

Travel

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MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

led haven

Hawaiian
without
glitz,
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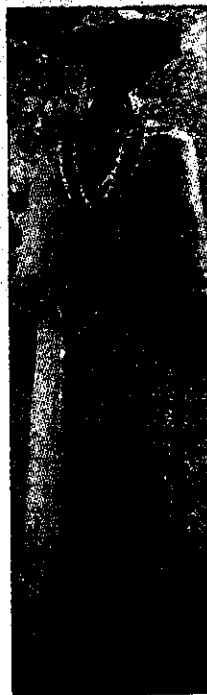
By **JANINE S. POULIOT**
Special to the Journal Sentinel

Molokai — If your idea of a Hawaiian vacation includes kitschy hula shows, Hawaiian shirt shops and wild-on night life, you won't want Molokai. Commercially undeveloped, Molokai is considered the most authentic island in the chain that makes up the state. There's virtually no tourist infrastructure to disturb the miles and miles of spectacular scenery.

Still today, visitors can detect a palpable sense of indigenous culture. You might even catch the native tongue spoken among its residents. Molokai is a quiet retreat that epitomizes the South Seas paradise that first sparked tourist interest.

Located between the popular vacation destinations of Oahu and Maui, Molokai retains its natural beauty. With a population of roughly 7,000 (compared to Oahu's nearly 1 million), it has the highest percentage of residents with Hawaiian blood — roughly 50%. It's a place where everyone knows your name. While I was waiting for the little prop plane that shuttles between Maui and Molokai, I overheard several locals strike up a conversation. They'd traveled to Maui for groceries (hard to come by on Molokai) and the first thing they asked one another was for the family name of their "people." And there seemed to be an immediate recognition.

For anyone who's read James Michener's novel "Hawaii," Molokai is best known as a former leper colony. Today, tourists can hike a short path through a fragrant iron-



The statue of Father Damien.

wood pine forest to Kalaupapa Overlook for a drop-dead gorgeous view of the 2½-mile peninsula that served as the leper settlement. Perched 1,500 feet above sea level, the lookout has signs and old photographs that explain the history of this stunning yet historically gloomy piece of real estate.



Before the late 1800s, Hawaiians traveled happily between the other islands and Molokai. But in 1866, in an attempt to stop the spread of leprosy, King Kamehameha V signed an act banishing advanced cases of the disease here. Having leprosy was cause for arrest and not looked upon with compassion. The first group of sick were literally tossed overboard near the shore, deserted with no food, medicine or materials for shelter.

It was a hellish community characterized by misery and death. Hawaiians came to dread the name Kalaupapa, and anyone dropped off here could truly abandon all hope.

In 1873, Father Damien, a 33-year-old Belgian priest, visited the peninsula and was so horrified by what he saw that he decided to devote his life to improving conditions for this wretched group. He built houses, schools and churches for the 11,000 sufferers. He later

Please see **MOLOKAI, 6H**

JANINE S. POULIOT PHOTOS

Once a leper colony, Molokai entices tourists with natural, serene scenery and native culture.

Purest Hawaiian Isle Unites With Maui

MOLOKAI, From 1H

contracted the disease and died in 1889, leaving behind a saintly legacy.

A cure for leprosy was discovered in the late 1940s and by 1969 the policy of isolation was eliminated. Kalaupapa Peninsula and overlook is now a National Historic Park. Remaining patients are granted the right to stay at the settlement for the rest of their lives.

The community is administered by the Hawaiian State Department of Health and has its own post office, library, fire station, store and landing field. Supplies are transported by barge and ferry. To protect the privacy of the afflicted, access to the community is restricted and special permission must be granted to enter.

Royal history

A main attraction on this pretty, peaceful island is Molokai Ranch, which occupies roughly one-third of the island. Sprawling over 54,000 acres, the working cattle ranch has a long and royal history. The first owner was the great chief Kapualwa, the future King Kamehameha V. During his reign, the king visited Molokai Ranch often, and after his death, the ranch was passed on to Princess Ruth and Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop.

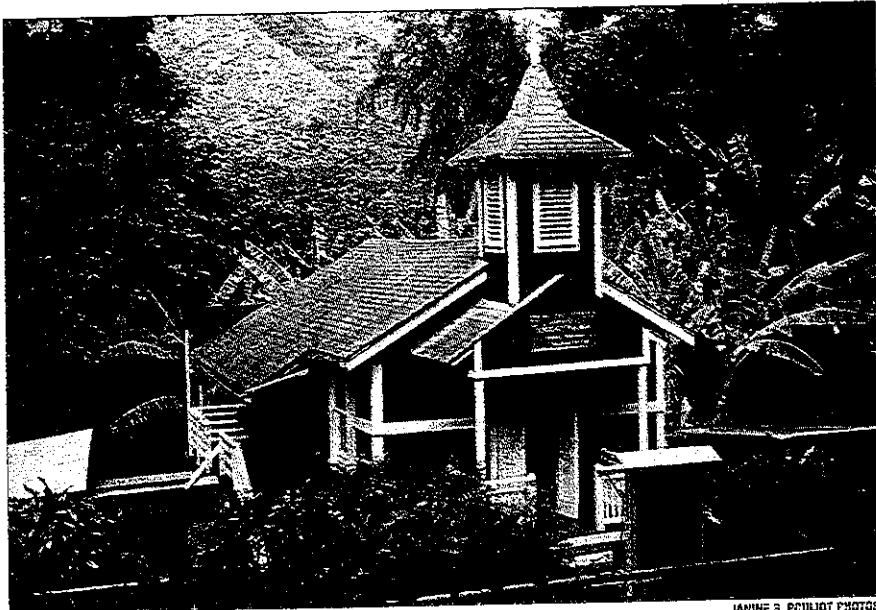
About a hundred years ago, Molokai Ranch was purchased by a group of Honolulu businessmen. Since then it has undergone various incarnations from a sugar plantation to honey producer to pineapple plantation. But its mainstay — cattle ranching — remained constant. Today there are 3,000 head roaming this vast terrain.

Sitting amid these holdings is the Molokai Lodge, one of the few places to stay on the island. The 22-room upscale inn is as ranchy as you can get, decorated with old saddles, rawhide chairs, antler lamps, skins on the floor and leather couches.

Sweeping vistas

On a stormy evening, I arrive wet and grumpy after a bumpy ride over from Maui. I walk into the lodge and am immediately engulfed by the warming smell of the huge stone fireplace and the sweet melody of traditional Hawaiian songs sung in the Great Room by a local performer.

The next morning I awake to



JANINE S. POULIOT PHOTOS

Though you won't find bustling resorts on Molokai, quaint spots such as this wood-frame church at the island's eastern tip can be just as intoxicating.



The 54,000-acre Molokai Ranch has undergone various incarnations, but the lush green foliage throughout the vast terrain has remained.

or and the rich smell of soil mixing with the perfume of landscaped gardens. Chirping birds are the only sound.

I feel like I'm in a time warp somewhere between the South Pacific and the American Southwest. My room is pure understated elegance with a handmade quilt for a bedspread, a claw foot tub, a thick terry robe and tons of

reinvented itself, this time as an eco-adventure resort. Pasture land provides the perfect terrain for horseback riding, mountain biking and hiking, and an activity center offers every imaginable excursion throughout the entire island. Trail rides visit ancient archaeological sites and skirt along the edge of the world's tallest sea cliffs.

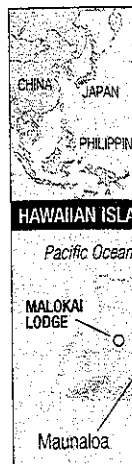
boy for a day, herding cattle and practicing riding skills in a corral. My husband goes for a guided group ride and returns breathless with excitement over helping to bring two stray doggies back into the fold.

There are also 125 miles of biking trails and a variety of experts on hand to lead organized treks or get you started on your own.

I, on the other hand, decide not to move a muscle and spend the afternoon lounging on my patio staring out at the amazing sweep of color and luxuriating in the tranquility. Out of a sense of guilt, however, I do manage a few laps in the infinity pool.

What's particularly interesting about Molokai Ranch is its effort to preserve the native culture. Local Charles Aki, raised by his grandfather and Hawaiian grandmother, is an expert on indigenous history and leads cultural hikes to ancient sacred sites. Others at the ranch teach traditional skills such as throw-net fishing and crafts.

Eight miles from the lodge is the ranch's beach and a small city of what's called tentalows — tents on raised platforms with solar-powered electricity and semi-private, environmentally friendly



cue. It's dark and tiki torches flicker in the balmy breeze, the ranch's own string quartet plays a grill, locals sing and the surf crashes against the background. It's a mantic setting.

More than a scene

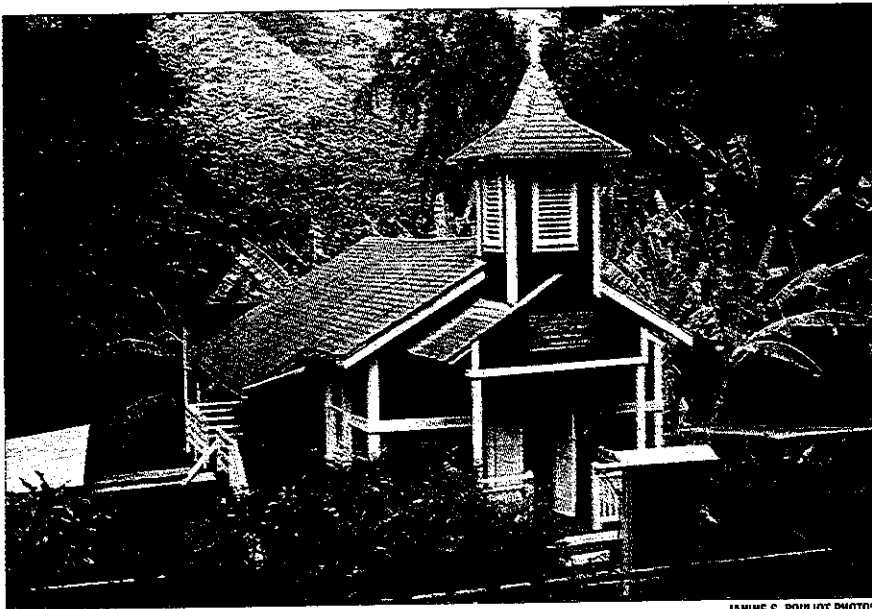
The other side of Molokai is only a road across to the east and is got to be one of the most breathtaking of photographers' from the ranch's edge, the flat dry plains the topography lush green tropical foliage

The lack of obvious developments are just fact, some are ing off the land and fishing are a few fields and on stores. Everything

Beaches do 1 waters around dangerously 1 ming is often Around the 20 ever, the surf 1 sserted coves a dipping. Just jump in.

Before start

Hawaiian isle thrills with nature, serenity



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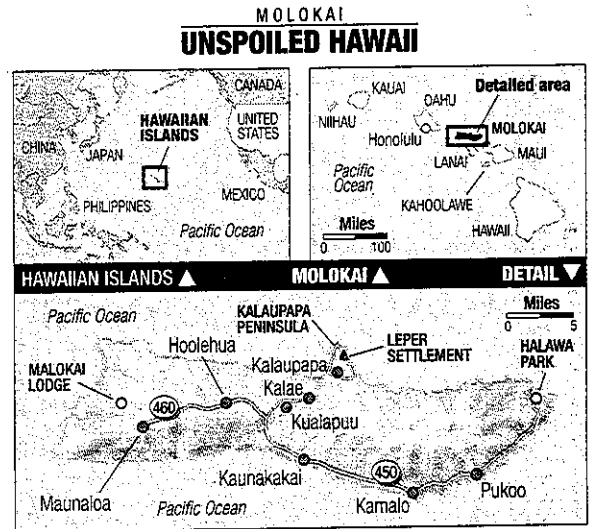
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JOHN PINCHARD/Journal Sentinel

cue. It's dark when I arrive and tiki torches flicker gently in the balmy breeze, steaks from the ranch's own stock sizzle on the grill, locals sing Hawaiian ballads and the surf crashes gently in the background. It's an incredibly romantic setting.

More than a scenic drive

The other spectacular activity on Molokai is the drive on its only road across the island heading to the eastern tip. This has got to be one of America's most breathtaking coastal trips and a photographer's dream. Traveling from the ranch set on the western edge, the landscape at first is flat dry plains. But moving east, the topography slowly changes to lush green mountains and wild tropical foliage.

The lack of development becomes obvious, and many residents are just fine with that. In fact, some are self-sustaining, living off the land, hunting, gardening and fishing. Along the road are a few simple homes, some fields and one or two general stores. Everything else is natural.

Beaches do line the way, but the waters around Molokai can be dangerously rough, and swimming is often not recommended. Around the 20-mile marker, however, the surf calms down and deserted coves are generally fine for dipping. Just pull-over, park and jump in.

Before starting out, make sure

stops and slow speeds). You won't find provisions along the way. And be prepared for winding switchbacks and spots where the road narrows to one lane. But what you see is well worth overcoming any uncertainty.

End of the road

The scenery really kicks it up a notch about eight miles before the end of the road. Soaring sea cliffs are juxtaposed against crashing surf. Waterfalls pour out of lush green, undulating mountains, tops shrouded by misty clouds. Moist rain forest is thick with huge banana leaves, hanging plants, brilliant flowers. It's the kind of territory you'd think accessible only by helicopter.

At the end of the road at Halawa Park is a picturesque, brightly colored, tiny wood-frame church tucked in among the palms, with those amazing mountains as backdrop. It's a great spot to get out and explore. There's also one of the few public restrooms on the road. Another of Molokai's winsome little churches built by Father Damien is the one-room St. Joseph's in Kamalo, located about halfway along the road. Guests are welcome to step inside. Outside, a statue honoring Father Damien is always draped with flower leis.

For another glimpse of history, the little Molokai Museum and Cultural Center has a functioning restored 1878 sugar mill, the last of its kind in Hawaii. You can see

Copy skills need improvement!