

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

DEEP SENSE OF PLACE

On Maui, fresh, simple food takes center stage

BY DIANE BAIR AND PAMELA WRIGHT
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The setting for the Grand Tasting at the 37th annual Kapalua Wine and Food Festival on Maui, the longest running food and wine event in the country, was hard to beat. White tents were spread across the expansive, sloping front lawn at the Montage Kapalua Bay Resort, overlooking pristine, aquamarine waters. We took the path out to the Cliff House, a simple 1940s wooden structure perched on a promontory with sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean and the neighboring islands of Molokai and Lanai. There we sipped a glass of Veuve Clicquot Rich Rose as we waited for the grand tasting to begin.

Our curiosities were piqued. What were Maui's top chefs cooking these days? What is the next Hawaiian culinary craze? (Have we moved beyond poke?) What we discovered was an almost fever pitch advocacy for all things local, a burgeoning movement to support and form alliances with small, artisan farmers, and a nod to ethnicity and home-style cooking. The setting was elegant, but island chefs were eschewing the fussy for straightforward, locally-based dishes, that not only showcased their heritage but provided a deep sense of place.

The island's locavore ethos is not all that different than what's happening in pockets across the country. But for Hawaii, it's a big deal. While things are changing, Hawaii still imports about 85 to 90 percent of its food, which is shipped or flown in daily. Chefs, agricultural activists, farmers, and private and nonprofit organizations are working to change that. Even the state govern-

ment has set a goal of doubling local food production by 2020 with a host of programs and initiatives. And small farms are booming, bringing a slew of new products to the table.

"There is a growing movement of farmers committed to sustainability and to bringing new — sometimes exotic — ingredients to light," says Chris Damskey, executive chef at the award-winning Cane & Canoe restaurant on Maui. "Maui has various micro climates that allow farmers to grow a wide range of plants, fruits, and vegetables in different altitudes and environments."

"We have locally-made cheeses and distilled



PHOTOS BY PAMELA WRIGHT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

ocean vodka, sustainably-grown kampachi and abalone, locally-grown Berkshire heritage pork and some of, if not the best, grass-fed beef in the country," Damskey says. "We like to showcase these items at Cane & Canoe with as little fuss as possible, letting the food shine and speak to the sense of place."

During our visit, we sampled an array of dishes, highlighting Hawaii's vast bounty. Some of our favorites included Big Island abalone with green papaya; warm duck confit salad with local greens and Kula strawberries; line-caught onaga snapper ceviche with a coconut mango broth; Big Island goat cheese panna cotta with a local fig jam and baby watercress greens; ahi-avocado-shoyu poke with ogo (seaweed), chilled cauliflower gazpacho, shrimp and grits, and a spicy seared ome with foraged mushrooms and chili braised local greens.

"When I started, no one was even thinking of using vine-ripened tomatoes on their menus. Growing them back then was unimaginable," says Peter Merriman, chef-owner of Merriman's Restaurants. "Today, you can find a growing variety of locally-grown, sustainably-caught items on menus across Hawaii." A standout for us was Merriman's signature Kahua Ranch lamb served with hamakua mushrooms and Maui onions.

Merriman, who was one of the founders of Hawaii Regional Cuisine, a pioneering movement that partners with local farmers to bring fresh, sustainable ingredients to the kitchen, says that chefs are also in-

corporating more ethnic flavors, fusing their heritage and backgrounds with locally-grown island food.

Damskey agrees. "Hawaii is my definition of a true melting pot of the US in the Pacific," he says. "The food is influenced by the different cultures in Polynesian, but also the wave of immigrant workers who came to work in the pineapple and sugar cane fields. Cultural influences include Filipino, Chinese, Japanese, Okinawan, Spanish, Puerto Rican, and Portuguese."

At the festival, we tried a Sicilian-style lobster arancini, a kimchi scallop poke, papusas with a Maui onion crutido, and Kona lobster spring rolls with a lychee sweet and sour sauce. We also traveled to fan favorite "Top Chef" contestant Sheldon Simeon's Tin Roof for lunch one day, enjoying locally-made, wok-fried saimin noodles and locally-raised fried chicken marinated in ginger sake shoyu, with su-miso sauce and gochujang aioli.

Our final night, we were back at Cane & Canoe at the Montage Kapalua Bay resort, dining al fresco, within sight, sound, and smell of the ocean. We tried "Oysters Rockefeller" made with local abalone and "Beef Wellington," made with ahi tuna. And, of course, poke, made with ahi, inamona, ogo, and locally-grown avocado and hearts of palm.

Because we're definitely not done with poke.

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The ahi Benedict at Cane & Canoe on Maui is a great way to kick-start your day on the island.



Local, sustainably-grown dishes are a hallmark of Cane & Canoe.

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HERE

MOM'S DAY DEAL IN MAINE

Treat mom to an extra special Mother's Day with a two-night package at the Camden Harbour Inn. Stay in either a guest room or suite and enjoy a four-course tasting menu for dinner at the hotel's own acclaimed Natalie's; a la carte Champagne breakfast; bottle of Prosecco and tasty pastries in your room; Mother's Day gourmet brunch buffet; and 60-minute massage for two. Package also includes a Saturday master baking class with Cas Wolters, a 2019 contestant on the Dutch version of "The Great British Baking Show" (\$25 for non-hotel guests). Wolter's cakes and savory snacks from the Netherlands will also be featured at the Sunday brunch. Additional complimentary offerings include wireless Internet, beverages and snacks in each room, and concierge and turndown services. *Package rates from \$429. 800-236-4266, bit.ly/2Wb4Lsc*

MURDER MYSTERY WEEKENDS

Put on your sleuthing cap and head to Glen, N.H., for one of the rollicking Murder Mystery Weekends at Bernerhof Inn. In advance of your arrival, the hotel will e-mail you a custom written mystery character packet so you can plan an entrance as your "character." The package features two-night accommodations in one of the Victorian inn's rooms; wine and cheese reception; candlelight four-course mystery dinner; two country breakfasts; and more. In addition, win gift certificates for future visits to the inn at the Best Dressed and Most Entertaining Mys-



tery Awards ceremony. Upcoming weekends: June 7 and 28; July 12; Dec. 6. Availability does not appear on website calendar; inquiries should be made by phone. *Package \$629 per couple, plus tax, for all rooms. 877-389-4852, www.bernerhofinn.com*

THERE

HIGH-WATER RAFTING ADVENTURES

Avid rafters looking for high-water thrills will want to check out Western River Expeditions' Cataract Canyon Rafting Adventure. Record level snow pack measurements this year (up more than 132 percent since 2013) and seasonal rains bode well for river rafting vacations this season. Cataract Canyon begins just south of Moab, Utah, where the Green and Colorado Rivers meet. Bolstered by the Green River, the Colorado River doubles its force, car-

ving a 100-mile-long chasm through the heart of Canyonlands National Park. This four-day trip mixes the thrill of class III-V whitewater rafting with calm stretches that wind through stunning geologic formations, and off-river hikes to ancient Native American ruins and pictographs. Includes camping under the stars and dining on chef-prepared meals. Concludes with a flight over Canyonlands on the return to Moab. *Available select dates, May through August. Per person rate \$1,570. 866-904-1160, www.westernriver.com/cataract-canyon-rafting*



ROUGH GUIDES SMOOTH AWAY ROUGH EDGES

After 35-plus years in the travel business, Rough Guides is growing up. Well, sort of. Acknowledging that its young backpacker audience is now — ahem — approaching middle age, the company is launching a new site with tailor-made adventures based on each customer's personal needs. The company will still emphasize new experiences and off-the-beaten-track elements while taking care of all accommodations, transport, and other creature comforts. Think of it as the Rough Guide minus the rough bits. (Meaning you won't be crammed in a shared dorm in a budget hostel.) Simply go online, pick your dream destination, and fill out a short form with your trip preferences. After that, a local expert will craft an itinerary that you can refine and tweak. *go.roughguides.com/tailor-made-trips/*

FAMILY LEARNING JOURNEYS

Tired of the same old family vacations? Turn your precious time together into an immersive, hands-on learning and cultural travel experience on one of Perillo's Learning Journeys. Six special trips span the globe from Europe to South America and Africa, offering opportunities to spark imaginations and give back to local communities. For example, a seven-day adventure in the Andes in Peru explores nature, archeology, and handicrafts. Includes a visit to an alpaca farm and a textile

showroom in Cusco where guests learn traditional weaving; tours of Machu Picchu and Coricancha; visit to the home of a musician who makes traditional instruments that children can learn to play; and more. *Departure on July 14 from \$2,990 per person. Additional destinations from \$2,450-\$7,100. 888-884-8259, www.learningjourneys.com/family-journeys*

EVERYWHERE

COMPREHENSIVE FIRST AID TRAVEL KIT

The newest must-have accessory for backpacking, camping, and any other travel adventures is MyMedic, a comprehensive first aid kit by MyMedic. Weighing in at less than 3 pounds (for the basic kit), the heavy duty, waterproof nylon bag is stuffed with pretty much everything you'll need in case of bleeding, burns, airway obstruction, sprains and fractures, basic medications and topical products. It also includes a survival rescue blanket and whistle, and specialty items such as

EMT shears, sutures and scalpels, thermometer, pen light, and more. The advanced level pack features all this plus an expanded array of products. Available in five colors. *Basic \$120, advanced \$240. my-medic.com/products/myfak-firstaidkit*



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