

Dining in Kapolei: It's more than food; it's an experience.

Kapolei residents couldn't be happier. The choices keep growing — from fine dining in an elegantly appointed candle-lit room in a resort, to a bright storefront hamburger and sandwich shop in a shopping center. These eating experiences share one thing in common — wonderful food.

From Roma to Kapolei

Diners in Hawai'i are no strangers to the term "regional cuisine," generally referring to the blend of ethnic cuisines found in the islands. Here's another one to add to your foodie vocabulary: Roman cuisine fused with Tuscan-style cooking. That's the fare at **Azul**, the recently renovated fine dining restaurant with a new menu at the JW Marriott Ihilani Resort & Spa at Ko Olina.

Azul co-owners, Marco Cialini and Roberto Cotrufo, who also own restaurants in California, selected Chef Stefano Cialesi for the new restaurant because of his credentials. Cialesi was born and raised in Rome, learned how to cook from his mother, trained at Italy's top culinary school, ALMA Scuola Internazionale di Cucina Italiana di Colorno, studied under renowned Italian grand master chef Gualtiero Marchesi, and worked at 5-star Michelin restaurants in Italy.

Azul offers Roman cuisine fused with Tuscan-style cooking.

Now he presides over Azul, serving up such dishes as the *Lobster Salad* appetizer (fresh lobster with mix greens, mango, green apples, peanuts and balsamic vinaigrette), *Homemade Fettucine with braised Chicken* (an original recipe made with tomato sauce, chicken and a secret blend of herbs slowly cook for three hours), and a simple dish from Rome, *Agnello alla Romana* (lamb chops pounded, seasoned, breaded and fried, served with aioli sauce). There's also an extensive wine list for perfect pairings.

Cialini says he has had a 20-year love affair with Hawai'i leading up to the creation of Azul. "While we enjoy your beautiful lifestyle, we invite you to enjoy our beautiful restaurant, and truly authentic Italian cuisine prepared by Chef Stefano and his excellent staff. *Mangiamo!* (Let's eat!)"

As an added incentive, Azul offers a 20 percent Kama'aina discount on food only. The restaurant has been a consistent AAA Four Diamond Award winner since 1996.



Kua 'Aina

If you're old enough, you may remember the first Kua 'Aina hamburger and sandwich shop. It was founded by Terry Thompson and opened in 1975 (quick calculation: 38 years ago) in a storefront shack on the main drag in Haleiwa. It was an instant hit. Folks didn't mind waiting in line — in fact, they expected it — to finally get their turn to order the huge, juicy burgers cooked fresh to order along with a side of stringy fries.

Fast forward, 2013, and Kua 'Aina has finally come to Kapolei. The shop just opened at Kapolei Commons with no announcement or grand opening celebration. Even so, when it opened, the response was phenomenal, according to owner/operator Bryan Botelho. "It was way past busy," said Botelho. "People knew we were coming, and would check regularly. Word of mouth was viral!"

Kua 'Aina serves up "juicy burgers, some of the best drippy, messy sandwiches and delicious salads."

— Zagat



Botelho says there are three Kua 'Ainas in Hawai'i (Haleiwa, Ward Center and Kapolei, 20 in Japan under a trademark agreement with a Japanese food company, and one in London. The Kapolei shop is co-owned and managed by Karen Hagen.

Kua 'Aina enjoys the distinction of being the original gourmet sandwich shop in Hawai'i, and is still holding its own as a top local favorite. In fact, in the February 19 edition of *USA Today*, Kua 'Aina was **Zagat's** pick as the best burger joint in or around 25 cities across the US.

From classroom to kitchen

Kapolei High School's culinary program is serious business. Students are being taught all things related to a food service career — food safety and kitchen sanitation, knife skills, various methods of cookery, menu planning and recipe development, costing and restaurant service. The program, which started in 2005 with 40 students, now has more than 80 enrollees learning the trade in a dedicated classroom and lab that has a commercial kitchen.

Students also get practical experience at events like Taste of Kapolei, Evening at Lanikuhouua,

Hawai'i Food & Wine Festival, First Hawaiian Bank Holiday Gala, and fundraisers for organizations like Hawaii Fire Fighters and Bishop Museum. In 2011, the program helped to launch *From the Heart of Hawaii's Families*, a cookbook of 182 favorite family recipes and personal stories that sold more than 1,500 copies. They donated well over \$5,000 to Kapi'olani Medical Center Neonatal Intensive Care from the proceeds.

In a grueling test by fire, the program hosts the annual *HEAT IS ON: Buying Local & Cooking Fresh*, a 12-day competition where

students demonstrate their culinary skills and end by preparing three restaurant-quality plates for two professional judges. This year's event is the 7th and is scheduled for April.

According to Cynthia Pratt, head of the program, each year two to three graduating students enroll in culinary programs at Leeward Community College or Kapi'olani Community College. Some have found jobs in the industry, or have gone on to four-year programs. "In time, I hope to see some of our graduates come back to work as chefs in Kapolei."



Kapolei High School culinary students with Chef Morimoto at the Moana Hotel's 2011 Mango Festival. From left to right, Brett Henry '13, Christalynn Lamoreaux '12, Chef Morimoto, Tara Young '11, Cynthia Pratt, and Aaron Hashimoto '11.