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MEDIA CONTACT:

Katie Vanes

Public Relations & Social Media Manager  
Sheraton Kona Resort & Spa at Keauhou Bay  
(808) 557-8034



*Image by Bo Pardau*

## **SHERATON KONA TO HOST MALAMA HĀHALUA, INAUGURAL MANTA RAY WEEK, AUG. 16 - 22**

***\*Resort Will Celebrate the One-year Anniversary of its Manta Learning Center\****

KONA COAST, Hawai'i (July 23, 2015) – [Sheraton Kona Resort & Spa at Keauhou Bay](#) will invite guests and local residents to glide over for Malama Hāhalua, Manta Ray Week, from Aug. 16-22. The week of art, cultural and educational activities will celebrate the one-year anniversary of the opening of Sheraton Kona's Manta Learning Center, increase awareness about manta ray conservation and "rays" funds for the Manta Pacific Research Foundation (MPRF).

"Our resident manta rays in Keauhou Bay are a unique, globally-recognized icon of the Kona Coast," said Sheraton Kona General Manager Matthew Grauso. "We believe it's our kuleana to support the Manta Pacific Research Foundation, which performs outreach and conservation efforts to protect the manta rays. This is exactly which is why we established the Manta Learning Center in 2014 – to educate our guests about these majestic creatures."

Highlights include a manta ray and marine life "live" exhibit by renowned Hawai'i artist and author Patrick Ching, a Manta Ray Instagram contest, an unveiling of a plaque on the spiritual Native Hawaiian significance of manta rays and a Manta Ray Open House featuring interactive activities and talk story opportunities with MPRF experts.

The week culminates in a sunset silent auction at the resort's Pa'akai Point to support MPRF, followed by lectures by guest speakers Roxanne Stewart and Keller Laros, founder of MPRF.

"This August not only celebrates the one-year anniversary of the Manta Learning Center, but my 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diving with manta rays!" said Laros. "As long as I've been diving with them, I've been looking for a permanent home base to share this knowledge with the public."

“I’m so happy that the Sheraton team gave us the opportunity to build the center with informative plaques and photos about these beautiful marine creatures – right next to one of the best viewing areas in the world from Pa’akai Point.”

Sheraton Kona partnered with MPRF in summer 2014 to open the Manta Learning Center. Laros and his wife Wendy established MPRF, a 501 (c)3 nonprofit, in 2002 to study manta rays in their natural habitat, conduct scientific research and provide education programs for the public about manta rays.

### **Sheraton Kona Manta Ray Week Schedule:**

#### **Sunday, Aug. 16 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

- Hawai’i marine life artist and children’s book author, **Patrick Ching, will begin a live painting exhibit** of three manta ray paintings on Sheraton Kona’s inner pool deck near Keauhou Bay Coffee Company. The paintings, estimated to be worth \$3,000 each, will be sold to the general public and hotel guests when completed on Tuesday. A portion of proceeds will go toward the Manta Pacific Research Foundation (MPRF).
- Rays on the Bay, Sheraton Kona’s signature restaurant, will launch its Table 53 initiative – one table’s profits all week will be donated to the MPRF. Rays on the Bay will also host themed drink and culinary specials from Tuesday through Saturday.

#### **Monday, Aug. 17 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

- Ching will be painting on the inner pool deck from 8 a.m. to noon. Guests will be welcome to contribute to the painting at the discretion and supervision of the artist.
- Ching will host a **T-shirt Splash Art keiki (children’s) activity at 1 p.m.** on Sheraton Kona’s Bayview Grounds. Sheraton Kona logo shirts with a manta design will be provided to participants. \$20 per person for activity, to include T-shirt and supplies.

#### **Tuesday, Aug. 18 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.**

- Sheraton Kona will host an **art exhibit featuring Ching’s finished paintings and the unveiling of a cultural plaque** in the Manta Learning Center. A reception will follow at Pa’akai Point with pupu (appetizers) and beverages available for purchase from Rays on the Bay.

#### **Wednesday, Aug. 19 from 6 to 10 p.m.**

- Rays on the Bay will host a special performance by local favorite musician **LT Smooth.**
- Themed culinary and beverage specials will be available for purchase at Rays on the Bay.

#### **Thursday, Aug. 20 from 5:30 to 7 p.m.**

- Sheraton Kona will host a **Manta Ray Open House in the Manta Learning Center.** Guests will be invited to join manta experts Keller and Wendy Laros to learn more about these amazing ocean animals and the local population. Hands-on activities including manta identification crafts and educational talks will be included. Open to resort guests and the community. Afterward, guests can stay for dinner at Rays on the Bay and view manta rays from the restaurant in their natural environment in Keauhou Bay.

### **Friday, Aug. 21 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.**

- Interactive cultural activities such as lei-making, ukulele lessons and hula lessons will be relocated to the inner pool deck next to Keauhou Bay Coffee Company from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Featured local artisans will also have booths and have been required to donate items to Saturday's silent auction for MPRF.
- **The Humble Project ukulele group** will be performing from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. next to Keauhou Bay Coffee Company.

### **Saturday, Aug. 22 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.**

- Sheraton Kona will host a **silent auction** by local artisans and other community businesses, and **guest lectures by Keller Laros and Roxanne Stewart at Pa'akai Point**. All proceeds from the auction will go toward the MPRF. Laros's speech will provide engaging insight on manta rays such as the history behind the gentle giants, current research findings and the path to their protection in Hawaii.

### **Manta Ray Instagram Contest**

To participate in Sheraton Kona's Manta Ray Instagram contest sponsored by KAPA Radio, Follow @SheratonKona and use the hashtag #MantaRayWeek on manta-themed photos for a chance to win dinner for two at Rays on the Bay, an autographed book by Patrick Ching and more! Winners will be randomly selected.

For updates and more information on Manta Ray Week, visit <http://www.sheratonkona.com/manta-ray-week> or follow us on social media at [Facebook.com/sheratonkona](https://www.facebook.com/sheratonkona), [Twitter.com/sheratonkona](https://twitter.com/sheratonkona) or [Instagram.com/sheratonkona](https://www.instagram.com/sheratonkona).

### **About Sheraton Kona Resort & Spa at Keauhou Bay**

[Sheraton Kona Resort & Spa at Keauhou Bay](#) is Hawaiian hospitality experienced through adventure, culture and its rich heritage. Situated on the iconic lava rocks of the Kona coast overlooking historic Keauhou Bay, the unique oceanfront resort flourishes with naturally landscaped lands that were once the birthplace and playgrounds of kings. There are 485 guest rooms and 24 suites on 22 acres. Considered the "Gateway to the Bay," The Flying Fish outfitters provide an all-access pass to fun and adventure where guests have immediate access to paddle boarding, kayaking, fishing, surfing, boat tours and exploring the pristine reef. Ocean view restaurants partner with local farms and fishermen to serve only the freshest ingredients. Rays on the Bay is Hawai'i Island's only restaurant to enjoy nightly live music by fire pit and observe majestic Manta Rays in their natural habitat. Under the stars, a weekly luau offers a colorful journey through history. Offering the ultimate pool experience, guests rave about the 200-foot lava tube water slide, hot tubs, sprouting fountains and the sandy-bottomed children's play area. Hoola Spa offers a healing Himalayan Salt Room and oceanfront treatment patio. Whether culture seeker, romantic or ocean or land explorer, guests find themselves in the perfect location to discover and experience the beauty of Hawai'i.

Visit us at [SheratonKona.com](http://SheratonKona.com), "like" us on Facebook or follow us on Instagram @SheratonKona and Twitter @SheratonKona.

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With 11 properties across the diverse Hawaiian Islands of Oahu, Maui, Kauai and the Big Island, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Hawai'i offers the best hotel destinations to celebrate romance, reconnect with family, focus on business or launch an adventure. Located on or just footsteps away from the Islands' best beaches, Starwood hotels & Resorts in Hawai'i is a collection of iconic and historic hotels and resorts – properties with expansive and breathtaking backdrops, innovative guest programming and luxurious amenities representing internationally renowned hotel brands from Sheraton, Westin, Luxury Collection

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**About Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc.**

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc. is one of the leading hotel and leisure companies in the world with more than 1,200 properties in some 100 countries and over 180,000 employees at its owned and managed properties. Starwood is a fully integrated owner, operator and franchisor of hotels, resorts and residences with the following internationally renowned brands: St. Regis®, The Luxury Collection®, W®, Westin®, Le Méridien®, Sheraton®, Four Points® by Sheraton, Aloft®, and Element®. The Company boasts one of the industry's leading loyalty programs, Starwood Preferred Guest (SPG®), allowing members to earn and redeem points for room stays, room upgrades and flights, with no blackout dates. Starwood also owns Starwood Vacation Ownership, Inc., a premier provider of world-class vacation experiences through villa-style resorts and privileged access to Starwood brands. For more information, please visit [www.starwoodhotels.com](http://www.starwoodhotels.com).

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