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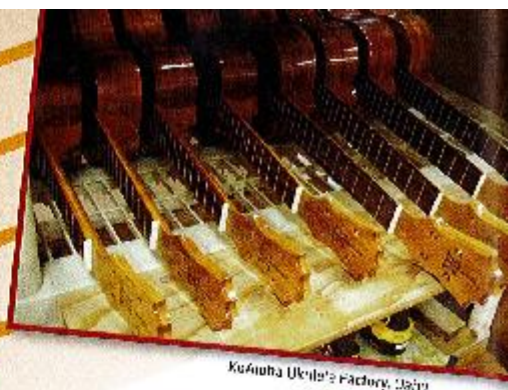


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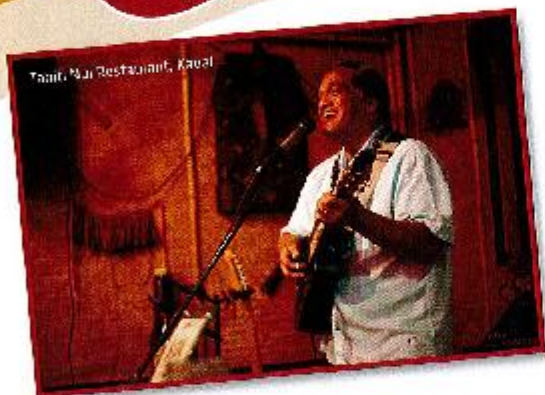
Striking a Chord



Ku'aloa Ukulele Factory, Oahu

Music and other arts experiences make Oahu and Kauai cultural hot spots

BY GARY SINGH



Tahiti Nui Restaurant, Kauai

Music plays much more of a role in Hawaiian history and culture than people may realize. Chants were the oral history of the Hawaiian islands before Hawaiian became a written language. Storytelling and music were integral components of the Hawaiian monarchy. Infusing these native threads into any group program is sure to enhance the attendee experience.

Oahu

Located just off the Kalaniana'olaha Canal in an industrial area of Honolulu, the family-run Ku'aloa Ukulele Factory (www.ku'aloa.com) is a veritable gem, an oasis where diligent craftsmen sip piña colodas off the line. Groups of up to 15 can tour the facility and step into a multisensory goldmine of industrial equipment, some of which is custom-made just for ukulele parts. Twenty high-end ukuleles come out of this plant every day and each one is constructed from local Acacia Koa wood, only available in Hawaii. The business started nearly 20 years ago when a former plastics factory was converted into a ukulele manufacturing plant.

"It's a family-type environment that you walk into," says Brian Bernavente, Ku'aloa's vice president and ukulele maker himself. "Our shop is full of characters, too, so there's never a dull moment. The machines, the smell of the wood, the sound of sandpaper—you get that total factory



Ku'aloa Ukulele Factory, Oahu



Ku'aloa Ukulele Factory, Oahu

kind of feel along with the a'oha too."

Situated on 14 acres of land, Bishop Museum (www.bishopmuseum.com) presents visitors with centuries of Hawaiian music, visual art, film, documents, manuscripts and photographs. Generally known as one of the premier institutions of cultural history in the Pacific region, the museum offers numerous tours for private groups. The Cultural Tour will especially enlighten anyone interested in native Hawaiian music. For corporate events, groups have the entire backing of Hawaiian history at their disposal, as well as the Hawaiian Waiata Hall Planetarium and The Richard L. Mabee Science Adventure Center.

The history of the Hawaiian monarchy is also steeped in music. Tours of Iolani Palace (www.iolanipalace.org), the former home of King Kalakaua and Queen Liliuokalani, Hawaii's final monarchs nearly a century ago, are popular with groups, but any visit can also be infused with emphatic musical history. Both Liliuokalani and Kalakaua studied at Honolulu's Christ's Children's School, beginning at age 4, and later with Henry Berger's Russian bandmaster who came to Hawaii. Some of his sheet music is still on display in the music room.



Iolani Palace Gahu



"Music was an important feature of events in the 19th century Palace," says Zita Cui Choy, docent educator at Iolani Palace. "The Royal Hawaiian band played at balls, meals and musicals, and Liliuokalani composed over 200 songs in her lifetime. Most of our visitors are unaware that Liliuokalani wrote the words and music of *Aloha Oe*."

Today, the Royal Hawaiian Band is an agency of the city and county of Honolulu and is the only full-time municipal band in the U.S. It performs and marches in over 300 concerts and parades each year, including

weekly public performances at Iolani Palace.

Honolulu also offers many places where groups can congregate and catch local music. Corner Kitchen is a relatively new sushi restaurant and a "musicians playground" where many local bands perform. Additionally, one of Honolulu's best kept secrets is catching Jolani Valentine at Sheraton Waikiki's The Edge and Hyatt Waikiki's Stone Bar. Valentine is singer Bruno Mars' uncle and mentor.

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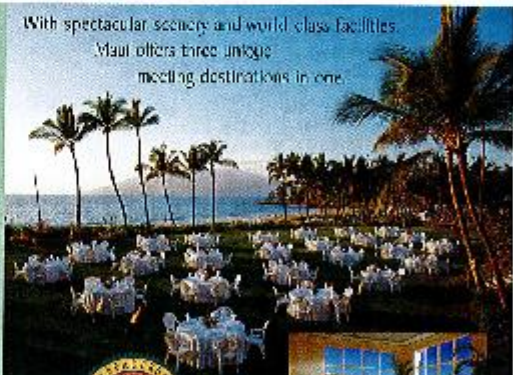
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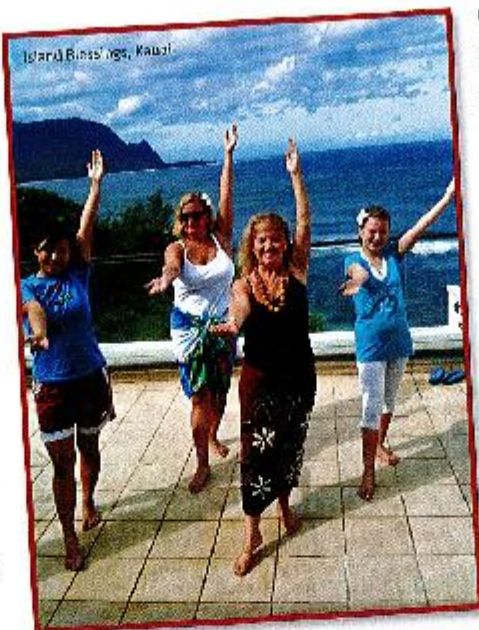
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Meanwhile, a variety of Oahu resorts feature cultural programs that groups can take advantage of. On the North Shore of Oahu, Turtle Bay Resort (www.turtlebayresort.com) annually excels at meetings, beach concerts, golf tournaments and surfing lessons, and ukulele and hula lessons can also be incorporated into any group agenda. The property features 25,500 square feet of indoor space for 600 people, while another 1000 people can congregate outdoors and enjoy awe-inspiring ocean views.

Kauai

On the island of Kauai, Fern & Michael Merle Jones star at Island Blessings (www.islandblessingslanai.com) in 1989. Island Blessings offers a variety of programs designed to increase well-being and create happiness, especially through hula lessons. Small or large groups can be accommodated.

"Teaching hula to groups is very fun and educational and we give

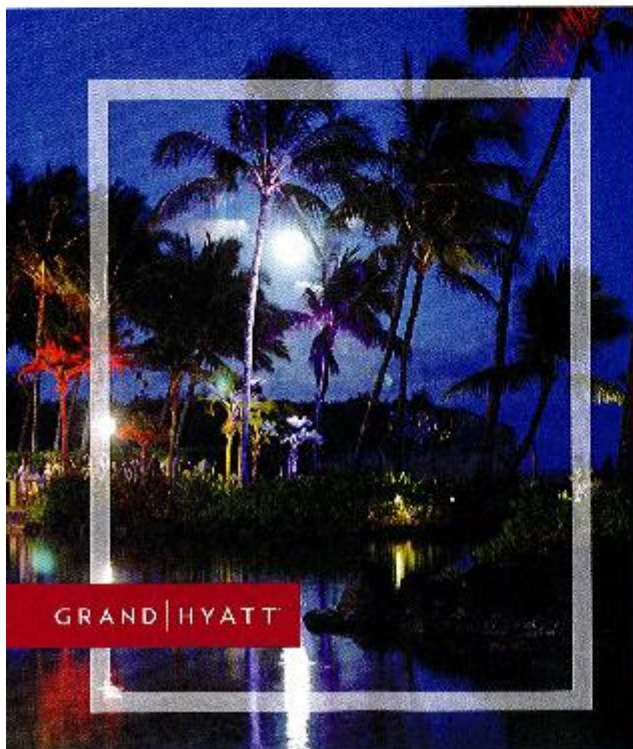


them some background on the different types and the commonality between them," Merle-Jones says. "And it gives people an opportunity to have some information they can use next time they see hula."

What's more, for a teambuilding event with people of different skill sets who might be hesitant at pooling their resources, Merle-Jones says hula can help. No musical instruments or skills are required.

"Hula is the easiest way to do that, since you already have your feet and your arms," she says. "We don't have to provide that for people."

Meanwhile, several meetings-friendly Kauai resort properties already offering a wealth of cultural components for any group event will throw native music and dance into the mix. The Grand Hyatt Kauai Resort and Spa (www.grandhyatt.com) offers hula lessons twice a week and ukulele lessons once a week. The property features 25,000 square feet of function space, all on one level, plus 60,000 square feet of outdoor gardens and lawns, poolside and



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lagoon event areas, and beachfront venues.

Similarly, the Sheraton Kauai Resort on Poipu Beach (www.sheraton-kauai.com) features numerous cultural programs, including ukulele lessons, hula lessons and a program spotlighting Hawaiian culture and traditions. The property sits on 25 acres of coastline and offers 25,000 square feet of indoor meeting space with an additional 40,000 square feet of outdoor possibilities.


Team building via percussion instruments isn't really common in other parts of the world, but in Kauai, one can easily envision

hula, ukulele or even slack key guitar lessons as alternatives. Creative planners might consider designing an experience incorporating the Ka O'i O Ka'eo, Kauai Cultural Center (www.kauaiculturalcenter.com), located in the Coconut Marketplace in Kapolei, which offers classes on Hawaiian arts, events, historical displays and cultural demonstrations. Basic hula, beginning ukulele, slack key guitar and even Hawaiian "talk story" with legendary musician Larry Rivera are offered.

Once groups venture outside their main accommodations, the iconic Tahiti Nui (www.thenui.com) is a family-owned institu-



For more Oahu and Kauai content, visit MeetingsFocus.com/Hawaii.

tion offering elaborate hulas and mighty live music. "The Nui," as it's known, was featured in the film, *The Descendants*. 

On his last visit to Tahiti, **GARY SINGH** wrote about the music scene and came back with a ukulele.



ONLINE EXTRA Check out the Oahu, Kauai section of MeetingsFocus.com this month for a Zoom In Q&A with Paul Kaslino, president of the Hawaii for Academy of Recording Artists.



Tahiti Nui Restaurant, Kauai



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