

# TRAVEL



The 50th state is so much more than pineapple. Agritourism is growing here.

Lunch at the Hawaiian Vanilla Co. on the Big Island.

MICHAEL MILNE

# Hawaii

## FOR FOODIES



**Kuaiwi Farm, top**, is a center of the locavore movement in Hawaii. Above, hygienically grown Hamakua mushrooms.



**The Hilo Coffee Mill**, on the eastern slope of the Big Island near Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

By Larissa and Michael Milne  
FOR THE INQUIRER

**T**iki's Restaurant on Waikiki Beach provides all that a visitor to Honolulu expects: a superb view of the setting sun melting into the Pacific, flaming tiki torches casting dancing shadows, fruity drinks served in coconuts. But a few delights are unexpected, such as entrées featuring locally sourced Kahuku corn and arugula, with organic herbs from the base of the nearby Ko'olau Mountains.

Farm-to-table offerings in a tropi-



**At Madre Chocolate**, Oahu's first bean-to-bar chocolate maker, the process requires perfect humidity.

cal paradise?

Agriculture and tourism have long been two of Hawaii's main industries, so it makes sense that "agritourism," which exposes visitors to the state's unique food culture, would follow. But what the 50th state offers goes far beyond the usual international pineapple conglomerates and sprawling sugarcane fields.

Ronnie Nasuti, the chef at Tiki's, explains that in Hawaii, the locavore movement is smart business for restaurateurs. "We're 2,000 miles from See **HAWAII** on N4

## On Molokai, sounds of tradition and the Beatles

By William Ecenbarger  
FOR THE INQUIRER

**K**AUNAKAKAI, Hawaii — Auntie Vivian arrives first, leaning on a walking stick, her straw hat jauntily askew. Next is Auntie Mary, waving to the audience as laughter smooths out her wrinkled face. Then comes Auntie Hattie, knocking spectacles back up on her nose.

Before long, there are a dozen or so *kupunas* (older ladies given the honorific title "Auntie") sitting on folding chairs around three card tables, half of them with their backs to the audience. As soon as they sit, the bartender, without being asked, brings them a drink while

See **KAPUNA** on N4



**At the Hotel Molokai every Friday**, "kupunas" (older ladies given the honorific title "auntie") gather with their ukuleles to sing and play, with an occasional hula performance by a waitress. SUSAN ECENBARGER

## Moulin Rouge still has its 'ooh la la!'

The venerable Paris spectacle satisfies with music, acrobats, showgirls — and the can-can.

By Sharon Ebersson  
PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

**P**ARIS — At 125 years old, the Moulin Rouge sparkles and shines from its nesting place along a busy commercial street in the Pigalle district.

The Blanche metro station is mere yards from the home of ornate musical numbers, acrobatic acts, can-can dancers, and topless showgirls, but I chose to walk the few blocks from the station on the line closest to my hotel.



**The Moulin Rouge in Paris**, in the red-light district on the Rue de Clichy. SHARON EBERSON / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

I emerged onto the Boulevard de Clichy, where the center pedestrian island provided a view of Paris' red-light district, a sea of signs for sex shops and massages, Le Folies Pigalle, La Diva, and the Musée de l'Erotisme, before the telltale Moulin Rouge windmill appeared, benign and friendly in the light of day.

It was early, and I had a dinner-show reservation, and I was never so happy to see a Starbucks directly across the street. After enjoying a latte and WiFi, I made my way up the side street that borders the Moulin Rouge, Rue Lepic, toward Montmartre. In addition to cafes and souvenir shops, the street was lined with small markets such as La Fromagerie Lepic, the Boucherie des Gourmets, Routisseurs du Roy, Primeurs Lepic ... maybe next time.

This time, I had preordered the "Blanche Evening" dinner and the *Feerie* show — the least-expensive combo, at 172 euros (\$183) — weeks before, online. Doors open at 6:45 p.m. for dinner; the show starts at 9 p.m. You don't have to do both, but I wanted the full experience.

It can be a long, hot wait on the steps — lined with posters of can-can dancers — leading to the 850-seat Belle Epoque-style theater, but people were chatting and taking pictures until they were escorted to a seat.

Being alone, as it turned out, was a good thing. There were two vacancies in need of occupants at one of the up-front tables, so I wound up three seats from the stage, opposite another solo — Jim, an enthusiastic 21-year-old from Newcastle, England.

The only sour note of the night came from the stage during dinner, when a band of what we might call wedding singers performed tunes with English lyrics sung phonetically — let's just move on.

The chicken dinner, with an appetizer. See **MOULIN ROUGE** on N5

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**Nat Bletter, cofounder of Madre Chocolate,** aims “to turn the windward coast of Oahu into the Napa Valley of chocolate.” MICHAEL MILNE

# Hawaii

**Continued from N1**  
 the U.S. mainland,” he says. “It doesn’t make economic sense to ship lettuce that far, and we can procure excellent products from area farmers. Everybody wins.”

The foods once most identified with Hawaii — pineapples, sugar, macadamia nuts — now are cheaper to grow elsewhere in the world. Although small plantations still exist throughout the islands, they produce a fraction of the output of a century ago.

Enter a new breed of entrepreneurs and farmers who are taking advantage of Hawaii’s unique topography. Its tropical locale, coupled with mountains rising to varying altitudes, provides a range of micro-climates suitable for growing just about anything.

Unlike with agribusinesses of the past, Hawaii’s 21st-century food folk are more interested in small batches and organic practices — and welcoming visitors. Tours, tastings, and classes are abundant, offering an intimate slice of island life.

Hawaii is the only state where cacao beans thrive. Nat Bletter is a cofounder and “chocolate flavormeister” of Madre Chocolate, Oahu’s first bean-to-bar chocolate maker. Bletter, who has a doctorate in

ethnobotany, calls chocolate making a “black art.” It’s a delicate process requiring perfect humidity and temperature.

“We’re trying to turn the windward coast of Oahu into the Napa Valley of chocolate,” he says.

On a side street in Oahu’s historic Chinatown, Madre offers classes and chocolate tastings that would be right at home in any winery. The comparison is appropriate. The first thing a visitor notices upon stepping into the shop is the cacao beans’ musty, vinegary aroma, similar to that in wine caves.

In its raw form, chocolate is much more complex than a typical Hershey’s bar, and Bletter teaches how to extract its pulp. We sipped raw cacao pulp: milky and tangy, evocative of crushed lychees. During the one-hour class, visitors savor beans from various regions and follow their evolution from fruit to confection.

A perfect counterpoint to chocolate is the Hawaiian Vanilla Co. on the Big Island of Hawaii.

Having grown up on Oahu in a family “who can be traced back to grass shacks,” owner Jim Reddekopp and his wife, Tracy, moved to this plot overlooking turquoise waters to raise their family on a farm.

The vanilla orchid thrives in the tropics and can be found only within 20 degrees of the equator. Here, they just squeeze in at 19.5 degrees north of Earth’s waistline. Guests tour the “Vanillery,” where the fussy flowers are coaxed into blooming — for a single day, per year, and only four days, at that — a prelude to producing the long skinny bean that is one of the world’s most expensive flavorings.

Reddekopp holds presentations daily, sharing vanilla’s history and teaching such nifty tricks as making your own extract and vanilla-infused liqueurs. For full-on immersion, reserve a place at the “Vanilla Experience Luncheon.”

The Ka’u district near Hilo was coffee country in the 1800s until sugar became a more profitable crop. The agricultural pendulum swung back in the late 1980s when the Puna Sugar Co. closed, leaving



**At Hamakua Mushrooms,** the mushrooms are cultivated organically by a proprietary Japanese bottle method in incubation rooms.

displaced local farmers to replant coffee trees.

Jeanette Baysa, a former banker from San Francisco, moved to Hilo to open a café in 1992, but she had difficulty finding Hawaiian coffee to serve. No one roasted the local beans, so the enterprising Baysa stepped up. In 2001, she opened the Hilo Coffee Mill on the eastern slope of the Big Island near Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

Baysa promotes locally grown coffee from areas other than the well-known Kona. The mill has a café where visitors sample blends (including a quirky but surprisingly tasty pineapple coffee) and explore the fledgling 24-acre farm, which includes a brood of free-range chickens pecking among the coffee trees, along with one rooster.

Hawaiian volcanoes create their share of lava tubes and caves, but it’s unlikely you’ll find any exotic mushrooms growing in those dank subterranean crannies. Instead, seek them out on a sunny hillside along Hawaii’s northeast shore at Hamakua Mushrooms.

Visitors immediately notice the yeasty aroma, akin to a commercial bread bakery, as they enter a facility reminiscent of a hygienic pharmaceutical laboratory. The mushrooms are cultivated organically by a proprietary Japanese bottle method in incubation rooms that are naturally lit by the sun. As co-owner Janice Stang says, “We are enlightened mushroom growers.”

Taste what you can while there. Almost the entire harvest of alii, pioppini, gray oyster, and abalone varieties are gobbled up by local restaurants and markets. The Stangs also offer other “fungal in the jungle” goodies; be sure to try some of their mushroom brownies (which, we have to admit, sound like a treat from Woodstock).

Thoughts of the 1960s were on our minds as we drove up a bumpy, unpaved road to the geodesic-dome Kuaiwi Farm, where Una Greenaway and Leon Rosner have been farming organically for almost four decades. Arguably the elder statesmen of the locavore movement in Hawaii, Greenaway describes herself and Rosner as “a couple of old hippies who came to live off the land.”

Greenaway packs a lot into their five acres above the Kona coast. Call in advance to arrange a two-hour tour, during which she shows off her 100-year-old coffee trees, avocados, cacao, bananas, and whatever else happens to be fruiting or flowering.

Afterward, she brews up a pot of her award-winning “Old Kona Coffee” to taste, served with house-made chocolate and macadamia butter. Sitting on the lanai at Kuaiwi Farm, overlooking the Pacific Ocean 2,000 feet below and drinking incredibly smooth coffee, you can tell the locavore movement in Hawaii has been flourishing for quite some time.

Larissa and Michael Milne have been global nomads since 2011. Their new book is “Philadelphia Liberty Trail: Trace the Path of America’s Heritage.”

# Kapunās

**Continued from N1**  
 they tune their ukeleles.

Friday night is “Kupuna Night” at the funky, down-home Hotel Molokai, and, as always, every table in the thatched-roof open-air bar is filled with a blend of locals and tourists, all there to listen to the weeklies, serenades that range from Hawaiian folk music to the Beatles.

They are led on guitar by Lono (like Madonna and Sting, he goes by one name), who was born and raised on Molokai, left to pursue a professional career that includes a Grammy nomination, and came home three years ago to dedicate his remaining career to preserving traditional island music.

“The group is constantly changing because they get sick or they die,” he says behind a neat goatee and deep, dark shades. “As long as they can participate, they will. They come here to preserve the music, the language, and the culture of old Hawaii.”

Molokai, the least visited of the main Hawaiian islands, is off the beaten track for most tourists, and that’s a good reason to come here. It is a place to step out of the fantasy world of conventional tourism and connect with real Hawaiians. Especially on Kupuna Night, which offers a glimpse of Hawaiian culture most travelers don’t see.

The *kupunās* begin with an old, sad song of Molokai written more than 100 years ago, “*Ke po’okela I ka piko o na kuahiwi*.” The vowel-rich Hawaiian words rise like incense, and there is a cathedral hush in the bar. But as the last melting notes fade away, they step up the beat with a Beatles classic, and they ask, “Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I’m sixty-four?” Hands in the audience begin clapping like cymbals.

During the first break, Lono is asked when they rehearse. He smiles. “Every Friday night. We rehearsed for tonight last Friday night, and this is the rehearsal for next Friday night.”

When the music resumes, the group has swelled to 16, including Willie on guitar and Larry on washboard. After each song, the players stop to take long sips of their drinks. In the brief silence, you can hear the trade winds rustle the fronds of the palms that line the beach.

A waitress puts down her tray and begins to hula. She sways in unison with the music with smooth, piscine grace, long slender fingers flickering just over her head. Her feet are planted, knees bent, body low to the ground. The singers chant in Hawaiian, words seeming to glide off their tongues. When the dancer finishes, she is bathed in a warm blanket of applause from an appreciative audience.

“This is real hula,” Lono declares. “Hula is critical. Hula is not just movement. The words are the most important thing. You need the words in order to do the choreography. The virtues of Hawaiian character — generosity, spirituality, harmony, reverence for nature, strong family ties, and respect for ancient legends and traditions — find their expression in Hawaiian music, chanting, and hula.”

They go on for another hour. Sing. Sip. Sing. Sip. Their finale is “God Bless America,” which they say is to honor the veterans who have died. Then they put down their instruments, sit back, and “talk story” — the Hawaiian pidgin term for chit-chatting. Laughter spills out at the least provocation. The night deepens, and the sky begins passing out stars, one by one.



**Molokai musician Lono,** who accompanies the “kupunās” every Friday. SUSAN MILNE



**Madre Chocolate offers classes and chocolate tastings** that would be right at home in any winery. Hawaii is the only state where cacao beans thrive.