



Threatened Green Sea Turtles Set Free at Mauna Lani

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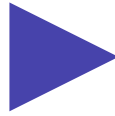
While Independence Day has ended this year, it's just begun for two Hawaiian green sea turtles that are swimming free for the first time. We watched the turtles celebrate their Pacific Ocean homecoming at Mauna Lani on Big Island yesterday.





For the past 34 years, a [Turtle Preservation Program](#) at the resort has nurtured hatchlings to be released on July 4th annually in a partnership program with Sea Life Park on Oahu. The event is called Turtle Independence Day and now draws thousands every year. It was quite the crowd. Watch our live coverage of yesterday's event below.





Meet natural resources manager Ethan Souza.

Editors Rob and Jeff met Ethan Souza, one of the 4-member team of natural resources managers here. Ethan said that “After two to three years of growth, our sea turtles return to their home in the ocean.” He goes on to say, Mālama Honu, Mālama Honua: When we care for the turtles, we care for the world.”

Ethan says that the Honu (green sea turtles) “is so culturally and ecologically significant that ancient Hawaiians may have believed their shells symbolically carried a map of the Polynesian Oceania world, encompassing the Hawaiian islands, Rapa Nui and Aotearoa.”





BOH editor Rob and Ethan.

Joining Ethan is a renowned team that includes Pii Laeha, who they affectionately call “turtle guy.” He’s spent the last 23 years in this work of love here at Mauna Lani. Also on the team is Mauna Lani’s cultural practitioner Danny Akaka, better known as “Uncle Danny.” He has been the resident historian for the past 40 years at Mauna Lani and meets with guests to talk story and help them learn more about the area’s vast historical significance.

Hawaii turtle independence day is the culmination of years of work.

You may recall we previously wrote about one turtle which was found at Kaloko-Honokohau National Historic Park, not far from Mauna Lani. The team realized it was the same turtle that they had released on Turtle Independence Day in 1999. The now 27-year-old turtle weighed in at 267 lbs, and its shell was three feet long!





After nurturing the turtles for the past 2-3 years, it's a bittersweet moment for the team to see them go. The turtles have been lovingly cared for in the saltwater Honu Lagoon since they arrived at Mauna Lani. For the past 34 years, thousands of the endangered Hawaiian Green Sea Turtles have been returned to the ocean. Each one has a very small passive tag that can be scanned, which came in handy recently.

Green sea turtles have been around for 200 million years. Read more about them here: [Hawaii's Green Sea Turtles](#). They are listed as a threatened species in the Central and North Pacific by [NOAA Fisheries](#) and protected under state and US federal law. Internationally, they are considered endangered by both CITES and the IUCN Red List.

Annual Turtle Independence Day at Mauna Lani.

Held every July 4th at Mauna Lani, the event is free and open to the public. Arrive by 9 am to find a place to stand on the beach or in the c  in. Others gather at the lagoon for a special blessing by Uncle Danny. He leads a parade of hula dancers that escorts a van carrying the turtles to their release.

Once at the beach, the turtles are given a traditional Hawaiian ceremony. Seeing the turtles swim into the ocean and to their new life is amazing. Big Island residents and visitors shared great food and enjoyed the special moment with family and friends.

Tip: While you are visiting, we highly suggest walking around the 11-acre historical Kalāhuipuaʻa Fishponds. It's located on the grounds of the Mauna Lani. The ancient Hawaiians maintained this living museum. Bottom samples taken from the ponds predate Western contact and go as far back as 250 B.C. It's one of our top picks for things to do on the Big Island.

Mauna Lani welcomes back prior general manager Pete Alles.

If you haven't visited [Mauna Lani](#) recently, you're in for a pleasant surprise that caught us off-guard. The entire property underwent a 200 million-dollar renovation and reopened in January 2020. Big changes to guest rooms, public areas, swimming pools, and more took place. The 33-acre property has 333 guest rooms and sits about a half-hour north of Kona Airport. Mauna Lani has been managed by the Auberge Resorts Collection since 2018.

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4 thoughts on “Threatened Green Sea Turtles Set Free at Mauna Lani”

Mary E

July 6, 2023 at 9:02 am

Hi Rob & BOH Staff: nice to see your photo. Well, you’re always coming up with events in the Hawaiian culture that I was unaware of after many travels to the Islands. Hawaiians have such a rich culture which needs to be preserved. The Honu is my favorite and enjoy drinking coffee in my Honu “reward” cup from ABC each morning.

 3

[REPLY](#)

Beat Of Hawaii

July 6, 2023 at 11:05 am

Hi Mary.

Thanks! And great to hear from you again.

Aloha.

 3

[REPLY](#)

Roy

July 6, 2023 at 8:42 am

This is a very special event for us.

 4

REPLY

Chris R

July 5, 2023 at 4:37 pm

I was there too! I was standing in the water behind you.

 6

REPLY

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