

## Coffee Plantation Guide



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOM BENTLEY

At Kona's Mountain Thunder coffee farm, left, tastings are offered outdoors in a venue that evokes mai tais rather than java. Hula Daddy's coffee farm, center, provides daily tours and tastings — and incredible views. The tours at Greenwell Farms, right, give visitors a glimpse into the coffee-roasting process. Below, Coffee cherries at Greenwell Farms on Hawaii's Kona coast are hand-picked in waves as the fruit ripens from green to yellow and finally red.

# Kona's best sips come in a mug; cream's optional

By Tom Bentley  
Correspondent

No Louvre docent offers to let you take off with a Leonardo da Vinci, and they don't let you cut any orchids at the Royal Botanic Gardens, either. So I was delighted when our tour guide at Greenwell Farms coffee plantation on the Big Island told us to come back after the tour and bring our own mugs. Fill up when we want, any old day we like.

OK, it's true that coffee isn't quite the same as a priceless painting, but since Hawaii's prized Kona java represents such a tiny percentage of coffee grown worldwide, it's rare enough. Besides, you can't drink the Mona Lisa.

Greenwell is an easy turn off the Kona coast highway, and the family knows their way around beans — they've been in the coffee business since 1850. The original ranch was thousand of acres, but the company's main orchard is a picturesque 90 acres now. The coffee cherries ripen on the trees at different times, so hand-picking is a necessity.

Then there's the small matter of pulping, fermenting, washing, drying, hulling, grading, sorting and roasting — all done with critical attention — to create that Kona distinction of subtle, smooth, biteless coffee for which java aficionados pay a premium.



JACKIE BURRELL/STAFF

Greenwell does most of those processes on site, and your tour includes a leisurely peek at all of it as you stroll the grounds.

And after the stroll, you get to sip freely: They serve 10 varieties of coffee, enough to give any sipper a temporary face-lift. I was taken by the meaty, fruity peaberry, and also amazed that the macadamia-flavored coffee, which seems traitorous as a notion, actually tasted fresh and appealing. They even sell an antioxidant juice made from the cherry skins at the farm.

### Hula juice

I tried to control my well-caffeinated accelerator foot on the way to Hula Daddy's coffee farm, which sits at an elevation of nearly 2,500 feet. The orchard is in a lovely area, looking down to the sea (in fact, I recommend the men's bathroom view, too).

Our guide explained that the leaves and bark of

coffee trees are caffeinated as well, which serves as a natural pesticide, though it doesn't stop the wild pigs, who uproot trees when they're in the mood. Nor has it stopped an evil coffee beetle that's gobbling many of Kona's trees. Since it can take years to get a crop, farmers are working overtime to battle the beetle, mostly with organic solutions and hyper-vigilance.

Hula served some yummy samples in lovely little ceramic cups. I was taken with their deep, naturally sweet Oli coffee, where the beans are dried with their pulp membranes on. The chocolate-covered coffee beans they gave us had a nice chocolate coating, which is a membrane I've always cottoned to, as well.

### Fog lifter

Hula's had me pretty high, but Mountain Thunder's farm is in another climate zone altogether: a cloud forest at 3,200 feet. The farm was cool, misty and jungly when I visited this summer. Ten of its 200 acres are at this elevation, which produces a premium reserve coffee the company is mighty proud of.

There's some high-tech in that jungle, too: The sorting machine uses a very sophisticated camera to examine the beans for subtle distinctions in grade and level to ensure that only the best get that premium labeling. I

### KONA COFFEE TOURS

**Greenwell Farms:** Free tours offered every 10 or 15 minutes, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. daily; no reservations necessary. 81-6581 Mamalahoa Highway, Kealahou; www.greenwellfarms.com

**Hula Daddy's:** Free tours 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday through Saturday, as visitors arrive. 74-4944 Mamalahoa Highway, Holualoa; www.huladaddy.com

**Mountain Thunder:** Free tours are offered on the hour from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily at both locations. The coffee plantation also offers several two- to three-hour VIP tours (\$65-\$199) on weekdays; reserve at least a day ahead. 73-1944 Hao St., Kaloko Mauka, Kona; 79-7469 Hawaii Belt Road, Kealahou; www.mountaintunder.com

**Kona Coffee Cultural Festival:** Discover the culture behind the cup and sample coffee from 30 different Kona coffee farms at the Big Island's 45th annual coffee-centric festival, which runs Nov. 6-15. Take a living-history farm tour, pick fresh coffee beans, sample coffee-infused desserts and more. Ticket prices vary. Details: www.konacoffeeest.com

### JAVA GLOSSARY

**Arabica:** About 70 percent of the world's coffee is Coffea arabica.

**Coffee beans:** What we call a coffee bean is actually the seed inside coffee fruit. There are typically two inside each cherry.

**Coffee cherry:** The coffee fruit is called a cherry. It ripens like a reverse stop light: first green, then yellow and finally red. Red means go for cherry-pickers.

**Cupping:** A fancy word for coffee tasting

**Kona coffee:** Champagne can only come from the French region of Champagne. Dijon mustard must hail from the French region of Dijon. And only coffee grown in the Kona district on the Big Island's West coast can be called Kona coffee.

**Peaberry:** This is not a variety of coffee or a type of roast, it's a coffee fruit anomaly: a cherry with a single round seed, instead of two beans.

**Pulp:** The fibrous mucilage inside a coffee cherry

thought the Black and Tan, which mixes American and French roasts, was particularly zesty.

All three farms have won awards for their coffees — and all the free tours are conducted by easygo-

ing, genial guides ready to spill a fact or spin a tale. Volcanoes and waves are great sights, but there may be no better way to spend a day than tasting good coffee — free of charge — on Hawaii's Big Island.

# Go for a cheeseburger in paradise, local-style

## Annie's Island Fresh Burgers, Kealahou

**The vibe:** Whether you're dropping in at Greenwell Farms — a block or two away — for a coffee tour or just exploring the western side of the Big Island, head for Annie Roesler and Josh Levenson's sunny, casual, 5-year-old burger joint. Annie's celebrates local ingredients, from the Purple Potato Salad to the housemade pickles and burgers made with grass-fed, island-raised beef. A long bar serves up Hawaiian brews and cocktails, and tables are sprinkled here and there, including along a screened porch that captures the island breeze.

They make salads — with produce sourced from the organic garden out back — seafood and sandwiches here, but burgers are Annie's well-deserved claim to fame. Half a dozen variations on the burger theme are offered up with libation-pairing suggestions, a Lavaman Red Ale to go with the BBQ South Point Burger, for example, or a malbec to complement the Bacon-Blue.

**The dish:** The BBQ South Point (\$14.50 including a side) is a glorious, four-napkin affair, dripping with tangy, spicy, Kona-style barbecue sauce



JACKIE BURRELL/STAFF

Annie's Island Fresh Burgers, just a few blocks from Greenwell Farms on the Kona coast of the Big Island, woos passers-by with giant burgers, made with island-raised beef, topped with organic produce and served with addictive garlic-basil fries. The restaurant also pairs local brews with its burgers.

and topped with melted cheddar, sliced avocados and tempura-fried onion rings. If your burger height-mouth circumference ratio is out of alignment, you may need to devour the crisp onions rings first. And no, fried onion rings and crisp basil-garlic fries are not too much fried awesome-

ness, but the vividly violet Purple Potato Salad side is pretty wonderful, too.

**The details:** Open for lunch and dinner daily at 79-7460 Mamalahoa Highway, Kealahou, Hawaii; www.anniesislandfresh-burgers.com.

— Jackie Burrell, Staff

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