



Perfect days end with a perfect sunset.

kayak there. Currents and winds between Molokini and Maui are too strong for most kayakers.

The crater is a marine and bird sanctuary. You're not allowed to walk on the island. Once inside the crescent, you'll find the water inviting. See page 209 for more on snorkeling and diving Molokini. In the past, the crater was visited often by a lonely monk seal who was famous for swimming right up to divers. Boat captains nicknamed him Humpy because of his...*unusually* friendly gestures toward swimmers. The seal was apparently unaware of the law prohibiting human contact with monk seals. If any monk seals visit Molokini while you're there, just remember that *they* have to initiate any contact.

The horizontal notch on the back of the crater is caused by wave cuts. If you were to SCUBA dive down 250 feet, you'd find a similar wave cut, evidence that the ocean was *much* lower during a past ice age.

According to lore, the 19th-century King Kalakaua wagered Molokini in a hand of poker with a local rancher. When the king lost the hand, he reneged, proclaiming that he hadn't wagered Molokini, but rather *omole kini*, which is a bottle of gin.

### LA PÉROUSE BAY

As you approach the end of the road, look on both sides of you. It appears to be a lumpy, tilled field, just waiting to be planted. That's a field of a'ā lava rock, and it looks just the way it did when it erupted two centuries ago. Turn your attention to the split lava mound uphill just before the road's end. This is where the last eruption took place on Maui. Local legend states that there was a family living there at the time. An old woman came one day and asked for a chicken to eat. The family refused, saying that they first had to sacrifice some to the volcano goddess, Pele. The old woman raged, saying that *she* was Pele, and how dare they refuse her? She sent lava flowing their way. The mother and daughter fled toward the mountain, but Pele seized the two and turned them into stone. The hill you see, split in two, is made up of the mother and daughter, forever separated by a vengeful Pele.

La Pérouse Bay is as far as you can go by car in South Maui. It's renowned for two things: **dolphins** and **wind**. Dolphins are relatively common early in the morning. A pod patrols the area, and we often see them here around 7 a.m. and at Big Beach by around 10 a.m. But we often go months without seeing them at all. (Maybe

dolphins take vacations, too.) Scientists think that, while resting, dolphins are able to turn off much of their brain (including the part that runs their echolocation abilities). They do a sort of snooze-and-cruise at La Pérouse in the early hours, counting on the fact that the shallow water and a light bottom will alert them to predators in the absence of their sonars. This means that, in the morning, dolphins are *literally* operating on half a brain. (Come to think of it, so am I before my coffee.)

### When was the Last Eruption of Haleakala? 1790... Or is it 1490?

*Ask most people on Maui, "When was the last time there was an eruption here?" and you'll be told 1790. It's said so often it's considered an unchallenged fact. The truth is, no one knows when it happened. The 1790 date is based on the fact that when George Vancouver visited here in 1794, he drew a map showing the lava flow at Cape Kina'u (at the end of the road in South Maui). But when the French explorer La Pérouse visited earlier in 1786, his map didn't show the cape. This, coupled with the fact that the flow looks very young, allowed people to divide the time and conclude that the eruption occurred "around 1790."*

*The problem is this: As a mapmaker, La Pérouse was terrible. He didn't get anything right. And his map of the shoreline was so crude and inaccurate, you can't use it to determine anything—other than the fact that La Pérouse probably flunked out of cartography school. You'd never recognize these islands from his map. Recent carbon-14 dating puts the eruption closer to 500 years ago, give or take a century. And by analyzing crystals in the lava, they can check the direction of the earth's ever-changing magnetic field. The crystals don't match the flows that we know happened on the Big Island in 1801.*

*What about historical accounts? There were people living here and, after all, two centuries isn't that long. Didn't they witness it? Sure, they did, but nobody wrote it down. The Hawaiians didn't have a written language until western man invented one in the 1800s. The only known historical accounts come from two sources. One is an American missionary who came to Maui in 1841. He said the native Hawaiians had told him their "grandparents witnessed it." Hmm, pretty slim. The only other account is from a Hawaiian cowboy named Charlie Ako. In 1906 he told a reporter that his father-in-law told him that his grandfather had seen the flow when he was "old enough to carry two coconuts from the sea to the upper road," which was 4–5 miles. The reporter plugged in the various ages and dates, assuming 33 years per generation, and came up with around 1750.*

*So we have map readers saying 1790, historical accounts saying 1750, and some scientific tests saying around 1490. Since we had to use some date, we mention the 1790 date in this book. But now you know the full story.*

*So now if someone tells you that the last eruption took place in 1790, you can look them directly in the eye and tell them with smug certainty...mmmmaybe.*