

Well what an amazing journey, I can't wait to read all the stories the rest of you have to tell. Since we were all there, mostly in the same place at the same time, one would think we may have garnered the same experiences but this will no doubt be proven a falsehood.

The treasure house of experience, graciously gifted by our amazing hosts will no doubt be a blessing we can each continue to embrace and share for all time.

My story unfolds with the initial calling, to say I was very resistant and required many pono paddle slaps to get me on board would be a vast understatement. Once in Hawai'i my resistance still remained and I often found myself feeling awkward and ill at ease, my sense of I don't fit in was a constant companion. I struggled to learn Hula, words to the songs and chants would drift from my memory banks as swiftly as they came and my sense of "I'm just not getting this human experience", echoed in my mind. One time on the bus staring out of the window the tears of despair and loneliness flowed silently down my cheeks as I wallowed in my " I just don't fit in essence." I struggled to stay in the sun and stand for long periods with my back aching and I so wanted to scream "this is not for me, I want to get on a plane and go home, to my quiet, secure mountain and continue to plod along at my own pace and sit in my own solitude." I was feeling more alien than ever, yet in amongst all this, the spirit of my fellow paddlers would embrace, encourage, support and teach me how to become the best me ever, with a word of encouragement here and there and a willingness to spend time with me going over hula steps again and again, with all the aloha and pono of true greatness and no judgement, when I still danced alternate steps.

The final thing that cemented my transformation was kumu Namakanaokalani's (Tracey) gift of a gentle whisper in my ear, that encouraged me to just go at my own pace and do what I can and that our time in the canoe (both figuratively and metaphorically) was not a competition. At first I was like "what do you mean? I'm not competitive, I'm a good sport, surely you have mistaken me for someone else.!" (this was all said inside my head of course, not really that brave to talk back to kumu.) Then the penny dropped and with the sense of a long nurtured burden released, I was now free to recognise, embrace and become the learning " Keia anuenu au la'akea Mau ho'ololi ana i pono au." I am a rainbow of sacred light, ever evolving in my own perfection. Translation just in case someone not paying attention. Hee Hee. Suddenly I found myself able to say It,s ok to be me and to stand proud in my own uniqueness and yet still be part of the amazing ohana that evolved along the journey to Hawai'i.

Mahalo, Mahalo nui, fellow paddlers lots of love and Aloha Lesley.

Aloha Kumu,

Aloha Uhane many thanks to the ohana who had been in the moment with me in Hawaii. This event has been a blessing to me and I personally would like to say thank you to everyone who was present. With everything in perfection and such a joyful money can't buy moments it was the most profound thing I have ever done this far. I knew something big was going to happen on this trip and was in full acceptance for it to just happen, and it did every day just got better and better. From Working in the Aina, Learning Hula, singing with Aunties and even all day Shopping with my Sisters and not to mention the endless teaching and Messages we all had received. I would not change anything the way things happened. I Ka Pono Mea

with much love,

I Ku Mau Mau! Steven Wierzbicki

Where to start ?! This retreat was so far even beyond my experience of previous retreats ! Kumu had built relationships & connections with new kumu & kahu which delivered a whole new level of participation in protocol, ceremony, hana ka lima (hands on) & malama 'aina.

Our visits to Mauna Kea & Waipio Valley with Lanakila Mangauil deepened my understanding of place & its relationship to the sacred as well as the myriad connections in the Hawaiian way of thinking about the physical & spiritual realms. These two days with this gifted leader & educator (and wonderful storyteller!) were literally awesome & yet to say that doesn't convey the sheer impact of standing on Mauna Kea in some of the very places as all those who have stood for the mauna to preserve her sacredness, & of gaining a more embodied understanding of the deities relationships to the natural elements. In Waipio Valley we had a very physical experience of the genealogy of the Hawaiian people through the Haloa story & helping with some land clearing & planting kalo.

Other highlights were pono classes wih 'Anake, La'akea & Kumu Neaulani; learning hula & oli wih Kumu Neaulani which we presented to Pele's fiery glow one night at the volcano- chicken skin moment for sure !! An opportunity to malama 'aina & bring the healing energies of oli & pule to the Kuamo'o battlefield at Lekeleke: a place of deep ancestral significance in 'Anake & Kumu Neaulani's lineage. A day at Keoua canoe club with Uncle Rafael who shared so much 'ike & aloha with us, talking story & taking us all out to paddle wa'a in the sacred waters of Honaunau. (including dolphins swimming close when some us were swimming off the wa'a !!) Such a concrete experience of 'Anake's teaching of "we're all in the same canoe"

And really the trip had so many moments like that- actual embodied learnings of what we have learned in classes/talkstory/trainings – it was so perfect & seemed like this group was just so ripe for absorbing all the learnings & expanding. I can truly say this was such a pono group & so aloha – I had so much joy from seeing them really embrace everything that was offered & immersing themselves in the "hands on" – practicing hula every evening & on the bus, fully absorbed in the lauhala weaving with La'akea & making ipu heke with the wonderful Mary Amos. Rolling up their sleeves & clearing & planting. I have never seen such focus & joyful commitment to the hana as with these pono paddlers!

We were also blessed to have Kumu's Mahealani & Neaulani & alaka'i La'akea come with the group on most of our adventures , in addition to our classes with them. This really deepened our experiences of protocol, messaging from the Kupuna & flat out fun ! And of course the trip would not have been possible or as graceful without our steersman/driver Kana who always brings so much aloha, pono & local knowledge- love you uncle !!

So aside from an abundance of wonderful experiences & memories I bring home with me a renewed experience of the vitality & relevance of Hawaiian culture & spirituality as practiced by elders & the newest generation of practioners alike, as well as having witnessed again the power of these ways to heal & empower ourselves & create sustainable relationships to our natural world.

Kaleo

Aloha Kumu

The waipio valley has been very significant for me, learning the sacredness of the taro plant and the deep relationship that every individual has with the plant that is the whole family behind it and the responsibility for our origins and for the Future generations have made me think about my role here in italy about why I was born here and why it is so important to me the importance of reconnecting with my land and my desire to create something in this land as a symbol of Gratitude for everything that italy represents for me and for future generations ...many people of my generation flee from this earth in search of a better place that offers them more opportunities and prospects for the future, for a long time it was What I also thought about but after this trip I felt the strong desire to develop something tangible, as Lahakila said when we ask something we have to be pron Give you something in return

Another incredible experience was to live every day in the King Kamehameha Hotel, at first i did not like that place, after being captured and pampered by Elvira and Sandy . I felt the K.K.H cold and impersonal, but spending days looking at the paintings and all the objects that represent the Hawaiian culture I began to feel a strong connection with the spirit of that place, walking every day in that hall increased the sense of grandeur and royalty, because it is so that I have come home with this sense of Uhane Nui. Even if my life in front of the usual routine seems normal, I have this sense of greatness I have this sense of feeling important to myself, I recognize how every day the choices I make are turning to a good sense of well-being for me before, what is it good for me and how can I improve my physical and spiritual mental condition ??

Canoe clubs ... deep HA breath ... so many things !!

To perceive Rafael's humility and the mana of every story he told us

The same humility that each of us has brought to the canoe, to see how each one gave the best he could for the success of our common intent .. I wear chicken skin still today

Deep lessons for one like me who grew up in a family who said "helping yourself, no one else will help you" was a journey organized by the ancestors in all their perfection

big big Mahalo , Barbara

I am forever grateful to Kumu Namakanaokalani (Tracey), always listening & trusting her na'au & spirit with so much aloha, respect & care, being guided to organise the most Divine Cultural Immersion Retreat that could ever be created!!!

I am so grateful and in admiration of Kumu's gracious & incredible dedication, in creating so many precious opportunities, to experience beyond profound feelings of enlightenment, empowerment, inspiration & revelations! Kaleo! What a beautiful, wise, strong & nurturing alaka'i & gift to us all, guiding & supporting us through our life expanding & upgrading experiences!

Our pono journey began with meeting generous hearted, masterful driver & guide Uncle Kana, sharing mo'olelo at Moku Ola where we released, cleansed and set our greatest aloha intentions to begin our voyage!

We were so fortunate to have Kumu Hula Neaulani join us throughout our journey, talking story, learning oli & hula to present to Pele's womb at the volcano, where Pele's brilliant glow, clouds parting for the stars to shine and unite with the aloha brightness in us all, reminding me we are all energy, in oneness, our intentions so powerful!

We were welcomed like family at our stay in Elvira's 'Ohana House-Your Hawaiian Retreat', by our hosts Elvira and Sandy, incredibly generous, joyful & compassionate hearts who made our stay so memorable! We were so blessed to have the most nutritional, 'out of this world' delicious meals created by Elvira, encouraging her to open up a place where we & the world can experience her loving delicious creations!

The sacred aloha light of Kumu Mahealani & La'akea arrive to share and deepen our learning of Hawaiian culture, messages of Kupuna & Ho'opono Pono Ke Ala. A precious evening weaving lauhala with La'akea, talk story at Ahalanui warm ponds, sunrise at Cape Kumukahi, & to top it off, Kumu Mahealani & La'akea deciding to continue with us in Kona, where we shared deep aloha energies of pule & oli at Kuamo'o battlefield, finding myself in the deepest gratitude & understanding of Kumu Mahealani & Neaulani's lineage. This was truly the greatest blessing!

We were so fortunate to experience Mauna Kea & Waipio Valley with the aloha, pono filled passionate educator Lanakila Mangauil, sharing the importance in preserving and being a voice for Mauna Kea, the precious Aina & culture. There were so many chicken skin moments, feeling the importance and embodying protocol, learning, nurturing and planting kalo at Waipio Valley & especially experiencing Lanakila & Kumu Mehealani, share in deep gratitude for one another at Mauna Kea. I don't know how I contained myself in this truly sacred, heartfelt melting moment. I am forever grateful!

I was so excited when we arrived to Keōua Hōnaunau Canoe Club to meet Uncle Rafael who shared talk story and learning's for our experience in the wa'a. We were focused, paddling strong together, in such gratitude, aloha and pono filled energy, the dolphins came to share their aloha! This was a very special day where I felt we literally actioned our learning of being in the same canoe together!

Then the trip to Ipu Lani Gourd Farm! What a treat to share the day with Mary Amos & her family, having the privilege in making our own Ipu's with the assistance of this wonderful earth angel who 'strives to revitalize Hawaii's ipu culture'!

We truly experienced the most Divine, based on a true-story movie that could ever be scripted but still, only if you were there, would you truly get the fullness, the endless heights and depths of the extraordinary moment to moment experiences and blessings we shared and received!

When I returned to Melbourne, I was beaming with profound insights and revelations, walking my aloha talk, knowing and believing nothing can ever take me back to being less than the best version of myself! I am truly living & forever grateful for our 'Gift of Choice' as Kumu Mahealani has always reminded!
Kumu Namakanaokalani was so right in saying 'things will never be the same again, tie your slippahs tight'!
Aloha Nui & Mahalo Nui to the sweetest, supportive, 'ohana, everyone & everything we experienced on our sacred, aloha, pono, malama & joy filled journey! Endless Blessings!!! Chrissie

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The Hawaiian Cultural Immersion tour was an amazing experience.

To enter such a tour with an open mind, open heart, to be fully present with no expectations, to leave aside the ego and my own opinions meant I received deeply from our immersion into Hawaiian Culture.

Being receptive to the simple and profound wisdom shared through 'talk story' by elders and teachers, when in a teaching session as well as listening to the stories that are shared in every day conversation.

Doing the Hana, doing the work, with presence & pleasure, whether it was learning a chant, practising hula steps, scrubbing an 'ipu' gourd clean, digging & planting on the land, paddling a canoe, swimming in the ocean; whether it was a solo effort or working together with the group, to embrace the experience with openness and with Aloha was ... actually, an indescribable feeling !!?! The rewards I received of wisdom, contentment, joy, compassion, pride, enthusiasm, peace, Aloha, and to feel 'in flow' with Life.

And that would be it, being open, present and receptive to the flow of the tour, the flow within the group, the (energy) flow of the Hawaiian land was to be in flow with Life.

I have returned to my every day life full of Life! and continue to live in Aloha. In the weeks that have passed, I have had many an 'Ah ha!' moment of a learning becoming apparent and witnessed changes in my perceptions, thoughts and actions and how those changes have been supportive of living a Life in flow.

I highly recommend a Hawaiian Cultural Immersion Tour organised by Tracey Lakainapali. Your willingness to be a receptive, empty 'bowl' on the tour means your experience of Hawaii will fill your bowl full to the brim, most likely to overflowing! :)

With Aloha & gratitude,  
Marian