

“Let’s go find Africa” – Nainoa Thompson, Captain, Hōkūle‘a Voyaging Canoe

A double hulled, authentic, voyaging canoe is about to hit the shores of South Africa. The Polynesian Voyaging Society (<http://www.hokulea.com/>) set sail out of Hawai‘i 40 years ago, and has been sailing to different parts of the world since then. The legendary vessel Hōkūle‘a is growing its historic journey to include the continent of Africa for the first time ever. First they traced their roots through the Pacific, and then on to Madagascar, which was the furthest point the Polynesian voyagers of old reached over 1000 years ago. Now they look to Africa, an uncharted continent in an ocean that is unlike their own.

From her home in Hawai‘i to her first port of call in South Africa (Richards Bay), the Hōkūle‘a is voyaging about 19,000 kilometres, or over 10,000 nautical miles. This historic occasion is the first time the African coast has seen a Polynesian voyaging canoe and crew, and we welcome them to our home waters.

In accordance with their culture, the crew of the Hōkūle‘a has invited local ocean stewards to meet them before making port. This allows them to ask for permission to enter our waters, and pay respect to those who came before. It also gives us as South Africans the opportunity to welcome them in our own way.

Malama honua, the mission of the voyage, in Hawai‘ian means "caring for the island earth" has a very similar message to our local South African ubuntu philosophy of community and caring. This is voyaging in the ancient way, as their Polynesian ancestors once did when they first came to the islands of Hawai‘i.

On board, there is no compass, sextant, or cell phone, watch, or GPS for direction. The navigator and crew find their way by the stars, the sun, and the moon. The Polynesian Voyaging Society and the Hōkūle‘a are almost exactly halfway around the world from their home port, and have embarked on this worldwide voyage to further the message of global connectedness, sustainability, and creating a future that includes healthy oceans.

Coastal communities worldwide face similar threats due to climate change and warming oceans. The mission of the Hōkūle‘a is to learn how we can combine what we learn from science and indigenous knowledge to benefit and conserve the world’s oceans. Through community engagement, story-telling, and caring for this island we all call our home, we can all *mālama honua*.

