



MAUI

MAUI, IN FOCUS

An exclusive photo tour, in partnership with Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea, reveals an acclaimed photographer's tricks of the trade, scenic landscapes you'll never forget and images to last a lifetime.

STORY BY MATTHEW DEKNEEF

“**A**lways move your body instead of zoom,” fine-art photographer Daniel Sullivan suggests, encouraging me to get myself and the Nikon DSLR camera he’s lent me closer to our subject. “That can give you a new perspective.”

Trained in our camera lens is the sprawling Waihe’e region of West Maui, the rocky and wild coastline glistening in the morning light, all coming into focus. Per his advice, I step further down the 3-mile loop trail in the Waihe’e Coastal Dunes and Wetlands Refuge, a peacefully isolated nature reserve on the island I would’ve

never thought to visit on my own, driven by an ageless pursuit that has motivated photographers in nearly every field since the invention of the camera itself: I’m here to get the shot.

By the edge of the Waihe’e River, overlooking where it empties into the ocean, I look again through the camera’s

viewfinder to frame anything resembling an artful composition. “Remember the rule of thirds. It’s a big mistake to just look at the coastline without an anchor,” Sullivan instructed earlier. “When there’s something to ground you, it becomes more interesting. It’s about waiting for that decisive moment.” Then, as if on cue, my “anchor” materializes. A lone surfer approaches in the distance, delicately stepping over wet river rocks, a shortboard tucked tightly under his arm. I watch him in the viewfinder, adjusting my lens to keep him in focus, just waiting for that “decisive moment” where his figure aligns with the horizon in the lower third of the frame, an optimal intersection point as demonstrated by the guiding rule of thirds. *Click, click, click.* I press down on the shutter and snap the scene. I review the images on the LCD screen. I have my shot.

This exchange between Sullivan and me becomes a recurring theme on our Maui Photo Adventure, an over-the-top, natural attraction-packed excursion hand-tailored with the Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea, and offered to its guests through the resort's Unforgettable Experiences Series, a premier portfolio of customized tours, paired with a local expert like Sullivan. (If you've been to Pā'ia, you might already be familiar with his crisp and dynamic work. His gallery, Indigo Pā'ia, showcases his vivid Maui landscapes.) It's also reflective of both Sullivan's and the newly renovated Four Seasons' world view—to immerse yourself in the scenery within your lens and beyond the resort's surroundings.

From this tour, "I hope people will learn to travel deeper while at the same time learning valuable photography techniques," he says, "and gain a greater appreciation for the beauty and culture of Hawai'i." To move your body. To gain a new perspective.

My version of this customized tour traversed West Maui, an intimate introduction to "the most removed," Sullivan austere refers to the region. We started in Waihe'e, wrapped up and around the winding highway toward Kahakuloa, down through Kapalua and, by



OPPOSITE: Pu'u Koa'e at Kahakuloa, from Sullivan's book, "The Maui Coast: The Legacy of the King's Highway." ABOVE: A white peacock emerges from a meadow in Waihe'e at the start of the tour. BELOW: Photographer Daniel Sullivan shares tips on how to capture a perfect Maui sunset shot in Olowalu with the writer.

sunset, ended in Olowalu. On this route, Sullivan curated stops at hidden gems he thought would appeal to me as someone who's never been to West Maui. Just scroll through the reel of images I took under his technical guidance for the highlights: surfers carve sparkling waves at a secret surf spot; a magically unscribed moment with an all-white peacock in the wild; a serene waterfall on the 13 Crossings Hike, a local favorite; humpback whale sightings from the *lānai* of a private residence overlooking Mōke'ehia Island; Pu'u Koa'e looming over Kahakuloa Village on a

surprisingly windless day; a close-to-full moon shining brightly against Olowalu Valley. I came, I saw, I photographed.

Photo tours are unlike normal guided tours. There's more to consider than just checking off must-see sights. Those are important, absolutely, but equally crucial? The lighting. Which is why most, like Sullivan's, are full-day excursions (sunrises and sunsets offer golden opportunities for photography). He crafts these itineraries for guests considering how a place responds to light at different times of day. Not only does he provide all the camera gear, he shares exactly how he captures his more awe-inspiring images. I'm thinking specifically of sunset at Olowalu where he taught me how to affix a density filter to a lens to produce a silky smooth effect on the water lapping against the shore. For photography enthusiasts, this type of intel and access is everything.

That said, photo tours with the Four Seasons are unlike normal photo tours. It includes a roomy Escalade outfitted with WiFi (for when you want to Instagram those powerful waves crashing up against Nākālele Point in the moment), enough phone chargers to power an Apple store, a skilled private driver (because who actually wants to drive the cliff-hugging highway around West Maui?) and a satisfying picnic lunch made fresh that day by the resort's chefs. The tours, like the Four Seasons itself, are constantly striving to outdo themselves.

"Here on Maui, we have guests who have been here so many times and the challenge is offering something new every time they come," says Shermaine Rodrigues, the guest experience manager who spearheads the resort's Unforgettable Experiences Series. "We have to take it to the next level, especially for our guests who come





PICTURE PERFECT

The writer's three favorite images taken on his Maui Photo Adventure. They won't be published in an art gallery any time soon, but they just might be good enough to frame and hang up in his office cubicle.

- [1] A surf spot on Maui.
- [2] Mōke'ehia Island.
- [3] A white peacock emerges from a meadow in Waihe'e.

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and don't want something straight out of a brochure. They want something unique, something they can't read about on TripAdvisor or Yelp, something that can't be replicated."

This is where Sullivan's wealth of knowledge factors in. Even though he didn't set out to be a tour guide, he has all the traits that make up a really great one—conversational, easygoing and well-connected. "He's one of those personalities that's really good at reading people, their expectations and adapting to them," Rodrigues says. Since launching, Sullivan has given tours to celebrities, energy tycoons and even royalty. He basically gets along with everyone from all walks of life, which makes sense, considering it was walking that eventually led him here. In 2015, Sullivan published a photo book, "The Maui Coast: The Legacy of the King's Highway," which chronicled his grueling journey retracing an ancient Hawaiian trail that circumnavigated the entire island. In doing so, he rediscovered places steeped in culture, met people rich in local knowledge and snapped priceless photography along the way. When he walked West Maui, in particular, he was moved by just how untouched it was.

When I finally retire to my room following our tour, I am surprised to find a limited-edition copy of this book gifted to me, lying on the dining table. I flip through its glossy pages again with a newfound appreciation for its photography, for West Maui, already reminiscing fondly on our day together. I went there and I have the pictures to prove it. ¶

MAUI PHOTO ADVENTURE, A FOUR SEASONS RESORT AT WAILEA UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES TOUR

Starts at a half-day rate of \$1,110 (3-hour) or a full-day rate of \$2,091 (6-hour). Custom tours like the writer's, which included exclusive stops at private locations and additional hours, are valued around \$4,500. fourseasons.com/maui.