

front cottage at **Watch Hill**, and be sure to pack your fins: The third-largest barrier reef in the Northern Hemisphere runs just offshore (\$3,200 a week; vrbo.com/104478).

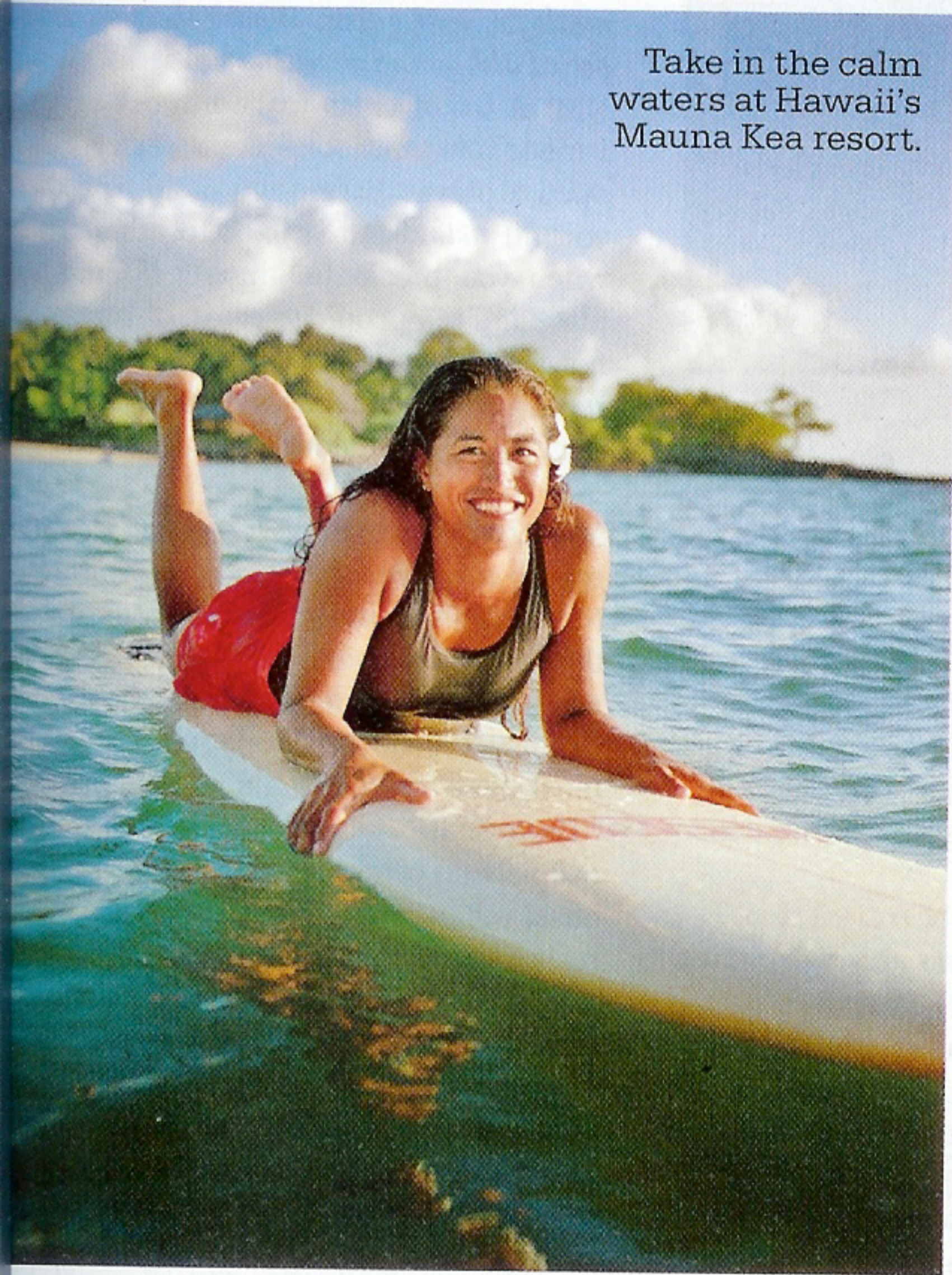
BEACH WITH A VIEW

Kauna'oa Beach, Hawaii

When Laurance Rockefeller took his first dip in **Kauna'oa Bay** back in 1960, the hotel magnate and early eco-tourism adopter knew he'd landed a good one, and he didn't waste much time: Five years later he opened his landmark **Mauna Kea Beach Hotel**. To this day it remains the only property overlooking the perfect

half-mile crescent shoreline, with its glassy, crystalline waters and sublime view of Mauna Kea's snowcapped peak against the distant horizon. The resort and its Robert Trent Jones Sr.-designed golf course underwent a \$150 million renovation in 2008, but all the truly important stuff has stayed the same. It's still quiet (no motorized recreation is allowed), wild (green sea turtles frequent its waters, ditto massive manta rays), and utterly placid (one-foot waves are considered high). And on a clear day, you can still glimpse Mauna Kea's picturesque summit (from \$500; maunakeabeachhotel.com). —C.F.

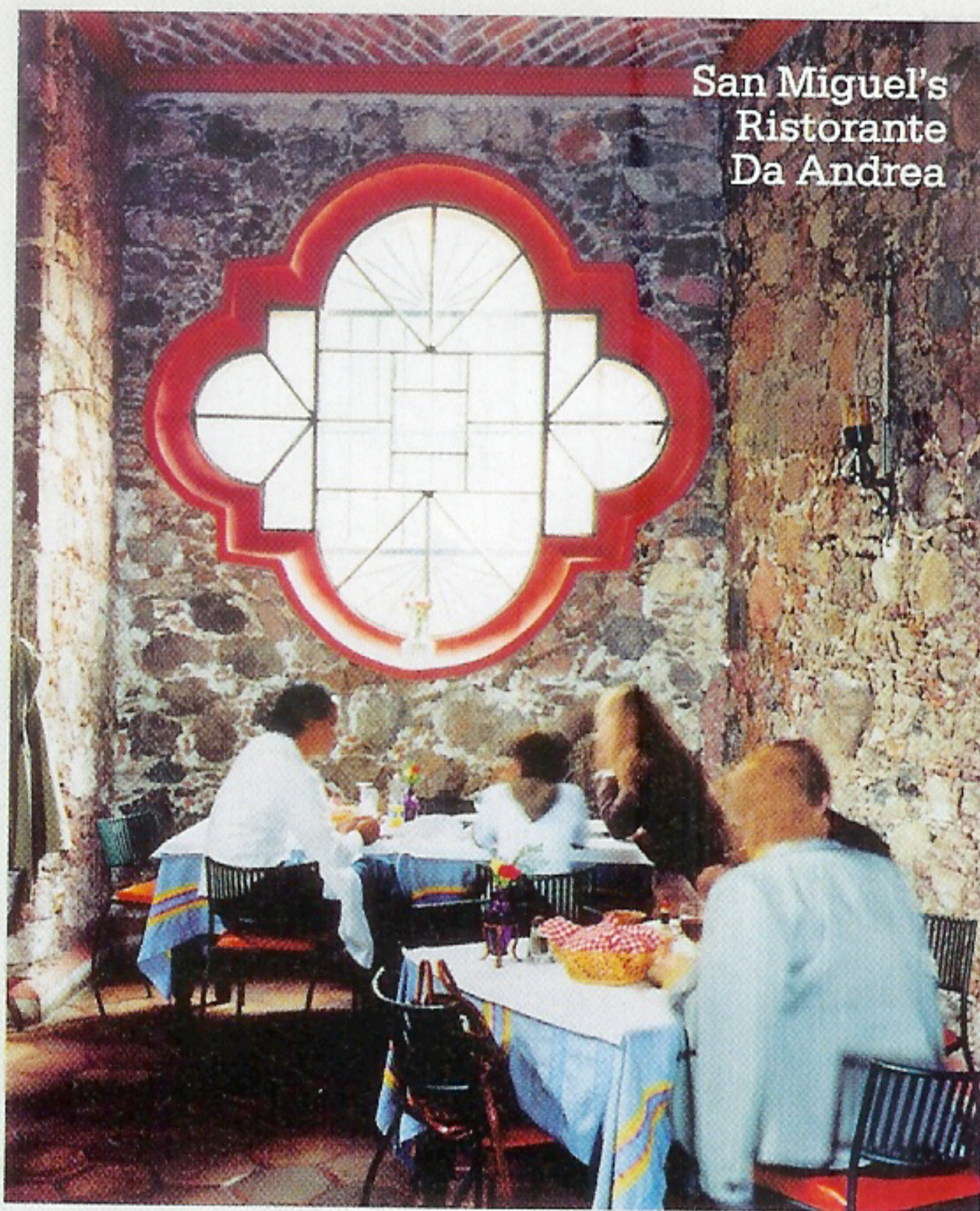
Take in the calm waters at Hawaii's Mauna Kea resort.



AN OFF-THE-GRID WATER WORLD

Corn Islands, Nicaragua

The sparsely populated **Corn Islands** off the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua (an hour's flight from Managua) are sleepy tropical islets dotted by low-key resorts known mainly to the back-packer set. **Casa Iguana**, on roadless Little Corn, has a PADI dive center and cabanas for \$20 a night (casaiguana.net), while **La Princesa** on Big Corn has waterfront rooms for \$60 and a seafood and Italian restaurant (laprincesadelaisla.com). Dive, fish, hike — or if the hammock beckons, just hang out. —R.E.H.



San Miguel's
Ristorante
Da Andrea

FOOD MECCA

MEX-MEX CUISINE AT ITS SOURCE

San Miguel de Allende and Guanajuato, Mexico

In these colonial cities in Mexico's central highlands, just 34 miles apart, classic Mexican cuisine gets refined by European influences and elevated by fresh local chiles, housemade mole sauces, and exotica such as *huitlacoche* (a corn-husk fungus that shows up in soups and quesadillas). So you get zingy fresh salsas, tamales wrapped in banana leaves, and saucy dishes like *pollo en cacahuete*, all representing a couple of centuries of Mexican-cooking evolution. But across the street might be a great Italian restaurant or a French café that seasons its fillets with chipotles and sun-dried tomatoes.

Start in **San Miguel**, an artsy haven for expats and a hotbed of English-language Mexican-cooking schools. Most of the action lies behind the town's pastel walls — wander through gates into any garden restaurant, but don't miss the sausage tacos at Tacos Don Felix; the beef topped with chipotles at Chamonix; or the rich, spicy moles at Rincón de Don Tomás. Stay at Hotel Villa Rivera, which is tucked behind the 17th-century Parroquia church (\$148; villarivera.com/hotel_villa).

Just west of San Miguel is the old silver-mining town of **Guanajuato**, which was carved into the mountains. Grab an outdoor table on the Plaza de San Fernando for Brazilian, French, or Italian — or settle in for haute Mexican at La Casa del Conde de la Valencia and try the *enmoladas* (tortillas filled with chicken and rolled in mole). In the homey Las Mercedes, you can get huitlacoche soup (yep, corn fungus), salmon in a dark mole sauce, and mescal margaritas. Lay your head at La Casa de Espiritus Alegres — it's like sleeping at a folk art museum with a killer breakfast (\$125; casaspirit.com). —R.E.H.