

# Top Ten Best Restaurants in Maui

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 LAUNCH SLIDESHOW

**Maui Fine Dining:** Looking to catch the perfect island fish, or a huge slice of chocolate lava cake the size of Haleakala? Well, you're in luck. We've (eagerly) done the research for you, bite by bite, and have narrowed down Maui's best to these top 10 contenders. Let the dining begin!

## PINEAPPLE GRILL

What effect can delicious food have on you? Rebecca McGibboney, our server at the Pineapple Grill, told us an unusual story. She moved to Maui and visited Kapalua's Pineapple Grill to try its signature, award-winning pineapple upside-down cake. It was so delicious, she said, that "I applied for a job three days later. I just had to be near that cake!" And what a cake it is: a small mound of pineapple cake, topped with Roselani macadamia-nut ice cream, a haystack of sugared phyllo dough, and swimming-so-elegantly in a swirl of dark rum-and-butter-and-sugar Foster sauce. "It's worth ordering, even if you only take one bite," Rebecca told us.

And that's pretty much how our evening went at the Pineapple Grill, where chef Ryan Luckey makes the most of every morsel, with his signature modern Pacific island cuisine. Not surprisingly, the restaurant has won a slew of awards for its cuisine, including most recently "Maui's Best Restaurant" as rated by the staff of *Honolulu Magazine*.

"The chef's goal is to use fresh products and local ingredients," Sheehan McCoy, the assistant general manager, told us. It's worth noting that the Chop Salad, for instance, contains Waipoli Farms butter lettuce, Kapalua Farms tomato, as well as Hana Herbs pohole fern shoots, all in a papaya-seed vinaigrette. Lunch and dinner specialties include a pistachio-crust ed ahi over coconut black rice with wasabi ginger butter, Asian-braised short ribs with truffled potatoes, and an amazing Kona lobster coconut bisque. We dined on Maui Gold pineapple-miso marinated wild king salmon served with buckwheat soba noodles, and a citrus ponzu sauce, as well as a delicious macadamia-nut crusted mahi mahi with edamame, Kula corn and asparagus risotto (recommended with a 2007 Treana white wine that is inspired by the great wines of France). Other notable entrees include Alii Kula lavender- and herb-crust ed chicken breast; pineapple glazed pork chops (one of Chef Ryan's specialty dishes); and a lemon-porcini-dusted Hawaiian monchong. We were too full to eat more dessert than the pineapple upside down cake, but the wealth of desserts include warm chocolate fudge cake, chocolate banana bread pudding, and lilikoi (passion fruit)-infused cheesecake, all of which can be paired with excellent dessert wines. Expect to pay \$100 for dinner-for-two, without alcohol and gratuity. Try to visit the restaurant on "Wine Wednesdays," in which prices are 50% off

selected bottles from the wine list, and 25% off wines by the glass in the bar area only. The Pineapple Grill is owned by the Cohn Restaurant Group, which owns 11 restaurants in the San Diego area, including the every-popular Corvette Diner. The Pineapple Grill – well, it got our engines running. [pineapplekapalua.com](http://pineapplekapalua.com), (808) 669-9600.



#### LEILANI'S

Some things just get even better with time. For the past 10 years, we've regularly dined at Leilani's in Whalers Village, Kaanapali, and the experience we just had there – well, it just wowed us. We had an incredible server, Lorri Lane, and she went above-and-beyond the call of duty with our order, without ever even writing it down. We wanted everything special ordered – salad dressing on the side, addition of feta cheese and extra beets to our salad, one coconut shrimp added to the order of grilled fish, one order of diet lemonade, extra rice – your name it – and she got it all right, and with a huge smile and winning personality. Leilani's restaurant sits right on Kaanapali Beach, and it's a great place to dine, watch the sunset, and enjoy the open-air environment. Bill had the opah prepared with a pistachio crust, and it put new meaning into the word "delicious." Deb had grilled opah with a side of grilled shrimp, which came with a healthy portion of polenta and steamed vegetables. We also started with salads of baby kula greens. All totaled, our dinner came to about \$80, which is very reasonable by Hawaii standards – we always expect to pay at least \$100 for dinner-for-two. Fresh fish, available in four preparations, ranges from \$21.95 to \$29.95. Steaks range from \$18.95 to Maui style teriyaki steak to \$29.95 for filet mignon served with caramelized Maui onions and wild mushrooms. And the original Hula Pie – a whale-served portion of dessert – is also on the menu, along with a mouthwatering apple crisp that Bill inhaled, and a tropical cheesecake. For a real substantial slice of authentic Hawaiian hospitality, Leilani's is it. [leilanis.com](http://leilanis.com), (808) 661-4495.



#### LAHAINA GRILL

Welcome back! That was the heartfelt message we got from Richard Olson III, the sommelier at the outstanding Lahaina Grill. Richard had waited on us last year, and we were delighted to have him serve us again this year. Even though we eat at dozens of fabulous restaurants, it's always a thrill to dine at Lahaina Grill. Our dinner-for-two cost \$150, including just two bottles of water (not wine), and that's pretty much what you can expect to pay. Appetizers include a reconstructed California roll made with crab, and we heartily also recommend the eggplant Napoleon – a mini-meal in itself, consisting of smoked mozzarella, mushrooms, olives, and roasted peppers in a tomato-balsamic vinaigrette. But as far as salads go, nothing surpasses the restaurant's baby spinach salad with raspberry vinaigrette, which includes a healthy dose of caramelized Maui onions. (Make sure to pair it with a thick slice of bread with the restaurant's signature garlic-shallot-rosemary butter.) The onions are a meal in themselves – and that meal could be dessert, they

are so sweet. Diehard dieters that we are, we of course wanted sauces on the sides of our entrée, and absolutely nothing sautéed. “We can change anything and make it work,” said Richard. Bill had the grilled salmon served with asparagus, and Deb had the wild salmon fillet baked with Pommery mustard and caramelized Maui onion crust. Can you say “delectable?” All the cuisine here is to-die-for, and worth every calorie. For dessert, owner Jurg Munch sent over four samples including the warm chocolate cake served with Kona coffee ice cream, a berry tart, a sour-cream and chocolate mousse dipped in chocolate, and a vanilla bean crème brulee. We couldn’t have had a warmer welcome to Maui. Richard also told us about the wine list. “I’m really focused on small production and those wines that are hard-to-get and impossible to find.” His favorites, available at the restaurant, include Gemstone Vineyards in Napa and Kosta Browne in Sonoma. “I take one international trip a year, just to look and find what we don’t have,” he told us. “I also love the Neal Family Vineyards.” And we just love the Lahaina Grill. [lahainagrill.com](http://lahainagrill.com), (808) 667-5117.



#### NICK'S FISHMARKET AT THE KEA LANI

Sometimes you eat something so delicious, so amazing, that you just have to order it not once. But twice. That's what we did with the tomato soup served at Nick's Fishmarket, a first-class, fine-dining establishment that set the stage for celebrating Deb's birthday dinner. Everything impressed us – from the elegant booth in the corner, where we dined at this distinctive al fresco restaurant – to the service, to, of course, the cuisine. Try the ahi tiger-eye sushi, or the sweet tiger-shrimp served scampi style, as the appetizer. And whatever you do, pray that on the night that you visit, the chef has made his wonderful tomato soup—a blend of Olawalu red and gold tomatoes mixed with shallots, onions, garlic, cream and butter. It's like eating deliciousness itself, and we swore that it's the best soup we've ever had. Nick's should bottle it and sell it, so the world could enjoy it. You could make a meal out of it, with some bread, and live on it for the rest of your life. You get the point. For salad, Bill chose the Greek Maui Wowie, which was a delightful mélange of chopped Maui onions, tomatoes, avocado, romaine, feta and bay shrimp, and he accented it with a splash of balsamic vinegar. He also chose the diver scallops for his entrée, served with herb gnocchi and local mushrooms – it was fantastic. Deb had the \$43 island snapper (opakapaka) grilled in a tomato puree, with sweet-potato hash browns and artichoke hearts – it was tremendous. For dessert, there's no lack of enticements – Bananas Foster, homemade apple pie, and Nick's famous crème brulee with Tahitian vanilla bean. Pair it all with a glass of dessert wine, and you can die and go to Heaven. Expect to pay about \$200, without alcohol, for two appetizers, salads, soups, entrees and dessert. [tristarrestaurants.com](http://tristarrestaurants.com); (808) 879-7224.



#### HULA GRILL

*I can't believe I ate the whole thing.* That was Deb's refrain after devouring the flourless chocolate cake at the Hula Grill on Kaanapali Beach, (made at the Stilwell Bakery in Wailuku). But it was so delicious it was hard to stop eating it, and it was worth every calorie. This distinctive restaurant is an absolute must for any traveler to Hawaii – we dine there on every Maui trip, and it just keeps getting better and better. (Chef Bobby Masters is definitely doing something right.) Start with a tropical drink – say, a Plantation Lemonade – and then you can sink your teeth into the hot bread served with the Hula Grill's famous chili water made with garlic and rice wine. Then there's an overwhelmingly wonderful choice of items – pupus of fire-grilled shrimp and scallops, or Kalua pork potstickers. Although we have to say that the crabcakes, made with lump real snowcrab plus celery, garlic, carrot, onion, shitake mushrooms and ginger, are the best crabcakes we've

ever eaten in our life. The Hula Caesar salad, or the vine-ripened tomato and Maui onion salad, are two other all-time favorites. Then there are the Hula Grill “traditions” that include coconut-seafood chowder and pan-roasted shrimp with macadamia nut pesto pasta. Chef Masters told us that the chowder is a huge favorite, and that the poke tacos are also big sellers. We chose the macadamia-nut crusted fish (let’s face it, you just can’t visit Hawaii without getting your fill of macadamia nuts) and the waistline-friendly tandoori-style fish (Deb had the ono). For dessert, there’s also a Kona coffee cheesecake, and a Baked Hawaii – pineapple upside-down cake with Tahitian vanilla ice cream, with caramel rum sauce. Order the Baked Hawaii – and have a heavenly portion the size of Hana, while you sit back and enjoy the authentic, unbelievable beachfront view. [hulagrill.com](http://hulagrill.com), (808) 667-6636.



### **SARENTO'S ON THE BEACH**

They weren't kidding when they say that Sarento's is on the beach – you're just a shell's throw from the sand and the ocean, and at 5:30 it is the best place to be on Maui – that's where you will see an outstanding sunset. We dined at Sarento's two years ago and we're happy to report that it is even better than we remembered. We sat at table 25, and started by simply enjoying the awesome view of the beach right next to us. Sarento's, which uses Pacific ingredients in a Mediterranean style, is known for its pastas and veal, and it sells out of its osso buco every single night. But we tried to keep it simple. We started with a delicious gazpacho served with a tower of crabmeat and avocado, which was a savory palate-pleaser. Then we inhaled the mushroom bruschetta, made with sherry, a veal demiglaze and tarragon. By that time we were actually stuffed, but we pressed on. Deb ordered mahi mahi loaded with vegetables and “linguine” zucchini, while Bill feasted on opakapaka grilled over zucchini. The crackerjack waitstaff enticed us with dessert, and we sampled the chocolate-fudge profiteroles with Tahitian vanilla bean gelato (sensational) and pumpkin ice cream. By that time we were filled-to-the-gills like a humuhumunukunukuapuaa (it used to be the state fish) and after driving back to the Kea Lani and sitting for a half-hour, we went straight to the gym at midnight! But our meal was worth every calorie. No doubt, you'll feel the same way. [tristarrestaurants.com](http://tristarrestaurants.com); (808) 875-7555.

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