

MOANA (2016)

- Released November 23, 2016
- 103 minutes
- \$150,000,000 million budget
- Ron Clements (directed), Don Hall (co-director), John Musker (directed), Chris Williams (co-director)
- Rated PG for peril, some scary images and brief thematic elements
- Walt Disney Animation Studios, Walt Disney Pictures
- Produced by John Lasseter, Osnat Shurer
- Announced at August 2015 D23 Expo

QUICK THOUGHTS:

- Marisa Serafini
- Phil Svitek

DEVELOPMENT

- After directing *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), Clements and Musker started working on an adaptation of Terry Pratchett's *Mort*, but problems with acquiring the necessary film rights prevented them from continuing with that project. To avoid a recurrence of that issue, they pitched three original ideas
 - The genesis of one of those ideas (the one that was ultimately green-lighted) occurred in 2011, when Musker began reading up on Polynesian mythology, and learned of the heroic exploits of the demigod Maui. Intrigued with the rich culture, he felt it would be suitable for an animated film
 - Shortly thereafter, Musker and Clements wrote a treatment and pitched it to John Lasseter, who recommended that both of them should go on research trips
- The story is inspired in part by oral histories of the people and cultures of Oceania, where filmmakers traveled to learn as much as possible. For centuries, the greatest navigators in the world masterfully navigated the vast Pacific, discovering the many islands of Oceania. But then, around 3,000 years ago, their voyages stopped for a millennium – and though there are theories, no one knows exactly why. “Navigation—wayfinding—is such a big part of Pacific culture,” says Musker. “Ancient Polynesians found their way across the seas, wayfinding island-to-island without the use of modern instruments, using their knowledge of nature, the stars, the waves and the currents.”
- RESEARCH:
 - Needed to go to the islands of the Pacific to see the places and meet the people in person. Clements and Musker, along with a group of artists from Walt Disney Animation Studios, traveled to the southern region of Oceania. Their mission was to experience the islands not as tourists, but as observers, researchers and students—to listen. “We came away from these trips not only with ideas, images and inspirations for our story, but with an even stronger resolve that we wanted to make something that the people we met would embrace,” says Musker. “We aren’t making a documentary, of course; it’s an animated feature and a work of fiction. But our experiences infused our imaginations in a way we hadn’t anticipated.”
 - Ventured first to Fiji, Samoa and Tahiti.

- The filmmakers spent time within local communities, meeting and sharing stories and meals with elders and chiefs and their families, as well as teachers, craftspeople, farmers, fishermen and navigators. They consulted with experts in archeology, anthropology, history, culture, music, dance, carving and more.
- The team met a group of academics from the Centre for Samoan Studies at the National University of Samoa. They welcomed discussion about stereotypes and fallacies, as well as themes and the value of myths and legends.
- Filmmakers met with tattooist Su'a Peter Sulu'ape, who taught them that tattoos are a right of passage in Samoa: Samoans have to earn the right to be tattooed traditionally. The skill of giving a tattoo is passed down through generations and the symbols themselves typically have very specific meanings, including powerful qualities like strength, unity, family and spirituality. Sometimes they simply embrace nature.

WRITING (Jared Bush, Screenplay)

- Taika Waititi wrote the initial screenplay. The first draft focused on Moana as the sole daughter in a family with "five or six brothers," in which gender played into the story
- However, the brothers and gender-based theme were deleted from the story, in which the directors favored for Moana's journey to be about finding herself
- A subsequent draft had Moana's father as the one who wanted to resume navigation, but it was rewritten to have him oppose navigation so it would have not overshadow Moana
- Instead, Pamela Ribon came up with the idea of a grandmother character for the film, who would serve as the mentor tied to the ancient traditions
- Another version focused on Moana rescuing her father, who had been lost at sea
- The story changed drastically during the development phase (which happens with most Disney films), and the original idea ultimately survived only as a subtle element of the father's backstory. Aaron and Jordan Kandell came onto the project during a critical period to deepen the emotional story architecture of the film. They are credited with developing the core relationship between Moana and Maui, the prologue, the Cave of the Wayfinders, the Kakamora, and the collector crab Tamatoa (played by Jemaine Clement)
- As with most Disney and Pixar animated films, several major story problems were identified in 2015 only after the film had already transitioned from development into production, but computer-generated films tend to have much shorter production schedules and much larger animation teams (in this case, about 90 animators) than traditionally-animated films. Since Clements and Musker were already working 12-hour days (and Saturdays) directing such a large team of animators, Hall and Williams (who had just finished directing *Big Hero 6*) came onboard as co-directors to help fix the film's story issues
- "It's a story that takes place many, many years ago, but with a contemporary feel," says producer Osnat Shurer. "Our hope as filmmakers has been to create a universal story that is also an homage to the beautiful people of the Pacific Islands who inspired us along this journey."
- Bush is also co-creator, executive producer and writer for Disney XD's animated comedy adventure series "Penn Zero: Part-Time Hero." He also helped develop the Oscar®-winning features "Big Hero 6" and "Frozen," and served as a screenwriter and co-director for this year's hit feature "Zootopia."

- Began his career as a script reader for Academy Award®-winning director Robert Zemeckis

STORY/CAST

- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:**
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- With actors/actresses consisting of Dwayne Johnson, Auli'i Cravalho, Rachel House, Temuera Morrison, Jemaine Clement, Nicole Scherzinger, Oscar Kightley, and Troy Polamalu, this marks the first time where Polynesians performers are the main focus of a Disney/Hollywood film

AULI'I CRAVALHO (Moana)

- Cravalho didn't pursue the role. The film's Hawai'i-based casting director recalled her singing performance from a video submission for a fundraiser/talent showcase and asked her to come in and try out. Three auditions later, including her first trip to Burbank, Calif., Cravalho earned the role.
- "I connect with Moana in many ways—growing up on an island, as well as the way I love the ocean," continues Cravalho. "She is braver than I am though—literally sailing so far out of her comfort zone. I hope to push to new horizons like Moana does."
- Grew up singing and dancing for family
- After the filmmakers sat through auditions of hundreds of candidates from across the Pacific, 14-year-old high school freshman Auli'i Cravalho was cast as the lead character Moana, a young girl who sets sail to find Maui and save her island
- At that point in time, the design of Moana's face and personality was already complete, and Cravalho's obvious physical resemblance to her character was simply a coincidence

DWAYNE JOHNSON (Maui)

- The character of Maui was inspired by a great mythological hero known throughout Oceania—though the stories of Maui are widely varied.
- "He's very connected to his Samoan roots," says Clements. "Maui is a charismatic character and Dwayne is nothing if not charismatic. He has great comedic timing, nails the action scenes and is so likable. And he can sing."
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- Dwayne Johnson is a firm believer that voice-acting is the most difficult career in acting, and is personally annoyed by celebrities being cast in animated films despite their bad delivery in voicing their characters. When Johnson was cast for the film, he repeatedly asked the other voice-actors present if he was indeed giving a good performance

RACHEL HOUSE (Grandma Tala)

- Has acted in some of Aotearoa/New Zealand's most critically and commercially successful films, including "Whale Rider," "White Lies" and Taika Waititi's "Eagle vs Shark and Boy."

TEMUERA MORRISON (Chief Tui)

- Temuera Morrison lends his voice to Chief Tui. "The best big chiefs are the humble ones with their feet firmly on the ground. Chief Tui is a likable chap—taking good care of the

people of Motunui,” says Morrison, who can relate to Moana’s urge to venture beyond the reef. “Some people are just born to traverse the ocean—to seek beyond the horizon. I have a sister called Moana and I know her name means ‘the great blue ocean,’ so I was very excited to be a part of the movie.”

JERMAINE CLEMENT (Tamatoa)

- *Flight of the Conchords, Rio & Rio 2, Another Period, Milo Murphy’s Law*

NICOLE SCHERZINGER (Sina)

- “Sina reminds me of all the women in my family—my ohana,” says Scherzinger. “She’s fun, she’s playful, but she’s also very strong. I feel like she’s the backbone of a family, as women often are.”

PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY ()

DIRECTING (Ron Clements, John Musker)

- Moana is the first full-length computer animated feature film to be written and directed by John Musker and Ron Clements, who were responsible for directing *The Great Mouse Detective* (1986), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Aladdin* (1992), *Hercules* (1997), *Treasure Planet* (2002), and *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), all of which were predominantly in hand-drawn animation. When it was initially rumored that Moana would be made in the hand-drawn/computer-animated technique "Meander" introduced with Disney's short film *Paperman* (2012), director John Musker said that it is "far too early to apply the *Paperman* (2012) hybrid technique to a feature. The Meander digital in-betweening interface still has a host of production issues (including color) that need to be perfected."
- Besides, the directors also stated that the environment, including the ocean, benefited much more from the use of CGI as opposed to a traditional animation and that three-dimensional computer animation is naturally good at generating the sculpted faces of the people of the South Pacific. Maui's tattoos, on the other hand, are purely hand-drawn animated without the use of the "Meander"
- CLEMENTS:
 - With his longtime collaborator John Musker, Clements has written and directed iconic feature films that have become part of Disney’s legacy, including beloved classics like “*The Little Mermaid*” in 1989 and “*Aladdin*” in 1992, as well as Disney’s 2009 return to hand-drawn animation, “*The Princess and the Frog*.”
 - Clements served a two-year apprenticeship under Disney legend Frank Thomas. He quickly progressed through the ranks from in-betweener to assistant to animator-storyman.
- MUSKER:
 - “I read novels by Joseph Conrad and Herman Melville. But once I began to explore their history as voyagers and read the mythology—particularly about this cultural hero called Maui—I was hooked, so to speak.”
 - Initially rejected by Disney, he enrolled at the California Institute of the Arts the following year to master his craft. After completing his first year, which included a summer internship at Disney, Musker was offered a full-time job as an animator.

SYMBOLISM/TRIVIA

- The scene in which Maui and Moana encounter the Kakamora is an intentional homage to *Mad Max: Fury Road*
- Lin-Manuel Miranda was signed on to write the music for Moana (2016) before the Broadway stage musical "Hamilton" became a worldwide phenomenal hit. After it did, he would often chat with the rest of the crew through Skype from backstage, sometimes still in costume
- The word "moana" is the Polynesian word for ocean or sea. It is also a common Polynesian word for the colour blue
- At one point in the movie, Maui is seen bouncing his tattoo self from one side of his chest to the other and back again as he flexes his pectoral muscles. This is a signature trait of Dwayne Johnson, who voices Maui. One example of this can be seen in Journey 2: The Mysterious Island (2012) when Dwayne Johnson's character "Hank" is demonstrating the "Pec Pop of Love"

EDITING/VFX (Jeff Draheim)

- Editor for Frozen, Princess and the Frog, Brother Bear

ANIMATION

- One of the reasons for using computer animation was that the environment, including the ocean, benefited much more from the use of CGI as opposed to a traditional animation
- The filmmakers have also suggested that three-dimensional computer animation is well-suited to the "beautiful sculpturing" of the faces of the people of the South Pacific
- In early development, the film was originally supposed to be made hand-drawn, but only a few animation tests were made. In the final cut only Maui's tattoos are hand-drawn
- CHARACTER APPEARANCE:
 - **MOANA:** Bill Schwab, art director of characters. "We wanted to give [Moana] an athletic build." "She is energetic, powerful and coordinated in her movements.
 - Artists were inspired by real people living in the Pacific Islands and looked at hundreds of pictures of native Polynesians. "We spent a lot of time on Moana's eyes," continues Schwab. "And we gave her sculptural bone structure with strong cheekbones and a prominent upper lip. We really do sweat the details to get our character design right."
 - "We were lucky to document all of [Auli'i] recording sessions," says Smeed. "She's a teenager herself, so we were able to observe the high-energy spirit of a teenager. Auli'i is very expressive, both facially and with her gestures, and we tried to capture that in Moana as well."
- MOVEMENT
 - Achieving accurate and diverse expressions for Moana was critical. The rigging team, responsible for giving animators tools to achieve the character's performance, created more than 180 controls—points that can be manipulated by an animator—for Moana's face alone.
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- NECKLACE:

- “We finally landed on a blue abalone mollusk shell. It’s usually covered by a layer that resembles rock, but if you carve that layer away, you reveal this beautiful blue abalone full of colors from the ocean—it has a pearlescent look. We carved it to have both the rock layer and the abalone visible to create a juxtaposition between land and sea. I added stylized stars and details to symbolize the stars that a voyager needs to navigate the ocean.”
- HAIR:
 - More than six months was spent developing a system called Tonic that artists could use to create authentic-looking hair for several key characters. The system needed to be fast enough to allow for artistic iteration. Then they needed to figure out how to make that fabulous, curly hair look right when it’s wet—since Moana spends some time underwater. “We brought in some volunteers who had similar hairstyles and dunked them in water,” says Thyng. “We were surprised at how much of the curl remains—even when the hair is soaking wet.”
 - According to Thyng, technology allowed artists to create a wet look for Moana that was much closer to real life—messy. “It allows wet hair to break apart and come back together again in a slightly jostled look—not always going back to original style.”
- MAUI
 - PHYSICALITY: “Maui doesn’t wear a shirt, so we couldn’t hide under clothing,” says Hyrum Osmond, head of animation. “We had to make sure all the anatomy was right—for animation, we needed tension controls that we could dial in and out as needed.
 - Animators referenced weightlifting and bodybuilding competitions to ensure the character’s muscular chest felt right. The rigging team added controls to Maui’s chest, while simulation was tasked with adding the subtle extras to Maui’s muscles—the jiggle of his pecs or biceps when he’s moving with power.
 - TATTOOS: “Maui’s tattoos are inspired by Marquesan tattoos from French Polynesia,” says production designer Ian Gooding.
 - “Maui has a tattoo that actually acts as his conscience,” says Johnson. “It’s alive; it’s really cool. He’s called ‘Mini Maui’
 - “As Maui’s personality began to take shape,” says the director, “we thought, ‘what if a particular tattoo was like his alter ego?’ So we created this 2D character that Maui can talk to: it’s someone who’s been with Maui a long time and knows him too well. Mini Maui undercuts this big demigod’s pomposity.” - Musker
- OCEAN
 - The directors met a host of people during their travels who cited a profound connection to the ocean. “They think of the ocean as a living, breathing being that has feelings and emotions,” says director John Musker. “Your relationship with the ocean is one of the most important relationships you’ll have in life.”
 - Rapunzel’s hair from “Tangled” was an early inspiration, but they ultimately decided on a simple shape. “It can be anything, but is often like a giant wave that comes up to interact with Moana.”
 - Ocean required a lot of communication between several departments to get it right.
 - “We set up a system that runs buoyancy after the waves are created so the boats actually feel like they’re moving on the water,” says Mayeda.

- To understand the clarity of the water, the team conducted some extraordinary tests. “We created a physical rig that was 50 feet long with a series of balls that were painted gray, black and red,” says Lusinsky. “The balls were hung from a rope every five feet and photographed underwater in three different environments or types of water. We took it to a pool in Van Nuys, Mission Bay in San Diego and all the way to Bora Bora.”
- KAKAMORA PIRATES
 - Bill Schwab liked the idea of introducing coconuts. “I did all this research and I found full suits of armor made out of coconut fiber with helmets made out of puffer fish,” he says. “The coconut gives you scale right away. So when you see this sea of them, you know right away that they’re small.
 - Crowd system, Denizen—introduced in the film “Big Hero 6”—to create the Kakamora—building a few different sizes of the coconut characters, and painting multiple variations to create the massive army.
- TAMATOA (Egotistic Crab)
 - Not only were Tamatoa’s crab legs difficult to rig, his facial adornments got in the way. “He’s got a bunch of barnacles on his chin,” says Schiller. “We had to make sure they looked right when his mouth moved—and it moves a lot during his song.”
- TE KA (Lava Monster)
 - Making the character was a collaborative effort between several departments, including animation and effects. “We created some tools that the animation team could use to see within animation how the smoke looks coming off of Te Kā,” says head of effects Dale Mayeda.
- PACIFIC ISLANDS OF MOTUNUI
 - “Motu means ‘island’ and nui means ‘big,’” says Gooding.
 - “The islands, the skylines, the mountains, even the characters all have a sculptural quality to them that comes through really well in CG animation.”
 - Musker says they never aspired to create a photo-real look. “We have developed a world that’s a slightly caricatured version of the Pacific Islands we’ve experienced,” he says. “The colors, already rich, are pushed a little. We want the look of this film to be so enveloping that you want to jump right in.”
 - The film features more than 60 species of plants, including those native to the islands and also varieties Polynesians brought with them from their home islands.
 - Scaled the island to make it appear large and fanciful with exaggerated verticals. “We had to adjust the scale a bit to make the height of the mountain more realistic and to make the size of the island something we could capture,” says Gooding.

SOUND/MUSIC (Lin-Manuel Miranda, Mark Mancina, Opetia Foa’i)

- Filmmakers first brought the team together in New Zealand at the massive Polynesian music and dance festival Pasifika. The group got together for their first studio session while there watched live performances at the festival. “There was a dance competition—fast Pacific Island movements,” says Foa’i, “and Lin got up there on stage. He actually won the competition. I was so impressed and thought ‘this is the right man for this job.’ When we get together, there is a kind of magic that generates.”
- Written and performed by Foa’i and Miranda, “**We Know the Way**” showcases the rich and vibrant voyaging life of Moana’s ancestors. “After meeting with [directors] John and

Ron in 2013, I actually started writing that song on the flight home,” says Foa’i. “It came quite naturally. Then Lin added his beautiful lyrics and it just came to life.”

- **“Where You Are”** is written by Miranda, Foa’i and Mancina and performed by Christopher Jackson, Rachel House, Nicole Scherzinger, Auli’i Cravalho and Louise Bush.
- **“How Far I’ll Go”** is Moana’s song. “It’s intimidating to write an ‘I want’ song for a Disney animated movie,” says Miranda. “You think of Ariel with ‘Part of Your World’ or ‘Reflection’ from ‘Mulan.’ This is Moana’s chance to say for herself how she feels and where she belongs.”
- Written by Miranda and performed by Dwayne Johnson, **“You’re Welcome”**
- **“Shiny,”** a song written by Miranda and Mancina- “I really went to the glam rock of the ‘70s,” continues Miranda. “It’s our only rock tune in the show because it’s about being fabulous and glamorous.”
- Canadian singer/songwriter and Def Jam recording artist Alessia Cara (“Here,” “Wild Things,” “Scars to Your Beautiful”) was called on to do the end-credit version of “How Far I’ll Go.”
- “The backdrop to the movie is percussive and choral and orchestral, but then pop at times,” says composer Mark Mancina. “We have these really great rhythms inspired by music from the Pacific Islands; we have rhythms that are signatures of Opetai’a’s band Te Vaka, which has been performing original Pacific music for more than two decades. It all makes for a likable score and a fun movie.” The score is an organic blend of styles, often incorporating the style and sound of the film’s roster of songs.
- Mancina used an 80-piece orchestra, as well as a band with drums, bass and guitar. The score features contributions from Te Vaka’s singers and log drummers, who spent two days recording with Mancina in 2015. Mancina also incorporated a choir, the Pasifika Voices, consisting of 10 men and 10 women from Fiji, Solomon and Cook Islands, among others. They were led by Igelese Ete, who is the head of performing arts at the Oceania Centre for Arts, Culture and Pacific Studies at the University of Pacific in Suva, Fiji.

PROMOTION

- On October 20, 2014, Walt Disney Pictures announced that it would be releasing the film in late 2016, and hinted that it might be the November 23, 2016 release window previously announced by the studio in March 2014 for a then-untitled film
- The film is accompanied by the new short film, *Inner Workings*
- August 2015 D23 Expo. Showed clips of Moana first meeting the ocean. Showed concept designs of characters: Moana, Maui. Dwayne Johnson made an appearance. Talked about his Samoan background. Live Performance of “We Know The Way.”
- The picture will be titled *Vaiana* in many European countries following a trademark conflict
- The picture will be titled *Oceania* in Italy, while the name of the protagonist will be Vaiana in lieu of Moana, presumably to avoid confusion with an Italian porn star of the same name, Moana Pozzi
- On October 25, 2016, at a press conference in Pape’ete, it was announced that the film will be the first motion picture to be fully dubbed in the Tahitian language. This marks the third time Disney has released a special dubbing dedicated to the culture which inspired the film: the first case was *The Lion King* (1994), for which the directors travelled to South Africa to cast voice actors for a Zulu-dubbed version; and the second case was

Mulan (1998), which was the first Disney film to have a Mandarin Chinese dubbing made in China, separate from and independent of the version released in Taiwan

- Disney India chose popular Indian music composer Bappi Lahiri to voice the character of Tamatoa in the Hindi-dubbed version of the film for release in India
- Similar thing was done in Russia. Tamatoa was voiced by a popular singer Ilya Lagutenko, who performed the song with his distinctive soft "meowing" intonations

BOX OFFICE

- Total Lifetime Grosses (As of November 27th)
 - Domestic: \$81,108,000
 - + Foreign: \$17,177,794
 - = Worldwide: \$98,285,794
- Domestic Summary
 - Opening Weekend: \$55,523,000
 - (#1 rank, 3,875 theaters, \$14,329 average)
 - 68.5% of Total Gross:
- > View All Weekends
 - Widest Release: 3,875 theaters
 - In Release: 6 days / 0.9 weeks

RECEPTION

- IMDB: 8.3
- Cinemascore: A
- RT: 98% Tatometer, 93% Audience
- The site's critical consensus reads, "With a title character as three-dimensional as its lush animation and a story that adds fresh depth to Disney's time-tested formula, *Moana* is truly a family-friendly adventure for the ages."
- Writing for Roger Ebert's website, Christy Lemire gave the film three-and-a-half stars out of four, writing "*Moana* would have been enormously entertaining regardless of when it came out, but its arrival at this particular moment in history gives it an added sense of significance—as well as inspiration."
- Steve Pulaski of *Influx Magazine* gave the film an A–, saying "Disney's *Moana* sits comfortably alongside *Zootopia* and *Finding Dory* as one of the finest animated pictures of the year, but usurps them as the most attractive, visually dazzling picture of the year. The film is an immaculately detailed, visual marvel, with background and foreground elements like water and forestry, that normal moviegoers take for granted, protrude out and force you to notice them like never before."
- Conversely, Disney's *Moana* has received some criticism. The criticism seems to be primarily within the Oceanic region. Socio-cultural anthropologist Tevita O Kaili said that, "despite its important girl-power message, the film had a major flaw. It lacked symmetry by its omission of a heroic goddess. Disney resorted to reducing the mighty god Māui to a one-dimensional, selfish, borderline abusive, buffoon to foreground the strength of the movie's protagonist Moana." He goes on to explain that, "the omission of a goddess-heroine is significant because Polynesia is a culture with a vast pantheon of powerful heroic goddesses. Hina, a companion goddess to the god Māui, was nowhere to be found in Disney's imagineering of Moana."

SEQUEL/LEGACY

FINAL THOUGHTS