

Crossing Paths With Dalai Lama an Unexpected Delight

By Ken Cable

It's a rare journey when the traveler does not encounter the unexpected. Often it is a negative experience – lost luggage, missed plane, engine trouble, wrong turns, insurmountable language barriers. However, there can be pleasantly unexpected positives as well.

Most of our trips to Maui are predictable. Dorothy and I board the plane in Los Angeles, land at Kahalui, drive to our condo, and settle in to two or three weeks immersed in the beauty of our exotic pied-à-terre. We have become familiar with the highlights of our island home – Hana, the volcano Haleakala, Fleming Beach, and the blue green sea stretching from our bit of western shore out to the islands of Lanai and Molokai. And, if we time it right, we can watch our ocean being roiled by the passing of hundreds of cavorting humpback whales. We never grow tired of this “routine” experience.

We do spend time carrying out our duties as owners of our apartment, and we do spend time seeing to it that it remains in top condition and repair for the enjoyment of our rental guests. We eat out often at an array of restaurants and we do make use of the barbecue facilities near our sunken garden and pool. This is our predictable routine.

On a visit a couple years ago, our usual routine was interrupted by one of those unexpected positives. We learned that the Dalai Lama was coming to our island.

This was to be a singular event for us. It's not that the 14th Tibetan Dalai Lama doesn't take his message of “The Human Approach to World Peace” all over the world, but for his path and ours to cross on this tiny speck of land in the middle of the world's largest ocean was a coincidence we couldn't ignore. It demanded that we join the anticipated 10,000 Hawaiians (800 of whom were school kids) at Maui's War Memorial Stadium in Kahalui to listen to his message.

While it seemed incongruous that this dedicated man of peace would be speaking his message from a War Memorial Stadium, latitude is due the Hawaiian people for choosing this place based on their experience out the outset of World War II. What better way to contrast the potential for world peace than from a place acknowledging the sadness of war?

Born in 1935 in the Amdo Province of Tibet, Tenzin Gyatso is considered the 14th reincarnation of the Dalai Lama lineage which began in the 15th century. He is the temporal and spiritual leader of Tibet, forced from his homeland in 1959 when the

Communist Chinese invaded and occupied his mountain nation. He lives in exile in Dharamsala, India, but, unlike his predecessors, he travels extensively as an esteemed, international spiritual leader. He says of himself that he is a “simple monk” whose religion is “kindness.” He continues to seek international support for relief of the Tibetan people and believes global unity can be achieved by applying the principles of “universal responsibility.” We arrived at the stadium early to ensure we would have seats.

Weather-wise, Hawaii is always a potpourri of wind, rain and sun. On this April day, Maui had all of these. When we arrived at the stadium (two hours early), most of the people were already there. High clouds boiled up over the West Maui Mountains pushed by winds that flowed over the summit from the east. Occasionally a light rain brushed by to offer a brief cooling, and then the sun would break free again and dry everything in minutes. We found seats in the back and settled in to wait.

At 2 p.m. the announcement came that “his holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet” had arrived and was mounting the stage. His image was displayed on a large TV monitor next to the stage, but he could easily be seen seated in a chair in the center of the dais.

The Hawaiians have a wonderful heritage of ceremony for important events. Six greeters – each clad in traditional Hawaiian raiment – displayed Aloha to their guest, chanting and dancing in the distinctive language of their ancestors. These impressive ceremonies, accented by drums and ancient flutes, went on for several minutes. Two student speakers, reciting original poems, concluded Maui’s welcome to its honored guest who then began to speak.

The 14th Dalai Lama’s first words demonstrated that he had a sense of humor (a trait that manifested itself throughout his talk). Speaking in English, he thanked the welcoming entourage and laughingly added that he had no idea what they said but was sure it was offered in loving greeting. As he presented his message of compassion and tolerance for all living beings, he emphasized the principles of universal responsibility to achieve global unity.

No one left the stadium as this popular monk spoke to the people – not at or down to them, but to them. There was no proselytizing for Buddhism, just a plain face-to-face talk with his audience, encouraging them to ponder his message.

Back in our condo, sitting on the lanai toasting a brilliant sunset, we agreed that this event was, indeed, an unexpected positive for all of us.

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