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Hawaii's Road to Hana

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The road to Hawaii's heavenly Hana Town is long, windy and sometimes backwards, but the journey is one you'll never forget, writes Phoebe Tilelli...

When visiting Hawaii most travellers' go-to destination is the island of Oahu for the tourist strip of Waikiki. Great for beaches, shopping, hotels, and restaurants, this area has everything you need. Unless you're looking for peace and quiet. That is a little harder to find. Something that most people don't realise is that the island of Maui, just a stone's throw away, offers a slower paced retreat. In fact, Maui's East Coast is home to what many refer to as 'the land that time forgot,' or Hana town.

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Picture yourself cruising along the highway, top down, the sweet smell of sugarcane in the breeze. I bring to you the ultimate summer road trip. Think Great Ocean Road but with more palm trees and ukuleles playing on the radio. The Hana highway is 109 kilometres of ocean views and lush rainforest that connects Kahului and Hana town. The highway was originally built in 1926 for sugar plantation workers but is now a must-see for anyone who visits the island.

That being said, the road can get busy with a steady flow of rental cars so it's best to leave early. Many opt for the tour buses and leave the driving to the experts because the highway isn't exactly straight forward. If you decide to brave the steering wheel, be sure not to miss your morning coffee because along the way you will come across 59 bridges, and approximately 620 curves on this winding highway. You can understand why people say the journey to Hana can bring you closer to heaven in more than one way. On the flip side, it also means that you can take your time and make stops at your own pace.

From Kahului it takes about two and a half hours to drive to Hana when no stops are made, but the stops are what make this trip so special. The road to Hana is just as much about the journey as it is the destination. Hiding along this highway you can find waterfalls, gardens and picture perfect picnic spots, often with no one else around. Be sure to pack a camera, good walking shoes, swimsuit and snacks because you never know what you might come across. The highway is dotted with 'mile markers', which will help to indicate where some of these great pit stops are. Take note that the mile markers don't always go chronologically as you would expect. Once they get to #16 they start from the beginning again. Also, after Hana Town, they jump to #51 then go backwards.

Paia town is the last place to grab brekkie and a coffee, before you head off. It is also possible to pick up a Hana CD guide, which points out things to do and see as you go. Personally I prefer to crank the radio for optimum cruising conditions, so if you're like me and can't hear anything over your own singing, a CD guide might not be the way to go. To avoid listening out for the pit stops, here is my **top five for the Hana drive**.



Mile Marker #2 is the home of Twin Falls in Ho'olawa Valley. If you're already feeling the Hawaiian heat it's the perfect place for a dip under one of the fresh water pools. The lower falls are picturesque and often over looked by hikers who are keen to get to the Caveman Falls that are larger. If you're planning on making the 20 minute walk to the top be sure to leave the new pink Nikes at home and wear some practical shoes because you'll be lucky if you keep your toes dry. Slowly make your way up the uneven, muddy path and through a couple of trickling streams. As you get closer you will hear the gushing water and see glimpses of the large pool through the trees. It looks like a scene out of *Fern Gully* with local kids playing on a rope swing and a cave behind the falls covered in hanging ferns. Live out your *Blue Lagoon* fantasy and take a dip, but don't be surprised if you don't have the place to yourself. This is a favourite stop for most Hana goers.

On the way out don't forget to visit the Twin Falls farm stand. This little shack has been open since 1997 juicing up to 225 kilos of sugarcane a week and serving their sweet treats to the lucky ones who stop at Twin Falls. If you're in the passenger seat grab a coconut and kick back until the next stop.



Mile Marker #10 is the Garden of Eden Arboretum. The \$15 USD entry fee goes toward the maintenance of this beautiful garden. With its 100 year old mango tree, duck pond and well groomed nature trails you can see that the money provides a lot of TLC for this tranquil slice of paradise. Wander the 25 acres of peaceful grounds and enjoy the panoramic views of the ocean and a rainbow of Hawaiian native plant species. If you're feeling a sense of déjà vu you might find that you recognise the garden from when it was shot for the opening scene of *Jurassic Park*. As you leave, looking over your shoulder to check for dinosaurs, jump back in the car and be on the look out for your next stop.



Mile Marker #17 is the half way to Hana stand. Congratulations, you've made it this far, so treat yourself to the best banana bread on the whole Hana highway. The perfect snack to keep you going until your next stop where you will find the perfect highway lunch.

At Mile Marker #29 you can forget service station meat pies and stale sandwiches. Here at Nahiku market place you will find the best Kalua pork tacos in Maui. Kalua is a Hawaiian cooking method where the meat is wrapped in taro leaves and cooked in an underground oven. Now when I say market place it probably won't look like what you're imagining. There are only about four little stands side by side on the edge of the highway but look out for the taco sign painted on a big red surfboard and you won't miss it. This is also a cute place to pick up hand made souvenirs for friends at home. You can even get a hat woven for you while you watch!



Mile Marker #32 is Wai'anapanapa state park and my favourite stop off for the trip. I would recommend spending a decent amount of time here as it's a great opportunity to stretch the legs, swim at Pa'iole the black sand beach and explore the truly unique landscape. The black pebbles and large arch form protruding from the ocean at this beach was formed by lava. The trail that leads along the coast line is carved in between these jagged black rocks and bright green foliage making for an amazing colour contrast and great photo opportunity.

Follow the labyrinth cut through Hau grove. The winding dirt track will have you ducking under low hanging branches and weaving through the trees but keep your eyes peeled because you might see some secret caves hidden along the trail. The Wai'anapanapa state park's name means 'glistening water' or 'water flashing rainbow hues'. This is because within the caves are pools which have fresh water floating above salt water where people swim today. However, legend has it

that these same caves were the scene of a chilling murder. The wife of a chief once used these caves to hide from her husband's cruel wrath. Unfortunately the chief saw her reflection in the water, captured her and put her to death in the darkness of the cave. Now every spring, on what the Hawaiians call the night of Ku, the anniversary of her death is marked by the red shrimp that cover the cave floors. The bright red hue in the water is a reminder of the blood once shed here. Don't be deterred by the legend, though. You will most likely find that the water glitters silver due to the volcanic rock within the cave rather than glowing blood red.



Now you'll be on the road again and hitting the highway for the last time. After a long day you will finally reach Mile Marker #34 Hana town. Many visitors rush through Hana trying to tick all the tourist boxes before heading back on the road. I would recommend staying a night to give yourself a chance to really take in what Hana has to offer. You deserve to relax after a jam-packed day of driving and hiking. Most people don't realise that Hana is rich in history and is one place that you can really enjoy Hawaiian time and go with the flow of things. Take a stroll through the bamboo forest, read your book on the beach and visit the Hana cultural center. Enjoy the lovely restaurants, resort and do as the Hawaiians do in heavenly Hana. Hang Loose.

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