

Visiting the Maui Film Festival: Communing with the Stars

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by Bekah Wright

Rolling out the red carpet is an everyday occurrence for Maui's Wailea Resorts. There's a certain time of year, though, when those red carpets are more star-studded than usual. A week when international celebrities find themselves in a theatrical venue lit by the Maui moon. This standing celebration hosted each June is, of course, the Maui Film Festival. Hear about what the festival holds in store and one is instantly compelled to make reservations for next year's event so they can commune, as I did, with the stars.




Checking In on Opening Night

Where the stars stayed for the 16th annual [Maui Film Festival](#) (MFF) – the [Four Seasons Resort Maui at Wailea](#). Here, aloha is bestowed upon arrival via warm smiles, heavenly-scented orchid leis and a frosty glass of ginger lemonade. Check-in and stay a while? Yes, please.

As my suitcase was whisked away to my room, I made a beeline for the pool area and its distinctive fountain. Listen closely and it's possible to hear angels singing and mermaids frolicking around said fountain. Okay, there might not be have been angels or mermaids, but who was spied in a cabana – Michael B. Jordan. The much-lauded star garnered quite a bit of "hardware" in 2016 alone, including two Image Awards – Outstanding Actor in a Motion Picture for his role in *Creed* and Entertainer of the Year. The MFF would be adding another to his stockpile, the festival's Rainmaker Award.





Strolling on the golden-sand beach would have to wait for later. This particular evening was devoted to the festival's Taste of Summer Opening Party at the [Grand Wailea](#), A Waldorf Astoria Resort's. Toasting over cocktails in the Molokini Gardens were the recipients of the Rising Star Awards – Kelly Rohrbach and Wyatt Russell. On hand to cheer for Russell? His mother, a beaming Goldie Hawn.

As the sun went down, the strains of slack-key guitar drifted away and final bites were taken of crab cake sliders. It was time to adjourn to the famed Celestial Cinema. Located at the [Wailea Gold & Emerald Golf Course](#), this pop-up amphitheater lies on the slopes of a driving range with panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean. Most attendees unfurl blankets on the grass and settle in for a double-feature evening. There are also two VIP areas – one with lawn chairs, the other golf carts. The latter is where Bryan Cranston was staked out with his spouse. Catching sight of the actor only served to rev up my excitement. The five-night MFF was just beginning.

And begin it did. A *hula halau* performed at twilight. Once the moon made its appearance, all other lights were extinguished while Festival Astronomer Harriet Witt educated the crowd to the constellations. In short order, other luminaries appeared on the outdoor screen. First, though, was a perennial festival favorite – a short of MFF Founder and Director Barry Rivers giving his granddaughter a laundry basket joyride.

As night one of the MFF came to a close, accommodations called. The turndown elves had visited my room at the Four Seasons Maui. The scent of the welcome lei on the nightstand lulled me into a sweet slumber.

Day Two of The Maui Film Festival

The scuttlebutt over the breakfast buffet at Four Seasons' DUO was a mixture of which celebs had been spotted at the MFF, and critiques of the previous night's films: *Captain Fantastic* along with *Folk Hero & Funny Guy*.

Some festivalgoers were headed to the Castle Theatre at the [Maui Arts & Cultural Center \(MACC\)](#). I toured the extensive facility, finding myself drawn to an exhibition based on the Polynesian myth, *The Rat & The Octopus*. Outside, it was possible to imagine the artists who'd performed at MACC'S intimate A & B Amphitheater. Among them, Elton John and Prince.

Waiting this night, however, was the Celestial Cinema. A gracious Michael B. Jordan accepted his award. Reflecting on his path, he pointed out the accompanying sunset as a "pinch himself" moment. "As a kid from New Jersey, (acting) has given me the chance to travel the world and meet so many incredible fans. I'm constantly reminded of my blessings."

As one would expect, the roster of surf movies were instant crowd favorites. Cheers burst forth when Danilo Cuoto, Marcio Freire and Yuri Soledade, three Maui "locals" from Brazil appeared onscreen in *Mad Dogs*, *The Conquest of Jaws*.

Several hours hence, celebrating continued at a VIP Soiree Honoree Celebration at Spago. As attendees dressed to the nines arrived, Jordan wasn't the only one pinching himself that night.

Friday Is for Viola



There was much swooning at the Four Seasons on Friday. Why? A very glamorous Viola Davis was making her way through the lobby. No stranger to awards, Davis has been nominated for two Oscars and four Golden Globes. In 2015, the “How to Get Away with Murder” star took home the Emmy Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series.

On this full-moon Friday, Davis was accepting the MFF Navigator Award. “It’s always an honor to get an award,” she told the crowd, “because you’re never satisfied with your work; you’re just not. You always feel like you could do better. So it’s amazing when people have a different purview of who you are, and your work, than you do.”

The evening extended beyond film premieres to another much-anticipated event: The Taste of Chocolate, hosted by the Four Seasons. Just how serious is Maui about its chocolate? Over 350 guests arrived, plates in hand, waiting for deposits of chocolaty goodness. Of course, it was possible to overdose on sugar. Then again, room should be saved for Saturday’s Taste of Wailea.

A Taste of Cranston & Wailea on Saturday



Officially, Saturday wasn't the finale of the MFF, but it was definitely stellar. The evening kicked off with this reporter chatting with Bryan Cranston about how he'd been getting into a Hawai'i state of mind via a hammock on the grounds of the Four Seasons. No amount of prodding could get him to reveal the hammock's location. Where a crowd was gathering on property at that moment was equally dreamy – beachfront, at the Toes-in-the-Sand Cinema for a public film screening.

The GPS coordinates set for other MFF attendees – the Taste of Wailea. On a crest overlooking the golf course, the setting was beyond idyllic. Capping it off was the perfect sunset. Adding to the *ooos* and *ahhs* was fare from Wailea's culinary wizards.

Down at the Celestial Cinema, Bryan Cranston took his turn on the tiki dais to receive his Navigator Award. Suddenly, the lights dimmed in preparation for a film. In that moment, the most magnificent spectacle of all lit up the sky. The stars of Maui in all their glory, and we, their fans, sitting right amongst them.

Celebrity Images: Mike Windle/Getty Images for the Maui Film Festival at Wailea

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