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Fresh Maui fruits

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Most travelers to Maui take roads west, away from the airport in Kahului and toward sun, sea and sand, where high-rise hotels meet crowded boardwalks. But bearing east, the 42-mile road to Hana pulls drivers through 600 hairpin turns, down into verdant valleys and up toward vine-embroidered cliffs. Rainstorms pressure-wash the twittering, fruit-scented forest and add to dozens of thundering waterfalls. Lobster-like blooms hang from heliconia next to roadside stands, laden with mangos and macadamia nuts.



As agritourism and "locavore" movements boom, Eastern Maui offers multiple temptations. In Hana, Chuck and Lilly Boerner host tours of their 70-acre organic, off-the-grid ONO Farms, set in the Kipahulu Valley, where over 120 inches of rain fall per year into thick jungle. Travelers from around the world sample farm-grown coffee and a catalog of exotic fruits including abiu, chocolate sapote, lychee, soursop and tamarind. After taste-testing fruits, groups are guided through the farm's productive wilderness, sampling low-hanging starfruit along the way.

"It's not like any farm they've seen before," Lilly Boerner says. "It's not a thousand acres of apples, but a forest of diverse fruit trees."

The Boerners aren't greenie-come-latelies. They've used solar energy, composting and self-sufficient organic farming methods for over 35 years. "The only thing we get from the county is our telephone service," Boerner says.

Further along the road, travelers can replenish at LauLima Farm's roadside shack. Visitors hop on a yellow blender-powered bike and pedal their way to a fruit smoothie of farm-harvested ingredients like sugarcane and mangos. Locals and visitors sit and chat at long picnic tables, and children play underneath a cluster of tall bamboo. There's no guided tour, but curious newcomers can see clutches of papayas on eight-foot-tall trees, red-berried coffee shrubs and banana bunches right outside the café's back door.

"More people want to know where their food comes from," says Charlene Ka'uahane of the Maui County Farm Bureau (MCFB). "We're at a turning point," she says, regarding the renewed interest in locally grown foods.

Home to around 800 farms, 55% of Maui's land is used for agricultural purposes. The state of Hawaii imports 80-90% of its food, according to MCFB, but grows around 50% of its own fruit and vegetables. And agricultural workers are paid around \$11.95 an hour, which can raise the locally grown prices over mass-imported fruits and veggies.

But West Maui restaurants like Hula Grill, Pineapple Grill and Feast of Lele have helped to turn the Pacific tide by sourcing local produce first, even if it means paying a little more.

Louis Coulombe and Stephan Bel-Robert, business partners and owners of oceanfront Pacific"O and I"O restaurants in Lahaina, Hawaii, took fresh, island-



grown food a step further. They created the 8½-acre organic O"O Farm, now open to the public. O"O is located in Kula, on Mt. Haleakala's misty slopes, so farm staff encourage visitors to bring sweatshirts—it can be downright chilly in the mornings. Steaming apple cider and homemade pastries are brought out by the farm's resident chef. Then the tour begins, as visitors help harvest herbs, salad greens, root vegetables and stone fruits not typically grown on Hawaii.

The farm's chef creates a feast of the hand-harvested vegetables and fruit, served with fish and tofu. Diners eat *al fresco*, seated at a 20-foot-long pine table under a tin roof, as the farm manager strums a few songs on his guitar.

"The farm-to-table menus reflect what we have available," says Angel Green of O"O Farm. "Our chefs have fun creating specials based on the seasons, while we grow produce to supply the menu. They inspire each other." One example? At I"O restaurant, diners can feast on Pukalani Salad—mixed farm greens with shaved red Kula onion, fresh feta crumbles, Olowalu tomato, candied peanuts and passionfruit-tarragon dressing.

But Maui farms aren't just providing tours and tastes for the traveler; they are also reinvigorating a made-on-Maui ethic. Small mom-and-pop stores and outdoor markets increasingly carry Hawaiian-grown produce.

"A wise family always has crops growing in the backyard," says Lilly Boerner.

LORA SHINN *is a Seattle-based freelance writer.*

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