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# A TASTE OF PARADISE

MIX GIN-CLEAR WATER, BLACK LAVA ROCKS AND PURE WHITE SAND. ADD GORGEOUS ROOMS AND SUITES, SUPERB SERVICE AND A SPA THAT MAKES YOU SWOON. COMBINE WITH A WORLD-CLASS CULINARY FESTIVAL. SEASON WITH EXTRA SUN AND FUN. YIELD: ONE DELECTABLE VISIT TO FOUR SEASONS RESORT HUALALAI AT HISTORIC KA'UPULEHU.

By Beth Weitzman

After years of listening to my travel-savvy pals rave about Four Seasons Resort Hualalai at Historic Ka'upulehu—and chide me for never having gone there—I arrive at the revered resort on the Kona-Kohala Coast of Hawaii, the Big Island, with grand expectations. I had heard about the resort's premier culinary event, Chef Fest, part of the Four Seasons Food and Wine Series, and decided that the time had come to experience the celebrated oasis myself. Food, fun and sun, amid luxurious environs with mesmerizing views. What could be better?

An annual event, Chef Fest brings top chefs, along with wine and spirits experts, to one of the most beautiful settings in Hawaii, where they host interactive cooking classes and demonstrations, participate in tasting events and multicourse dinners, and enjoy leisure activities (yoga, stand-up paddleboarding and outrigger canoeing) with guests. This year's extravaganza (Oct. 28 to 31), like last year's, features a lineup of top toques—all cookbook authors and TV personalities, as well as chefs at some of the best restaurants in the country. Although star-studded, Chef Fest

RICH DELIGHTS From top: 'ULU Ocean Grill + Sushi Lounge at the Four Seasons Resort Hualalai offers spectacular views and delicious Asian-inspired cuisine; the 2014 Chef Fest at the resort featured luminaries (from left) Aaron Brooks, Massimo Falsini, Ben Ford, Marco Canora, Amanda Freitag, Ned Bell and Seamus Mullen.



is a relaxed affair—a showcase for local bounty from area farmers and the surrounding sea, and a chance for food lovers to mix and mingle with culinary leaders.

Food aside, another delectable reason to attend Chef Fest is the opportunity to stay at Four Seasons Resort Hualalai, the Big Island's only five-star, five-diamond resort. Set on sacred grounds, the ½ mile of beachfront property, which faces a distant Maui with Hualalai volcano at its back, manages to be both expansive and intimate, a place where CONTINUED...



...CONTINUED spectacular Pacific Ocean panoramas collide with black-lava landscapes, swaying palm trees and sensational sunsets—every moment here is a marvel.

Similarly wonderful, my room overlooks King's Pond (a snorkeler's dream, teeming with 4,000-plus tropical fish of more than 90 species), volcanic remains and a white-sand shore, with island authenticity lurking right outside the lanai. Set in five crescents around the resort, each of the 243 bungalow-style guest rooms and suites were built with a view of water or the Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course. Spacious rooms with private lanais boast lavish bathrooms with glass-enclosed showers and separate Jacuzzi tubs; some have outdoor lava-rock showers. Bamboo, thatch and slate connect the midcentury Hawaiian-style structures, which feature natural woods and materials in a neutral palette. The resort's collection of local art, from 1775 to the present, adds to its island ambience. New for guests who book one of the 10 top-class suites, a designated suite experience manager attends to every detail, small or large, around the clock.

Places to perch and relax are seemingly endless, and when it comes to soaking up the sun, Four Seasons Resort Hualalai does poolside right. Cabanas and open-air lounges line the beachside Beach Tree pool's perimeter, while waves gently lap over plush sand mere footsteps away. Sensing the needs of sun worshippers, staff members magically appear at precisely the right moment, bearing refreshments and snacks, such as smoothies, gazpacho and fruit. Complimentary sunscreen is conveniently provided at all seven swimming pools (one for laps, one for adults, another for families and others). For beach lovers, a carved-out Bay Area proffers protected swimming and lounging. And there's no need to interrupt your relaxation by seeking help at the concierge desk; the resort's just-introduced oceanfront concierges roam both beach and pool, arranging various excursions, making reservations and, when the time comes, handling the necessary departure details.

Guests with a spa experience on their itinerary find a luxuriously spacious sanctuary sporting tranquil dark woods and a flawless indoor-outdoor design at the Spa at Four Seasons Resort Hualalai—an idea that carries over to the showers. The glass-walled steam room, meanwhile, is the place to relax both body and mind before a rubdown in one of the massage *hales* (thatched huts). In addition to the signature Hualalai Hot Rock Massage, Couple's Hale with outdoor showers for two, *hinoki* (Japanese cedar soaking tub) and a private garden for dining, there's a special Apothecary treatment in which a spa

concierge custom-blends body wraps and scrubs out of plants and minerals, many from Hawaii, for personalized, 100 percent natural, bespoke bliss.

Chef Fest serves up its own indulgence to be sure, but for the days before and after, there are four eateries. 'ULU Ocean Grill + Sushi Lounge pairs Asian-inspired fare with stylish indoor-outdoor decor and vast ocean views. Memorable dishes here include the Hawaiian Anthology (deconstructed ahi poke, Liliko'i barbecued Kalua pork steamed buns, Hawaiian abalone and lobster cappuccino) and steamed local market catch (soy-ginger Hamakua mushrooms, cilantro and sizzling sesame oil). With a focus on fresh local flavors and sustainable ingredients, the resort-wide team works with more than 160 local farmers and fishermen. Thus, 75 percent of the produce and seafood comes from Hawaii Island: Kona avocado, Big Island goat cheese, Waimea ("wow") red and yellow tomatoes, Hamakua mushrooms, Kona cold lobster, Kona baby abalone and Volcano white organic honey, for starters.

Adjacent is 'ULU Sushi Lounge, a great spot to leisurely dine beside the fire pit on the beachside terrace or at the ocean view bar. Down the path is another indoor-outdoor venue, Beach Tree. Headed by Italian chef Massimo Falsini, who oversees all resort dining options, the specialty here is Italian- and Mediterranean-influenced Californian cuisine, including a simply to-die-for pizza. The toniest of all culinary options, Hualalai Grille is above the 18th green of the resort's famed Jack Nicklaus-signature Hualalai Golf Course. Here, the familiar, dark and clubby American steakhouse concept has an open-air flair. The extensive wine list, beer selection and innovative cocktails perfectly complement menu classics like prime steaks, Kurobuta pork, and local fish and chicken.



**FRESH & FABULOUS** From top: Chef Seamus Mullen cooking it up at the beach barbecue at Chef Fest 2014; wild boar chop and belly with Chermoula, macadamia nut and grilled heart of palm prepared by chef Mullen. At right: 'ULU Ocean Grill's fresh tableside ahi poke.





**POINTS OF VIEW** Clockwise from top left: 'ULU Sushi Lounge offers a casual dining venue and a great place to mix and mingle with other guests; the spacious prime ocean view room provides all the comforts of home; crisped Hapu, Hualalai Noni leaves, mountain apple vinaigrette, roasted Kekela roots prepared by Ned Bell at last year's Chef Fest; lounge beachside in comfort on plush daybeds and chaise lounges; the Beach Tree pool lined with cabanas that beckon you to relax.



Recreationally speaking, the resort is rich in playful pursuits for land, sea and air enthusiasts. Along with golf, tennis on eight courts, a trio of open-air gyms, fitness walks, hikes through volcanic landscapes and horseback riding in an ancient valley, there's a helicopter flight to whisk high-flying adventurers over an active volcano. Sunrise meditation, meanwhile, assures shoppers feel calm and centered as they explore two fashionable, well-curated boutiques that carry luxury labels and beach-chic items.

My stay at Four Seasons Resort Hualalai culminates with Chef Fest—four full days of savory cuisine, fine wines and entertaining activities. All this, plus a hedonistic spa, a gorgeous beach and pools, great service and casually elegant accommodations, and it's clear that my travel-savvy pals were right. Why *did* it take me so long to come here? I'm sure I don't know. What I do know, however, is that it won't take me nearly as long to return. **A**

**Chef Fest 2015** (Oct. 28-31) features chefs Hugh Acheson (Five & Ten and The National, Athens, Ga.; Empire State South, Atlanta; The Florence, Savannah, Ga.; *Top Chef Masters*, *Top Chef*; author of *A New Turn in the South*; multiple James Beard awards); Seamus Mullen (Tertulia, El Colmado and El Colmado Butchery, New York City; Sea Containers, London; *Chopped*, *The Next Iron Chef*; author of *Hero Food*); Naomi Pomeroy (Beast, and Expatriate, Portland, Ore.; *Top Chef Masters*, *Knife Fight*; author of *Oui: Lessons From an Award-Winning Self-Taught Chef*, 2016; James Beard Award winner); Jonathan Waxman (Barbuto, New York City; Adele's, Nashville, Tenn.; *Top Chef Masters*; author of *A Great American Cook* and *Italian, My Way*); Robert Gerstenecker (executive chef, Four Seasons Hotel Atlanta); and Stephen Wambach (executive chef, Four Seasons Hotel Chicago). Also featuring Master Sommelier Roberto Viernes and Director of Mixology Chandra Lucariello from Southern Wine & Spirits. *Five-night package, offered Oct. 25-Nov. 3, includes luxurious accommodations in ocean-view and above-room categories and a \$750 resort credit to use toward any Chef Fest event, from \$5,475; nightly rates from \$795 for rooms, \$1,695 for suites, 888.340.5662, foodandwine.com; fourseasons.com/hualalai/*