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Upcountry Maui farm tours offer delights from goats to vodka



Ocean Vodka Martini Garden Photo Credit Jessica Pearl

By C.K. Leon

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KULA, Maui >> It's hard to imagine getting bored with Maui's world-class beaches and resorts, but anyone willing to pry themselves away from the island's coastal attractions will find a more grounded experience in the farms and funky little towns of the Upcountry region.

Long before Maui became a top travel destination, agriculture was king, with sugar and pineapple plantations blanketing much of the landscape. Only one sugar plantation remains, Hawaiian Sugar & Commercial Co., but there is an ever-growing number of small-scale farms, boutique growers and agritourism operations sure to please foodies with families.

Many of the farms sell food, but pack a cooler and enjoy the lovely picnic areas on site or at public parks with panoramic views. Note: Some of the farms require closed-toe shoes, and you may want to bring a light jacket or sweater for the crisp, cool Upcountry air. Even though you won't be anywhere near the ocean, the sun can be intense at higher elevations, so slather on sunscreen.

Surfing Goat Dairy

Parents can sample more than 30 kinds of gourmet goat cheese while their keiki — “children” in Hawaiian — scamper around the pens holding frisky baby goats or romp in the farm's Upcountry Beach sandbox and play area. Short casual tours run every 30 minutes (\$8 kids, \$12 adults). At 3:15 p.m. sharp, the Evening Chores & Milking Tour (\$14/\$17) allows visitors to help with the evening feeding and hand-milk a goat. The two-hour Grand Tour (\$25), offered 9 a.m. Saturdays, covers feeding, milking and cheese making. Admission is free.

Buy lunch there or bring your own and sit in the covered picnic area. (A purchase is suggested — try the goat cheese truffles!) 3651 Omaopio Road, Kula; 808-878-2870; www.surfinggoatdairy.com

Ali'i Kula Lavender

Undertake a Lavender Treasure Hunt at this scenic farm located at the foot of the Kula Forest Reserve at the 4,000-foot elevation of Haleakala. Check in at the gift shop for a map that will lead youngsters to the less-traveled sections of the 13.5-acre farm in search of hidden stamps. A prize awaits when the treasure hunt is completed. Celebrate with a spot of lavender tea and scones. Call or check the website for special craft workshops and family events. Admission is \$3 (children under 12 free). Five guided tours are offered daily (\$12 per person/ \$10 in advance). 1100 Waipoli Road, Kula; 808-878-3004; www.aliikulalavender.com

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Maui Pineapple Tours

Get a first-hand look at the cultivation, packing and shipping of the spiky fruit on a tour of the only working pineapple plantation in the U.S. It's a good bet the kids will care only about sampling the fresh, sweet fruit, and they will get plenty of opportunities to do so along the way — comparing the flavor of the tart, younger pineapple to the juicy, ripened version. At the end of tour, take home a free Maui Gold pineapple. Tours depart daily at 9:30 and 11:45 a.m. from Hui No'ea Visual Arts Center, 2841 Baldwin Ave., Makawao. Cost: \$65 adults, \$55 children ages 5-12. For an extra fee, enjoy lunch at celebrity chef Bev Gannon's Haliimaile General Store. Tour participants must be able to climb stairs and manage bumpy, uneven terrain; no pregnant women or children under 5. 808-665-5491; maupineapple.com

Ocean Vodka Farm

This stop, just down the road from Surfing Goat Dairy, is more for the grown-ups in the group. Tours of the grounds and solar-powered warehouse and bottling center are offered daily on the half hour starting at 9:30 a.m., with the last tour at 4 p.m.

Visitors are welcome to explore the martini garden featuring fresh lavender, passion fruit, pineapple, strawberry and other fruits and herbs, or the more than 20 varieties of sugar cane.

Admission is free; tours are \$10 per person for ages 12 and older, \$25 including lunch (reservations required). Vodka sampling and a take-home souvenir shot glass are included (21 and older). 4051 Omaopio Road, Kula; 808-877-0009 or toll free 866-776-2326; www.oceanvodka.com.

C.K. Leon is longtime Hawaii writer who has lived on Maui for 30 years.

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