

Pit Masters

Meat up around the Islands for Hawai'i's best barbecue

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AAA Hawai'i May/June 2013



At Kiss My Grits in Honolulu, tender ribs are served with sides, which may include yams, collard greens, and black-eyed peas.

With the right amount of heat, smoke, and spices, even the most humble cuts of meat can be transformed into finger-licking, rib-sticking barbecue. Here are our favorite picks from around the Islands.

O'ahu

[Kiss My Grits](#) (Puck's Alley, 1035 University Avenue, Honolulu; 1-808-348-0626) pays tasty tribute to Southern comfort food, especially with its barbecue. Meaty pork ribs are boiled with rosemary, sage, garlic, basil, and bay leaves for 45 minutes and roasted in the oven for two hours. These tender and juicy ribs are then brushed with a house-made sauce containing smoked tomatoes, peppers, and onions. You get a pick of three sides, which may include fried okra, collard greens, grits, yams, black-eyed peas, mashed potatoes, or coleslaw. Portions are large, and a plate can easily satisfy two.

Pork butt is rubbed with Hawaiian salt and slow-roasted for 12 hours, yielding a moist, chopped barbecue that's fabulous as an entrée, stuffed in a sandwich, or tucked in an omelet. Mac 'n' cheese with bacon, fried onions, smoked Gouda, and sharp white cheddar is an über-rich side worthy of entrée status.

All desserts are made from scratch, including the peach cobbler, which is available mostly on weekends.

At [Sweet Home Waimanalo Café and Market](#) (41-1025 Kalaniana'ole Highway, Waimanalo; 1-808-259-5737), meats are massaged with different house-made rubs that might include paprika, ground ginger, cayenne pepper, herbs, and citrus. Beef brisket and chicken are smoked on-site for about four hours. Pulled pork is smoked for three hours, and then braised in beer for five hours. There's a choice of two sauces: beer barbecue (an amiable accompaniment for all) or guava chipotle (perhaps a bit too assertive).

Healthful sides feature fresh, locally grown veggies: corn on the cob, purple sweet potatoes topped with a mango chutney sauce, bok choy slaw made with pineapple/celery seed dressing, and lovely greens from nearby farms and the café's rooftop garden.

Try the kalo bread pudding, made with Punalu'u Bake Shop's famous Hawaiian sweet bread, taro, and raisins drizzled with haupia (coconut pudding) glaze. —*Cheryl Chee Tsutsumi*

Kaua'i

At the aptly named [Chicken in a Barrel BBQ](#) (4-1586 Kūhiō Highway, Kapa'a; 1-808-823-0780), the meat is rubbed with spices and then slowly smoked in a 50-gallon drum/barrel smoker. The stand doesn't look like much, with its slightly grimy takeout counter and yellow and red picnic tables facing a steady stream of Kapa'a traffic. But it shines at barbecue. Hefty slabs of pork and beef, moist chicken halves, and meaty baby back ribs are presented naked, with brown rice and chili beans alongside. Thick, sweet-tangy, tomato-based sauce is available from pump jars in two heat levels: mild and raging hot.

The all-inclusive sampler plate is the way to go, though the melt-in-your-mouth beef and chicken are worth ordering à la carte. A side of the refreshing Hawaiian-style coleslaw lightens an otherwise heavy meal. Chicken in a Barrel has two other locations: a cart outside Home Depot in Lihu'e and a Hanalei outlet (Ching Young Village, 5-5190 Kuhio Highway, 808-826-1999), which has salads and a few counter stools.

Dining at the Anahola Farmers Market main stand (Kūhiō Highway and Hokualele Road, Anahola, 1-808-652-9238) is akin to attending a backyard barbecue. Under a shade canopy, USDA pork is grilled over an open fire using a variety of wood, including kiawe. The chicken is slow-cooked on a regularly turned spit, huluhuli-style. The stand also offers fresh fruits and vegetables and is part of a market group of independent food and craft vendors on Hawaiian Home Lands in Anahola, near Kalalea Mountain.

The chopped pork is lean and flavorful. But the crowning glory is the lip-smacking, house-made, smoky-sweet barbecue sauce. The chicken plate is a half-bird served with an irresistible shoyu/Hawaiian chili pepper water dipping sauce. Roasted corn on the cob and red potatoes or breadfruit round out the hearty meals. The baked goods are similarly ample, with the haupia-topped coconut brownie proving addictive. Picnic tables offer seating but no shelter. —*Joan Conrow*

Maui

Bring a gigantic appetite to [Beach Bum's BBQ and Grill](#) (Ma'alaea Harbor Shops, 300 Ma'alaea Road, Mā'alaea; 1-808-243-2286). The BBQ Tailgate Sampler has almost 2 pounds of four different meats ... and it's an appetizer. Thick-cut baby back ribs, smoky pulled pork, and spareribs are best sellers. Meats are smoked on-site in what staffers affectionately call "The Pretty Penny," Hawai'i's biggest smoker, a 4,000-pound beauty custom-built in Mesquite, Texas, that can hold 1,200 pounds of meat, including whole pigs of up to 80 pounds. House-made mild and hot sauces sit on every table (you have to ask for the Sneaky Tiki Volcano sauce). Sides include light, fluffy cornbread that melts in your mouth and an extra-flavorful, crunchy coleslaw with black pepper, celery seed, and a bit of pineapple. Add quirky cocktails and harbor views and you're in barbecue heaven, Maui-style.
<http://fatdaddysmaui.com>

You can smell the smoke from the far reaches of the parking lot, so all you have to do is follow your nose to Fat Daddy's Smokehouse (1913 S. Kīhei Road, Kīhei; 1-808-879-8711). When possible, they source their grass-fed beef from Maui Cattle Company and smoke the meat for 10 hours with beer-soaked kiawe wood. Most come for fall-off-the-bone house-smoked ribs and the delicious, tender brisket. The sweetness

comes from the meat and the barbecue sauce. The sides here (barbecue beans, mac 'n' cheese, coleslaw) are just that, sides, with simple flavors that don't detract from the purity of the barbecue. Old album covers substitute for wallpaper. You may think you can get out of there without scrutinizing them and playing, "I had that one ... and that one." But you can't. —*Bonnie Friedman*