

Laid-back Hawaiian island a bucolic gem

MOLOKAI

By Zeke Wigglesworth
KNIGHT RIDDER NEWSPAPERS

K MOLOKAI, HAWAII AUNAKAKAI, which passes as the metropolis on this backwater island, is getting way too big. Just the other day, a guy in a pickup truck had to wait at least 20 seconds for oncoming cars to pass before he could turn left. There was a line (two people) at the Bank of Hawaii ATM. Six cars were waiting to get gasoline at Misaki's service station. Most of the tables in the Kanemitsu Bakery were full of breakfast diners — you had to sit maybe 15 minutes before placing your order.

As urban expansion goes, the pace in Kaunakakai is positively glacial. The whole island of Molokai — 261 square miles — has maybe 7,000 residents.

Molokai is the most rural and laid-back of all the Hawaiian Islands open to visitors, and the folks who live here want to keep it that way, despite 10-15 percent unemployment, high prices and a lack of major urban services.

They don't seem to have too many cares, but one big worry they live with is the knowledge that Molokai is part



A YOUNG VISITOR gets a bit of island culture at Molokai Ranch.

of Maui County. They would very much like to form their own county, but state legislators don't pay much attention.

The way the islanders figure it, they're way too close to civilization as it is: Molokai is 25 miles southeast of Oahu, and only 8 miles across the Pailolo Channel from Maui. And the

See MOLOKAI, Page 5

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above, are a sight to behold. Mountain biking, right, and horseback riding fulfill the needs of active types.