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Maui Sets A Special Stage for the Arts

The island's distinctive performing arts scene shares stories, enriches vacations

By [Marty Wentzel](#)
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"Ulalena" showcases Hawaiian legends and history through dance and music. // © 2011 Matt Thayer

Maui may not boast the big-city lights of more cosmopolitan vacation spots, but its distinctive performing arts scene is so well-suited to the island that it deserves a rousing round of applause. From its impressive arts and cultural center and compelling annual events to live productions and varied nightlife scenes, Maui's entertainment mix matches the destination to perfection.

Maui Visitors Bureau (MVB) spokesman Keli'i Brown looked to the past to explain why his island is so rich in live entertainment.

"Native Hawaiians maintain that Maui has mana, or a spiritual presence, that inspires art and cultural appreciation," said Brown. "The MVB values the arts as an important expression of our culture, values and history. In all forms, art embraces Maui's connection to the land, sea, natural resources, language and storytelling."

Brown believes that visitors who engage in the arts on Maui come away with a greater appreciation not only for the host culture but for the multi-ethnic nature of the island.

"The arts give visitors a glimpse into Maui's past and future and tell stories about who we are," Brown said. "At the same time, the arts allow visitors to learn about rest of the world through visiting artist programs and concerts."

One of the island's best venues for visitors to enjoy entertainment is the Maui Arts and Cultural Center (MACC) in Kahului. Open since 1994, MACC houses a 1,200-seat main auditorium, a 250-seat theater for experimental performances and an outdoor amphitheater. It has hosted hundreds of entertainers of local, national and international fame, including the island's own Maui Pops Orchestra. Far removed from the stereotypical classical music ensemble, Maui Pops emphasizes music that is accessible to everyone, from traditional and light fare to Broadway, opera and choral music.

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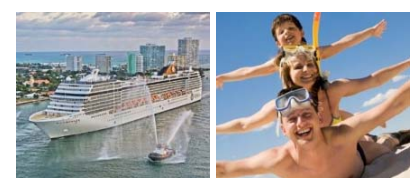
For live plays and musicals, clients should check the calendar for Maui OnStage, an island-based troupe presenting local versions of well-known works. Its headquarters are housed within Wailuku's beautifully renovated Iao Theater building, which dates back to 1928. Meanwhile, a group called Pro Arts produces high-quality theater performances in a playhouse in Kihei; and Maui Academy of Performing Arts specializes in productions for youth, by youth.

Clients can also time their Maui visit with annual events such as Celebration of the Arts. Held each April at The Ritz-Carlton, Kapalua, this compelling immersion into all things artistic includes live entertainment intrinsically linked to the local culture.

Hula o Na Keiki, a yearly children's solo hula competition held each November on the grounds of Kaanapali Beach Hotel, invites visitors to a heartwarming weekend of Hawaiian arts and music. Children ages 5-17 years old compete for coveted awards and titles as they perform traditional and modern styles of hula.

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Long-running shows provide additional allure for Maui visitors. "Ulalena," a stirring theatrical experience at the Maui Theatre in Lahaina, combines powerful vocals, traditional and modern hula, acrobatic feats, dramatic lighting and stunning stage design as it tells Hawaiian legends and history. Also in Lahaina, clients can get a double dose of comedy and magic at "Warren and Annabelle's," a spirited showcase for acclaimed magician Warren Gibson, whose sleight-of-hand and sense of humor are infectious. There's plenty of audience participation, so no two shows are ever the same.

The six-night-per-week "Cirque Polynesia" regales audiences under the stars at the Maui Moon Theatre, located at Hyatt Regency Maui Resort & Spa. The 75-minute extravaganza features an ensemble of internationally-acclaimed performers including aerial acrobats, masters of balance and talented illusionists.

Clients looking for the best in live Hawaiian music should head to Napili Kai Beach Resort's indoor amphitheater. That's the setting for George Kahumoku Jr.'s Masters of Hawaiian Music series. Each Wednesday night, Kahumoku -- a major name in Hawaii's slack-key guitar scene -- introduces one of the islands' legendary musicians and spins stories about old Hawaii between songs.

For a more spontaneous rendezvous, clients can find Hawaiian music, soft jazz and hula shows in open-air lobbies and shopping malls, demonstrating the vast repertoire of talent on the island. Music lovers can also head to nightclubs and restaurants for evening gigs by island entertainers.

No matter how clients encounter Maui's performing arts, Brown can't imagine a better way for visitors to get to know the island.

"The arts are a great way to enrich a Maui vacation," he said. "Visitors cannot have a thriving, authentic island experience without art as a key component of their vacation. Maui's natural beauty and mana inspire the artist in all of us."

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