

A Taste of Chocolate in the Hawaiian Islands

By Doreen Pendgracs

Nearly all the world's cacao is grown 20 degrees north or south of the equator. But over the past 10 years, an increasing amount of *Theobroma cacao* (the scientific name for the tree on which cocoa is grown) can be found in the tropical paradise of Hawaii. That makes Hawaii the only place in the US to grow cocoa!

looking for exquisite handcrafted Hawaiian-made chocolate, there are now a lot of fine choices, and a range of enticing chocolate activities for travelers to enjoy.

The Hawaii Chocolate Festival is held in Honolulu on the island of Oahu. It has previously been held on the site of the

which was changed from early May in 2014 to late May in 2015, with the new venue for 2015 being the Hilton Waikoloa Village.



Hawaiian chocolate originates in these cacao pods.

I'm sure most of us have tasted the chocolate covered macadamia nut clusters made by the Hawaiian Host brand. That company has been around for a long time, and sells more of a commercial grade range of chocolate products. But if you're really



A harvested cacao pod split open showing the beans inside.



Melanie Boudar, the grand dame of Hawaiian Chocolate.

old Dole cannery, but I'm told a new special events venue is in the works for 2015. In 2014, the Hawaii Chocolate Festival was held in February. In 2015, it will be held in mid-October, so it's best to check the website at hawaiiichocolatefestival.com to see when and where this evolving event will be held. The same goes for the Big Island Chocolate Festival (bigislandchocolatefestival.com), the date of

The most important thing to learn is that Hawaiian-grown chocolate is expensive and in short supply, so if you're purchasing chocolate in Hawaii, carefully read the label to be sure it's chocolate made from cocoa grown in Hawaii and not just chocolate made in Hawaii.

To be absolutely certain you're getting the real deal, I highly recommend a visit to the Original Hawaiian Chocolate Factory (OHCF, www.ohcf.us)

located near the city of Kailua-Kona on the Big Island. At present, this is the only sizeable company in Hawaii growing the cacao, and making and selling the



chocolate all on the same site. It truly is a tree-to-bean-to-bar Hawaiian chocolate company. Many of the other brands offering Hawaiian chocolate do not grow their own cacao or, if they do, it is not grown on the same site where the cocoa is processed and made into chocolate. OHCF offers weekly tours of its six-acre cocoa plantation and small factory to those with advance reservations.

If you're in Hilo on the eastern side of the Big Island, do visit Big Island Candies. Don't be misled by the name! Big Island Candies (BIC, www.bigislandcandies.com) makes some incredible premium chocolate treats including toffee-coated chocolate-covered massive macadamia nuts that are dusted in Hawaiian grown cocoa. This is one of the most delectable Hawaiian chocolate treats



I've ever had the pleasure of consuming, so, if you're buying some as gifts or souvenirs, be sure to buy some for yourself, along with BIC's version of the *turtle*. These are chocolate and caramel covered massive macadamia nut clusters that are absolutely outstanding!

In Maui, the finest chocolate bonbons are a creation of Melanie Boudar, the Grand Dame of Hawaiian Chocolate and chief chocolate maker at Sweet Paradise Chocolatier

These cocoa nibs are ground to make Hawaiian Chocolate.

(www.sweetparadiseshocolate.com). Boudar offers fantastic tropical chocolate flavors such as passion orange guava, lillikoi silk, and coconut crème brulee patterned chocolates in the Tropical Assorted Box. She also offers tours of her cocoa plantation called Manawai Estate (manawaiestatechocolate.com), located on the Road to Hana. The new processing plant, tasting room, and Manawai Chocolate Museum are planned to open summer 2015.

Kauai is home to Steelgrass Farm (steelgrass.org), an eight-acre diversified farm and "branch-to-bar" cocoa producer located near the



The stunning site of the Original Hawaiian Chocolate Factory.

town of Kapa'a. Steelgrass offers family-friendly tours of its farm and gardens, along with a tasting of their own small batch single-estate chocolate in addition to an assortment of the finest chocolate



from around the world. Don't miss this opportunity if you plan to be on the island of Kauai.

The largest cocoa plantation on the island of Oahu is the Waialua Estate (www.waialuaestate.com), owned and operated by Dole. Waialua currently sends its cocoa beans to the Guittard Chocolate Company in California to be made into chocolate, but plans are in the works to begin processing the chocolate right on Hawaii's North Shore where deep, dark, and delicious cocoa beans are grown on a 20-acre plantation. Waialua Estate also grows some truly flavorful coffee. Both the chocolate and the coffee are sold at numerous locations on the island.

Located in the town of Kailua, Oahu, just 12 miles northeast of Honolulu, are Kokolani, Manoa and Madre, three small artisan chocolate companies that make excellent handcrafted bars and confections from a variety of cocoa beans (some Hawaiian, some imported). I guarantee that once you taste Hawaiian made and Hawaiian-grown chocolate, you'll forget about the coffee and pineapple, and join me in choosing chocolate as the new favorite flavor of Hawaii. ✎

Doreen Pendgracs is author of the award-winning book, "Chocolatour: A Quest for the World's Best Chocolate." Hawaii will be featured in volume II of Chocolatour. You can purchase Volume I on Amazon or from the author directly at <http://chocolatour.net> and follow Doreen's chocolate travels on her blog at <http://diversionswithdoreen.com>.

