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Maui: Insert A Title That Doesn't Include "Wowie" or "Zowie"

A Confession

I have a terrible confession to make: I am not a travel writer.

To tell you the truth, I'm not even much of a traveler.

In fact, I have never been outside the United States. I don't even own a passport.

And, because I don't travel often, I don't read many travel articles.

From what I've seen, however, it appears that travel articles have something of a standard format whereby the travel writer will provide the reader with his assessment of a particular locale's best restaurants, hotels, shopping centers, museums and activities.

I'm afraid this article will not follow that standard format.

And, for that, I offer my sincere apology.

The Best Airplane Seat

Let me explain why I can't follow the standard format for a travel article.

I don't understand how someone can spend a week somewhere -- let's say London (which I have never visited but understand to be located somewhere in England or Spain) -- then proclaim some restaurant to be "the best restaurant in London" or some hotel to be "the best hotel in London."

I mean, how can he *know*?

If there are 200 restaurants in London, he would have to visit nearly 30 a day in order to be in any position to proclaim one to be "the best."

No one can visit 30 restaurants in a day. No one.

The same for hotels, bars, shops, museums, etc.

Now, if what the travel writer means to say is that someplace is the best restaurant *that he happened to visit*, well, that's a different matter altogether, isn't it?

So, using that standard, I'd like to say that seat 21A is the best seat on a plane to Maui. It's next to the window, and a very pretty and engaging dark-haired woman was seated next to me for the entire flight.

That woman is my wife.

And I would like to proclaim her to be "the best wife."

I think I've made my point.

Let's See How Lazy The Editor Is

There's another matter about travel articles that's worth mentioning.

Name the place, and editors seem destined to rely upon the same over-used puns or rhymes in giving the article its title.

If the article is about Rome, you can expect, "When In Rome...."

If it's about Paris, "I Love Paris In The Springtime."

If it's about New York, you can expect some quote from the song, "New York, New York."

If it's about Maui, you can expect some title containing the words "Wowie" or "Zowie."

This article is about Maui.

If the editor of this magazine uses "Wowie" or "Zowie" in the title, I urge you to return this magazine to the newsstand immediately and walk away from it as if it were a stranger with an odd and flaking skin condition.

Really.

Do it.

It will teach the editor a lesson.

Don't Be a Moron

Maui is in Hawaii.

Please read that last sentence aloud.

Did you sound like the customer at Taco Bell trying to impress the cashier by over-pronouncing certain syllables in an attempt to give his order an “authentic” Spanish sound?

“I’ll have a boo-RRRRREEEEE-toe GRRRRRAAAANNNNN-day and a kay-sa-DEEEEEEE-ya.”

For some reason, people from the “mainland” seem to do the same thing when they say “Hawaii.” They pronounce it “ha-VIE-ee” instead of “ha-WHY-ee,” as if doing so will trick anyone into believing that they are not tourists at all, but instead are native Hawaiians.

Now, technically speaking, “ha-VIE-ee” may be the correct pronunciation.

But when you or I say it, with a camera in our hands and a rental car ticket sticking out of our back pocket, we just sound like morons.

Just call it “ha-WHY-ee” like you always do.

There's A Psychological Term For This

If you tell a friend you’re going to visit Belgium, he is unlikely to have an image of Belgium in his mind.

The same is true for many, if not most, locales. Holland, for instance. Or the Netherlands.

Not Hawaii.

When I say “ha-WHY-ee,” I’ll bet a picture pops in your head.

And, if you are anything like me (witty, charming and prone to exaggerate how witty and

charming you are), that image is not based on actual, first-hand experiences in our fiftieth state. Nor is it based on careful, painstaking research about Hawaii's history, its geography or its culture.

Instead, it's based upon the Brady Bunch's memorable and suspenseful three-episode trip to Hawaii. (Not two episodes! Three!)

When you see or hear the word "Hawaii," that's what you picture.

You picture the Bradys' experiences, not your own.

I believe there is a psychological term for this. It may be called "transference," but don't hold me to that. I got a 24% on my psychology mid-term and had to drop the class.

Whatever the term is, I suffered from it, too, before actually traveling to Hawaii myself in "the best airplane seat" next to "the best wife."

I have only vague recollections of my own family's vacations, like the time we drove to Lake George in New York, listening to the *Grease* soundtrack all the way there and back. However, I have a very crisp memory of the Bradys' Hawaiian vacation.

The cursed tiki that caused Greg Brady to get conked on the head with his board during the big surfing competition. Peter shrieking, "Get it off me! Please get it off me!" as a tarantula crawled up his chest toward that very same tiki he wore around his neck. Alice throwing her hip out during her hula lessons while she wore -- yes -- the tiki. And, best of all, Vincent Price tying several members of the Brady family to totem poles in a deep dark cavern. Totem poles! (An aside: If Vincent Price ever tied *me* to a totem pole, I'd have talked about it non-stop for years afterward. Oddly, the Bradys never mentioned it again. Not once. Now, I may have been failing that psychology class, but I can tell you that just ain't healthy.)

Ah, yes, *that's* Hawaii.

The land of cursed tikis and Vincent Price tying people to totem poles.

Peculiarly, when I first contacted one of Hawaii's many boards of tourism to let them know about my trip to Maui, they acted as if they'd never heard about such matters. We had the following exchange, more or less (this is from memory, so please allow me a little leeway):

Me: *Can you tell me whether I have to be concerned about cursed tikis while I'm visiting?*

The State of Hawaii: *I don't know what you're referring to.*

Me: *Does that mean that the problem has been remedied?*

The State of Hawaii: *I'm sorry, but I don't know what you're talking about.*

Me: *A cursed tiki that might cause me to get conked on the head with a surfboard or end up tied to a totem pole by Vincent Price.*

The State of Hawaii: *I'm sorry, sir, but I really don't understand your question. Can we send you some information about snorkeling?*

Me: *That's right, Hawaii. Play dumb. You know exactly what I'm talking about. And, yes, you can send me some information about snorkeling.*

The State of Hawaii: *My name's not Hawaii. It's Stan. Also, you should know that Vincent Price is dead.*

That was how my trip to Hawaii began. Suspiciously. *Very* suspiciously.

Having now traveled to Hawaii, I wish to report that the cursed tiki problem apparently has been addressed -- and quite successfully. As a consequence, Hawaii today is a vastly different place to visit than when the Bradys vacationed there some years ago.

I'm Not As Stupid As You Think

Now, this being a men's magazine, I can only assume that the first question on most

readers' minds is this: *How hot are the women in Hawaii? Given all the beaches, there must be thousands of beautiful women in bikinis, right? Right?*

Well, as you now know, I was accompanied on my trip to Maui by my wife. Let me also say that the trip occurred only several days after we were married. So, for the record, I did not notice another woman the entire time I was in Maui, not one.

Women?

In Hawaii?

In bikinis?

Sorry, but I must've missed that. Women in bikinis don't show up anywhere in my notes of the trip.

Another Confession

Yes, you read that right.

I have just admitted that I was taking notes for this travel article *on my honeymoon*. I didn't use the word "honeymoon," but you figured it out, didn't you?

That makes me a horrible man.

Here's some free advice to single men: don't work on your honeymoon.

Trust me.

The Love Of My Life

You should know that I am no more of a drinker than I am a travel writer.

Or, more accurately, I wasn't much of a drinker. Past tense.

I am now.

On our first night in Maui, we went to a luau. There are more than a few luaus in Maui, most of which were highly recommended. Visiting Maui and not attending a luau would be like

going to Rome and not going to the Eiffel Tower. Or so I hear.

We went to **The Drums of The Pacific Luau (808-667-4727)** on Kaanapali Beach. An excellent experience for many reasons.

The food, which was served buffet style, was very good. Kalua pork, which was very tender. Mahimahi, which was very fresh. Huli huli chicken. Poi. Rice. Vegetables. Fruit. Pineapple cake. Chocolate macadamia pie.

The accompanying show consisted of a variety of dances and songs from different South Pacific cultures, culminating in a Samoan fire dance. All in all, very entertaining, and a perfect way to spend one's first night in Maui.

Oh, one other thing: throughout the luau, they had an open bar. (We had an open bar at our wedding, too. And we'll be paying off that bar tab for the next ten years).

It was there that my wife persuaded me to have my first mai tai.

I did not need to be persuaded to have a second, third, fourth or fifth.

A mai tai, for the uninitiated, is a fruity rum drink. It is made from white rum, orange curacao and tropical juices.

It is enormously popular in Hawaii.

It deserves to be popular everywhere.

Really.

If I weren't already married, I'd marry the person who invented the mai tai.

The Land of Postcards

There is only one reason to send postcards while traveling: to let people know you're somewhere better than they are, at least for a few days.

And you will be while you're in Maui. Beautiful beaches, cool breezes, palm trees

everywhere. In my humble opinion, you cannot be in a bad mood when you are around palm trees. (Memo to self: stop pretending to be humble.) Wherever you go, you will see things that look like they should be on a postcard. Often, they are.

That said, you should not worry about finding postcards to send to your friends and family. You can find postcards everywhere in Maui. And I mean *everywhere*.

Clothing stores, supermarkets, restaurants, book stores, gas stations, the omnipresent ABC convenience stores.

There are more postcards sold in Maui than any other place in the world. Or, at least, I'd bet that's true. I haven't conducted a formal study.

One of my favorite postcards is one of the Kaanapali Beach, with the blue ocean lapping at the white sand, the palm trees casting slivers of shadows. It is a stunning sight.

My very favorite postcard, however, is the one with the mai tai recipe on the back.

Lost in Translation

In Hawaii, "shave ice" means "snow cone."

"Mahalo" means "thank you."

"Aloha" means "hello."

"Aloha" also means "goodbye."

"Aloha" also has a whole lot of other meanings. Unfortunately, I didn't have my notepad with me when the hotel concierge was explaining the different meanings to us.

I told you I'm not a travel writer.

Maybe now you'll believe me.

Sushi By Mail

While we were in Maui, we stayed at the **Hyatt Regency Hotel (200 Nohea Kai Drive,**

Lahaina 808-661-1234) in the Kaanapali Beach resort area.

I can't say much about the other hotels in Maui since we didn't stay at any of them, but I can say this: we loved the Hyatt, and if we ever return to Maui, that's where we'd stay again.

Why, you ask.

Because it's an exquisite hotel. It's located right on the beach, which is perfect for a sunset walk. Also, if you have an ocean view room, you go to sleep to the sound of the waves crashing against the shore and wake up to the same. It's the sound those bedside sleep machines strive for, but never quite accomplish.

There is a large, curving pool with waterfalls and an in-pool grotto bar that serves mai tais. There are tennis courts, hammocks, a spa, sailboats, kayaks, surfing, snorkeling, etc., etc. The courtyard is filled with sculptures and palm trees and animals, including, surprisingly, an African black-footed penguin exhibit. (Apparently, while most people think of penguins as living in cold climates, only a small percentage actually live in the Arctic. The rest live in warmer climates. Like the Hyatt at Maui.)

The Hyatt is also the home of **Cascades Grille and Sushi Bar**, an open-air restaurant that overlooks the Pacific Ocean. My wife and I happen to enjoy sushi and have eaten in a great many sushi restaurants. Cascades has the best sushi we have ever tasted. Anywhere.

Seriously.

I can't imagine fresher, or more creative, sushi.

In fact, as I edit this article several weeks after returning, I wish I could come up with some way for them to ship me dinner because I have a craving for their wiki-wiki roll (shrimp, crab, papaya and avocado) and their volcano roll (broiled spicy scallops served on a traditional California roll) right now.

But sushi wouldn't stay fresh in the mail, would it?

A Six-Way Tie

So, Cascades must be “the best restaurant in Maui,” you ask.

I don't know. Didn't you read the first couple paragraphs of this article?

For such a small island, the restaurant scene in Maui is incredible. I have never eaten so well in my life, which is really saying something when you consider my ever-expanding waistline. My wife and I had at least six excellent and memorable meals in Maui, and it would be impossible to tell you which was “the best.”

I have already told you about one of those meals.

If you are looking for a romantic, beachside dinner, I can't imagine a better one than **i'o (505 Front Street, Lahaina, 808-661-8422)** just a short drive from Kanaapali. The restaurant itself is hip and stylish, with a curved bar and an over-sized window looking into the kitchen. The view from the patio is amazing. So, too, is the food. We started with lobster egg rolls, which were served with a passionfruit mustard dip. We then had the crispy ahi, which had been caught just that morning – the fishermen bring their catch in through the dining room so customers can see how fresh it is -- and the rock shrimp pasta. There is a reason this is one of Lahaina's hottest dining spots.

For a scenic lunch, **Mama's Fish House (799 Poho Place, Paia, 808-579-8488)** is superb. It, too, is right on the beach, but on the north shore of the island, where you can watch the surfers riding the waves. You couldn't ask for fresher seafood than that served at Mama's. “The catch of the day” is, quite literally, the catch of the day: the fish they serve is delivered to their door each morning by the fisherman who caught it, who is then credited on the menu. For instance, on the day we ate there, the menu offered “striped marlin caught by Dennis Alvarez”

and “mahimahi caught by Amando Baula.” We had the “opakapaka caught by Mark Hobson.” It was outstanding. Thank you for your fine work, Mr. Hobson. You are quite a fisherman!

For a more casual lunch, we loved **Kimo's (845 Front Street, Lahaina, 808-661-4811)**, which is something of a local landmark in Lahaina. Its deck offers a fantastic view of the ocean, where you can watch the ocean liners, sailboats and windsurfers mingle. Although it is known for its prime rib, we stuck to seafood. The fish tacos were excellent, as was the coconut crusted ahi, which is served with a rich peanut sauce and tropical salsa. If you should make it to Kimo's, whatever you do, save room for dessert. Their Hula Pie alone is worth the trip. Ice cream in an Oreo pie shell, topped with chocolate sauce and macadamia nuts. We actually bought one of their Hula Pie dessert plates in their gift shop just to remind us of that dessert. Or, should I say, “I” bought the Hula Pie dessert plate. My wife pretended she didn't know me while I made the purchase. Which is fine. I pretended I didn't know her when she tried on a coconut bra at a convenience store.

David Paul's Lahiana Grill (127 Lahainaluna Road, Lahiana, 808-667-5117), which offers “New American” cuisine, has been selected Maui's best restaurant 11 years in a row. Just off the main street in Lahaina, the restaurant has less of a “beach” atmosphere than the other restaurants. It has a beautiful, pressed tin ceiling and intriguing artwork from a local artist. While there, we started with the colorful toy box tomato salad, an inventive appetizer served in a martini glass. Because we had already eaten so much seafood on our trip, we decided to try something else and tried the four cheese manicotti and Chef Arnie's home-made meatballs, which are made with veal, pork and beef. Everything – the food, the drinks, the atmosphere, the service -- was absolutely superb. I only wish we had more time to go back and try their seafood, or their desserts, both of which had been recommended by too many people to count.

Longhi's, an Italian restaurant, has two locations in Maui, one in Lahaina (888 Front Street, 808-667-2288) and one in Wailea (**3750 Wailea Alanui Drive, 808-891-8883**). We went to the Wailea location, which is an open-air restaurant. Although Longhi's is also renowned for its breakfasts, we were told repeatedly that it was one of the finest Italian restaurants on the island. We went for dinner, which was fantastic. The Shrimp Longhi in particular was terrific, as was the artichoke appetizer.

A Long Massage

We ate at Longhi's after spending a day at the **Spa Grande** at the **Grand Wailea Resort (3850 Wailea Alanui, 808-875-1234)**. Wailea is about 40 minutes east of Kaanapali, where it is quieter. The spa and the resort are opulent and perhaps even decadent, the kind of place where you would take someone on a special occasion as a treat. Or if you sold your company for ten times your initial investment. Or if your friends chipped in to get you a wedding gift.

Fortunately, some friends had chipped in to give us a "Romantic Interlude for Two" spa package for our honeymoon. It included a "sandalwood serenity wrap" and a side-by-side couple's massage. The former involved having a sandalwood paste applied to our bodies before being wrapped in towels; the latter involved a long, deep massage by excellent, well-trained masseuses.

Now, I must tell you that I had never been to a spa before. In fact, I had never even had a massage before (unless you count the painful ones provided by college girlfriends, which I would rather forget). So I have no experience on which to base a comparison.

My wife, however, has been to many spas. In her opinion, the Spa Grande is the best she has ever been to anywhere. Putting aside her poor choice for a husband, I tend to trust my wife's judgment. You should, too.

The Hawaiian Shirt Issue

Hawaii is the one place in the world where you can wear loud, colorful Hawaiian shirts. You know the ones I'm talking about. There are hundreds of varieties sold in hundreds of stores in Maui. Every other person on Maui seems to be wearing one of these shirts, which are also referred to as "aloha" shirts. Unfortunately, I do not know which meaning of "aloha" is referenced in this name.

As much as you might be tempted, do not buy more than one Hawaiian shirt on your trip. Why? Because you will *never* wear it again once you return home. Never. Unless you happen to work in an office that occasionally has theme days to try to boost morale, like "Wild Wild West Day" or "Bring Your Dog To Work Day."

And if you work in an office that would even consider having a "Hawaiian Day," you should quit your job.

Immediately.

The Road Not Taken

The Road to Hana is the subject of great debate by tourists and locals alike. It ended up being the first debate of our young marriage.

Some claim that the winding, narrow drive through the plush land of Maui's north shore is a required trip. "You'll love the waterfalls," they say, "and you'll end up in the most beautiful spot in Maui."

Others say that the Road to Hana is a long, torturous drive with many hairpin turns that will have the driver clutching the steering wheel until his knuckles turn white, particularly when another car approaches on one of the many one-lane bridges. "Try not to look down," they say. "And buy plenty of life insurance."

Ultimately, we decided not to take the Road to Hana. I am not ashamed to say that it was I, not my wife, who did not want to make the trip. I kept envisioning headlines in our local paper that read, “Honeymooners Drive Off Maui Cliff (Husband Was Not A Travel Writer).” Accordingly, there’s not much I can tell you about the Road to Hana. It sure looks pretty on all of the postcards, though. In fact, the postcards were so pretty that it almost feels like we took the Road to Hana anyway. At least that’s what I kept telling my wife as I held one of the postcards in front of her face on the drive back to our hotel, where we had a few mai tais beside the pool.

Showtime

Some of the people behind Cirque du Soleil have created a show called *Ulalena*, which plays at the **Maui Theatre (878 Front Street, Lahaina, 808-661-9914)**. It is a beautiful, humorous and unusually staged production, using songs, dance, acrobatics and puppetry reminiscent of the theatre productions of *The Lion King* to interpret the myths and legends of Hawaii. It is an excellent way to spend a relaxing evening in Maui, and it’s only a short walk to the main street in Lahaina for a post-show meal or drink.

Unicornfish Sandwich, Anyone?

The **Maui Ocean Center (192 Ma’alea Road, Wailuku, 808-270-7000)** is the largest tropical reef aquarium in the Western Hemisphere. It’s a great way to spend an afternoon once you’re sunburned from lounging on the beach or poolside for too many days, as we did. The aquarium showcases hundreds of colorful and unusual fish, from the whitemargin unicornfish to the gray reef shark. The former look like the kind of fish you’d see in a cartoon; the latter would scare the bejesus out of you if not for that thick pane of glass keeping it from your throat.

However, being at the Maui Ocean Center did remind me of one of life’s nagging questions: why do restaurants at aquariums serve seafood? That just seems a bit inconsistent,

doesn't it? You really can't say, "Come and enjoy the beauty of our sea-dwelling friends in their natural habitat," then follow up by saying, "Now, wouldn't you like to try one of those babies between two slices of sourdough bread?"

That's why we had salad for lunch after our trip to the aquarium.

Poor Sports

We didn't golf in Maui. But that doesn't mean you can't. The golf courses in Kapalua in particular looked gorgeous, with views of the ocean that are breathtaking.

We didn't snorkel either, or scuba dive, or surf, or windsurf, or kayak.

What exactly did you do, you ask, if you didn't golf, snorkel, scuba dive, surf, windsurf or kayak?

Well, if you were paying attention you'd know that we ate, drank, sat by the pool, took walks on the beach and drank mai tais.

That, my friends, is a vacation.

A vacation that, sadly, came to an end much too soon. Although not as soon as it would have if we'd driven off a cliff on the Road to Hana. It's important to focus on the positive, don't you agree?

The Worst Airplane Seat

The worst airplane seat leaving Maui is seat 34A.

It's in the very last row, so the seat doesn't recline, and rather than having a window, there is just a blank stretch of cabin wall, so you can't even see the island as you're leaving it. Worse, the woman seated next to me kept saying, "What on earth do you plan to do with that Hula Pie plate?"

"I'll think of something," I said. It was then that I noticed that all of my notes about the

women we'd seen on the beaches had been torn out of my notebook.

Conclusion

So, that's my travel article.

I would like to proclaim it "the best travel article I have ever written."

With that, I say, "Mahalo."

And, "Aloha."

By which I mean "goodbye," not one of the other meanings I forgot to write down.