



**Three
“agri-visitor”
centers are
spreading the
word about
the state’s
diversified
crops**

Sharing **HOME-GROWN HAWAI‘I**

BY DIANA LOMONT

ASK INFREQUENT VISITORS TO THE ISLANDS WHAT IMAGES Hawai‘i conjures up, and words like “beaches,” “sunsets,” and “hula” will roll off their tongues. Prod them further by testing their knowledge of the Islands’ exports, and the words “sugar” and “pineapple” are bound to come up.

The state is eager to expand that image, to promote Hawai‘i as a grower and exporter of diversified agricultural products other than sugar and pineapple. Selective shoppers on the Mainland may know of our delicious macadamia nuts, Kona coffee and tropical juices and jams, but many people are still unfamiliar with such “exotic” edibles.

C. Brewer and Co., Ltd. is one local force that is trying to change that condition. Through its three agricultural visitor centers, the state’s oldest firm is giving tourists a taste of the Islands’ unique home-grown products. Mauna Loa Macadamia Nut Visitor Center, outside of Hilo on the island of Hawai‘i, Maui Tropical Plantation in Waikapū Valley on Maui, and Guava Kai Plantation in Kilauea, Kaua‘i, all offer visitors and residents the opportunity to learn about and enjoy a spectrum of Hawaiian fruits and products.

Founded in Hawai‘i in 1826, C. Brewer primarily grew sugar until the late 1950s. Since then it has diversified into a wide variety of agribusiness activities. A major aim of the company through its “agri-visitor” centers is to expand markets out of state in a very personal way: having people take home with them favorable experiences and impressions of made-in-Hawai‘i products.

All three attractions are free to visit, and they’re all open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.



A Rainbow of Island Crops

If there's one place that demonstrates the diversity of home-grown products possible in our climate, it's Maui Tropical Plantation. Located in scenic Waikapū Valley six miles from Kahului Airport, this agricultural conglomeration is a showcase for Island fruits and flowers. Here, you can see banana, avocado, mango and papaya trees growing side by side. There are guava and macadamia nut orchards, heliconia and red ginger fields, a passion fruit vineyard and coffee grove, as well as sugar cane and pineapple fields.

The crops are grown in a semicircle surrounding a 10-acre central court where visitors may wander among the attractively landscaped grounds that include an enclave of plantation-style huts grouped around a lush taro patch. Each hut is dedicated to a different crop, with exhibits describing not only the history of the crop in the Islands, but how it is grown, harvested and, in some cases, processed into

marketable form. Located among the Tropical Pavilions is the center's landmark, a 72-foot-tall windmill from Australia that pumps the plantation's complex irrigation system.

Visitors are also treated to pineapple-carving, coconut-husking and lei-making demonstrations, all performed with items grown at the plantation.

For those curious to explore the outer reaches of the plantation, an \$8 tram ticket will take them on a 45-minute tour of the orchards and fields set back against the mountains. A knowledgeable tour guide shares interesting information about the featured crops.

Back in the center's Marketplace, visitors can buy fruits that are as fresh as they can get, all grown on site. There are also numerous other good things for sale, some of which, like the jams, are found there only. Federal Express mailing service is available for delivery to the Mainland. The Tropical Nursery also offers certified plants for sale that can be taken out of state. Like everything else, all of the plants, including anthuriums, crotons, 'aloe, pikake, ginger, bird of

Maui Tropical Plantation in scenic Waikapū Valley is an interesting place to learn about the diversity of Island-grown products, and to enjoy a Hawaiian country barbecue show.

paradise and orchids, are grown on the plantation.

General manager Avery Chumbley, who sits on the state Board of Agriculture, says the plantation's objective is to promote locally grown and made-on-Maui products.

However well the center may be known for its promotion of diversified agriculture, it's equally celebrated for its Hawaiian country barbecue show with *paniolo* (cowboy) singer Buddy Fo. The lively event, held every Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening, includes square dancing, a bountiful barbecue buffet, and foot-stomping entertainment.

C. Brewer's new limited partner in Maui Tropical Plantation is Seiichi Sorimachi, owner of Nani Mau Gardens in Hilo. With the input of the new partner, Chumbley looks forward to expanding and improving the plantation to make it even better.



Diana Lomont

A Fun Kind of Nut House

Chocolate-covered macadamia nuts and cans of the delicately flavored nuts are popular delicacies of the Islands, but few consumers realize the complex process it takes to produce them.

The Mauna Loa Macadamia Nuts Visitor Center in Kea'au, south of Hilo, shares that process. Guests can observe from an outside vantage point the intricate stages of turning freshly harvested raw macadamia nuts into fine edibles.

The entrance into the orchard is when one's interest begins. Rows and rows of mature macadamia nut trees are flanked by tall evergreen trees that serve as wind barriers.

Mauna Loa's processing plant at Kea'au is the largest of its kind in the world. The business harvests more than 30 million pounds of nuts a year. C. Brewer controls 10,000 acres of macadamia nut orchards, 2,500 of which are at the Kea'au plantation. Other acreage is on the Hamakua

Coast and in Ka'ū on the island of Hawai'i and in Wailuku, Maui.

In 1974, C. Brewer bought Royal Hawaiian Macadamia Nut Co., and two years later began marketing its nuts under the Mauna Loa brand name.

Today, Mauna Loa macadamia nuts are sold across the Mainland and in Asia, including Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore.

Five years ago the company built its chocolate factory and in 1987 added the gift shop, snack bar and viewing gallery, along with a nature walk that features indigenous Hawaiian plants.

Visitors who wonder why macadamia nuts are so expensive have their questions answered here. For every pound of macadamia nuts on a tree, only 10 percent is harvestable kernel meat, compared with 35 to 40 percent for almonds, explains Mauna Loa vice president Al Kam. The nut's processing is also tedious and time-consuming. The nuts are dried for a minimum of two weeks, then they are opened by metal rollers that put out the 300 pounds per square inch required to crack the hard brown shells.

At Mauna Loa Macadamia Nuts in Kea'au on the island of Hawai'i, you can watch the delicious candies being made and buy them in the gift shop.

The shells are put to good use; they fuel turbo generators, which in turn supply all of the plant's energy requirements.

The kernels are roasted in coconut oil to give them a delicate flavoring. The nuts are then classified as "fancy" or "choice" and packaged accordingly. "Fancy" nuts are considered the premium grade and are lighter in color with fewer blemishes. They are usually salted and packaged in jars and tins. The "choice" nuts are generally processed for candy, glazing, cooking and baking uses.

Another reason for the macadamia nut's costliness is the time required for a tree to mature. It takes four to five years before a tree bears its first fruit and another 10 years before it matures to yield a full crop. However, once established, the trees live long lives. Kam says there are trees in Honoka'a more than 100 years old that are still producing well.



Kaua'i's Guava Haven

You may have tried guava juice, but how about guava sherbet, guava muffins, guava chiffon cake, guava chiffon tarts or guava glazed cinnamon rolls? A visit to Guava Kai Plantation, operated by C. Brewer subsidiary Kilauea Agronomics, offers the opportunity.

In addition to delicious guava food products, the Guava Kai gift shop sells gift items ranging from coffee mugs to teddy bears to earrings designed with a guava motif. C. Brewer's latest agricultural visitor attraction introduces guests to the great taste of guava, treating them to refreshing Ocean Spray guava juice. They also are free to sample the plantation's raw product, which, at about six ounces per guava, is three times the size of guavas grown in the wild.

Kilauea Agronomics president Jim Frazier explains that it's taken careful research and experimentation to grow guavas so successfully. It's only been three years since they planted their

first 150 acres in guava trees. "They're really exceeding our expectations on crop yield and fruit size," says Frazier, who is chairman of the agriculture committee of the Kaua'i Economic Development Board.

Kilauea, at the north tip of Kaua'i, was an ideal site to turn into guava orchards. The area receives an average of 90 inches of rain annually, and guava requires a lot of water.

Currently, Kilauea Agronomics manages some 600 acres of guava, including 115 acres on the island of Hawai'i, making the company the largest guava grower in the state.

A joint venture with Ocean Spray since 1985 has driven the successful expansion. The Mauna La'i drink is selling well in Mainland markets.

"The category of tropical juice drinks is growing as people get into non-alcoholic drinks and physical fitness," explains Frazier. "So our timing was good."

Last year, Guava Kai Plantation turned out 10 million pounds of fruit, which became 7.3 million pounds of puree. Frazier explains that Ocean Spray has been selling a "thinner" guava juice to Mainland shoppers on

The newest "agri-visitor" center, adjacent to guava orchards, is Guava Kai Plantation at Kilauea, Kaua'i.

the assumption that they wouldn't like the guava nectar that Island residents are used to drinking. However, favorable comments from visitors to the plantation are changing that perception.

The Guava Kai Plantation Visitor Center just opened last July. Here, an ice cream shop that serves guava sherbet also fixes sandwiches for lunch. Visitors can observe some of the factory processing of guavas from a viewing area. They can also see the different stages of a guava tree, from flowering to fruit, in a row of trees on exhibit near the entrance.

The plantation is also developing a botanical garden, nature walk and picnic area.

Agri-visitor centers, such as these three on Maui, Hawai'i and Kaua'i, are an interesting, inviting way to spread the word about the diversity of outstanding agricultural products of the Islands.

