



Best Eco Friendly Hike Maui

Voting for the first time in the brand new “Eco-Friendly” category, it’s fitting that The Maui News readers would go back to the most ancient and basic of activities to choose Hike Maui as the winner.

“Hikers just walk on the earth, they don’t create any damage,” says MJ Harden, vice president of the company that was started by her husband, Ken Schmitt, in 1983.

Hike Maui was a double winner, also picking up an honorable mention as Best Land Activity.

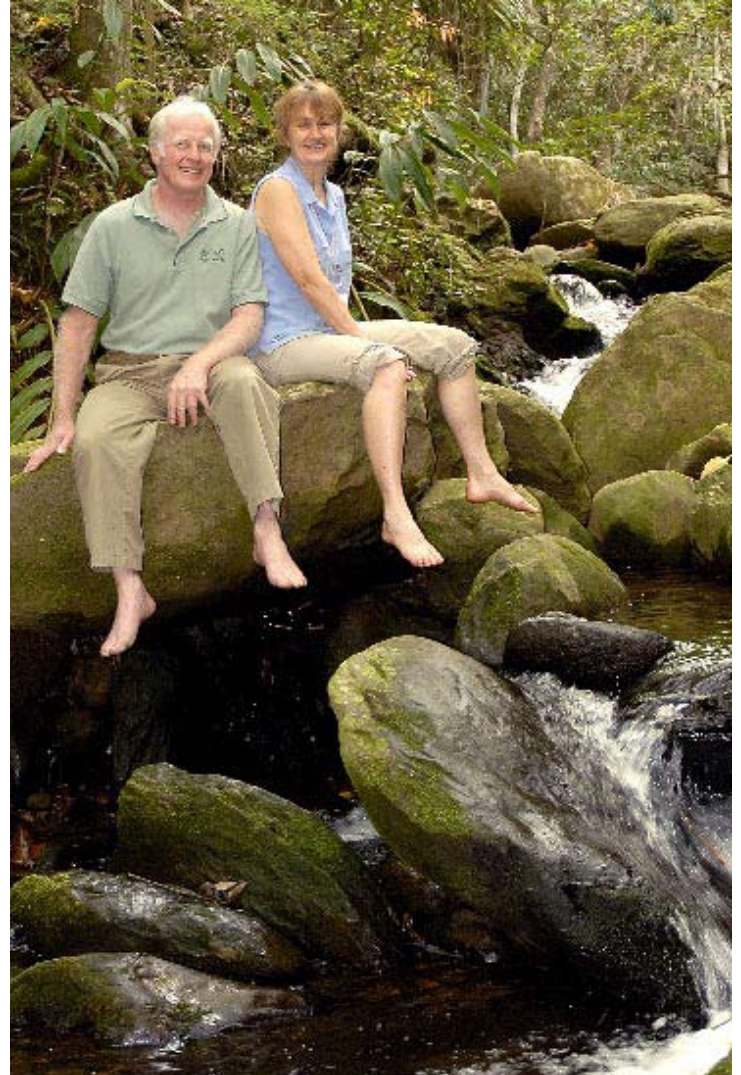
Expressing her delight at the awards, Harden pointed out, “Tourism is important. You have to do tourism right. Otherwise, what is there to show people?”

The state’s only hiking company when Schmitt launched it, he persisted in the then-novel mission of leading hikers into the wilderness to show them “the real Hawaii.”

For more than a decade, he was Hike Maui’s sole employee. Harden joined the company full time in 1994, bringing her skills as an award-winning travel writer and author well known to Valley Isle residents.

Although Schmitt built the company with his one-man encyclopedic knowledge, it now boasts some 20 guides with expertise in botany, ethnobiology, history and culture.

“We’re famous for our guides,” says Harden. “They’re very knowledgeable and terrific naturalists. They give people on vacation a more profound experience of Hawaii.”



Founder Ken Schmitt and vice president MJ Harden

With an emphasis on the waterfalls and rain forests on the island’s east side, as well as walks into the Haleakala crater, HikeMaui now boasts a fleet of 12 vans, offering or tailoring tours to visitors’ needs, serving 20,000 customers a year.

“We can do 12 trips a day,” says Harden. “Whenever somebody books us, we’ll go.”

As much as it stirs souls and shares adventure, Hike Maui is also about education.

“People don’t know how ecologically different and ecologically sensitive Hawaii is. They just come for the beauty. So it’s our job to teach them how unique Hawaii is in its ecology. After they’ve done a hike with us, they open up to issues they’ve never thought about in Hawaii, and the world in general.

“To stay in business, we have to be ecosensitive,” she concludes. “That’s our essence.”

Contact Info: HikeMaui is located at 285 Hukilike, Suite B104, Kahului. Call 879-5270.