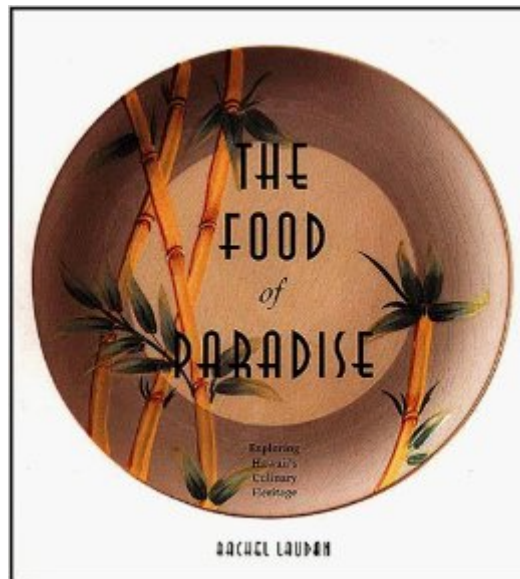


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The Food Of Paradise: Exploring Hawaii's Culinary Heritage (A Kolowalu Book)



Synopsis

Hawaii has one of the richest culinary heritages in the United States. Where else would you find competitions for the best saimin, sushi, Portuguese sausage, laulau, plate lunch, kim chee, dim sum, shave ice, and hamburgers? Hawaii's contemporary regional cuisine (affectionately known as Local Food by residents) is a truly amazing fusion of diverse culinary influences. In *The Food of Paradise: Exploring Hawaii's Culinary Heritage*, Rachel Laudan takes readers on a thoughtful, wide-ranging tour of Hawaii's farms and gardens, fish auctions and vegetable markets, fairs and carnivals, mom-and-pop stores and lunch wagons, to uncover the delightful complexities and incongruities in Hawaii's culinary history that have led to such creations as saimin, crack seed, and butter mochi. Part personal memoir, part historical narrative, part cookbook, *The Food of Paradise* begins with a series of essays that describe Laudan's initial encounter with a particular Local Food, an encounter that puzzled her and eventually led to tracing its origins and influence in Hawaii. Representative recipes follow. Like pidgin, the creole language created by Hawaii's early immigrants, Local Food is a creole cuisine created by three distinct culinary influences: Pacific, American and European, and Asian. In her attempt to decipher Hawaii's culinary Babel, Laudan examines the contributions of each, including the introduction of new ingredients and the adaptation of traditional dishes to Hawaii's way of life. More than 150 recipes, photographs, a bibliography of Hawaii's cookbooks, and an extensive glossary make *The Food of Paradise* an invaluable resource for cooks, food historians, and Hawaiian buffs.

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Customer Reviews

It seems this book was born out of Laudan's attempt to categorize and make sense out of the foods in Hawaii. I was raised in Hawaii and grew up surrounded by the foods that Laudan presents in her book. Many of the local cookbooks put together and sold by Hawaii's churches, schools, and communities give you recipes from local home kitchens; nothing too fancy and usually no description of the dish, because it is assumed you know what the ingredients are and how they are used. More than a cookbook, Laudan has written well-researched histories of how various local foods have developed throughout the islands before each main and sub sections (The Plate Lunch, The Matter of Mochi, Sorting Out Sushi to name a few). And, she includes a brief explanation of the dish before each recipe. I bought this book hoping to shed some light on "crack seed" and how to make it. Unfortunately, it appears that she was able to get only the more well known recipes due to the fact that the main ingredient (oriental flowering apricot) is not widely available. This book is a good resource, if not for the recipes, then for the history of Hawaii's local food for both non-Hawaii and island cooks. One caveat: a recipe found in a cookbook is no more than a base on which to add/subtract/change ingredients as you see fit. There is no such thing as "The Recipe" for teriyaki sauce - recipes vary from home to home and island to island.

Rachel Laudan has written a hymn to the plate lunch, a rhapsody on the theme of two scoop rice. The presses are running hot with glossy books about Pacific Rim cuisine. Laudan says she has nothing against it, but she is interested in local food. The recipes that conclude each of the essays in this book include such fare as Okinawan pig's foot soup. You will not find anything with lilikoi-Maui onion-ginger salsa on top. (Lilikoi is the local term for passion fruit.) For someone who had been in the islands only eight years (as a teacher of history of science at the University of Hawaii), she really knows her local grinds (but grinds, surprisingly, is not used anywhere in this book). For Laudan, food is not just a way of keeping the body fueled. The way people eat, their tendency to avoid strange foods, their willingness to make great efforts to maintain culinary traditions in new settings tell a big story. In Hawaii, they tell a story of a creation of a successful multiethnic, multicultural society. She doesn't go as far as the historian Gavan Daws, who says, correctly, that Hawaii is the most successful multiethnic society on Earth, but she does note that in the islands, half of marriages are across ethnic or cultural boundaries. Crossing food boundaries is just as significant, in her view. Local food is a meaningful development, the offspring of "a culinary Babel." "There are few places in the world," writes Laudan, "where the creation of a cuisine is so transparently visible." Well, yes, if you look, and this is where "The Food of Paradise" excels. I have at least a couple hundred

Hawaiian cookbooks (only a fraction of the published total), but all of them together don't provide as much food for thought as Laudan's one volume. While admirably thorough, she does stop short of the extremes of local food -- neither milk guts nor finger Jell-O is mentioned. One thing she has done is to compare different editions of local cookbooks. The changes in the recipes are revealing. Take poke. (Pronounced po-kay, from a Hawaiian word, usually taken to be the word for slice, although this is controversial.) It is so common that surely it has been around forever, but Laudan says not. It seems to have been created around 1970, a typical (for Hawaii) melding of themes from several sources -- the main ones Hawaiian and Japanese, with minor notes from America and other parts of Asia. The result is pure local Hawaiian. (Poke is simply cubed raw fish, preferably ahi tuna, with minimal flavoring of onion or scallion or seaweed and possibly salt or shoyu; but since this book was published it has become a contest to devise the most unexpected combinations. There have also long been versions of cooked seafood, notably baby octopus.) Local food, as an identifiable cuisine, "began to appear in the 1920s and 1930s," writes Laudan. She has done her homework, interviewing food preparers and vendors at what she calls Open Markets. This is very much a Honolulu book. Despite being the most cosmopolitan place in the islands (if not in the entire Pacific), Honolulu also has preserved many more local food traditions than Maui has. At the Aloha Farmer's Market, Laudan found fresh pig's blood, fresh chitterlings, dried fish poke and lomi oio. (You could occasionally find any or all of these on Maui, but not at the same time at the same place. If you ever encounter lomi oio, bonefish flesh scraped off with a spoon (an ancestor of poke), you are definitely out of the tourist zone.) There are a few oddities here that reveal that Laudan is malihini, though a very simpatico one. She says shave ice is sometimes called ice shave on the Neighbor Islands. She talks about the days of "sleeper jets" (they weren't jets). She starts pineapple plantations much too early. But Laudan does bring a verve, an extensive background as a world traveler and the skills of a professional researcher to her book, which is easily the solidest work on local food there is.

Read this book before or after you visit Hawai'i, and you'll increase your appreciation of the people, the place and the food. As one born and raised here and of mixed ancestry, I treasure this book. The only significant group the author missed is the Puerto Ricans, and consequently some of the Afro-Caribbean influences in our cuisine.

THE FOOD OF PARADISE ~ Exploring Hawaii's Culinary Heritage Rachel Laudan University of Hawaii Press ~ 1996 296 pages, softcover I must say that I was delightfully surprised when I received this book in the mail- I had expected just another Hawaiian cookbook, and that would have been

great too. Instead, I found not only recipes that were not available, ad nauseum, in every other Hawaiian cookbook, as I do seem to have an over-abundance of these, due to my obsession with Hawaii, but I was happy to get a few history lessons, as well. As many already know, besides the first Polynesian settlers to Hawaii, from the South Seas, Hawaii was settled by many diverse cultures. Certainly, the Asian influence is very heavy here: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Southeast Asians. There is a big Portuguese and Azores influence too. Europeans came to conquer and subjugate, but most of their food culture was not so compatible with the climate. New World foods did do very well, and many of the common foods we associate with Hawaii actually were imported from the Americas, such as pineapple. It seems that most Hawaiian residents are a mixed up combination of heritages and cultures, and they are very proud of that assimilation, and their food choices reflect that. The beloved comfort foods may have originated across the globe, but Hawaiians have reinvented them uniquely in their own way. A few favorites that are now heritage dishes are Jook, a porridge soup, Musubi (see my SPAM review!), Saimin noodles (available even at McDonalds), Shave Ice, Malasada donuts, and Crack Seed, which even has its own store in Ala Moana mall. This book has many great features beside the recipes: seafood made easy, a glossary, all about the water, rice savvy, and many black and white photos. I can show you a sample recipe here: In Hawaii, after Thanksgiving, everyone makes JOOK Ham & Turkey Jook (a rice soup) yield: 1 gallon, or 8 big servings 3 cups rice, well washed and rinsed 3 ham hocks of a big ham bone 1 turkey carcass, broken into pieces 1 cup raw, unsalted, skinned peanuts Garnish: lettuce; salted, preserved cabbage, Chinese parsley or cilantro, and finely sliced green onion Combine rice, ham hocks, turkey carcass, and peanuts in a large pot, add about a gallon of water, bring to a boil, and cover. Simmer for a couple of hours until the rice has disintegrated and the meat is falling off the bones. Carefully remove the bones and any bits of meat clinging to them from the soup. Chop the meat into small pieces and return to the pot. Add salt to taste. Ladle into large soup bowls and sprinkle some of the garnish on each bowl. Delicious. Many Hawaiians eat this for breakfast. A wonderful book, this will give you deeper insight into the food culture of Hawaii, but also appreciation for the way the foods transcended the racial problems each new ethnic group of immigrants encountered, and brought them all together to Paradise. Fun times here, makes you hungry!

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