

The Best Places to Eat on the Big Island

Written by Elizabeth Orient

Sometimes, the best way to get to know a destination is to eat your way through it. Hawaii's rich history has shaped the island's culinary scene into quite the melting pot. People from around the world visit the Big Island to experience its diverse food culture. Whether you enjoy traditional fare or innovative fusion cuisine, Hawaii is the place to be for those who love to eat.

[Under the Bodhi Tree](#) is a vegetarian-friendly cafe with a warm and welcoming atmosphere. The executive chefs pride themselves on their sustainable and environmentally-friendly business practices. The restaurant is located at The Shops at Mauna Lani and is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Under the Bodhi Tree offers an extensive breakfast menu complete with smoothies and egg scrambles. Their lunch and dinner items include an array of salads, combination plates, and sandwiches. My favorite dish is their amazing Curry Avocado Salad. A generous portion of avocado with a tantalizing dressing...what's not to like?

Hawaiian fusion is an important part of the Big Island's food culture. [The Blue Room's](#) take on French cuisine with a Hawaiian twist is certainly unique. Lunch and dinner are served bistro style. The Blue Room also has an oyster bar and an impressive beer list for adventurous souls. Interestingly, the restaurant was named after the reception room in the royal home of the Hawaiian Monarchy (known as the Blue Room). Patrons may dine inside or outside on the tropical patio. I personally enjoy "people watching" on the lanai as I dive into butter-sautéed calamari that has been graced with a Buerre Blanc sauce and capers.

Beachfront eateries are essential to Hawaii's culinary philosophy. [Hale Kai](#) at the Fairmont Orchid Hotel is a world-class beachfront dining experience. Their casual menu includes internationally-inspired salads, sandwiches, and entrees. My go-to dishes are the beet and avocado tacos or the fish tacos; they are incredibly fresh and flavorful. This fun restaurant in the sand is walking distance from our home in Puako. We regularly take a stroll down to Hale Kai and share a pu-pu platter. The staff is wonderful; Hale Kai feels like a "staycation" every time we visit. Insider tip: It is the perfect place for whale watching!

Undoubtedly, there is a strong Asian influence on Hawaii's gastronomy. Japanese, Chinese, and Thai establishments can be found on every corner. However, [Tina's Garden Café](#) on Front St. in Hilo stands unmatched. Tina has been serving the finest Thai food to her community for over a decade. She acquires her spices from local farmers to create traditional Thai dishes. Tina's specialties include garlic salmon wraps, pineapple curry, and black bean fish. Specifically, her chicken Tom Ka soup is off the charts! This is my absolute favorite restaurant and I will gladly make the 2-hour drive for Tina's incredible food. We love Tina's so much that she catered our wedding reception. People still talk about it to this day!