

Travel



INSIDE

Ga. coastal delights

Take in the Savannah Music Festival, and make time for a leisurely day trip to Tybee Island. L2



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Maui

'A reprieve from the traffic ... a place for people to reconnect with the land'

Upcountry farms tickle nose



STEVE HAGGERTY / ColorWorld

"Lavender has a hundred uses," says **Ali'i Chang** (right), co-owner with **Lani Weigart** of Ali'i Lavender Farm in Kula, Hawaii.

By **ANNE Z. COOKE**
and **STEVE HAGGERTY**
For the Journal-Constitution

Kula, Hawaii — Ali'i Chang buried his nose in a bouquet of fresh lavender, took a deep breath and closed his eyes beatifically. "Mmmm, that is so relaxing," he said, offering the bundle to a group of travelers gathered for tea and scones at his 5-acre farm and tea shop, the Ali'i Kula Lavender Farm, on the slopes of the volcano Haleakala.

Suddenly, with a mischievous grin, he leaped into the adjacent hedge and poked his head out of a protea bush, where a bunch of splashy pink blossoms, as big as cauliflowers, were just starting to open. "We used to sell these to the

Japanese," he said, beaming at the thought of the late 1980s, when the Japanese were flush with cash. "They couldn't get enough protea. They bought them as fast as we could grow them, until their economy collapsed.

"Then we discovered lavender. This plant has been around for centuries, since Roman times. It thrives in this cool climate, it's hardy and it has a hundred uses, for essential oils, soaps, lotions, even tea," he said.

Leading us down to the processing shed, Chang pointed out stacks of loose bundles of lavender laid out to dry, and trays of flowers waiting to be bagged. Some of the flow-

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Mykonos

Lazy days on this seductive, decadent Greek isle define the phrase 'getting away from it all.' L6



Jen Christensen

On Mykonos, lunch at a cliffside cafe comes with a view of Super Paradise Beach.

ISLAND GETAWAYS SPECIAL SECTION

Maui: Lavender fields, herb grow dairy thrive in the higher elevation



Photos by STEVE HAGGERTY / ColorWorld

Tropical plants surround a lotus flower-filled pond that follows the beach path at Wailea Beach Villas on Maui.

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ers would be sold for bouquets, he explained. The rest would be stuffed into beribboned sachets, crushed for oil or mixed into fancy soaps, lotions, fruit jams, headache remedies, massage oils and even scones.

After a break for tea and scones, served on the tea shop's lanai, we followed Chang for a closer look at the nearest lavender field, a 3-acre plot uphill from the tea shop. Here, 4,000 feet above sea level, 45 kinds of the woody gray-green plants sown in long, even rows, climbed the slopes, each plant manicured to a perfect half-sphere, as trim as any Japanese topiary.

"Isn't that a beautiful sight?" asked Chang, surveying his handiwork. "We love to share this place with visitors. It's a reprieve from the traffic on the coast, a place for people to reconnect with the land. This is the real heart of Maui."

Travelers who leave the beach for a day to tour the farm and garden and stop for a spot of tea are likely to share Chang's view of Hawaii's second-largest island. Maui, green and lush, is Hawaii's breadbasket. Accounts left by the first European explorers to sail offshore describe hundreds of islanders paddling out to meet the ships, their canoes laden with fruits, vegetables, fish and pigs. And no ship sailed away without a hold full of food.

After American and British colonizers introduced sugar cane, still grown on 37,000 acres (Maui's second-largest industry, after tourism), most small farms disappeared. But the interest in healthy eating reversed that trend, reintroducing small-scale vegetable and herb farms to Kula, Makawao and Olinda, "upcountry" at 2,000 to 4,000 feet. The volcanic soil at that elevation is so rich that growers cultivating small plots, from 2 to 10 acres, grow enough to supply

most hotels, restaurants and farmers markets.

"All the small growers know we're looking for better, fresher produce, so they're always trying new varieties," said executive chef Tylun Pang at the Fairmont Kea Lani Hotel in Wailea. "The more we buy, the more they grow, and we all benefit. We used to buy our vegetables from California, but they're two days old by the time we get them. I can order red oak lettuce and baby greens from Kula in the afternoon, and they pick them the next morning."

While most of Maui's upcountry farms don't advertise commercial tours, many small growers welcome visitors. Poking around Maui's upcountry back roads, we happened upon



Chef Dan Fiske picks fresh basil at Aina Lani Herb Farm in Makawao.

Mike McCoy, owner of Aina Lani Herb Farm, in Makawao. One of 38 growers that sells to wholesaler Kula Produce, McCoy also teams with chef Dan Fiske, mixing and matching ingredients in new recipes.

McCoy's west-facing garden grows the sorts of plants you might have at home, such standards as oregano, marjoram, rosemary, parsley, green onions, arugula and watercress. Ever inventive, he also experiments with new tastes and textures, from sorrel and kaffir lime leaves to pomelo, papaya and sapote, a pale green, creamy-smooth fruit. Most recently he's been growing varieties of basil.

"Tell me what you think of this one," said Fiske, who buys McCoy's produce for the custom events he creates for guests and homeowners at Wailea Beach Villas on Wailea Beach. Leading us past 10 different basil plants, rolling farmland, to alpine forests and hills so green I always think of Ireland."

She recommends wandering down narrow lanes, stopping to snap photos and keeping an eye peeled for places to stop.

he described each one, then snapped off a handful of fresh leaves to taste. "If you try this at home," he said, "remember that cooking kills the taste. You should sprinkle basil on afterward, just before serving."

Fiske also buys McCoy's greenhouse-grown microgreens, the newest hot seller. Look for them in Maui's better restaurants as garnishes in appetizers and on tapas.

But the best part of exploring Maui's upcountry slopes are the detours you'll make.

"You're not going to meet local people or feel the culture if you stay down in condo-land," said Jana McMahon, a chef and friend of Fiske's.

"Rent a car and drive up to the top of Haleakala," she advised us. "In a couple of hours you'll pass through a half-dozen climate zones, from hot sand at sea level to

"Check out the Surfing Goat Dairy on Omaopio Road on your way to Kula," she said. "They make more than a dozen kinds of cheese, all from goats milk — includ-

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ISLAND GETAWAYS SPECIAL SECTION

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ing feta and chevre. The quality and taste is excellent. I buy it, and so do lots of the restaurants. They have a regular tour you can take. Kids like it, too, because they let them try to milk a goat."

Another popular stop is Maui's only winery, Tedeschi Vineyards at Ulupalakua Ranch, another 20-odd miles south of the Lavender Farm, on Highway 37. The winery makes carnelian and chenin blanc wines, and a specialty party wine made from pineapple. The setting is beautiful and the trees are magnificent. Bring your own picnic and be prepared for a long drive.

Chang's guided tours of the botanical garden at Ali'i Kula Lavender Farm start at 10 a.m. daily. Don't miss the

gift shop in a rebuilt plantation shed, managed by Lavender Farm co-owner Lani Weigart. Shaded by big eaves and a tin roof, the shop is whitewashed and quaint, with windows and an open-beam ceiling. Filled with shelves and racks, it's full of lavender flowers, handmade ceramics, gift cards, tea towels, jam, honey, fine soaps, candles and aprons.

The tour and tea party are \$35 per adult, but you can take a self-guided tour of the garden, with Chang's map, at no charge. The garden, showcasing Chang's collection of rare and beautiful plants, is planted in terraced beds facing Ma'alaea Bay to the west and Kahului Bay to the north.

With the ocean in sight, says Chang, he never needs to go there.

IF YOU GO

Getting there

Expect to pay \$750 or more round trip from Atlanta to Maui (one-stop service). To visit Maui's upcountry hills, rent a car at Kahului Airport. Both Ka'anapali and Wailea are 30 to 40 minutes from the airport.

Where to stay

For variety and excitement, sample the hotel and restaurant scene in Lahaina Town and on Ka'anapali Beach:

► Sheraton Maui Resort: 1-888-488-3535, www.sheraton-maui.com.

► Westin Ka'anapali Ocean Resort Villas (condominium rentals): 808-667-3200, www.westinkaanapali.com.

At upscale Wailea Beach, on Maui's southwest coast:

► Four Seasons Wailea is a 370-room, five-star luxury hotel. 1-800-332-3442, www.fourseasons.com.

► Grand Wailea Resort Hotel & Spa: 1-800-888-6100, www.grandwailea.com.

What to see

► Ali'i Kula Lavender Farm, 1100 Waipoli Road, Kula. 808-878-3004, www.aliikulalavender.com. From Kahului, west of the airport, drive southeast on Pulehu Road or Haleakala Highway through sugar cane fields until you reach Kula Road heading south. At the intersection of Highways 37 and 377, look for Rice Memorial Park and take the second left uphill, following the sign. The tea and gift shops are up the lane.

► Aina Lani Herb Farm (in rural area; call for directions). 808-572-1771, www.freshislandherbs.com.

► Surfing Goat Dairy, 3651 Omaopio Road, Kula. 808-878-2870, www.surfinggoatdairy.com.

Information

► Hawaii tourism: 1-800-464-2924, www.gohawaii.com.

► Maui Visitors Bureau: 1-800-525-6284, www.visitmaui.com.