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Where to see Sea Turtles in Maui, Hawaii – Finding Hawaii's Honu

MARCH 12, 2019 STEVE ALL, HAWAII, MAUI

Of all the questions we get asked in Maui this is probably the most common. We don't advertise our "Travel Blogger Status" when we travel but we are naturally chatty, friendly people and talking to others about where we travel is kind of what we do. So we always end up talking about Turtles. And when we do we are almost always met with the same response. "Where is the best place to see Sea Turtles in Maui?"

We actually find this quite curious, as quite simply we can't STOP seeing turtles. Turtles have made an epic comeback and are now everywhere. It's not just snorkeling either. You see them on the shore and on the rocks, surfacing for breath, even through the waves as they break on shore. Yet still, we are asked Where to see Sea Turtles in Maui.



I have even been asked when I was waist deep in the ocean, 5-6 feet from a Turtle. So for us, it's clear NO ONE should visit Maui without seeing turtles, but it's equally clear some people do not yet know where, or indeed how, to look for Turtles. This Guide should will you out. Turtles are everywhere and people of all abilities can and MUST see them on their trip. You don't have to be good at snorkeling, you don't even have to get wet.

Honu – Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle

There are five Turtle Species in Hawaii Waters and by far the most common is the Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle. or the Honu.



This Species was almost completely wiped out in the 18-1900's as trade for meat, turtle Skin and the Shells, along with habitat destruction, nesting site interference and pollution all put intense pressure on the creatures. Around the world, the Green Sea Turtle remains on the brink. However, in Hawaii, the Story is remarkably different.

The Honu was a revered animal to the Hawaiian people and only rarely used as food and only for royalty, But eventually, the White man found Hawaii and the Turtles were quickly on the menu. The immense pressure on the turtles quickly pushed them to the brink. However, in the late '70s efforts began to protect the species. This has been an unmitigated success!

Turtles are now prolific around the Hawaiian islands, and almost every beach and cove on Maui has a population and just about everyone is capable of getting to a place where they can witness the turtles.

Respect this Endangered Species – It's the LAW



We have no time for anyone who wants to harass, crowd, touch, or even ride, any of Hawaii's Endangered Species. Fortunately State and Federal Law agrees with us, and you can face serious fines and consequences for even upsetting a Honu.

The Recovery has been fantastic but it is not a done deal. Turtles are still under extraordinary pressure and listed as threatened on the endangered species list. Climate Change, intrusion of breeding grounds, accidental fishing capture, boat accidents, farming run-off, pollution and over development of the coast all add to the risk of future population collapse.

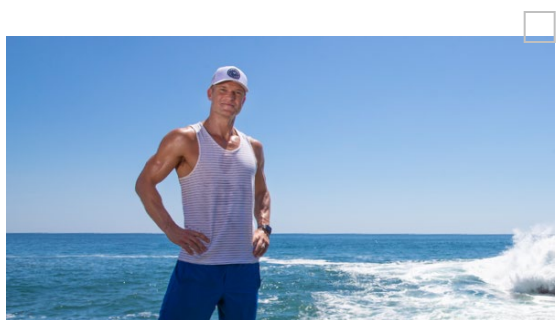
So we are not only compelled by law to respect these animals but we should want to. They are Majestic and awesome creatures and deserve every bit of respect and protection we can give them.

It is simple to do, in the water, just give them space. Some people say Not to touch them. But quite frankly if you are close enough to touch you are already too close. How close should you get. 5-6 feet is a good maximum. This is close enough for a fantastic view but not too close to worry them.

Never get between them and the surface. They need to breathe and don't need to be fighting past you to get a breath of air. Equally, don't chase them. You can swim alongside them if they are on a journey but stay clear and if it feels like they want to get away stop immediately and let them swim off.

At times, when obeying these rules closer encounters will happen. Normally initiated by them. Don't worry about this, if they have approached you, this is not a contravention of any law. Hold your position and let the turtle do as it pleases, and be thankful this creature has chosen you for a closer look.

If you see them on land, stay a good distance from them, and don't get between them and the water. They are on the shore to rest, so keep it quiet, you wouldn't want someone hollering while you are trying to get some Zzz, would you?



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Where to Find Sea Turtles (Honu) on Maui

Right Enough Preaching, Let's get onto where to see them. There are several ways to see Turtles. The main three are either by boat, which entails snorkeling, by snorkeling from shore or by seeing them "hauled out" onto the beach or rocks. Different methods work best at different locations so let's take a look.

By Boat



There are many Snorkelling boat trips available on Maui. Most go to Molokini, but they also often take a stop at Turtle Town. This does not actually exist and each tour operator has their own special location that they call turtle town.

Turtle Town is just a shallow shore reef location that has a steady population of turtles that are almost guaranteed to make an appearance. There is not a great deal we can tell you about these locations as they change from trip to trip and you will be under the expert guidance of the boat crew to get you into the best places to see turtles.

These trips are a great way to see turtles but they are only taking you to inshore locations that are easily accessible from the shore. As such we don't recommend them as a way to see Turtles. They are great trips and if you want to get out on the ocean enjoy the high seas and the food and drinks offered on these trips then they are highly recommended, but if you JUST want to snorkel with turtles just head to the beach.

Honolua Bay Cruise

Some of the Cruises take you to the Honolua Bay Nature Reserve. Again these are really enjoyable cruises and a worthwhile excursion in its own right, and you should see turtles in the bay. You don't, however, need to cruise to the bay and can snorkel fine from the shore.

Molokini

We love Molokini but any cruise going solely to the islet will not see turtles. Most also offer a turtle town stop on the way back. But unless this is offered you will not see turtles! One of the plus points of these cruises is to enjoy the open bars, but if you start drinking early you will not be allowed to snorkel at the second turtle town stop.

By Snorkel



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The single best way to see the Turtles in their natural environment is by snorkeling from shore. While putting this together I really struggled to think of a single shore snorkel where I didn't see turtles. With some thought, there have been a few but these are few and far between.

For a full overview of Snorkelling sites in Maui check out our Snorkeling site pages:

- [West Maui Snorkeling sites](#)
- South Maui Snorkeling Sites

General

As we have said MOST snorkeling locations provide the opportunity for Turtle sightings. But there are a few keys to finding them. The Number 1 thing to look for is a rocky outcrop. You will notice all the below spots sport these rocky features. These are places the turtles can call home. These rocks provide shelter, refuge, and places for their favorite food, algae to grow.

They are one Stop Shops for Turtles and normally static populations live around the same rocky areas travelling fairly little.

So If your looking at a long sandy beach, you will probably not see turtles. even if there is a reef just offshore, like Airport beach, you are still unlikely to encounter turtles. But head to the far end of Airport beach to the Start of Black Rock and turtles are abound.

These Rocky feature appear on many of Maui's beaches and snorkeling spots and these are the undoubted best locations to catch them swimming resting and feeding.

Honolua Bay



when the conditions are right, Honolua is one of the best sites on the island for snorkeling. It also happens to be home to an awful lot of turtles. Spend time exploring the reef along the right-hand side of the bay and you will likely run into a turtle.

However, if you are a strong swimmer and can make the crossing over to the left-hand side of the bay the number of turtles goes up dramatically. There is little else to see on this side however and time is better spent in the rich sunny waters of the reef side of the bay.

Honokeana Bay / Napili Point



Honokeana Bay is Turtle central. A large colony of turtles calls the quaint little bay home. Access is tricky but the turtles head out of the bay and around to Napili Bay where access is via a stunning sandy beach. If the surf is low it's a short swim around from Napili to Honokeana and you will likely encounter many turtles along the way, Not to mention thousands of stunning tropical fish.

Black Rock

This is one of West Maui's best beginner Snorkel Spots. The access is simply as you simply stroll into the water via the soft sands of Kaanapali Beach. Simply swim out along the rocky edge of Black Rock, taking care to avoid the cliff jumpers, and enjoy the splendid abundance of marine life, which almost always includes several Turtles.

You can also see Turtles from Airport beach side and all along the back wall. But immense care must be taken if you attempt the [back wall!](#)

Wailea Beach

If you are in South Maui the best shot at turtle spotting is Wailea Beach. Shouldered on both sides by rocky outcrops where turtles can be found. We have had the most success on the left-hand side, where swimming out and around the headland produces high frequencies of turtle sightings.

While Wailea Beach is our favorite south Maui spot, pretty much every beach on the coastline has rocky outcrops separating the sands. This means most beaches are productive to Turtle sightings. Just make sure you explore the rocky outcrops at the ends of the beach and not the middle sections where turtles rarely venture.

By Land



If you are not wanting to get wet then seeing turtles on land is your best option. Unfortunately, they don't really like hauling out onto the beaches like the rest of us. We have on occasion seen them on beaches and rocks in various places around the Island but not in any way to direct you with any real purpose, but DON'T despair.

For some reason we are unsure of, on one beach on the north coast of Maui, they do haul out of the sea to bask. And they do this every day, in incredible numbers. Even if you have seen turtles many times in the water you should still make the pilgrimage here to see this incredible spectacle.

[Ho'okipa Beach Park](#)









On route 36 (Hana Highway) just after the wonderful town of Paia, but before twin falls before the road becomes 360. There is a large pullout and Carpark to service the Ho'okipa Beach Park and surf break. It is a large parking area but if the surf is up you will be sharing it with quite a few surfers who can be a little grumpy at your touristy presence. Ignore them ut try and not get in their way.

As soon as you arrive you should be fairly clear as to where you need to head as there should be quite a buzz about. But to be clear, head for the right hand side of the beach near the collection of smooth black rocks.

As you approach the area you heart will drop. There is nothing there, just a bunch of rocks and silly tourists (like you) looking at them. You must have just come on the one day they haven't hauled out.

But get a little closer those smooth round rocks are actually turtles! and they can number in the hundreds! On busy days the immediate area will be roped off and there should be a lifeguard to ward off any trespasses. But the Rope allows you to get pretty close without encroaching on the Turtles personal space. Unfortunately, in the past people have harassed and actually tried to ride the turtles. So now we have to do this.

Back to the Turtles and it really is a stunning site. We have all grown up hearing all about the critically

endangered Sea Turtle and to see them here in such vast numbers just lounging on the beach is a fabulous site. Of Course the recovery is not complete and these gentle creatures need protection well into the future, Lets maybe learn the lessons of the past!

Once you have taken in your fill of the turtles head up to Ho'okipi point for some stunning views. Especially if the surf is up and you can watch the Giant waves crash into the coastline while the heroic surfers do battle with them. It's not quite Jaws, which is just a few miles up the road but trickier to reach. But Jaws doesn't have turtles.

[Our Recent Trip there.](#)

By Scuba Diving



There are several Dive Sites around Maui and Lanai where Turtles can be seen when diving. Turtles have a habit though of staying very close to shore and Diving allows us to explore a little further out in deeper water where turtles do not reside. As such most of the dives, we have done in Maui have paid little attention to the Turtles and favor more exotic quarry that are normally out of reach to the confines of the snorkeler.

That's not to say we don't see Turtles when Diving, as we do, but we tend to pay them scant attention.

[By Submarine](#)



No, We are not going Doolally. You really can go for a dive in a real submarine in Maui. There are actually Submarine tours that take you right down to the reef to see the marine life.

Turtles are not actually the Primary focus and there are no guarantees but Turtles are now so prolific in Maui's Water there is always a good chance.

Atlantis

This is a real 100% authentic Sub that descends down to over 100ft to the sea floor. The trip takes in several reefs and culminates at the sunken wreck of the Carthaginian where there are usually reef sharks.

Due to the deep nature of this trip, Turtles are not the indented target but chances are quite good on the shallower reef sections.

Reef Dancer

The Reef Dancer isn't really a Sub. It's a Submarine themed glass-bottomed boat. The seating area is all submerged and it feels like you are underwater but it is still actually a boat.

The 60 Minute tour only visits one reef whereas the 90 minute takes in a "Turtle Town" so you are pretty much guaranteed to see Turtles.

[Maui Ocean Center](#)



[Maui Ocean Center](#) by Michelle on [CC2.0](#)

Ok if none of the above worked for you, we are not sure how, but if you have tried all the above and still not seen a turtle, even at Ho'okipi then all is not completely lost.

Drop by the Maui Ocean Center. They have a Green Sea Turtle Exhibits where you are guaranteed to see turtles! In all honesty it really shouldn't come down to this, however the Maui Ocean Center is a great place to visit regardless and even if your trip has been blessed with Honu after Honu, the Ocean Center is still a great way to spend a few hours, especially if Maui is giving you one of her little blessings*

**Little blessing = Rain!*

Have Your Say

Have you seen Turtles on your Visit to Maui? Where did you find them? Have you seen the stunning spectacle off the Hookipa Haul Out? Or did you see the Turtles on a Snorkel trip or from the shore? Let us know where? Have you got any questions about where to find Turtles, whatever it is just drop a comment below? It would be a crime to Visit Maui and not see the Turtles so make sure you know exactly where you are going to see them!

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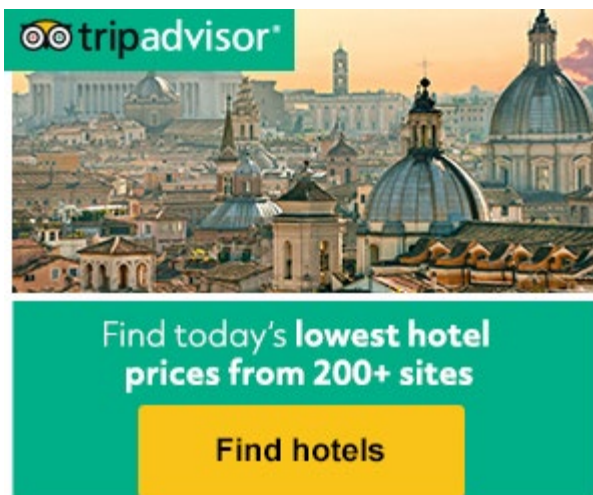
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