

TRAVEL

Molokai

FROM PAGE 1

last thing Molokaians want is to have their bucolic island turn into another Maui or — God forbid — Honolulu.

How bucolic is it?

There's one resort, a golf course and a half. One major east-west highway (two lanes). Two airports: one small, one tiny. One movie theater (20 miles from Kaunakakai). One major tourist attraction (the Kaulapapa Peninsula). A handful of restaurants.

Fully one-third of the island is comprised of the 130-year-old Molokai Ranch — which operates a multi-use, high-end dude ranch with one of the nicest lodges in the state. (The ranch is one of the few reasons most people think about a vacation on Molokai. See accompanying article.)

Because of the lack of normal touristy things to do and the very slow pace of life here, a visit to Molokai is not for everyone.

What you have here, in fact, is something about as far removed from the urban scramble of Lahaina and the sad urban sprawl of Waikiki as you can get and still be in the same state.

One of the island's tourism officials put it this way: "People come to Molokai to do nothing."

This is not to say that Molokai is without its lures — especially for active types who like outdoor activities, especially mountain biking and horses.

You've probably read about that mythical, miles-long deserted tropical beach, hidden someplace in the South Pacific? Say howdy to Papohaku State Park on Molokai's west end. White sand, three miles long, sunny — nobody around — and it's free.

Many beaches on Molokai, in all honesty, are not good for swimming, especially in the winter. But what they lack in swimability, they more than make up for in ambience.

Food? Get to Kanemitsu's before 11 a.m. every day, and have pastry and coffee or chow down on a solid breakfast: One local favorite is Spam (fried) or Portugese sausage, with eggs over easy, rice and toast, maybe \$5. Haute cuisine? Nah. Good chow? Sure.

Or for dinner, head to where the natives go in Kaunakakai: Oviedo's, a Filipino cafe that specializes in adobos (stews) with traditional spices and sauces.

You like sweet? Suck up a chocolate macadamia nut cheesecake at the Kualapuu Cookhouse in Kualapuu (east of Kanaukakai on the Kaulapapa road). Upscale? The



THE GREAT ROOM of the lodge at Molokai Ranch offers ample opportunity for reading or relaxation.

IF YOU GO

■ **INFORMATION:** Reservations and information are available toll free at 877-726-4656; on the Internet, <http://molokai-ranch.com>.

■ **AIR TRAVEL:** Flights from Honolulu or other islands will be in the \$100-\$125 range. There are a number of daily flights on several carriers; it's wise to book in advance, especially if you're going to or from Honolulu on Friday or the weekend.

restaurant at the Molokai Ranch Lodge. Picnic? There's a good deli in Kaunakakai.

About that major tourist attraction:

Kaulapapa sits on a peninsula below the towering sea cliffs on Molokai's north shore (at 3,000 feet or so, the tallest such cliffs in the world).

The peninsula was infamous as the dumping ground for people suffering from Hansen's Disease — leprosy. Ships would come close to the peninsula and throw the hapless lepers overboard. If they didn't drown, they ended up in one of the cruelest settlements on earth where starvation and slow death were constant.

There are less than 50 patients left in the settlement (the disease is now treatable), and what happens when they leave or die is anybody's

guess. The National Park Service would like to take it over (it's a national historic monument at the moment). The locals suspect somebody will turn it into a golf course.

Getting to the settlement is usually a hike — or a mule ride — down a cliffhanger trail that drops about 1,700 feet. Not the Na Pali Coast of Kauai, but a close second. You can also fly in on small aircraft.

Then there's Halawa.

Most Hawaiian islands have at least one "good drive," such as the road to Hana on Maui, the drive up to the top of Waimea Canyon on Kauai, or the Saddle Road on the Big Island.

On Molokai, it's the trek out to the Halawa Valley and the island's extreme eastern end. It's close to being as curvy and laborious as the road to Hana, but most days it lacks the bumper-to-bumper traffic that makes the Hana drive a pain.

At the end, there is the valley, with its famous waterfall and views of the Molokai coast. Sadly, you can't hike into the falls any more without a guide — insurance problems and such. Road's end is not a bad place for a picnic, however.

And that's about it, excitement-wise. Hike, bike, golf, lie around, maybe kayak. After a few days puttering around Molokai, there are not many things you're going to miss: Crowds, mostly. And sirens. And horns honking. And neon. And traffic lights. And smog.

Molokai? That's civilization, folks.