

Best Snorkeling in Maui

If you are in search of the **best snorkeling in Maui**, you will not be disappointed in your visit to this island of paradise. Maui is surrounded by hot spots for snorkelers and divers, depending on where you want to go and what you want to see. Snorkeling can be just about anywhere on the island, depending on where you go and what you want to see.

Did you know that Maui is known as the #1 Hawaiian Island for snorkeling? That is so for many reasons, but most popularly because it is the best place to learn how to snorkel in Hawaii. For beginners, Maui offers shallow and calm ocean conditions, and yet still wonderful for experienced snorkelers because of drop offs, ledges, over hangs and the variety of marine life that are recurrent in Maui waters. The island is also virtually surrounded by hot spots for snorkelers and divers, depending on where you want to go and what you want to see.

#1 Molokini Crater

Located just 2.5 miles off of Maui's south shore, Molokini Crater is an underwater volcano islet. Listed as a Marine Life Conservation District Seabird Sanctuary, this partially submerged, crescent-shaped volcanic crater is like no other snorkeling location in the world. Ecologically, it is the perfect environment for marine life feeding and breeding, and hosts over 250 species of endemic Hawaiian tropical fish. Within the volcanic walls you will find a host of tropical marine life and colorful reef formations, including Manta Rays, Black Triggerfish, Yellow Tang, Raccoon Butterflyfish, Parrotfish, Moorish Idol, Moray Eels, and even the occasional small White Tip reef shark. The Pacific waters surrounding Molokini Crater have over 100 species of algae and approximately 35 hard coral species.

The crystal-clear water (average of 150-feet of visibility) at Molokini Crater is what makes this one of the best Maui snorkeling locations on Maui.



Molokini is a popular location for beginning and experienced snorkelers alike, and most popular for morning snorkel tours. The waters surrounding Molokini Crater are also one of the most popular locations for scuba diving in all the Hawaiian Islands.

#2 Turtle Town

Justly named, Turtle Town is the best place to go snorkeling on Maui if your goal is to see the Green Hawaiian Sea Turtle in action!

Thanks to current government protection and the Endangered Species Act (ESA), this stretch is home to a particularly dense population of the Green Hawaiian Sea Turtle. There have been some questions as to precisely where Turtle Town is located, but the general knowledge is that Turtle Town is located on the southern coastline of the island, between Nahuna Point and Black Sand Beach. Best visited by boat, Turtle Town is well known for providing some of the best snorkeling in Maui, particularly if these large lumbering sea creatures are your sightseeing target. When enjoying a Maui snorkel tour at Turtle Town, guests can expect to see turtles gently approaching swimmers with curiosity, as well as an abundance of colorful marine life.

Turtle Town is a top place to snorkel on Maui for many reasons, including a chance to view the Green Hawaiian Sea Turtles in their natural habitat, calm wind conditions, clear waters, and a gentle slope which allows all snorkelers to find an ocean depth that is comfortable. In addition, snorkelers can also see the Wrasse fish cleaning the Green Hawaiian Sea Turtles' shells, Butterflyfish, Perch, Chub, Triggerfish, Snapper, Goatfish, Big Eye Scad, Needlefish, Moray Eels, Crustaceans, Trumpet Fish, and a common appearance by the former Hawaii State Fish, the *Humuhumunukunukuapuaa*.

#3 Coral Gardens

Coral Gardens in Hawaii is located near the center of the West Maui shoreline. This awesome snorkeling location is home to a large number of brightly colored fish, breathtakingly gorgeous coral reef formations, and the occasional Green Hawaiian Sea Turtle. At this secret Maui snorkeling gem, guests will have an opportunity to see a plethora of Hawaiian tropical fish, including Angel Fish, Butterfly Fish, Parrot Fish, Triggerfish, Octopus, Crabs, Moray Eels and more. During the Winter months, this location has also been noted to provide an underwater glimpse of the North Pacific Humpback Whales during their annual migration to Maui waters between December and April.

The Coral Gardens underwater reef formation stretches underwater from the South end of Papalaua Beach towards the cliffs. This is a truly incredible Hawaiian reef to visit if you'd like to see a dreamy underwater world with clear waters, dramatic black lava fingers extending from the shoreline to the visible ocean floor, secret coral sea caves and passageways, and a host of colorful marine life flourishing in every nook and cranny. Coral Gardens is best reached by ocean vessel with Maui snorkel tours that leave from the Lahaina and Maalaea Harbors. This is a great location for beginning and advanced snorkelers with calm ocean conditions, clear water, an ocean depth that slopes from shallow to medium. On your next trip to Maui, make sure to visit this West Maui gem.

#4 Honolua Bay

Honolua Bay is located about 20 minutes North of Lahaina Town on Maui's North-West Shore. It's one of the most incredible locations on Maui, providing plenty of remarkable underwater and out-of-water scenery for residents and visitors. *The Bay* offers a small, sandy beach where you can access the water directly, otherwise it can be reached by a short downhill hike or by boat. Honolua Bay is a marine reserve that Maui residents have fought for years to protect from

development, and a snorkelers paradise for spectacular coral reef formations, Green Hawaiian Sea Turtles and large schools of tropical fish.

The best time of the year to snorkel and scuba dive at Honolua Bay on Maui is mid-Summer when ocean conditions are calm and flat. Any other time of the year, especially when there's a North swell, Honolua Bay is dominated by Maui's elite surf scene. Not only is this an awesome snorkel spot in Hawaii, but it is also one of the most famous surf locations in the world. There is no place like Honolua Bay, and if you ever lay your eyes on it's majesty, you will instantly know why it is almost made the list for the *Wonders of the World*. When snorkeling at Honolua Bay, guests will find themselves in a Hawaiian wonderland! Honolua is a part of the Mokuleia Marine Life Conservation District, and offers a cornucopia of tropical fish and coral reef formations to explore. Whether you find Honolua by car or boat, you will not be disappointed. Honolua Bay is without a doubt one of the most beautiful places to go in Hawaii.

#5 Five Caves



If you are a good swimmer and a relatively experienced snorkeler, Five Caves is another amazing spot for some of the best snorkeling on Maui. Also known as 'Five Graves' (*because it's near a graveyard*), it is also a popular location for experienced scuba divers. Located just North of Turtle Town, Five Caves provides a myriad of Hawaiian marine life, Green Hawaiian Sea Turtles, and harmless reef sharks. It is best to reach Five Caves on Maui by boat, but the beach can also be accessed by Makena Road in South Kihei. Visitors without a guide should take caution due to variable ocean conditions at this Maui snorkeling locale. Even if the surf is small, Five Caves can be a tricky area for a variety of variables. Make sure to always swim with a buddy and take proper safety precautions.

Five Caves isn't just an amazing location for snorkeling on Maui, it is almost mystical with common sights of the Green Hawaiian Sea Turtle, tons of tropical fish varieties, Eagle Rays, and a truly diverse underwater landscape. It has been noted that sleeping White Tip sharks have been spotted in the caves, so use your discretion and be careful to tread lightly out of respect for Hawaiian marine life.

#6 Black Rock

Black Rock is located on Ka'anapali Beach in West Maui and has won numerous awards as one of the best places to go in Maui. Ka'anapali Beach encompasses over 3 miles of white sandy beach, a boardwalk, resorts and hotels, restaurants, shopping and nightlife. The beach itself is

one of the most widely visited locations on Maui, but Black Rock is still somewhat of a hidden gem to most non-residents.

Black Rock is most popularly known as “the rock you jump off” on West Maui, but “the rock” also happens to be surrounded by a fabulous underwater reef formation. The clear-blue water is surely mesmerizing, the soft sandy bottom is inviting, the weather is always divine, and the ocean is calm. It’s perfect. The water at Black Rock starts at about 8-feet in depth, and gradually extends to approximately 30-feet as you swim around the point. To find the best snorkeling, follow the lava rock edge. Here, you can see the ultra-fab Green Hawaiian Sea Turtle, Moorish Idol, Surgeon Fish, Snapper, Hawk Fish, Porcupine Fish, Needle Fish, Jacks, Invertebrates, Box Fish, Damsel Fish, Parrot Fish, *Humuhumunukunuuapuaa* and more. To access Black Rock, travel to the Northwest end of Ka’anapali Beach near a black lava rock peninsula next to the Sheraton Hotel. This is great place for confident beginner snorkelers.

#7 Napili Bay

Located between Kahana and Kapalua is the legendary Napili Beach area. Napili is surrounded by a quiet community of residents and vacation rentals, but still remains to be one of the sleepest little areas on Maui, and a true Hawaiian gem. It is frequented by visitors, but mostly by those who are seeking solace with their families, even in a sometimes densely populated beach environment. This is definitely a beach where you can find peace and comfort in West Maui. For those looking to snorkel at Napili Bay, there is an activity rental cabana, and it is not necessarily a location where beginners will need much instruction.

Can you imagine transporting yourself to a beautiful sandy beach in Hawaii with calm swimming pool-like water, and a gentle shore break perfect for a relaxing dip in the ocean? I know that’s a hard request. Then imagine, gorgeous underwater coral reef formations, ideal for snorkeling on Maui, with an everyday presence of the Hawaiian Green Sea Turtle. That is Napili Bay. It is home to the West Maui Green Hawaiian Sea Turtle, and the always perfect magical Maui sunsets. We suggest that you arrive in the afternoon and stay for sunset, it is truly stunning. Napili Kai Beach Resort fronts the bay, so it can become congested during high season on Maui. The best time to visit Napili Bay is during the early morning on weekdays, or later in the afternoon for sunset celebrations with champagne in hand, of course.

#8 Kapalua Bay

Kapalua Bay is one of the most remarkable beaches on Maui, a perfect West Maui locale to explore while on vacation in Hawaii. Kapalua translates to *kapa* and *lua* in the ancient Hawaiian language, meaning “two borders.” Kapalua Bay is perfectly positioned between Oneloa Bay and Honokahua Bay, which explains its centrally located namesake.

Time and time again, Kapalua Bay has been named “Best Beach in the World” by numerous publications, including Conde Nast Traveler Magazine. The Travel Channel has even called it the “Best Beach in America.” Without a doubt, it is one of the best beaches for snorkeling and just chillin’ out in America. The quiet and peaceful community surrounding Kapalua Bay is

divine, and the beach in itself is out of this world with a protected, crescent-shaped cove ideal for Hawaii marine life to gather. Kapalua Bay most definitely provides a calm environment for snorkeling in West Maui, with vibrant colors, excellent swimming conditions, and the most ideal location for kicking back with your family and friends under the warm Maui sunshine. When snorkeling at Kapalua Bay, guests can expect to see Scorpion Fish, Cornet Fish, Jacks, Butterflyfish, Parrotfish, Goat Fish, Moorish Idol, Box Fish, Perch, Triggerfish, Chub, various invertebrates and more.

#9 Ulua Beach

Once known as “Kaula’uo Beach,” this concealed South Maui beach is now more commonly recognized as Ulua Beach, named after a popular Hawaiian fish. This sweet little Maui beach cove is accessed down a somewhat hidden Wailea beach road that may be marked by a sign that says, “Parking for the Marriott.” Ulua Beach is definitely popular for residents and experienced scuba divers, but more frequented by resort guests.

If you are staying in West Maui and trying to get away from the regular tourist hustle and bustle on the South side, or are looking for a place that is less frequented by tour guides, then Ulua Beach is perfect for you. It’s great for snorkeling because it is private and has calm waters, and is also a wonderful place to go if you’re looking for a more intimate and quiet place to decompress with your loved one. Pending water clarity, guests can expect to view Moorish Idol, Surgeon Fish, Snapper, Hawk Fish, Porcupine Fish, Needle Fish, Jacks, Invertebrates, Box Fish, Damsel Fish, Parrot Fish, and possibly the *Humuhumunukunukuapuaa*. Parking and restroom facilities are an added bonus.

#10 Ahihi Kinau Natural Area Reserve

Ahihi Kinau Natural Area Reserve is believed to be one of the most delicate and youngest eco-reef zones on Maui. This small cove is a great place to snorkel if you are with a small group, especially with young children or those who don’t feel comfortable in open water. Just nearby, Fishbowl aka “The Aquarium” is currently closed due to overuse by charter companies, and those who unfortunately did not visit with respect in the forefront of their minds. It is very important that if you visit the Ahihi Kinau Natural Area Reserve that you are extremely conscious of the ‘aina (land), and makai (ocean), as you should be wherever you visit in Hawaii. These lands are precious, and conservation is key for a sustainable and healthy future on Maui.

Ahihi Kinau Natural Area Reserve is found by traveling down the Southern coast of Wailea, past Makena towards La Perouse Bay. The coastline is jagged and mostly consists of intermixed coral reef formations and lava rock. Tropical fish are quite close to the coastline here, mostly prevalent in the shallowest waters. We suggest that you snorkel closest to the road in the protected bay. Make sure to be careful not to step on the coral, it is a living and breathing marine animal in itself! This is a great place to spot the Green Hawaiian Sea Turtles, and they are definitely visible from shore if you are focused. Guests commonly see Tang, Squirrel Fish, Goat Fish, Jacks, Needle Fish, Chub, Butterflyfish, Parrotfish and Sea Cucumbers at this location.

No fishing of any kind is allowed at Ahihi Kinau Natural Area Reserve.