

DESTINATIONS

OHAU

USA



Hawaii

WHERE ON EARTH

Tropical, Trendsetting *Oahu* by LAURA SUTHERLAND

WE'D ALREADY SNORKELLED SO CLOSE TO

a pod of pantropical spotted dolphins that we could almost count their spots. Next stop, the green sea turtle spa, an underwater oasis where turtles congregate so tiny fish can feast on the algae and parasites that stick to their shells and flippers.

I adjusted my mask, stepped off the boat and swam after Elizabeth, our Wild Side Specialty Tour guide. Sure enough, about 100 feet away, five sea turtles were suspended in water, legs and heads gracefully extended while tropical fish busied themselves feasting and polishing. We marvelled a respectful distance away until Elizabeth motioned us back to the boat.

As we made our way along Oahu's rugged green coastline to the dock, we learned more about the creatures that inhabit the waters and the people who settled on these lush volcanic islands centuries ago. Elizabeth's explanation of 'canoe crops' — plants like coconut, taro, sweet potato and sugarcane that were brought to the islands by Polynesian explorers — was particularly intriguing since we were on Oahu to check out its extraordinarily dynamic culinary scene.

Sugarcane, as we soon found out, is experiencing an intoxicating revival at Kō Hana rum distillery and tasting room on Oahu's west side. The distillery has worked with Honolulu's Bishop Museum to identify and breed 30 different heirloom sugarcane plants, many of which we saw in their demonstration garden. As we sampled five rums made from five different sugarcane varieties, we noted that they all shared a sweetly grassy flavour (sugarcane is a grass, after all) but each one was unique in its own right.

We made a note to look for establishments that serve Kō Hana rum, and that night at Mahina and Sun's Restaurant in our Waikiki hotel — the retro-hip»

PHOTO THIS SPREAD
Oahu sunset.

PHOTOS THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP LEFT A pair of cranes; Heading for the
North Shore; Hawaiian New Wave cuisine.

HAWAII TOURISM

*...This second wave of
inventive young chefs are
making Oahu one of today's
most exciting places to eat...*

HAWAII TOURISM

«Surf Jack — we spotted an Unkle's Punch that mixed Kō Hana rum with a heady swirl of Campari, falernum, lime juice and orange bitters. Our favourite dish at dinner — succulent *monchong* fish with roasted *ulu* (breadfruit — another canoe crop) — was paired with a wine that had a particularly fascinating story. A German winemaker had tasted a variety of Mahina's outstanding fish dishes and returned home to craft the perfect Riesling to pair with Hawaiian fish.

Mahina & Sun's is the latest restaurant founded by celebrity chef Ed Kenney, one of the 'new wave' of Oahu culinary masters, part of a creative movement launched 25 years earlier by 12 star-powered island chefs who banded together to establish Hawaiian Regional Cuisine and highlight the multi-ethnic cuisines and agriculture of the islands.

Some of the original 12 still have restaurants today, like Alan Wong, who was raised in Hawaii and brings Asian and Hawaiian influences and ingredients to his classical French cuisine. At his Honolulu restaurant, we tasted dishes like ginger-crusted *onaga*, (snapper) topped with spring-crisp corn shoots and a creamy coconut sorbet molded into a chocolate 'coconut' shell.

At Chef Mavro's namesake restaurant — another member of the original 12, who moved to Hawaii from Toulouse — his classic French background combined with his love of Polynesia was vividly apparent in richly flavoured and artfully plated dishes like *keahole* lobster in tamarind broth with pork belly, kaffir lime and green papaya.

The seasoned veterans and this second wave of inventive young chefs are making Oahu one of today's most exciting places to eat. There's a vibrant, effortless, east-meets-west Polynesian flair to the dishes and a sense of the delight the chefs take in amusing themselves and inspiring each other.

Take Koko Head Café in a quiet Honolulu neighbourhood where we stopped for brunch. TV personality/chef Lee Ann Wong's sly riff on eggs Benedict, *Eggs Haloa*, featured poached eggs on a poi biscuit with coconut luau, sour poi hollandaise and local greens, and her mimosas were deliciously Hawaiian thanks to fresh guava instead of orange juice.

To graze our way through more local dishes, we booked an Aloha Food Tour of Chinatown to explore this old Honolulu neighbourhood where trendy restaurants and bars are emerging amidst lei-making shops, fish markets and Chinese bakeries. We sampled buttery-tender poke flavoured with shredded shiso leaf that gave it a cinnamon kick, a savoury pastry called a *manapua* and a bahn mi sandwich and pho 'French dip' at Oahu's now-legendary Pig and the Lady. »



HAWAII TOURS

SERVES 4

Coconut Panna Cotta with Passionfruit Syrup

A SOPHISTICATED DESSERT that is super easy to make.

Powdered Gelatine 2 tsp

Cold Water ¼ cup

Full-Fat Coconut Milk 2 cups

Icing Sugar 2 Tbs, or to taste

Salt a pinch

Sugar ½ cup

Water ½ cup

Fresh Passionfruit Pulp 1 cup

- 1 STIR** the gelatine into the water in a small bowl and allow to stand for 5 minutes.
- 2 IN** a saucepan, bring the coconut milk, sugar and salt to a bare simmer, then remove from the heat. Do not allow the coconut milk to boil.
- 3 WHISK** the melted gelatine into the coconut milk.
- 4 STRAIN** the mixture into four ramekins, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, or overnight if you wish.
- 5 MEANWHILE**, bring the water and sugar to a boil and cook for 5 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the passionfruit pulp.
- 6 TO** serve, dip the ramekins very briefly in warm water and invert onto a serving plate. Top with the passionfruit syrup.

«The soup and sandwich were so good that we returned the next day to experience more from chef Andrew Le. His take on Vietnamese food uses his mother's family recipes, his culinary academy chops and his dazzling creativity to create dishes like *cha ca la vong* — fish-of-the-day marinated in turmeric and galangal (a member of the ginger family), scallions, dill, peanuts, rice noodles and his fermented shrimp and chili sauce that was so delicious we wanted to order it by the glass.

Knowing that the Pig and the Lady first gained fame as a farmers' market stall inspired us to visit the Saturday KCC Farmers' Market near Diamond Head. There was so much to see and sample — miniature grilled abalone sitting in opalescent shells the size of a teaspoon, sushi sliders, fresh pressed sugarcane juice, Hawaiian-style crêpes and pyramids of papayas, pineapples and exotic island fruits.

When you're in Hawaii, it's hard to resist the siren call of a good mai tai, and as we looked out the floor-to-ceiling windows of our next Waikiki hotel room at the Hyatt Centric, we could see the iconic pink Royal Hawaiian Hotel with its storied Mai Tai Bar a few blocks away. We lucked out on a beachfront table and lazily sipped before we boarded the Holokai Catamaran for a relaxing sunset sail as the sun painted the clouds tropical pinks and oranges.

Honolulu and Waikiki are the certainly the centre of the culinary action on Oahu, but the North Shore of the island where big wave surfers attack walls of water in winter has an exciting food truck scene. So the next day we drove up the dramatic coastline to watch the surfers and eat at local favourite Giovanni's Shrimp Truck with its decadent garlicky shrimp served on a plate of white sticky rice. Instead of breath mints, we cooled our palates nearby at Matsumoto's Shave Ice, an Oahu institution since 1951. I ordered a heavenly tropical»



ANTHONY QUINTANO



DESTINATIONS

USA

HAWAII TOURISM

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP LEFT Dining by
torchlight in Waikiki; Lisa
Asagi, Coordinator of the
KCC Farmers' Market;
Barbecued shrimp lunch;
Lei making in Chinatown;
Kamehameha statue.



LAURA SUTHERLAND



EDMUND GARRMAN

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
LEFT Oahu beach scene;
Kō Hana rum tasting room
pour; Lilikoī cheesecake;
Mai Tais; Giovanni's
Shrimp Truck plate; Fresh
lime pies.



Alan Wong's Honolulu
www.alanwongs.com

Aloha Food Tours
www.alohafoodtours.com

Chef Mavro Restaurant
www.chefmavro.com

Giovanni's Shrimp Truck
www.giovanisshrimptruck.com

Holokai Catamaran
www.sailholokai.com

Hyatt Centric
www.centric.hyatt.com

KCC Farmers Market
www.hfbf.org/market

Ko Hana Agricole Rum
www.kohanarum.com

Koko Head Café
www.kokoheadcafe.com

Mahina & Sun's
www.surfjack.com/eat-shop

Matsumoto Shave Ice
www.matsumotoshaveice.com

Modern Honolulu
www.hemodernhonolulu.com

Ravish
www.ravishhonolulu.com

The Pig and Lady
www.thepigandthelady.com

The Surfjack Hotel
www.surfjack.com

Wild Side Specialty Tours
www.sailhawaii.com




HAWAII TOURISM



LAURA SUTHERLAND

«flavour with coconut, pineapple and tangy lilikoi — a popular yellow passionfruit.

Back in Waikiki at another food-centric hotel, the minimalist-cool Modern Honolulu, we sat on the patio at Ravish Restaurant overlooking the yacht harbour and a beachy lagoon studded with palm trees. As we scrutinized the menu, our server explained that Oahu's top chefs get prime pick at the early morning fish auctions. Since the sushi chef at Ravish had recently worked at Morimoto's of Iron Chef fame, we figured he'd be first in line. We ordered a few provocative combinations just for fun, like the surf and turf sushi with ahi, steak, and onions, but the classic sushi had us swooning with cuts of fish so tender they truly melted in our mouths.

Sure Hawaii is known best for sun, sand and sea but Oahu's well-deserved reputation as a global culinary hotspot would lure us back just to eat. We'd make more time to visit the restaurants we missed, like Ed Kenney's Home and any of original-12 Roy Yamaguchi's places, and return to the places we loved. 

Click

LAURA SUTHERLAND is a travel writer based in Northern California. You can contact her at LauraSutherland.net and follow her @WanderandTaste



MAKES 1 DRINK

Uncle's Punch

THE SIGNATURE LIBATION served at Ed Kenney's restaurant Mahina & Sun's, in Waikiki.

Kō Hana Agricole Rum¹ 1 ½ oz

Campari ½ oz

Velvet Falernum² ½ oz

Fresh Lime or Lemon Juice or a combination, ¾ oz

Orange Bitters 2 dashes

Orange Zest Strip for garnish

- 1 IN** a cocktail shaker filled with ice, combine the rum, Campari, Velvet Falernum, lime/lemon juice and orange bitters and shake until well chilled.
- 2 STRAIN** into an ice-filled double old-fashioned glass.
- 3 TWIST** the orange zest strip over the drink, then drop it into the glass and serve.

¹ Or good quality light/white rum.

² A tropical drink syrup available in liquor stores or online.



HAWAII TOURISM