NĀ WAHI PANA
Respecting Hawaiian Sacred Sites

Culturally appropriate behavior when visiting heiau, wahi pana, and sacred sites in Hawai‘i

NĀ AKUA
Nā Akua, Hawaiian gods, spirits or deities, took various forms in nature referred to as kino-lau. There are four major gods and thousands of other gods and spirits (kini akua).

KANALOA
God of the ocean and voyaging, represented by the he‘e (octopus).

KĀNE
A creator, associated with freshwater, the source of life. Kāne is often represented by an upright stone.

KŪ
God of politics and warfare, both a builder and a destroyer, represented by the wide-mouth ki‘i (image).

LONO
God of fertility, peace, and harvest, represented by the tall, pearl-eyed ki‘i. Makahiki, the annual harvest festival, is dedicated to him.

TYPES OF HEIAU
Heiau were constructed under the direction of the ali‘i nui (high chiefs) and kāhuna (priests). They were dedicated to different gods for various purposes which could change over time with a new ali‘i. The mana (divine power) of the ali‘i dictated strict kapu (prohibitions) at these sites. These are some of the types of heiau:

• Heiau ho‘ōla are for treating the sick and training in the art of healing. An example is Kea‘iwa Heiau in ‘Aiea, O‘ahu.
• Heiau luakini tend to be the largest and most elaborate. Dedicated to the war-god Kū, these are the heiau of the ruling chiefs. Examples are Mo‘okini and Pu‘ukoholā Heiau on Hawai‘i Island and Pu‘u O Mahuka Heiau on O‘ahu.
• Heiau mäpele are dedicated to Kāne and Lono for peace, fertility, and agricultural productivity. Ulupō Heiau in Kailua has been rededicated as this type of heiau.

SITES TO VISIT
A number of heiau and wahi pana can be visited in national, state, and county parks, botanical gardens, and resorts. Before visiting, check websites for hours, directions, fees, and possible restrictions.

HAWAI‘I ISLAND
• Pu‘ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site
• Mo‘okini Heiau State Monument
• Ku‘emau Heiau, Kahalu‘u Beach Park
• Hāpapaili‘i Heiau, Keauhou Resort
• Hikiau Heiau, Kealakekua State Historical Park
• Hale O Keawe, Pu‘u‘honu O Hōnaunau National Historical Park

KAU‘A‘I
• Waialua Complex of Heiau, Waialua River State Park (Hikinaakalā, Kalaeokamanu, & Poliahu Heiau)
• Kauhau‘apa‘oa Heiau, Hā‘ena State Park

MAUI
• Haleki‘i-Pihana Heiau State Historic Site
• Ohala Heiau, Wai‘anapanapa State Park
• Pā‘ilāmāhale Heiau, Kahanu Garden

O‘AHU
• Keawia Heiau State Recreation Area
• Pu‘u O Mahuka Heiau State Historic Site
• Ulupō Heiau State Historical Park
• Kū‘i‘iloa Heiau, Pōka‘i Bay Beach Park
• Kūkaniloko Birthstones State Historic Site
• Hale O Lono, Waimea Valley

NOTICE
It is unlawful to take, excavate, destroy, or alter any historic site or state land. Violation is subject to a fine of $10,000 (HRS, Chapter 6E-11). Sites on federal land are protected under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act.

FRAGILE RESOURCES
Rocks collected from beaches, streams, and the mountains provide an abundance of building material for fishpond walls, house platforms, enclosures, and religious sites. Hawaiians use a technique called pāpōhaku or dry stone masonry. Their skill at locking the stones in place without any mortar is evident in the massive fishpond walls and heiau that remain hundreds of years after their construction.

Without the use of mortar, these stacked stone structures are now fragile and subject to collapse. Do not walk on or over any of these structures for your safety, the protection of the site, and respect for their cultural value. Help preserve these sacred places for the future.

TO LEARN MORE & GET DIRECTIONS
Department of Land & Natural Resources
Division of State Parks
www.hawaiistateparks.org
National Park Service
Hawai‘i Parks
www.nps.gov/state/HI
National Tropical Botanical Garden
Kahanu Garden, Hāna, Maui
http://ntbg.org/gardens/kahanu

This brochure was designed and printed by ‘Ahahui Mālama I Ka Lokahi and the Kailua Hawaiian Civic Club with a grant from the Hawai‘i Tourism Authority, Kūkulu Ola Program.
Wahi Pana

Wahi pana are celebrated and storied places in the cultural traditions of Hawai‘i. They may be heiau, royal birthing sites, legendary sites, and places of significance for the people who live there. These sacred places have nana (spiritual power) and are treated with great respect, honor, and reverence. Heiau are religious sites and places of worship where ceremonies and rituals are conducted. The design and size of these sites range from small ko‘a (shrine) to large, massive platforms and walled enclosures. Construction of a heiau requires engineering and expertise in the stacking of pöhaku (rocks) of various sizes and shapes for stability and structural integrity.

As you visit these sites today, you will see the stone foundations and walls that define the sacred area. The pole and thatch structures placed within the walls or atop the platform shapes for stability and structural integrity. Rendering of Pu‘u O Mahuka Heiau with ceremonial structures for future generations.

Hana Küpono

Hana Küpono is
• the right behavior
• conducted at the appropriate time
• by the proper people
• presented to the correct recipients
• toward a positive and significant goal.

Hana Küpono evokes respect in the form of silence and attention on the part of the recipients. It prepares the participants to engage seriously in what is to follow and initiates a set of responses from those who know the protocol.

It transforms the mood from the mundane and ordinary into something deeper and more important. It links all participants together and to their surroundings via an enhanced sense of place.

It expresses and confirms a living and vital Hawaiian culture, making each person a bit more appreciative of and more connected to these islands we call home.

Mālama

Mālama (care for) is a concept central to Hawaiian culture and values. To mālama is to show respect and help preserve Hawaiian cultural sites, sacred places, and wahi pana for future generations.

When Visiting . . .

Before visiting any place, it is important that we understand where we are going – the history, the usage and the spirituality of the place. And we need to realize that wherever we go – the forest or the ocean – we are entering as guests and we cannot automatically assume that we are welcome there. From this perspective, we may develop a proper attitude – one of humility, one that shifts our focus from ourselves to our surroundings, and one that allows us to blend with the elements of nature such as the sun, the clouds, the wind, and the rain.

Before approaching any sacred place, traditional protocol requires that we silently ask permission of the kūpuna (ancestors), we give thanks for the privilege of visiting, and we offer apologies for any negativity we may unwittingly bring or do at the site.

While near wahi pana, continued silence is the best behavior so as not to disturb the harmony of the place or the fauna and flora that reside therein. Silent prayers may be offered in recognition of the spirituality of the place with an understanding that anything we bring with us affects that spirituality. We need to be aware that we become a part of the place and the place becomes a part of us simply because of our presence.

We should always respect the boundaries and kapu (off limits) areas of these sacred sites. If not marked, use the outer edge of the stone or wood structure as your limit for viewing.

Hō‘okupu

Our quiet, respectful prayers or chants are our hō‘okupu (offerings). Nothing physical is required. However, simple, non-meat gifts such as ferns or other greenery may be appropriate, but be aware that this type of offering is traditionally made within the context of ritual and ceremony. Realize that if no one takes care of the place, any offerings we make may accumulate and litter the area rather than serve as an enhancement for the gods.

Put simply, if unsure, we should offer nothing spoken and nothing physical.

When you visit a site, you may see offerings of various kinds. Wrapping a rock in a ti leaf is not a traditional offering and it alters the integrity of the site when left on the heiau walls and platform. Incense, crystals, candles and coins are also inappropriate and can damage the pöhaku (rocks) of the sacred site.

In some cases, a lele structure is built for the placement of these hō‘okupu. While physical offerings are not encouraged, the lele avoids the need to walk onto sacred areas or damage the site.

Physical disturbance is to be avoided as well. This includes moving of pöhaku and the removal and/or addition of pöhaku and plants.

Heed all signs denoting restrictions and proper behavior when visiting. Mahalo.