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## Kona coffee: Caffeine to the max!

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The [Kona Coffee Cultural Festival](#) rates as one of the top 10 food festivals in the U.S. Besides scenic [golf](#), [coffee](#) is another reason to visit Kona on the Big Island and take in the diversity of land, culture and activities. In its' 45th year, the festival occurs about the same ten days in November.

[Hawaii](#) is the only state in the U.S. that grows coffee. The KCCF honors that progression of coffee from the first plant in the early 1800s to the over 400 growers today. Entry to all the events is via a festival button, which supports the festival mission. Open your world of coffee with the Art/Coffee Stroll at Holualoa village up on the hill from Kona. Sip on samples from some farms, and view art on display. Kona coffee has subtleties from farm to farm, so an excellent way to match a farm product to your pallet.

The [Kona Living History Farm](#) tour gives a look at early farm life and the production of coffee. On this farm, the first tenant farmers, the Uchida family lived and grew coffee in the 1920s. Guides at each of the 11 stations explain how their life was largely self-sustaining.

Climate affects coffee, and Kona is its' own microclimate. Each farm has slightly different weather, and so there are differences in taste from farm to farm. During the festival, each farm rolls out a little extra during tours and tastings. There are nuances, so see what is best for your taste. If you do not want to bop from farm to farm on your



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*Bob Brown Photography*



own, the KCCF offers a five-hour tour of three working farms including lunch guided by members of the [Kona Coffee Council](#).

The festival features rotating workshops and lectures on coffee and culture. Pageant excitement abounds with The Miss Kona Coffee Competition, with the winner being going on to the Miss Hawaii competition. The culinary games showcase professional and amateur chefs who add Kona coffee to dishes in every category. The chefs also include sampling bites for attendees. You will go back with coffee, and likely some creative recipes of what to do with that coffee.



*Arianna Farms*

The colossal achievement for the growers is who has the best cup of coffee. The cupping competition, sponsored by the [Kona Coffee Council](#), occurs in stages where the judges perform blind tasting. Coffee in Hawaii is a labor of love, so these growers invest heart and soul and the top prize is coveted. The winners this year were the [Aikane Kona Coffee](#) and the [Arianna Farms Ono Kona Coffee](#).

The [Kona Coffee & Tea Market](#) features a dinner where courses use coffee, wine, and beer infused into the dish. As you taste each dish, you can accompany that dish with the appropriate coffee, wine or beer. Coffee karma gets a boost with the lantern festival that marches down Alii drive in Kona-Kailua. Community, cultural and coffee groups parade, then float their lanterns in the bay for blessing and good wishes.

Coffee in Kona has some interesting people, including Mel Morimoto, festival president, who started in the business when he was just three years old. He noted that even with “agricultural science, Kona coffee still depends upon the weather.” The coffee borer beetle is becoming more prevalent, so each farm is incurring extra expense in fighting the pest.

The largest farm operation in the area is [Greenwell Farms](#), and Tom Greenwell has always pushed the envelope on moving coffee forward. When you visit Greenwell Farms, you will likely try varieties that are outside the traditional cup. As a family business, he has seen the newer growers more open to more modern varieties and methods to improve the appeal of Kona coffee. Their new “Elizabeth J” blend is likely the most expensive Kona coffee, akin to a Bentley in a cup.

A different kind of farm is the [Kona Coffee & Tea Company](#), championed by the all-encompassing Queen of Kona coffee, Malia Bolton. Her farms have two retail locations that serve only their coffee. Bolton has been on the festival board for nine years and is a staple at just about every event. Her farms are unique in they “are a fully vertically integrated operation, from Farm to Cup. Our Family controls every process. Also, all our cafes are using our single estate coffee. From espresso to lattes, to cold brew its all our coffee,” she

stated. Not only can you visit the farm, but you can also go to an actual coffee bar and try the beans in variations from straight Joe to unusual combinations. In 2015, a KCTC entry won 3rd place, no small feat in the crowded field.

The **Sheraton in Keauhou Bay** is the best lodging choice for the KCCF. This hotel was upgraded in 2012 and now is a comfortable resort. With plenty of ocean views, pools, and cultural excursions it is the ideal resting point and activity springboard. Built on the edge of ancient fishing grounds, the twice-weekly cultural tour gives a view of the culture of the early Hawaiians.

Need a sunset view for dinner? **Rays on the Bay** is their ocean view, upscale restaurant and bar, with panoramic ocean views and big island takes on favorite dishes. This point overlooks one of the prime manta ray gathering spots on the Big Island. At night, lights lure the plankton, which in turns signals the mantas to feed. One of the smaller tours using snorkeling to watch the mantas is **Eka Canoe Adventures**, where you ride on a Hawaiian catamaran canoe.

When you need a break from coffee, visit the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii Authority or **NELHA**. The research and industrial park have some research companies using alternative energy and deep-sea cooling, salt water and solar power. The exclusive tour gives you an inside view the Kampachi and Abalone farms and tanks as well as using seawater to develop electricity.

The **Kona Country Club** is the closest golf course to the festival and has just undergone significant renovation and irrigation improvements. So, when you have seen one of the presentations already, a little afternoon golf along the ocean is close by. Moreover, the KCC features both a mountain and an ocean course.

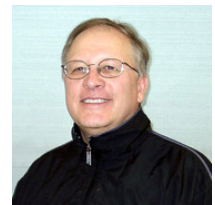
If you need fuel to start you coffee day, then **Java on The Rock**, a coffee farm in Kona, also does seaside breakfasts. A one-minute walk from Java on The Rock is **Basik Acai**, which takes the portable acai bowl to a new dimension with local fruits in tasty blends.

**The Fishhopper** is the best seafood restaurant in the area, with up-close views of the bay. The Ahi Poke was a 2014 & 2015 Award Winner and will turn you into a regular. The Lemongrass-Ginger Ono will change how you feel fish should be served as it blends classic flavors with island ingredients. A great happy hour from 2-9 every day, and in 2016, the restaurant will be expanded with additional bay-view levels.

The **Kona Brewing Company**, the home of liquid aloha, has grown into a local landmark in their 21 years. They craft their beers, and each variety is paired with all their fabulous food choices from pizzas of renown to local pork sandwiches. This is serious beer food and is way more than a brewery. Match the Koko Brown, with a hint of coconut with the fresh catch of the day with Thai-curry sauce.

Need a pasta fix? [Mi's Italian Bistro](#) is a small eatery, not far from Captain Cook. After coffee farm excursions, this is the perfect Italian landing. Morgan Starr, Executive Chef and owner, grows his vegetables and makes most everything on the menu from scratch. Tasty hits include the local avocado on bruschetta, and the Herb & Cheese Ravioli, which combines broccoli florets, toasted pine nuts and a blue cheese cream sauce. Deserts soar with a coffee-laced tiramisu, which earned a KCCF award for best coffee-infused dessert.

Most people when flying to Hawaii and back take more than they need, so luggage and airport travel is a little more cumbersome. [Canopy Parking](#) to the rescue with their indoor valet service. Pull up, hand over the keys, leave the heavy lifting of the luggage to the pros. With 4200 spaces and the ability to make a reservation for your preferred level of service, and option for every traveler. And, it's a certified Green Garage operation and generates some of it's own electricity.



**Neil Wolkodoff**  
Denver Golf Examiner

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