


TRAVEL

# THE MAGIC OF MAUI

Oahu, home to Hawaii's capital of Honolulu, gets the most praise from foodies. But there's another Hawaiian island that deserves equal attention

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088

The background of the page is a vibrant, stylized illustration of tropical foliage. It features large, dark green monstera leaves with characteristic holes, smaller green leaves, and several bright pink hibiscus flowers with prominent yellow stamens. The overall color palette is dominated by various shades of green and pink, set against a light, airy background.

**H**awaii, which is made up of the islands of Oahu, Maui, Kauai, Molokai, Niihau, Kahoolawe, Lanai and the Big Island of Hawaii, has a food culture unlike anything you'll find anywhere else in the world. Over the years, native Hawaiians, Asian and European plantation workers and American immigrants have contributed in some way or other to the Islands' culinary scene.

Hawaiian comfort food ("grinds", as it's affectionately called) is the ultimate in fusion cuisine. Take the humble 'plate lunch', for instance. This hearty, inexpensive dish originated with the arrival of plantation workers in the late 1800s, from countries like Japan, Korea, China, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Portugal. The labourers would get together and share the food they brought from home with one another, creating their own bento-style, multi-ethnic meals, made up of rice, macaroni salad, and entrées like kalua pig (pulled pork with cabbage), shoyu chicken, pork adobo, beef stew, chicken long rice (seasoned glass noodles with chicken) and kalbi steak.

When they came to Hawaii, these early immigrants brought a host of other traditional foods with them, too: noodles and char siew bao from the Chinese; kim chee from the Koreans; sausages, sweet bread rolls and malasadas (fried doughnuts) from the Portuguese and tofu from the Japanese.

Meanwhile, the foods that sustained the native Hawaiians centuries ago are still enjoyed to this day. Most locals, for example, cannot imagine a day without poke. This raw fish salad is commonly made from small cubes of ahi tuna or other seafood like tako (octopus) or shellfish, dressed simply with sesame oil, shoyu, limu, a type of seaweed, and slices of white onion. And then there's poi, a side dish made from ground taro root; lau lau, a mixture of pork, chicken and fish wrapped in layers of taro leaves and steamed; and haupia, a thick dessert pudding made from coconut milk and sugar. One of the best places to sample these and other traditional foods is at a luau—a feast to celebrate special occasions.



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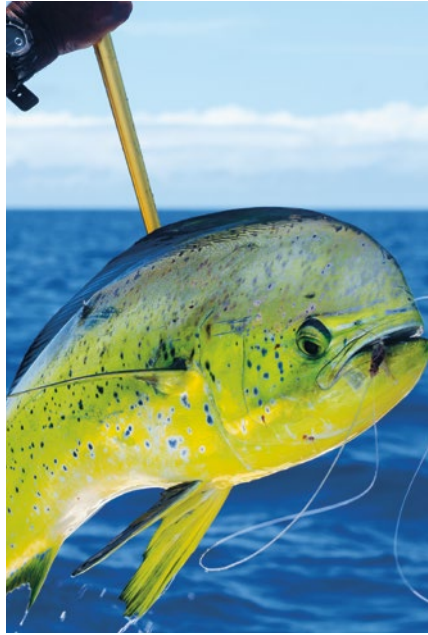


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Hawaii is also a major food producer. The Islands are particularly famous for their super-fresh seafood like tako, mahi mahi (dolphinfish) and ahi—not surprising, considering its location in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. And on land made fertile by rich volcanic soils is a bounty of delicious fruit and vegetables, from lilikoi (passion fruit), breadfruit, mango and guava to pineapple, crisp lettuces, sweet potatoes and taro.

In 1991, a dozen prolific local chefs banded together and started the Hawaii Regional Cuisine movement. Hawaii Regional Cuisine uses Hawaii-grown and -produced ingredients, combining them in innovative ways to create beautifully presented dishes that reflect the state's various ethnic culinary influences. Visit a restaurant that specialises in Hawaii Regional Cuisine and you might find dishes like locally caught, pan-seared fish served with lilikoi butter, premium steaks obtained from locally raised cattle, and salads that combine fresh greens, tomatoes and macadamia nuts harvested from one or more of the many farms across Hawaii—all prepared by classically trained chefs who use various techniques to ensure that these home-grown ingredients stand out.

Oahu has long been regarded as the culinary centre of America's 50<sup>th</sup> state. But in recent years, another island, Maui, has emerged as a major contributor to Hawaii's diverse dining scene, with its ever-increasing array of restaurants, bakeries, bars, cafes, food trucks and more. The Valley Isle, as it's commonly called, even boasts distilleries and breweries, and a picturesque vineyard that produces several varieties of grapes.

## CASUAL EATS

From fish tacos with beer down by the beach or a plate of succulent garlic shrimp with rice by the side of a food truck, Maui is the perfect place for a quick or leisurely, casual meal. If you're after picnic-style food to take with you as you journey around the island, Maui also has a number of bakeries and general goods stores selling gourmet sandwiches, salads and other ready-made meals.

For authentic Hawaiian fare and local plate lunches, drive up to **Ono Kau Kau Mixed Plate** (3481 Lower Honoapiilani Highway), a modest yet charming eatery that serves generously portioned meals like kalua pig, Spam musubi (a luncheon meat-topped rice block), Loco Moco (rice topped with a hamburger patty, fried egg and brown gravy) and lau lau.

In 2016, *Top Chef* alumnus chef Sheldon Simeon opened **Tin Roof Maui** (tinroofmaui.com), a mom-and-pop-style eatery serving classic local dishes with a modern twist. Chef Simeon works closely with local farmers, fishermen, ranchers and food artisans to create dishes like mochiko chicken, comprising chicken marinated in ginger, sake and shoyu, coated in a sweet mochiko batter and then fried twice; saimin noodles in a chilli miso broth, and breadfruit-based pono pies in delicious flavours like mango, haupia and lilikoi.

Food trucks and lunch wagons are a dime a dozen on Maui. **Geste Shrimp Truck** (gesteshrimp.com) is among the best. Make your way there for ono (Hawaiian for "delicious") garlicky Hawaiian scampi, spicy pineapple shrimp, hot and spicy shrimp, lemon pepper shrimp and crab salad.

### Opposite page, clockwise from top left

The islands boast a bounty of fruit and vegetables. They are also renowned for their super fresh seafood like mahi mahi

### From right

Tuck into a hearty meal at Tin Roof Maui; Chef Sheldon Simeon of Tin Roof Maui





**Like Poke?** (591 Haleakala Highway, Kahului. Tel: +1 808 757 2239) is a must-visit if you're a fan of the raw seafood dish. From the classic ahi poke with limu to the spicy varieties made with wasabi, ginger and chilli, this humble food truck has it all. It also offers interesting plate lunches with a choice of mains like fried octopus, fried poke and poke 'dynamite', all served with rice and salad.

For more mouth-watering seafood, try **The Fish Market Maui** (fishmarketmaui.com). In addition to poke, seafood-based plate lunches and deep-fried seafood (think coconut shrimp and chips), this place serves delicious sandwiches like ahi tuna melt and crab cake burger, fish tacos and burritos.

On your way to Hana, be sure to stop at **Kuau Store** (kuaustore.com) where you can pick up local plate lunches like pulled BBQ pork and shoyu chicken;

poke; fresh salads and sandwiches made from local produce; cheeses; deli meats; and organic groceries including nut milks, juices and smoothies served in mason jars.

Don't leave Maui without trying the Hawaiian-style sweet treats at **T. Komoda Store & Bakery Inc.** (3674 Baldwin Avenue, Makawao. Tel: +1 808 572 7261). Since 1916, this unpretentious store has been serving old-fashioned sugar doughnuts, custard-filled cream puffs, and golden-brown malasadas filled with tropical fruit-flavoured jams.

### FINE FARE

Maui has a good selection of upscale eateries, many of which can be found in the island's five-star resorts. In addition to creative and elegantly presented dishes made from fresh, locally sourced ingredients, these restaurants are also well loved for their ambience and, in some instances, romantic beach or plantation views.

**The Mill House** (millhousemaui.com) prides itself on its innovative farm-driven dining. Most of the ingredients are obtained from the grounds of the surrounding Maui Tropical Plantation or from local farmers and food providers. Executive chef Jeff Scheer heads the culinary team, which serves modern, farm-to-table dishes like Cornish hen with roasted vegetables, peach, black garlic and chard aioli, and Kalbi beef salad with carrots, green papaya, tomato, and smoked macadamia nut butter.

Over at the long-standing, award-winning **Lahaina Grill** (lahainagrill.com), diners can expect fresh-tasting, contemporary cuisine made with indulgent ingredients. Their wagyu beef ravioli, for example, is filled with black truffle, porcini, portobello mushrooms and braised apple, and served in a morel-mushroom brandy cream sauce, while their Surf & Turf comprises 200g of centre-cut beef fillet mignon and a broiled lobster half, served with wholegrain port wine demi-glace and truffle champagne beurre-blanc.

For Hawaii Regional Cuisine, **Merriman's Kapalua** (merrimanshawaii.com) is the perfect spot. This chic oceanfront restaurant serves appetisers like jalapeno corn cakes with a spicy garlic-coconut sauce and papaya salsa; and mains like pan-seared sea scallops with local green beans and macadamia nut brown rice, and mahi-mahi fish with truffled potato ravioli and ragout.

**Monkeypod Kitchen** (monkeypodkitchen.com) specialises in new American-Asian fusion cuisine made from locally sourced and produced ingredients. Their burgers make use of Maui beef and Portuguese sweet bread buns, while their fish tacos feature freshly caught fish. The family-style eatery also offers a superb selection of craft beers, wines and handcrafted cocktails.



PHOTO: MEGAN SCHILOW



**From top**  
Lahaina Grill offers fresh-tasting, contemporary cuisine in an elegant setting; Stop at Monkeypod Kitchen for a craft beer or a bespoke cocktail



094

## TOP DROPS

Hawaii isn't a place you'd think of when it comes to wine, so you may be surprised to learn that Maui has a famous winery, set on a sprawling 20,000 acres of land. For over four decades, **Maui Wine** (mauiwine.com), located on Ulupalakau Ranch on the slopes of Haleakala Volcano, has been producing delicious pineapple wines made from handpicked Maui Gold pineapples. Then, 10 years ago, winemakers started growing grape varieties like Syrah, Grenache, Malbec and Viognier on the elevated slopes, and today, visitors can sample the new estate wines that have been produced from these fruits.

Not long ago, Maui Wine introduced the Rose Ranch range of wines which are made from a unique combination of ingredients: Lehua, for instance, blends handpicked raspberries, Haleakala rainwater, pure cane sugar and grape neutral spirits, while Lokelani marries Pinot Noir with Chardonnay in a sparkling base. Maui Wine offers tastings and tours for individuals and groups.

Maui is also home to several distilleries and breweries, including **Hawaii Sea Spirits Organic Farm and Distillery** (hawaiiseaspirits.com), where Ocean Organic Vodka and Deep Island Hawaiian Rum are produced; **Kohola Brewery** (910 Honoapiilani Highway, Lahaina. Tel: +1 808 868 3198), which makes a range of excellent craft beers; and **Haliimaile Distilling Company** (haliimailedistilling.com), which produces Paniolo Whiskey and the pineapple-distilled Pau Maui Vodka.

What's a visit to Maui without tropical cocktails at a beachfront bar? You can't go wrong with **Duke's Beach House** (dukesmaui.com), which was named in honour of the father of surfing and Hawaii's most famous son, Duke Kahanamoku. This laidback establishment serves a good selection of wines and beers, as well as exotic tipples like the Awapuhi with citrus vodka, ginger liqueur, fresh lemon and bitters; the Lava Flow with pineapple juice, coconut syrup, strawberries and rum; and the Moana Sunset with Ocean vodka, pomegranate, peach and cranberry.

**Kimo's** (kimosmaui.com) is another local beachfront institution. Try traditional tropical cocktails like the Pina Colada and the Mai Tai, or be adventurous and go for the handcrafted creations like Kimo's Grog with Ocean vodka, ginger beer and ginger syrup; and the Kilohana Ginger Mojito with made-in-Kauai Koloa Gold rum; and Domaine de Canton ginger liqueur, ginger syrup, fresh mint, lime and club soda.

While Maui has yet to achieve the same status as Oahu as a dining destination, there's no doubt that the island has helped put the Aloha State on the foodie map. With its creative chefs, innovative restaurant owners, and dedicated farmers and food producers for whom freshness, flavour, quality and uniqueness are key, it's not a stretch to say that The Valley Isle may someday outrank Oahu as one of the Pacific's hottest culinary destinations. **WD**

**From top** Maui Wine overlooks a gorgeous landscape with views of Haleakala volcano: Locally brewed craft beer from Kohola Brewery