



Austin Kino guides O'ahu visitors on canoeing excursions and practices traditional Polynesian wayfinding methods.



HOLORINO HAWAII

THE WAY OF THE CANOE

HAWAII'S VOYAGING TRADITION

BY ERIC LUCAS

Aiming his double-hulled voyaging canoe into the 4-foot Pacific swell southeast of O'ahu, Austin Kino knows exactly how fast we are going. It's a lovely summer afternoon at 21 degrees north latitude. We are under sail, and Kino is holding the vessel on course by deploying his paddle like a rudder. He's using centuries-old navigation science to measure our speed: counting bubbles.

It sounds simple, but it represents an art that has sparked the Hawaiian cultural renaissance and re-written people's understanding of human history. The term used to describe this art is *wayfinding*, and it is a cultural current in Hawai'i today that has the power to enlighten, entertain, educate and empower all who visit the Islands.

"I know how long the canoe is, and how many seconds it takes the bow bubbles to reach the stern—and a little simple math tells me we're making about 5 knots right now," Kino explains, grinning.

Our vessel, the 30-foot trimaran *Uluwehi*, is a 21st century representative of one of the world's most amazing nautical traditions. The canoe's predecessors, and Kino's ancestors, crossed thousands of miles on Earth's largest ocean, using celestial navigation and knowledge of the sea that was passed down orally from generation to generation.

Wayfinders search the sky to measure star positions and angles. They memorize stars, and where the stars appear in the sky at different times and from



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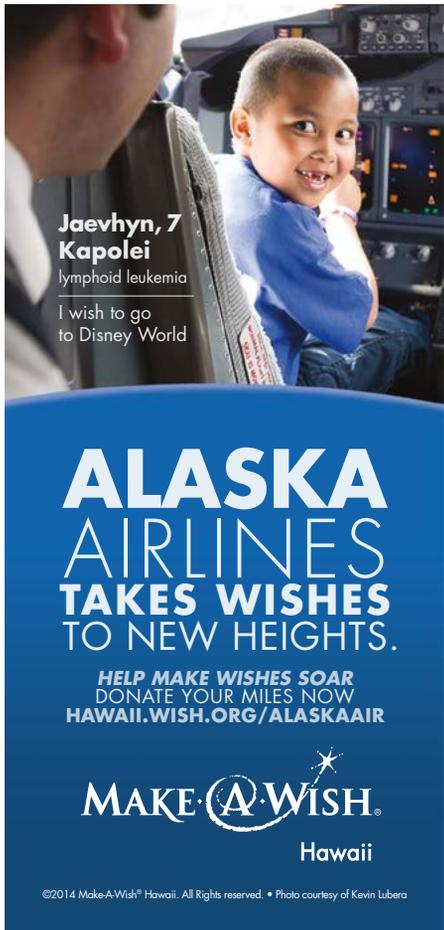
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different places. They check the position of the sun at dawn and dusk. They read the winds and currents on the open ocean. They watch for birds that ply the sea but live on land. And they gauge the size, shape and direction of waves. A master wayfinder can be asleep below deck and sense when a craft is off course simply by the way it breasts the swells.

“If you can read the waves, you can’t ever be lost,” Kino says.

Wayfinding skills are part of a system devised to travel accurately and deliberately across the Pacific. The current understanding is that people arrived in Hawai’i around the year 1000, says DeSoto Brown, historian at Honolulu’s Bishop Museum, a leading institution devoted to Polynesian culture, although there is much discussion about the arrival being earlier. Between a.d. 1000 and 1500, Polynesians were regularly taking long voyages between Hawai’i and Tahiti, and Hawai’i and the Marquesas Islands—in some cases crossing 2,500 miles of open ocean.

“Western culture long considered Polynesian expansion across the Pacific a primitive venture that depended on blind luck,” says Brown. “In fact, for thousands of years, the Polynesians’ approach was the best navigation science in the world. Europeans were clinging to coastlines to ‘explore’ the world. Polynesians were crossing the world’s biggest ocean repeatedly.”

Once almost vanished from the planet, wayfinding has undergone a renaissance for which Hawai’i is the focal point. Kino’s craft is a small-scale replica of the voyaging canoes that have been built over the past 40 years. Kino’s business, Holokino Hawai’i, takes O’ahu visitors out to sea almost every day from The Kahala Hotel & Resort, in Honolulu;

OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT, NAVALEHU ANTHONY / OIWI TV, COURTESY: POLYNESIAN VOYAGING SOCIETY; RIGHT, SAM KAPOI / OIWI TV, COURTESY: POLYNESIAN VOYAGING SOCIETY



Modern wayfinders use traditional methods on canoe voyages, such as navigating by the stars, left. Explorer Nainoa Thompson, right, has been one of the modern leaders in reviving such traditions.

the experience gives travelers the chance to gain a vivid, one-hour taste of voyaging.

Kino is an apprentice navigator who has practiced the art of wayfinding on the most famous voyaging canoe of all, the *Hōkūleʻa*. This vessel recently crowned 40 years of voyaging revival by completing an

around-the-world journey called Mālama Honua—which can be translated as “to care for our Island Earth.” After three years, more than 40,000 miles, 150 ports, and 23 countries and territories visited, the 62-foot *Hōkūleʻa* returned to Honolulu on June 17. More than 20,000 people lined

the shore at Ala Moana Regional Park, and a daylong festival celebrated the achievements of 245 crew members who had taken turns on the canoe on its various legs around the world. Well-wishers came from across the Pacific, some in their own voyaging canoes. Traditional Polynesian song, chant and dance honored the occasion. Governor of Hawaiʻi David Ige and Mayor of Honolulu Kirk Caldwell offered proclamations. The latter gave Polynesian Voyaging Society President Nainoa Thompson a key to the city.

It was an exhilarating and deeply meaningful day, and it was the climax of an incredible story of cultural revival and dedication to a simple, unorthodox idea.

“Which is more dangerous, the hurricane or the pirate—or keeping *Hōkūleʻa* tied to the dock because we are too scared to go?”

That’s how Thompson, the voyaging



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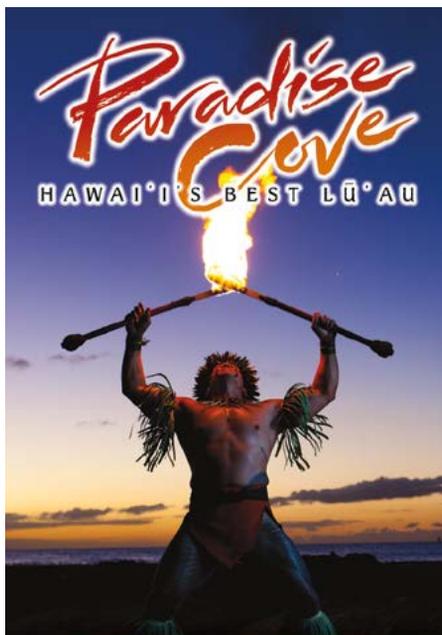
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society president, describes the dilemma that faced the PVS when it was first suggested that *Hōkūle'a* sail around the world. But it serves to depict the revival of voyaging itself when *Hōkūle'a* first launched in 1975. Back then, many Western historians and anthropologists scoffed at the idea that Polynesians had deliberately and artfully settled the Pacific by sailing double-hulled canoes over the open ocean. In the 1950s, a professor in New Zealand wrote a book debunking the idea. He promoted the idea of "accidental voyages and settlements," claiming that Hawai'i, Tahiti and their sister islands were populated only because Polynesians were carried off course by storms and somehow survived weeks at sea.

Ben Finney, a young anthropology student at the University of Hawai'i, read the book and disputed it. He later joined famed Hawaiian painter Herb Kāne and sailor Tommy Holmes to form the Polynesian Voyaging Society; they built *Hōkūle'a*, launched it in 1975, and scoured the Pacific for someone who could teach them traditional navigation. This seemed impossible, until they found Mau Piailug, a master navigator in Micronesia, who agreed to pass on his knowledge and help them sail *Hōkūle'a* to Tahiti, using no instruments at all.

That voyage was successfully completed in 1976, and it challenged a longstanding Western view of history. Yes, Polynesians could have deliberately settled the Pacific. And the work to clarify our understandings continues today. Some studies have, for example, suggested that people could have reached the American mainland by sea long ago, in addition to crossing the Bering Land Bridge. Could people also have traveled between Hawai'i and North or South America? One intriguing anecdote



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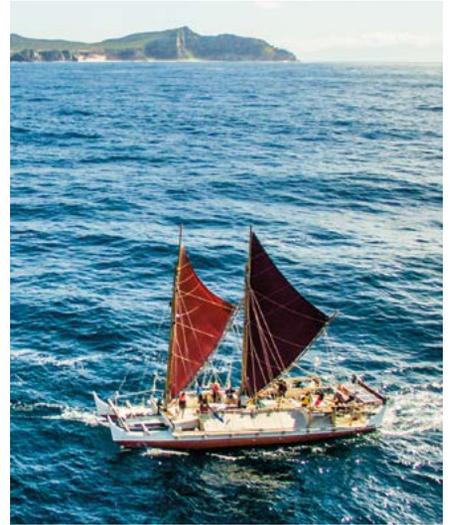
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After a three-year worldwide voyage, the June homecoming of Hōkūle‘a to Honolulu was a much-heralded event. Under sail, as below, the vessel is an impressive sight.



total detail is that a form of the sweet potato is a traditional Hawaiian staple food—and is native to South America.

Nainoa Thompson was a young crew member on the 1976 Tahiti voyage; over the next three decades, he helped guide

Hōkūle‘a to the mainland, Micronesia, Canada, Japan and other Pacific islands.

In 1992, Hawai‘i-raised astronaut Charles Lacy Veach suggested a journey around the world. The PVS debated it for years, with many constituents arguing it was too dangerous. Adventurous voices



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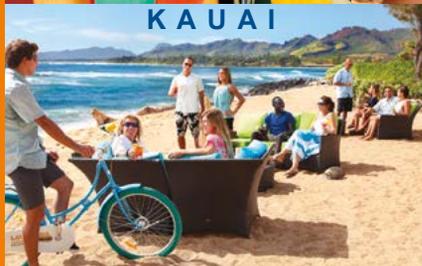
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WHEN YOU GO

Hawai'i visitors have many ways to learn about voyaging. A few follow.

- **Kevin Piilani Hoke** draws a map of the Pacific in the sand to begin his **Hawaiian Culture & Turtle Tour**, an hourlong excursion from the broad, golden-sand beach at Maui's Grand Wailea. On this exceptional paddling experience, Hoke explains celestial navigation and introduces guests to Hawaiian ocean ways.

- **Greg McCartney's Stars Above Hawaii** program is offered at Four Seasons Resort O'ahu at Ko Olina, Tuesday and Friday evenings.

- **Austin Kino's Holokino Hawai'i** sailing excursions are available by prebooking at The Kahala Hotel & Resort on O'ahu.

- **'Imiloa Astronomy Center** in Hilo, on Hawai'i Island, includes exhibits on culture, astronomy and voyaging.

- **The J. Watumull Planetarium** at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu has daily shows explaining wayfinding. Explorer Nainoa Thompson once used the planetarium to refine his knowledge. —*E.L.*

eventually won out, and *Hōkūle'a* set sail in May 2014, traveling to Tahiti, New Zealand, Australia, Africa, Brazil, the Caribbean, the American East Coast, through the Panama Canal to Easter Island and home to Hawai'i. Rotating crew members ranged from master navigators, such as Thompson, to apprentices, such as Kino; astronomers, sailors, journalists, cultural leaders, anthropologists and educators.

Linda Furuto is a University of Hawai'i at Mānoa professor of mathematics education. She took part in six legs of *Mālama Honua* (of about four to six weeks each).

"The *Hōkūle'a's* voyage made my classroom the world, and the voyage helps form a bridge between 21st century knowledge and indigenous knowledge that is really just as

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valid,” Furuto says. She teaches a branch of math called ethnomathematics, which links indigenous wisdom and modern learning. She says wayfinding is a way to make math relevant to indigenous youngsters and elders.

Just as canoe voyaging forms connections between modern and traditional knowledge, it is also a unifying force.

“If there is a symbol of Hawai’i, it’s the canoe,” says Timothy Lara, an apprentice navigator and owner-operator of Hawaiian Water Sports on Maui. He takes visitors to sea in traditional paddling canoes, incorporating information about wayfinding techniques such as star maps. “The classic Western view of the ocean is that it divides us. The Polynesian view is that it joins us.”

Take a moment to form the famous Hawaiian hand symbol, the *shaka*, with thumb and little finger splayed wide, and other



Master navigator Mau Pailug, shown at right, in 2007, helped pass his knowledge on to modern explorers such as Nainoa Thompson, left.

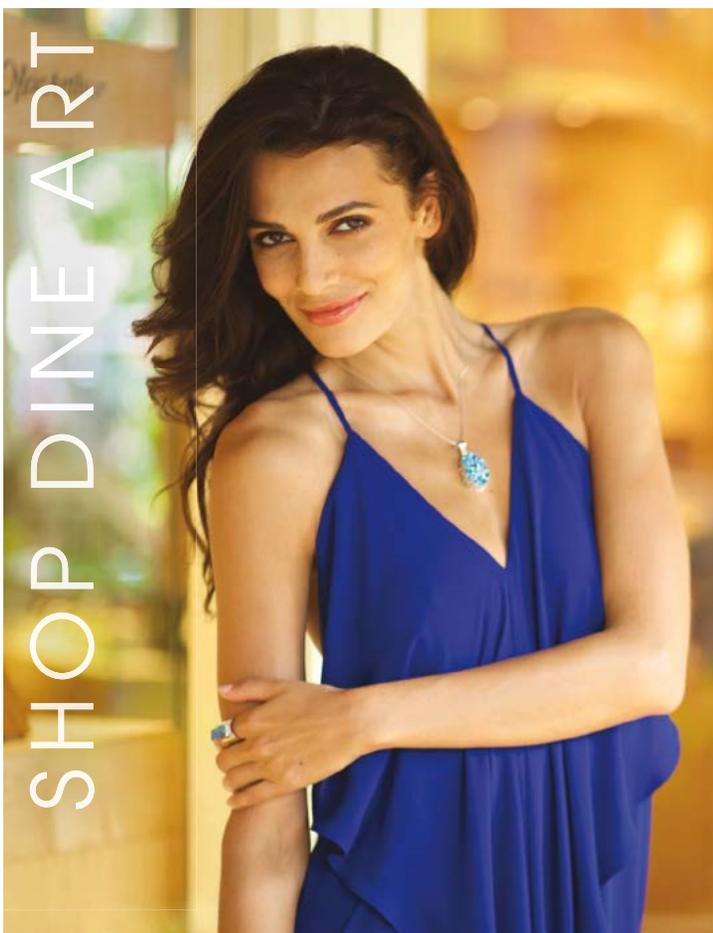
digits tucked in. It’s widely interpreted to be a greeting that means “all’s well.”

The shaka serves a profound navigational function for Kino: If he extends his arm with his hand in shaka position, with

his thumb to the horizon, and his pinky reaches the North Star, he is at about the latitude of Hawai’i (21 degrees north).

“As it happens, the Hawaiian Islands are the only Polynesian islands where you can see both the North Star and the Southern Cross,” says Greg McCartney, an astronomer who teaches the night sky to visitors at Four Seasons Resort O’ahu at Ko Olina, west of Honolulu. Setting up a telescope on the lawn by the hotel, he shows visitors constellations and stars both familiar and exotic, and explains how important star knowledge was historically to Polynesians. Also, how entertaining.

“There were no televisions back then,” McCartney notes. “No Facebook or video-games. Either you went outside and studied the sky, or you went to bed. It wasn’t hard to watch the stars from land. Navigating 2,000 miles of open ocean on a voyaging canoe with the fate of your crew



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in your hands—that would be more difficult.”

Today’s master Polynesian wayfinders know far more than a couple of constellations, of course; for voyages to and from Hawai’i, navigators use four main “star lines”—as they are called—which identify paths of stars in the sky overhead that guide the path of a canoe on the ocean.

Now that *Hökūle’ā* has returned home, its next destination has yet to be determined. It and its sister canoe, *Hikianalia*, will be sailing the Hawaiian Islands for the next year or two, visiting dozens of local communities to spread the idea of voyaging as both reality and metaphor. Visit hokulea.com/vessels to learn more about these canoes and their continuing voyages. And many other voyaging canoes have been built or are under construction throughout Hawai’i now.

“*Hökūle’ā* will always be the mother ship,” says Dennis Chun, an instructor in Hawaiian Studies at Kaua’i Community College and one of the creators of *Nāmāhoe*, the Garden Island’s major voyaging canoe. “But each community’s canoe represents our own way to celebrate our heritage, to learn that the ancient scientists and adventurers had just as much value as 21st century scientists and adventurers.”

And as *Hökūle’ā*, *Hikianalia* and the other canoes sail the islands, their navigators and crew members are indisputable rock stars of modern

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Polynesian Voyaging Society President Nainoa Thompson, right, continues to teach wayfinding for future explorations.

Hawai'i. Simply say "Nainoa" and many of the state's residents will know who you are naming; kids clamor for selfies with him; adults seek his autograph; audiences listen avidly to his tales and insights. Meanwhile, Austin Kino finds his own

image on the covers of magazines, and is an occasional model for Hawaiian clothing purveyors. Almost everyone associated with voyaging and wayfinding enjoys respected status in Hawai'i today—and every single one of them deflects admiration to a discussion of what the voyaging renaissance means to Hawaiian people and the Aloha State.

"*He wa'a he moku, he moku he wa'a,*" says Kimokeo Kapahulehua, president of Hui o Wa'a Kaulua, Maui's major voyaging society. "A canoe is an island, and an island is a canoe.' Seems like if we applied that thought to our planet, we'd be better off, I think: Apply Aloha. Take care of the air and land and ocean, and they will take care of us—that's what voyaging is about."

They are stately, sturdy vessels, these marvelous double-hulled canoes that have carried people across the Pacific

for two millennia. When you see them sailing into the Hawaiian evening, sails spread high and proud, their significance is evident. From the original radical adventurers—Finney, Kāne, Holmes and Thompson—to the young explorers of today who aspire to follow them, the voyaging heritage represents both history and 21st century life. The benefits of its lessons belong to Hawaiians, and to us all. We are all on a voyage, stars above us, planet beneath us. ✈

Eric Lucas lives on San Juan Island, in Washington state.

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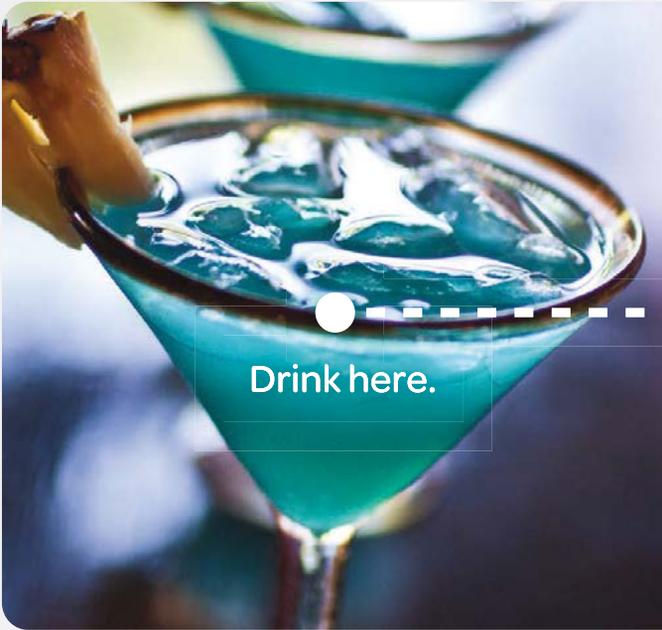
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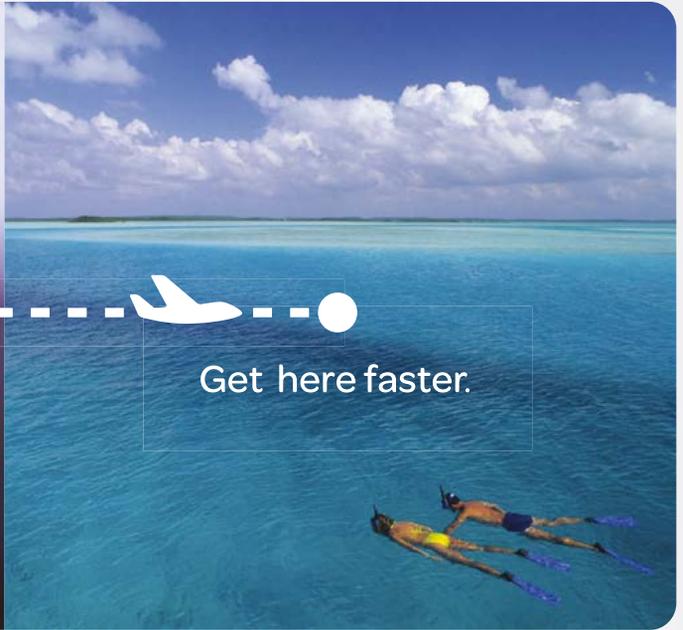
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