

| TRAVEL DIARY |

A VISIT TO THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

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PHOTOS: COURTESY



Waianapanapa State Park

The island state of Hawai'i has been called a paradise in this world. Its multifarious scenic beauty, magnificent beaches, active volcanoes, flora-fauna, and its vast distance from nearest land, have made it a very attractive spot to visit. With its admission to the United States of America as its 50th state on August 21st, 1959, it is the only State with an Asian plurality – with many of its inhabitants whose roots can be traced to Philippines, China, and Japan. Of extreme historical significance was the attack on Hawai'i by the Japanese that prompted the USA to enter the ongoing Second World War. I always wondered how this State was and I wanted to see for myself this land, with stories abounding. I had the opportunity in July 2016 to visit this Archipelago State along with my son and his family.

On an early Texas summer morning, we boarded a Los Angeles (LA)-bound United Airlines flight. The Hawaiian Islands are located about 2500 miles from Los Angeles and 5500 miles from Philippines, entirely surrounded by the Pacific Ocean. Before departure from Austin, my son had made all necessary arrangements: hotel reservation and a rental a car from Maui airport for the entire period of our stay in Maui and another one for the Big Island (Hawai'i).

He reserved a suite of two bedrooms with half kitchen on the 5th floor (5004) in the Marriott Vacation Club situated on the Pacific Ocean beach. This Vacation Resort Suite had a beautiful view of the ocean on one side and very tall mountains on the other side. It also had several swimming pools decorated with gardens of beautiful flowers and waterfalls. Visitors/tourists enjoyed the pool by lying on the beach chairs having a view of the Ocean with roaring sound of waves crushing on their feet.

26th June-2016 - Next morning, about 8:30 am we got ready and started for a drive on the Road to Hana. We had rented a SUV for our stay. The Road to Hana has been written about as the world's most beautiful drive – road carved on high mountain rising directly out of the Pacific Ocean thousands of feet from the ocean-level, where you find all the waterfalls, fresh water pools, bamboo and rainforest, and, of course, the ocean on the other side. It was a zig-zag road and the driving speed was between 20 and 30 mph, and sometimes 10 mph. At the end of the road, pioneering American aviator, Charles Lindbergh, is buried, on the grounds of Palapala Ho'omau Church. His wife worked in this area for many years and Charles fell in love with this place as well. As he was dying of cancer of the



Haleakala crater

lymphatic system at the age of 72, he was urged to stay in New York for his final days and receive treatment, and he famously said, "I would rather live one day in Maui than one month in New York." Such is the charm of Maui.

27th June-2016 - We went out early for a drive to Haleakala Summit in the Haleakala National Park, established in

July 1961, with a total of 52 sq miles. This National Park houses the Haleakala volcano and has the cinder cones at about 9000ft and the accompanying caldera from the eruptions before. The summit is at 10023 ft and you can drive to the Visitors' Center at 9740 feet – you have to climb the remaining few feet to the summit, on a walkway. We reached there

| TRAVEL DIARY |

mid-day and it was foggy. But, the strong wind and the spectacular view of the caldera along with the black lava gave us a view of mother nature, which was unforeseen by us. At this height, we have seen the endangered Silversword plant, some in full bloom, which are only found in the island of Maui and only at this altitude.

On our way to the Haleakala Summit, we stopped and took pictures of the spectacular views and ourselves, being amazed at the nature all around us. But, coincidentally, we were fortunate enough to come across the indomitable human spirit, another beautiful aspect of nature as well. As we stopped on a viewing point around 5000 feet, we came across a bicyclist who was cycling up all the way to the summit. As we said 'Hello' to him and appreciated his indomitable effort, we came to know that his name was Peter and he was visiting from Canada and carried his bicycle with him during his trip to Hawai'i. We asked Peter if he needed anything and he asked us if we had any water in water-bottles. We were carrying water bottles with us and my son happily gave him as many as he needed. Interestingly enough, Peter asked if he could pay us for the water, and we definitely said, "Not at all." We were happy to be able to be a part, however small, of his spectacular endeavor to climb this mountain on his bicycle. As we were descending on the curves after visiting the summit, we met Peter again at 8000 feet, still cycling up. We stopped the car and asked him as to how he was doing. Peter was still in good spirits and asked us if it was raining at the higher altitude, which would make his ascent difficult. It was not raining up above and we told him so. It is this glorious human spirit, akin to Peter's predecessors, such as, Edmund Hillary, Charles Lindbergh, Ernest Shackleton, or modern day Steve Fossett, to overcome a seemingly

insurmountable hurdle, which we will remember for a long time. To me, Peter's spirit, often overlooked, soared higher than the 10023 feet he was climbing.

Maui is famous for its very tasteful sugarcane and golden pineapple. The once-famous sugar factory, Hawaiian Commercial and Sugar Company, in Maui was closing down a few months after our visit, after operating for many years, losing out on competition from mainland. Local news reports on TV showed concerns of about 300+ workers who would be laid off by the closing. Working in the factory was their only trade and they were very worried as to how they would support their families. Human and social challenges exist everywhere there is a

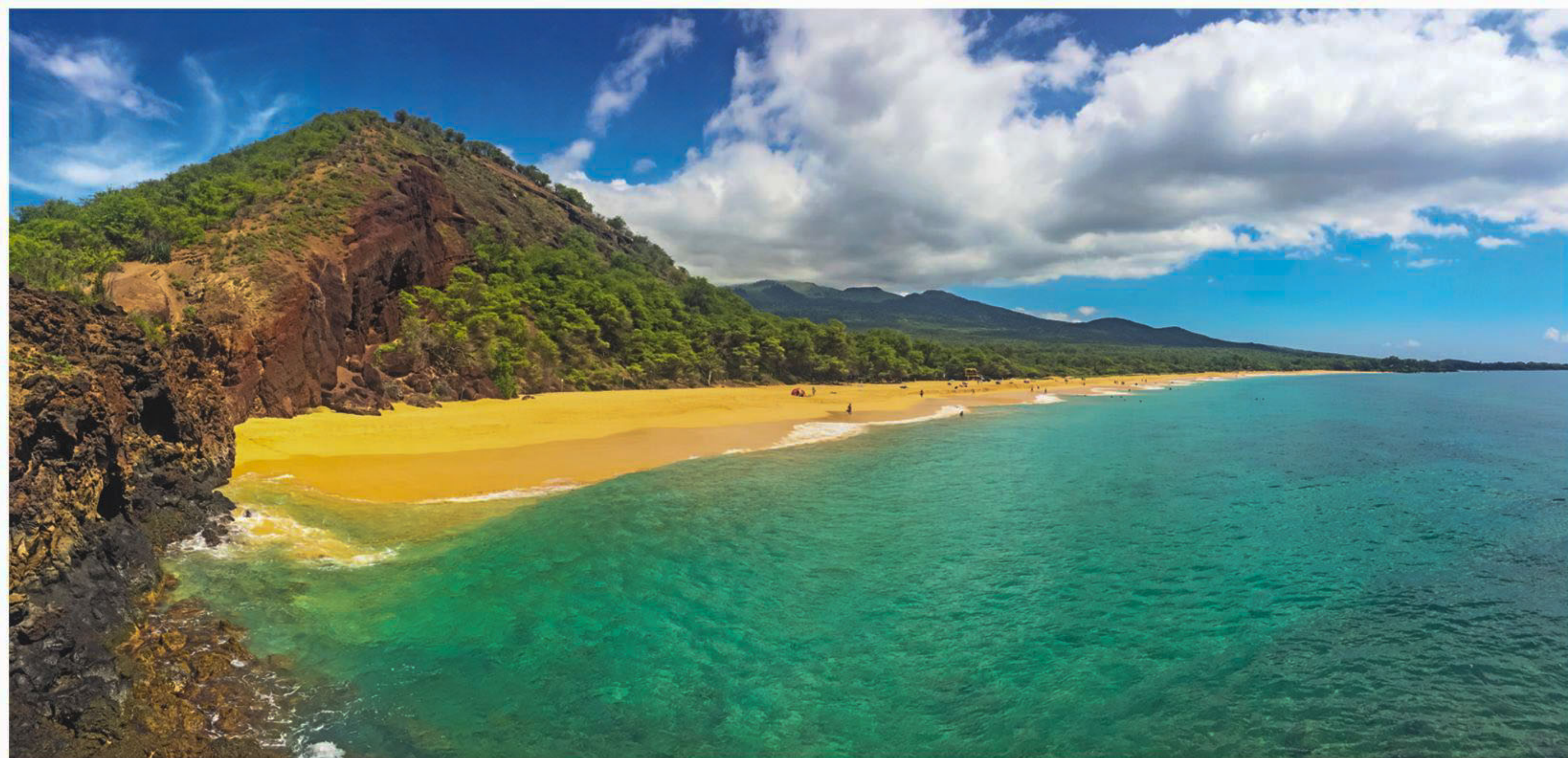
society – sometimes, it is just not visible when you are visiting a beautiful place as a tourist.

29th June-2016 - We left Maui for The Big Island (also known as Hawai'i Island). The Big Island is the biggest of the Hawaiian Islands and, therefore, so named. It hosts the Volcanoes National Park with an area of 505 sq miles, which is established in August, 1916. So, we were visiting the island (and the park) during the centennial celebrations of the Park. From the airport, we went straight to the Hilo Hawaiian hotel about 10 minute drives, situated at 71 Banyan Drive. The Banyan Drive lives up to its name – the whole road was lined by century-old banyan trees on both sides, which



Fruit sellers in Hawaiian farmer's market.

Below: Maui Makena Big Beach, Hawaii.



reminded me of a small section of road from Jhenaidah to Jessore. These trees were planted in the early-mid twentieth century by many luminaries. The plaque at the bottom of each tree identifies the person who has planted the tree and the year. Some of the very prominent people who planted, were: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, Amelia Earhart.

30th June-2016 - We went out to see the famous Hawai volcanoes in the National Park. From the main viewing area of the Park, we did see the volcano mouth and the hot lava inside with blue smoke coming out, during the day. After dark, you can see the glow of the lava and the plume – a spectacular view into the core of our Earth. The center of the crater has been kept closed to the public as high amounts of sulfur dioxide gas maybe present in this area of the park which is dangerous to human life.

1st July-2016 - From the hotel we went to see the Black Beach and Kona City. There are many many viewing spots on the road. Of particular interest on this highway is the Punalu'u Black Sand Beach. None of us in our traveling group had seen a black beach before. After getting down, we realised that the black color of the beach came from the black sand-like volcanic ash, which have accumulated over the years, and the wave patterns and the beach-head have caused the accumulation. This sand is little bigger in size than the ordinary sand and it is neat, clean and comfortable to walk on these.

Even though inclusion into the United States and getting statehood was not smooth, two facts remain historically true about the Hawaiian Islands. One, 2403 Americans were killed and 1178 others were wounded during the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Royal Japanese Navy on December 7, 1941; two, President Barack Obama was born in Hawai, the first US President to have been born outside the continental USA. ■