

VISITING MAUI

& THE FAIRMONT KEA LANI

BY KAREN VILLALPANDO

Just the mere mention of “Hawaii” and I can feel the ocean breezes on my face. The place conjures up a feeling of relaxation like no other. In today’s economy, getting to paradise might take some creativity, and besides, I was motivated by my doctor, who told me I needed a vacation. So I took him at his word, and googled “cheap airfare”. I found an incredible deal at Pleasant Hawaiian (pleasanthawaiian.com). If you combine the airfare with either lodging, or in my case, car rental, you can get some really great rates. I booked airfare for four, and a week’s car rental for \$1600! The flight times were not the most desirable, but it saved me well over \$1,000 to take the red eye for the leg back, so grin and bear it, right?

As for lodging, we knew where we wanted to be – the Fairmont Kea Lani on Maui. We had stayed at the beautiful, palace-like hotel three years ago, and so enjoyed our time there, we just had to go back. The alabaster white, Moroccan style architecture lends an exotic flair to guests upon their arrival. The traditional lei greeting by beautiful Hawaiians and a refreshing glass of tropical fruit juice put the “Aloha” in our visit from the start.

We arrived at the hotel at 10:00pm, and after dropping our bags in the room, headed to the Luana Lounge for a quick cocktail and snack before retiring. Arriving in Maui at night was somewhat surreal – we knew we were in Hawaii, even though we couldn’t see it. When we awoke the next morning with a stunning view of the Pacific Ocean, we knew we were in paradise!



The sparkling adult pool at the Fairmont Kea Lani Resort on Maui is the perfect setting for R&R while sipping a cool drink. photo courtesy of The Fairmont Kea Lani

All of the rooms at the Kea Lani are spacious suites, with two fluffy double beds and a separate living room, featuring a pullout couch and room for a rollaway. The large marble bathroom, with deep soaking tub and separate shower, accommodated the four of us nicely, even with two teenaged girls. Currently, the hotel is offering a fifth night free and a bonus of daily breakfast. Also, the hotel just announced another summer package – the 7 Day Spectacular Sale. Book an “Everyone’s An Original Spectacular Summer Sale” rate before July 27, 2009 and receive up to 20% off the daily published rate of the day AND the 7th night free.

The hotel also has 37 villas, which are 2-3 bedroom posh accommodations, just steps from Kea Lani’s Polo Beach. Each villa has its own private courtyard with plunge pool, a barbecue grill, a private washer and dryer and a full kitchen. The special Aloha Savers package is currently available, and offers guests a 30% discount off published rates. With so many discounts available, the Kea Lani has a package to suit your needs.

The amenities at the Kea Lani are plentiful, with one of the best being their expansive pool area. The main pool is quite large with a water slide for the kids, and a separate swim-up bar pool. An additional quiet pool with private cabanas is available for adults. The lounge areas boast an abundance of chairs – and pool attendants – who deliver fresh towels, chilled fruit, smoothie tastings (gratis) and, of course, piña colodas or other refreshers which are conveniently charged to the room. It’s very easy to lounge away the entire day, just reading, napping and tanning.

We are at the beach in Maui, however, where the Pacific Ocean in its deepest blue hues, and warm waves splash against the shore. The Polo Beach boys will gladly set up chairs and umbrellas, or even a cabana on the sand. Polo Beach is excellent for snorkeling with its clear water, and equipment is available for rental from the beach shack. The water temperature averages between 75° and 79° this time of year, perfect for swimming, diving and snorkeling.

After a day at the beach, an evening of fine dining is welcomed. Ko, the Kea Lani’s newest restaurant, offers cuisine showcasing Hawaii’s many cultures. Fresh fish dominates the menu, including ahi, opakapaka, walu (a Hawaiian butterfish). The chef offers three different preparations, which can be adapted to the fresh catches of the day. We enjoyed a macadamia nut crusted opakaka and a grilled Walu in a Miso butter sauce with Asian coleslaw.

One of the highlights of the evening was the Ahi on the Rock, a 250° rock set on a plate of rock salt and accompanied by several large portions of ahi and two dipping sauces. Diners cook the ahi to their liking, using bamboo skewers. Think of it as a Hawaiian version of fondue – delicious!

Other standouts at Ko are the spicy tuna tempura roll, the coconut-curry lamb



The main pool area at the Kea Lani lights up the night sky with the Pacific Ocean providing a magnificent backdrop. photo courtesy of The Fairmont Kea Lani

The restaurants at the Kea Lani include Nick’s Fish Market, Cafe Ciao Deli, the Polo Beach Grill, and the Kea Lani Restaurant, where breakfast is served. A splendid buffet offers fresh fruit, omelettes, eggs benedict, smoked salmon, pancake or fresh toast, granola, yogurt and the list goes on. Or you can order specialties off the menu, like mango cream stuffed French toast, or bananas foster pancakes. If you’re not up for a big breakfast, the Café Ciao Deli has granola yogurt parfaits

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for \$6.95 that are amazing. Or grab a lox and bagel to go before you head to the golf course.

There is a lot to do in and around Wailea. If you’re feeling a little too sunned, head to the Shops at Wailea where you’ll find everything from haute couture to fun beach wear, art galleries, jewelry shops and more. If you drive a few miles north to Kihei, there are several outdoor market places, which are great for picking up souvenirs. If you’re looking for surf lessons, Kihei is the place. The concierge at the Kea Lani can make arrangements for you, or contact the local Surf Shack at (808) 875-0006.

Golfing in Wailea offers several options, with three courses at the Wailea Golf Club. The hotel will shuttle you to and from the course. Look for a detailed review of the courses, publishing in the next few weeks.

The hotel will also shuttle you to area restaurants and shopping. We dined one night at Mala at the nearby Wailea Marriott. The owner, Mark Ellman, hails from the San Fernando Valley, and not only runs the fine dining restaurants Mala Wailea, and Mala Tavern in Lahina, but also opened the original Maui Tacos, which has since been franchised throughout the islands. The food is prepared fresh with simple ingredients and is delicious! At Mala, Ellman strives to combine local and healthy ingredients to create innovative dishes. His seared ahi brushetta on flax seed toast, Olowalu tomatoes and edamame puree not only tastes incredible, but you feel good eating it. A Kobe beef burger is featured on the menu and Michael had to have it, and he raved about it for days. Visit his website at www.malaoceantavern.com to read raving reviews and peruse his menus. If you’re near Sacramento, there’s a Maui Tacos in El Dorado Hills. We’re still waiting for one in So Cal.

If it sound like we ate our way through Maui, we did. It’s vacation for goodness sake and pampering yourself is what it’s all about. So we sun bathed, frolicked in the ocean, ate and “piña coloadad-ed” ourselves for four fabulous days at the Fairmont Kea Lani Maui. The girls and I even got henna tatoos – the Mehndi ink variety that fade after a few days. Of all the places I’ve traveled, I find Maui to be one of the most relaxing and rejuvenating destinations. Since I’ve shown you how you can do it on a budget, do yourself a favor and book a vacation to today – doctor’s orders.

Fairmont Kea Lani Maui, 4100 Wailea Alanui Drive, Maui, Hawaii, 96753; 1(866) 540-4456; TEL (808) 875-4100www.fairmont.com/KEALANI.



Rebecca, left, and Emily enjoy the sunset from our balcony at the Kea Lani. photo by Michael Villalpando

chops, the Maui Cattle Company rib-eye steak, and the Zarzuela – a seafood stew with lobster, clams, and shrimp in a spicy chorizo tomato sauce. An incredible highlight of our dining experience was the twilight dinner setting at poolside under a cabana of twinkling lights and candles. Our private dining adventure included a sampling of many dishes and impeccable, personalized service. We ended our night with a yummy Wailea Estate Chocolate Baked Custard on Macadamia Nut Praline Crust with Strawberry Sorbet.



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