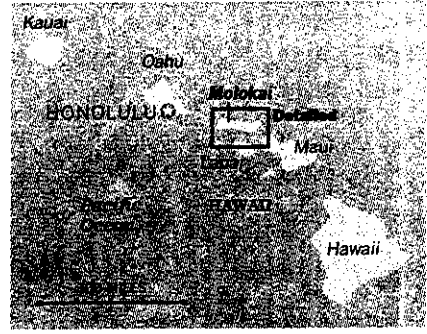
VALUING PEACE AND QUIET

Fairly or unfairly, island residents have earned a reputation as being against any change on the theory that saying no is always safer than saying yes. They said no to Holland America, which hoped to have the 1,266-passenger cruise ship Statendam call here in 2002 and 2003. Too much of a trade-off for too little benefit, islanders decided.

Cheryl Corbiell, a teacher who relocated here from the mainland, heads the responsible-tourism committee of the Molokai Enterprise Community. She's adamant that tourism policies be based not on what visitors want but on what residents are willing to share. "And we don't want them to go everywhere."

Snorkeling is fine — in certain places. Kayaking is good, but "we don't want a flotilla of 25 kayaks." Hiking? Sure, but not "roaming all over the hills" without guides, possibly disturbing sacred sites.

Ideal tourists, Corbiell said, value peace and quiet and "want a people ex-



DOUG STEVENS Los Angeles Times

perience, rubbing shoulders with locals in a local environment."

Although Molokai does not want tourism to be its No. 1 economic driver, it knows it needs to increase visitor numbers to improve its economy. Its tourism initiative emphasizes the importance of finding a balance where "sense of place is not overwhelmed by large-scale tourism," Corbiell said. "We want to share our authentic Hawaiian culture, not sell it."

Molokai can't market excitement — at least the man-made variety.

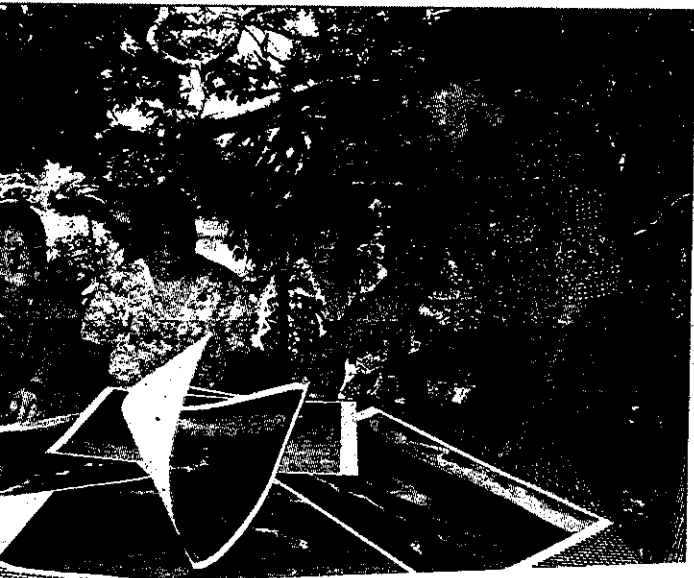
The island has no traffic lights. For a while, it had parking meters, but locals got those removed. The tallest building is two stories. Fancy restaurants and shopping malls? No, thank you.

Night life? That would be the bread run, nightly except Mondays, at 10:30 p.m. at Kanemitsu's Bakery in Kaunakakai, which has been in the same family for nine decades. Locals line up in the alley to get bread hot from the oven, slathered with jelly, butter or cream cheese.

Entertainment? Well, there's live music nightly at the Hula Shores restaurant at Hotel Molokai. On Friday nights, a group of "aunties" (mature women) performs.

Up at the Lodge at Molokai Ranch, there's hula Sunday nights and Hawaiian music Fridays and Saturdays. The Paddlers' Inn in Kaunakakai has live entertainment on its outdoor stage.

likes it lonely



Restaurant choices are few. The best beaches require a drive. Two of the prettiest are the three-mile stretch of white sand at Papohaku (which has treacherous currents and where swimmers are cautioned they could "become a part of the food chain") and Murphy's Beach at the 20-mile marker on the lush eastern shore.

Hotel Molokai fronts the ocean, but there is no sand beach and, as with much of the island's shoreline, the water is muddied by soil erosion.

But don't sell Molokai short. This is authentic Hawaii. The pace is slow and non-stressful. A dozen cars at an intersection is a traffic jam. Given the island's unspoiled beauty, it attracts those who enjoy outdoor activities, many of these family oriented.

Tourists "tell us, 'Don't change a thing,'" said Karen Holt, executive director of the Molokai Community Service Council.

Molokai's principal draw is Kalaupapa, the former leper colony where a few victims of Hansen's disease remain by choice, even though the disease has long been treatable.

This isolated peninsula, now a national historic park, can be reached by small plane, on foot or on a guided three-mile white-knuckle mule ride down a steep, serpentine trail. The settlement offers tours and has a museum and gift shop.

The less adventurous can get a spectacular view of the peninsula and its 1909 lighthouse from Kalaupapa Overlook in Palaau State Park at the end of Route 240.

Molokai also has two golf courses, sailing charters and scuba diving, as well as horseback riding with *paniolos* (cowboys) and is hoping to find a niche market for visitors who might appreciate such authentic experiences as making a net to go catch-and-release fishing, talking story" with the islanders or agritours" of taro patches and ancient shponds.

Harry and Kammy Purdy welcome visitors to Purdy's Natural Macadamia nuts, their 5-acre nut farm established in 1980. Coffees of Hawaii has mule-drawn wagon tours through the coffee fields, with a visit to the processing plant.

Most visitors are day-trippers or overnighters who have come to visit Kaunakakai. (Those coming by ferry from Maui to take the mule ride to Kalaupapa must stay overnight.) One goal is to increase the average length of stay to about three days. Proposed activities include stargazing (there are no bright stars to interfere) and historical walk-tours of Kaunakakai.

Visitors who are sensitive to local customs are welcome at local events such as the Molokai Ka Hula Piko Festival, a May celebration of Molokai as the birthplace of the hula, or at October's Molokai Hoe, a men's long-distance outrigger canoe race from Molokai to Oahu.

SHORELINE DRIVE

My idea of one perfect day on Molokai is to drive the 32 miles of Hawaii 450 from Kaunakakai to the Halawa Valley. The road is narrow and winding, hugs the shore and framed by tropical vegetation.

It passes St. Joseph's, a beautiful 19th-century white-frame chapel with the name of its founder, Father Damien, an Irish-born Belgian priest who ministered to the lepers until he succumbed to the disease.

Further along is Smith Bronte Landmark, notable as the site where the first

WHERE TO STAY

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See more of Molokai and its fierce
independent spirit in a photo
gallery at latimes.com/molokai