

# The Sea Cliffs of Molokai

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*Essay by Lysbeth Bledsoe ♦ Photograph by Tom Till*

Slipper-shaped Molokai, 38 miles long and 10 miles wide, is both the smallest of the five major Hawaiian Islands and the most Hawaiian, with more ancient archaeological sites than any of the other islands. In addition, the hula was born here, as was early aquaculture, in the form of fish ponds located on the south coast. ♦ But Molokai is not just culturally unique, it claims topographic wonders as well. The world's highest sea cliffs, higher than a 300-story skyscraper, loom for 14 miles along the island's north coast. From the south, Molokai's landscape rises from sea level to the 4970-foot summit of Mount Kamakou before ending suddenly in verdant

greenery-clad cliffs plunging more than 3200 feet into the Pacific. Along their flanks are sparkling waterfalls, and at their feet are five isolated valleys—Wailau, Halawa, Papalaua, Pelekunu, and Waikolu. ♦ While marveling at the sea cliffs is easy, getting close enough to inspect them is more difficult. In summer, when the Pacific is relatively calm, boat trips are available. But at other times of the year, determined visitors must take a 10-mile hike through Wailau Valley or a 2.9-mile mule ride to Kalaupapa, a flat peninsula protruding like a tongue from the middle of the north coast and site of Molokai's famous leper colony.



PHOTOGRAPH BY TOM TILL

On the north coast of the Hawaiian Island of Molokai rise the world's tallest sea cliffs, soaring more than 3200 feet.

