

ROADSIDE ATTRACTIONS

On The Road To Hana

BY ROB PARSONS

The fabled Road to Hana is unequalled among scenic drives in the Hawaiian Islands. Each year, close to a million visitors to Maui traverse the winding highway through the lush, colorful rainforests on the windward slopes of Mount Haleakala.

A trip along the Hana Highway is as much about the journey as the destination, with eye-popping coastal vistas, cascading waterfalls and stands of bamboo, wild ginger and rainbow eucalyptus trees along the way. More than 50 one-lane bridges punctuate the ride, requiring a good deal of patience on a road with more curves than a beauty pageant.

Among the unexpected pleasures of an all-day excursion to Hana is the surprising variety of homegrown fruit and snack stands along the way. Good news for those not so adept at planning details while on vacation: If you don't want to bother with packing a cooler, you can eat your way to Hana, and dine well, too!

Tropical sunshine, rain-bearing tradewinds and fertile volcanic soil collaborate to provide a virtual cornucopia of delicious locally grown fruits. Travelers will likely be amazed at many never before encountered—mountain apple, liliko'i (passion fruit), egg fruit, lychee, starfruit, rambutan and dragon fruit—in addition to more standard fare of bananas, papayas, pineapple and coconut.

As exotic and sumptuous as the fruitarian menu may sound, it is advisable to be prepared for an uninvited guest: motion sickness from the ever-winding road. Those passing through the funky, fantastic North Shore town of Paia might stop at Mana Foods, the island's health food mecca, to buy ginger candies or natural ginger ale to counter carsickness.

Paia also has at least five restaurants serving fish tacos, four making eggs benedict, three independent coffee shops, two Mexican cantinas and one business, Ono Gelato, making fabulous homemade sorbetto and gelatos.

Leaving Paia, the Hana Highway journeyer will soon pass kiteboarders, surfers and wind-surfers at Hookipa Beach Park. A few minutes later, an unobtrusive stone monument marks Hana Highway as Hawai'i's only National Millennium Legacy Trail—so designated by President Clinton in 1999.

Ten miles beyond Paia, a refurbished school bus painted with an elaborate jungle and underwater mural serves as the kitchen for the Twin Falls Farm Stand. 'Aina, a smiling local gal, is cheerfully waiting to make smoothies, serve banana bread or offer a refreshing chilled coconut with a straw. Twin Falls features easy hiking trails to waterfalls and pools, and remains a favorite outing for tourists and locals alike.

Soon after the straightaways yield to miles of twists and bends, the Huelo Point Lookout offers an assortment of goodies. Tri-colored ripe mangos highlight the display of fruits, while the simple pop-open shack also advertises fresh-squeezed cane juice, Maui coffee, all-natural shave ice and even crepes! A "Grown on Maui/Island Fresh!" logo on the front of the stand denotes locally produced goods.

By county law, persons vending fresh fruits, flowers, leis, fish or vegetables are not required to be licensed, though they may need to obtain conditional use permits to sell their goods at roadside stands. Those offering prepared foods may need to follow more stringent guidelines, and in some cases, use a certified kitchen.

Rules notwithstanding, it is the lack of uniformity and large doses of creativity in roadside stand design and cuisine that make them so appealing. Hand-painted signs entice passers-by, offering "big homemade cookies," "Hawaiian guri guri ice cream," and "steamed breadfruit." One placard urges visitors, "Honk if you're hungry."

Just past the Kanae peninsula and arboretum is Uncle Harry's stand, marked by a sign with green taro leaves and a stone poi pounder. Adjacent to the rows of ripening bananas and pineapples, just above the menu board, a bristly, tusked wild boar head greets visitors. The fruit stand's founder, the late Uncle Harry Mitchell, was a revered practitioner of la'au lapa'au, or traditional healing uses of native Hawaiian plants.

Past the spectacular overlook of the Wailuanui taro fields and community, the road climbs into the forest, with hillsides painted in light green hues of kukui nut trees, and splashed with bright red-orange blossoms of the pervasive African tulip trees. Passing Pua'a Ka'a State Park, the road levels out and twists along its way to Nahiku.

Here, hungry travelers will find a huge assortment of delectable offerings, tucked in a shady grove that also attracts ravenous mosquitoes.







Known for its homemade coconut candy, espresso stand and quaint art gallery, the growing conglomeration of cuisines has expanded to the point that some East Maui residents laughingly refer to it as “the mall.”

A bold red surfboard sign advertises “Island Style Tacos,” made with either kalua pork or local fish. Famished families can choose from chili and rice, fish and chips, smoked barbecue or hot dogs, Kula sweet corn on the cob, baked goods and full menus of Chinese and Thai food.

Nearing the Hana Airport and Wainapanapa State Park, you have suddenly entered a dimension not only of sight and sound but of mind—the Banana Bread Zone! Hana Farms, with its thatched-roof huts and umbrella-covered outdoor tables bordered by crimson ti plants, bakes six varieties. A neighboring stand features macadamia nut banana bread, while another tempts travelers with banana bread pudding.

In front of the Hana Health Clinic, pop-up tents cover fruits, vegetables, baked goods and a fancy espresso machine at the Hana Fresh farm stand. All items sold—“Hana Grown, Farm Fresh, Chemical Free”—are grown or made in the moku (district) of Hana, and benefit the health center. Fresh fish, poi, plants and crafts may also be found. If you are lucky to visit on a day when they have local pumpkins, you will find them to be the best-tasting you’ve ever had.

The Ono Organic Farms Stand is set up in the parking lot of the old Hasegawa General Store that was memorialized in song before

burning down in 1990 and rebuilding across the street. Ono Farms is known for its exotic fruits, including the fuchsia-hued dragon fruit, a delicious delicacy that grows on the night-blooming cactus and requires hand-pollination.

Hana fishermen sell their catch daily on the road that connects Koki Beach and Hamoa Beach, in front of a historic Hawaiian fishpond. Depending on the season and the anglers’ luck, fresh-caught ono, ahi and mahimahi may be available, and at reasonable prices, with no middle-man.

Past Oheo Gulch, where Haleakala National Park meets the ocean, Lulima Farm has attractively landscaped its hillside with an opulent combination of edibles and ornamentals. The path to the front door is lined with papaya trees, clustered with dozens of plump green fruits. Inside, the Lulima folks have hooked up a stationary bicycle to a blender, so customers can make their own pedal-powered smoothie!

Many more treats await adventurers on the dine-and-drive Road to Hana. More than ever, it may be said that those making the excursion are sure to encounter lots of local flavor. □

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