



## KAUAI JUNE 2019

In June of 2019 I was given the opportunity to attend a work related continuing education meeting in Kauai, Hawaii. This had long been a destination I wanted to visit to see Hawaiian monk seals.

This is general information on three locations where myself and my travel companion saw them.

I stayed at the Grand Hyatt Resort and Spa where my meeting took place. Located on the south shore of the island at the gateway of Poipu, it is a location that seals show up on from time to time. It is also the location where many monk seal talks occur for tourists. I asked the people at the hotel if Kauai had set up an online update for seal sightings, similar to to Monk Seal Mania website set up in Oahu, and was quickly told no. I was told however, that the best place from the hotel to see the seals was along the Mahaulepu Coastal trail. The trail starts from the east corner of Shipwreck Beach Keonela Bay which is just next to the hotel's private beach, and ends at Mahaulepu Beach . The trail runs about 3.7 miles and has a variety of habitats from sand dune cliffs, limestone formations and small rocky inlets where the seals haul out from time to time. I did the hike one afternoon with my friend and saw dolphins (unsure of the species) and plenty of green sea turtles, but no seals. While in a meeting the next morning, my friend did the hike again, then taunted me with the pictures she had taken of a large seal that had hauled out close to Mahaulepu Beach around 8 am. Even without the seals, it is a beautiful hike and worth taking the time to do.

My one big activity on the island was doing a boat tour of the Napali Coast which included traveling to Ni'ihau island which is one of the breeding grounds for the seals. I was told later by some of the monk seal volunteers that the majority of the seals seen on Niihau are females, while the majority on Kauaii that haul out are males. I used a company called Holo Holo charters that offered tours to Ni'ihau. As well as seeing seals frequently, according to my online research they have good luck with seeing other marine mammals. Ni'ihau is the western most main inhabited island in Hawaii. To get there you have to cross the Kaulakahi Channel. Holo Holo has reports of seeing false killer whales, Blainville and Cuvier beaked whales, and roughed toothed dolphins during the channel crossing. Sadly the day I went it was raining on the way to and from Ni'ihau and the sea was VERY rough. I did see the crew watching, and I did my best to also look, but even trying to look over the high waves and not be nauseous was difficult. The crew more commonly sees bottlenose, striped, and spinner dolphins. We saw spinner dolphins around Ni'ihau where a small pod hung out around the boat for an extended period of time, and saw multiples along the Napali Coast doing their famous "spinning" moves out of the water.





Once at Ni'ihau the boat stopped along a small cove for people to snorkel. As soon as they started to do the safety snorkel session, two monk seals started swimming around the boat. Excited, I might have ran to the back of the boat to grab my camera, then got scolded for my lack of attention to the safety talk while I was staring at the seals.



We were given one hour to snorkel, and as soon as a people got in the water, the seals left. The current where we were snorkeling was really strong, so after about 45 minutes I left the water, took off my snorkel equipment, and grabbed a drink. At this point, when there was about 8 minutes left, the seals decided to show up again and the 6 or so remaining people in the water had the seals swimming all around them..... While I was sad/jealous that I did not get to snorkel with them, the seals did swim right up next to the boat several times and stare at the people on board. On the way back when we were in a small cove along the Napali coast we saw a third seal. Overall it was a great experience that I can recommend.

Poipu Beach is the most famous spot on Kauai for the seals to haul out and bask in the sun. The beach is located on the south shore of the island close to the hotel I was staying at. As I only had two afternoons and two mornings free from meetings, I tried to make the most of this location. I checked the back of a few hotels, but the best overall location was the public Poipu Beach Park. The first afternoon I went there were no seals. I was told by a lifeguard the best thing to do was to come at dawn and see if the seals show up. Once on the beach they tend to stay out for 8-10 hours at a time. The next morning at 5:30 am my friend and I got on the



beach and were quickly rewarded with not one, but two seals. We watched the seals interact with each other in the water for an extended period of time, then haul out in two separate locations. Within a blink of an eye, local “Monk Seal” volunteers were roping off the snoozing seals to





keep tourist away from them. The volunteers put up signs about who the seal is and about keeping away from them. As expected, all the seals on the beach I saw were male. As soon as the seals would get on the beach the first thing they would do (all of them) is rub their faces in the sand. I











I suspect this was to keep it protected from the sun. For the last few days of the trips we showed up on the beach early and were rewarded with seal sightings. The public beach is also favorite spot for green sea turtles to haul out at night and sleep. We watched each morning as the turtles made



their way back into the water.