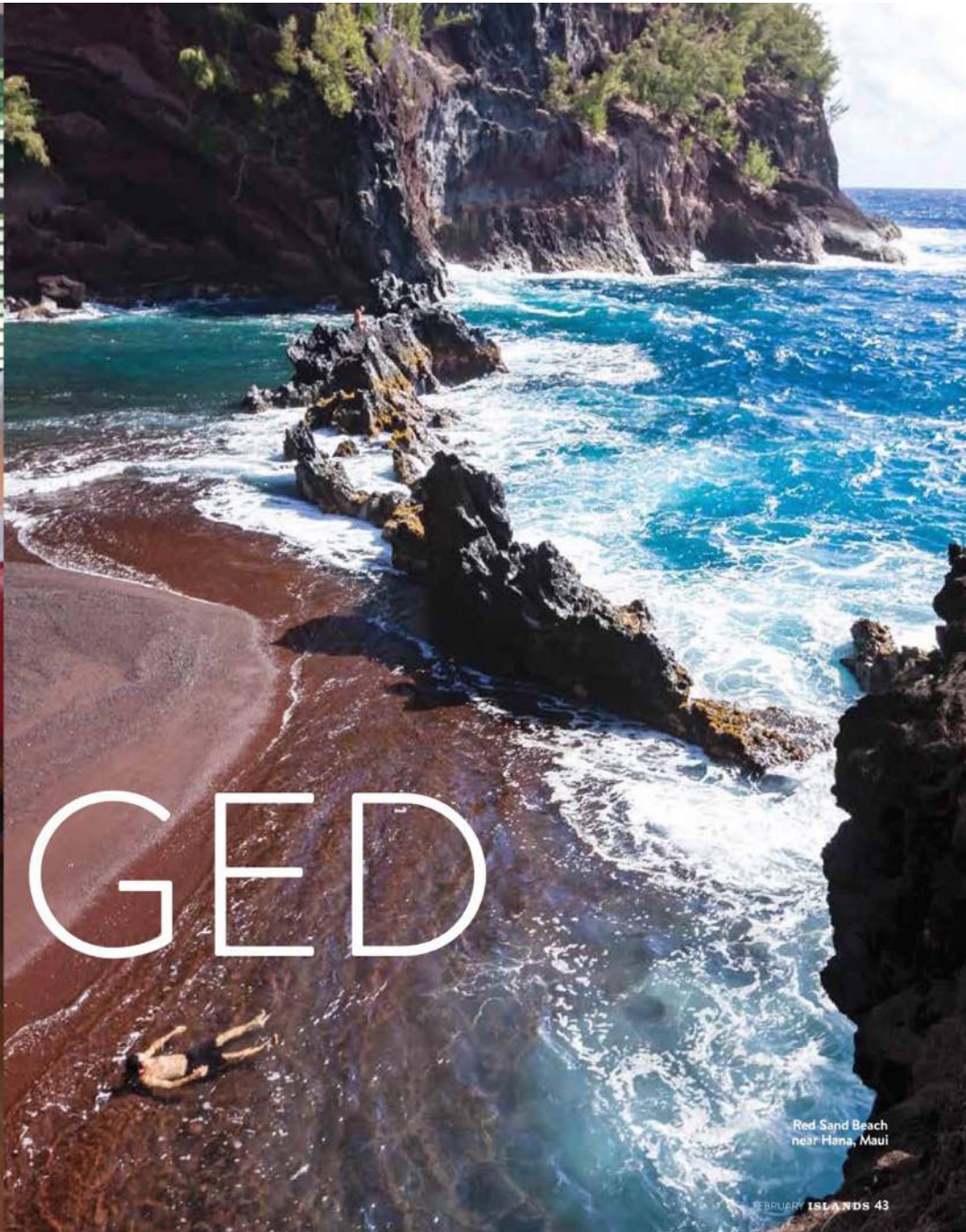




UNPLUGGED MAUI

MAUI IS MANY THINGS,
BUT ON ITS QUIETEST
COASTLINE THERE IS
SOMETHING MOST VISITS
LACK: PURE ALOHA.
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Red Sand Beach
near Hana, Maui

For more than three decades my parents have wintered on Maui. In that time they have witnessed their once tiny community of Kaanapali transform. Traffic lights, strip malls, construction — what surrounds them today isn't what originally brought them to the island. And it isn't what attracted my wife, son and me here for a two-week visit.

"Dad, let's go to Hana," I suggest on day 10. "Your mom gets carsick."

I turn to Mom.

"No, thanks," she says. "We're fine here."

She knows about the 620 switchback curves and 46 single-lane bridges. The Road to Hana, a

three-hour stomach-churning drive that separates Maui's tourism boom from its empty beaches, is just too daunting for my folks. So my wife, son and I depart, opting to travel bare-bones, packing little more than toothbrushes, bathing suits and cellphones.

THE CELLPHONE "Would you like me to check that in?"

Jonnie, a receptionist at Travaasa Resort in Hana, is pointing to my wife's phone. Ashley is an attorney. Her cellphone might as well be epoxied to her hand. *Check it in?* The proposal smacks of an amputation.

"We call it cellphone baby-sitting," Jonnie explains.

Ashley looks pale. We've just spent six hours on the Road to Hana with Simon, our 3-year-old. We

stopped at every waterfall, 18 named, countless unnamed, and he kept begging for more. But now that we've arrived at Travaasa, Simon's patience is fading. Ashley is holding up check-in.

"If you leave your phone with us, we'll answer it when it rings," Jonnie tells her. "We'll take a message."

"Do guests really do this?" Ashley asks.

"Absolutely," she says, pointing to a shelf cluttered with smartphones. "We'll get you if it's important."

Ten minutes later, Simon and a cellphone-free Ashley have crashed out on the king-size bed in our ocean-view cottage. For the first time since we arrived on Maui 10 days ago, we can hear Hawaii. The only sound: mynah birds squawking somewhere far away.

WHAT TO BRING

☑ Toothbrush
Necessary after smoothie-making classes. Travaasa's locally sourced fruits are good for your body, but their acid isn't any better for your teeth.

☑ Undershorts
Wet baggies and beach walks are a recipe for rashes — especially keeping up with Andrew Park. Nylon undershorts keep the glide in your stride.

☑ Denim

Hawaii's cowboys (paniolos) predate their mainland counterparts. Joining one for a horseback ride doesn't require riding experience, but you'll want jeans.

WHAT TO DO

Soar
Helicopter tours on Maui are old hat. Hopping in a glider flying up and over Haleakala is not. Travaasa offers it.

Strum

Pluck each ukulele's string from the top down and you've learned "My Dog Has Fleas." Lessons start at 10:30 a.m. daily. Imagine what you'll play by 10:35.

Sew

Leis can be strung with a needle, or braided or twisted. But in a lei-making class, the lesson is not in the making, but in the giving.



THE LESSON I'm belly-deep in the Pacific Ocean wearing the only pair of board shorts I brought to Maui. A 10-foot-wide nylon throw-net is wrapped around my torso, and I'm uneasy. Head-high swells have been rolling into Hana Bay every few minutes. I'd be a sitting duck for a rogue wave if it weren't for the man standing next to me.

"Turn perpendicular to the surf."

Andrew Park, 51, is my human breakwater: 5-foot-11 and 270 pounds. He is a master throw-net fisherman and the activities director for Travaasa, which bills itself as an "experiential resort."

"Fling the net like you're tossing a Frisbee — and put your weight into it!" Andrew instructs me.

I do so, expecting the net to splash down in a tangled heap. Instead it unfurls in a near-perfect circle.

"Good," says Andrew. He points to a gap between coral heads where glints of moi (Pacific threadfin) dart through the shallows. "Now throw there."

Getting schooled by Andrew here in Hana (population 1,235) feels like going to Wharton to get an MBA. Travaasa's cultural courses include ukulele playing, hula dancing, lei making and surfing. All are taught by Hawaiians who share a Hana lineage. Andrew's family has resided in Hana for seven generations.

We stand in the shallows, throwing and bundling our nets, utilizing life-sustaining techniques refined to their essentials and passed down over centuries.

Andrew promises me he'll grill whatever I catch today. I'm determined to make good on the offer. My only distraction is a wish that we'd come to Travaasa sooner. Perhaps I would've packed more board shorts.

There they are again! Moi, just a few feet away. I toss my net true. Andrew is smiling. So am I. Forget the board shorts. Everything I'd ever need is with me.



Travaasa offers quiet cottages and coastline classes. In this case, throw-net fishing with Andrew Park, a Hana local.



Bridges on the Road to Hana date back to 1910. Travaasa Resort's offerings are more modern, but the property's ties to Hana span centuries.



THE KID “Where are the toys?” Simon asked us this question the first morning he woke up at Travaasa. We didn’t pack any toys. So we told him and held our breaths. Ever since, I’ve been holding his hand, leading him to a new friend.

“Let’s go find Andrew,” demands Simon. Their friendship began when Andrew gave Simon the green light to set halved coconut shells adrift in the hotel pool.

In that moment, my fears about Simon — whose manic energy prompted a friend to describe him as “a dwarf on LSD” — disappeared.

I have Andrew to thank for this. Since we have arrived, he has been indulging Simon’s obsession with Hawaiian flora, even helping him invent games with seeds from the pods of African tulips.

Today, Simon and I find Andrew leading a class on how to properly choose ripe coconuts, husk them on a pickax blade, extract natural “cotton candy” from the flesh, and fashion the dried shells into various functional objects, including drinking mugs, candle holders and a puniu — a Hawaiian knee drum.

All of that is impressive. But my eyes are fixed on Simon. Watching him sit calmly listening to Andrew’s 120-minute coconut brain-dump is enough to make me want to remain at Travaasa forever.

THE ROOTS Folks born in Hana stay in Hana. That’s an easy conclusion when strolling Travaasa’s grounds with Danny Mynar, Travaasa’s general manager.

“My grandma was in housekeeping. My mom bartended here for 30 years. My grandpa was the gardener. My stepdad still works here.”

He adds that of the resort’s 84 employees, 90 percent are locals, nearly all with kin who toiled in the sugar-cane fields that once ringed Hana, where Hawaii’s first plantation was established in 1849.

It’s easy to imagine Hana back then amid Travaasa’s quaint cottages and suites (70 total). The property’s landscaping blends seamlessly with the rainforest that girdles the slopes of the adjacent Haleakala volcano. The scent of plumeria — in full bloom — permeates the damp air.

A squall rumbles in, and with it a stiff wind that makes the palm trees dance. Danny and I part ways. On my way back to our cottage, I bump into Andrew, watching the palms sway from under an awning. He points to a string of palms and tells me he has had to scale every one of them — 222 at last count.

“I ran the landscaping here for 20 years,” he says. “When I was a kid, I’d surf all day and get hungry, so I’d climb palm trees to get the coconuts. I had to fight off the rats and centipedes that lived up there.”

HER LAW PARTNERS TAKE XANAX IF AN EMAIL GOES UNANSWERED FOR 10 SECONDS. ASHLEY HASN’T TOUCHED HER CELLPHONE FOR THREE DAYS.



IF YOU’RE CURIOUS Taking on the drive to Hana is a tall order. But it’s also what keeps Hana pure. And for those who make a day of the drive by stopping at waterfalls, it’s pure fun. But there are options to avoid the road trip entirely (see below).

IF YOU’RE SERIOUS The three-hour drive from Kahului to Hana is just a 20-minute flight. Yep, 20 minutes. And guests of Travaasa who stay for more than three nights can fly for free.

He was also a lifeguard and a dishwasher for the resort. And, no surprise, Andrew is related to several co-workers. His uncle, now retired, did grounds maintenance beginning in 1947, the year Hotel Hana-Maui, Travaasa’s predecessor, opened.

“See that banyan tree?” says Andrew, pointing to a 30-foot-tall goliath. “My uncle planted it.” Of course he did.

THE RESULT God help Ashley’s law partners back in Colorado. They start gulping Xanax if an email goes unanswered for 10 seconds. Ashley hasn’t touched her cellphone for three days.

“Pass me the pineapple.” I hand her a pineapple. Her palms are dry. Her face is relaxed. She exhibits no signs of cellphone withdrawal during this smoothie lesson held poolside.

In fact, it’s me that’s beginning to sweat. Today we’ll make our way back to my parents’ place in bustling Kaanapali. The traffic, the construction, the noise — all of it looms. So does the thought of retrieving our big suitcases, full of items we thought we’d need for a trip to Maui. In Hana, and at Travaasa, we’ve needed none of those things. And of all the things we’ve learned, that’s easily the greatest lesson. From \$350 per night. travaasa.com

📍 10 MUST-DO’S ON MAUI: islands.com/top10maui