NOT YOUR TYPICAL CHINATOWN

O'ahu’s Chinatown, one of the oldest in the U.S., is unlike any other: from its inception, it has never been as insular as other Chinatown communities. Hawaiian ali’i (royalty) lived in the area as well, and the neighborhood attracted the hodgepodge of Hawai‘i’s ethnicities, as well as whalers and sailors who flooded in from the nearby Honolulu Harbor. In this way, Chinatown has not changed much: Vietnamese noodle shops neighbor Filipino mom-and-pop restaurants, and locals still come for some of the island’s best selection of tropical fruit and everything from dim sum to whole roast pigs.

What has changed: chefs, artists and designers have revitalized crumbling storefronts, stripping away the plaster to reveal handsome red brick walls, and opening stylish restaurants, bars, boutiques and galleries. It is still an area that feels undiscovered, with few tourists, despite being only 3 miles from Waikīkī. Now’s the time to explore the neighborhood.

Fashion Forward
The island’s trendsetters come to shop at Chinatown. Here, a few of their favorite spots.

While Barrio Vintage stocks a range of vintage wear, its specialty is bright, psychedelic colors applied to aloha prints. Find unique pieces, from casual to dressy, at this boutique on Nu‘uanu Avenue. www.barriovintage.com

Fighting Eel, started by local designers Rona Bennett and Lan Chung, distills the island aesthetic into breezy, feminine pieces with bright, tropical prints that look as good on the beach paired with flip flops as they do in the work place with high heels. Shoppers can find their downtown boutique on Bethel Street. www.fightingeel.com
Argentinia-born Florencia Arias-Nordstrom melds Latin culture with Honolulu’s tropical lifestyle in flirty frocks found at Florencia Arias. She launches a new collection five times a year, which can be found at her boutique on Nu‘uanu Avenue. www.florenciaarias.com

At Ginger13, Cindy Yokoyama’s chunky, asymmetric jewelry are conversation starters, from the statement necklaces that feature slabs of gemstones to the mismatched teardrop earrings. Pairings and textures are unexpected, and the effect is organic and soulful. www.ginger13.com

Hawai‘i rock ‘n’ roll is the aesthetic at Homecoming Honolulu on Bethel Street, which features satin bombers and body-hugging mini dresses for the youthful set. www.shophomecominghonolulu.com

What started as a pop-up shop has turned into a chic boutique. Located on Bethel Street, House of Aria is stocked with sexy dresses perfect for hitting the town. www.shophouseofaria.com

Started by pro and amateur skateboarders and surfers, IN4MATION is one of Honolulu’s most popular lifestyle and streetwear brands, perhaps best known for its iconic “hi” and “aloha” lettering, offered on everything from men’s and women’s tees, hats and accessories. www.in4mants.com

The whimsical La Muse carries everything from indigo dyed dresses made in Japan to dainty French parasols to trinkets and jewelry culled from around the world. www.lamuschawaii.com

Leather Soul is O‘ahu’s destination mens’ shoe store, specializing in handcrafted shoes from Alden, from wingtips to the “Hawaiian Stomper,” a low-cut boot. With locations in Downtown Honolulu as well as Waikīkī, the intimate boutique prides itself on providing a personal touch in service and product. Leather Soul’s motto is, “From our soul to your sole.” www.leathersoul.com

A haircut at Mojo Barbershop is the equivalent of a spa day for men. Get pampered with haircuts, straight razor shaves and a cold beer. www.mojobarbershop.com

On the corner of Nu‘uanu and Pauahi Streets, the cheery Owens & Co. offers accessories for you
and your home, with an emphasis on local designers, who craft items such as a shaka bottle opener and skincare products made in Kaua‘i. www.owensandcompany.com

Each Reyn Spooner print is inspired by nature and guided by the island’s diverse culture—from early Polynesian ancestors to those who came later from Japan, China, the South Pacific, California and around the world. Today, Reyn Spooner has grown from that first store in Hawai‘i — still located at Ala Moana Center — to a global presence with modern, high quality aloha apparel. www.reynspooner.com

Roberta Oaks pioneered the modern aloha shirt, with a slimmer fit and cuffed sleeves, for both men and women. The result is 1960s Ivy League meets the Hawaiian tropics. www.robertaoaks.com

Hilo-based Sig Zane and his son, Kūha‘o, opened the tiny Sig on Smith boutique to showcase their aloha shirts with more urban prints, as well as capsule collections that change every few months. The collections are based on Sig’s old designs based on a theme; previous themes featured rain prints and kinolau, plants that are significant to the gods of hula. www.sigzanedesigns.com

Heart of Arts
From attention-grabbing street art to polished galleries to jazz in a funky, hidden space, Honolulu’s Chinatown is known as the arts district, where the art encompasses an assortment of mediums.

The ARTS at Marks Garage, a community arts center and incubator, hosts a variety of exhibits, performances and workshops and is responsible for revitalizing the Chinatown community through its launch of celebrations such as First Friday, a monthly gallery walk and block party, and Second Saturday, a family-friendly daytime affair. www.artsatmarks.com

Part tattoo parlor, part art studio and gallery, Black Cat Tattoo is a shop owned and operated by local artists who mandate their employees have interest in other art mediums outside of tattooing. www.blackcattattoohi.com

Vintage curios shop Hound and Quail specializes in the bizarre, from the taxidermy deer heads
and preserved spiders and crustaceans, to vintage finds such as classic cameras and typewriters. The basement event space, The Outpost, is used for art displays and wine and art classes. www.houndandquail.com

Pegge Hopper’s distinctive paintings of island women are a familiar sight around Honolulu. View original paintings and drawings at the Pegge Hopper Gallery located on Nu’uanu Avenue. www.peggehopper.com

Tin Can Mailman overflows with vintage tropical kitsch of the pinup-girl and hula doll sort. It’s packed shelves also offer an array of vintage Hawaiian related paper, advertisements, postcards, menus and out of print books. www.tincanmailman.net

Refuel
Polished interiors join the hole-in-the-wall eateries in Chinatown as a slew of restaurateurs are opening bars and restaurants, turning the neighborhood into a culinary destination for both locals and tourists.

Downbeat Diner & Lounge serves American diner fare with vegan and vegetarian options on almost every menu item. Next door, the Lounge hosts live music shows 4-5 nights a week alongside a full-service bar. www.downbeatdiner.com

Ethiopian Love Restaurant is Honolulu’s only Ethiopian restaurant, serving flavorful, spicy stews of vegetables, legumes and meats atop injera, a spongy, thin flatbread. The food is eaten with your hands, which coupled with the restaurant’s BYOB policy, makes for an intimate and communal dining experience. www.ethiopianlovehi.com

At Fête, Honolulu-born Robynne Maii cooks the food she craves. What that translates into: international comfort foods executed with impeccable technique, thanks to Maii’s time spent in New York kitchens. Favorites here include the Chaz Burger (named for her husband and co-owner of Fête) and kalbi-marinated bavette, a nod to Maii’s Korean mother. www.fetchhawaii.com

At Grondin, French and Latin dishes such as coq au vin and mole, ratatouille and pozole share the
menu in a cozy, French-styled bistro. The restaurant reflects Jenny Grondin’s French heritage and David Segarra’s Ecuadorian roots and also offers classically-made cocktails and a carefully edited wine list. [www.grondinhi.com](http://www.grondinhi.com)

With wine tasting events every Tuesday and Friday and live entertainment every Friday and Saturday, **HASR Bistro** is a lively spot with hearty, wine-friendly dishes such as braised short ribs and cioppino. [www.hasrbistro.com](http://www.hasrbistro.com)

One of the liveliest dining rooms in downtown Honolulu, especially around pau hana (after work), **J.J. Dolan’s** offers some of the best New York-style pizzas in town, served with cold beers and a friendly, Cheers-like vibe. [www.jjdolans.com](http://www.jjdolans.com)

Seasons, in Hawai‘i? **Livestock Tavern** makes it happen, swapping out the décor and menu every three months; summer might bring lobster rolls and fall a savory mushroom bread pudding. The full bar features creative cocktails alongside classics, all impeccably mixed. [www.livestocktavern.com](http://www.livestocktavern.com)

Find an upscale ramen experience at **Lucky Belly**, where the sake is served in delicate white wine glasses, and the Belly Bowl combines pork belly, bacon, and sausage with noodles in a sesame-based broth. Owners Dusty Grable and Jesse Cruz (also owners in Livestock Tavern and Tchin Tchin!) bring their attention to detail in everything from the stylish digs to the ramen broth. [www.luckybelly.com](http://www.luckybelly.com)

**Madre Chocolate** is one of the island’s premier bean-to-bar makers, sourcing cacao beans from Hawai‘i and working directly with farmers around the world to ensure quality beans and fair prices to support their communities. In addition to 70 percent chocolate bars, Madre Chocolate also makes a tangy liliko‘i chocolate bar and a smooth coconut milk and caramelized ginger chocolate. [www.madrechocolate.com](http://www.madrechocolate.com)

Inspired by the authentic Vietnamese recipes from his mother, the Lady in **The Pig & The Lady**, chef Andrew Le serves up noodle soups beyond pho alongside imaginative dishes that combine the culinary heritage of Vietnam, Asia and the Pacific. Must-try dishes include the pho French dip bánh mì. [www.thepigandthelady.com](http://www.thepigandthelady.com)
**Watering Holes**

Whether looking for meticulously poured cocktails or music to dance the night away, visitors will find a nightlife to suit their tastes in the bars and clubs of Chinatown.

With more than 110 specialty beers from around the world, specialty cocktails and creative pizzas, **Bar 35** has become one of O'ahu’s hot *pau hana* (after work) happy hour spots. On First Fridays, Bar 35’s fully stocked indoor bar and outdoor beer garden are packed. [www.bar35hawaii.com](http://www.bar35hawaii.com)

At **Bar Leather Apron**, the emphasis is on the intimate atmosphere and carefully crafted cocktails, which is to be expected from the owners, Tom Park (of Leather Soul) and Justin Park (award-winning mixologist, no relation). Tucked away in a downtown office building, Bar Leather Apron provides a speakeasy feel and offers an ever-changing menu of classic cocktails alongside bespoke creations. The Bar incorporates seasonal ingredients and regional flavors, inspired by Hawaii’s surroundings. As avid travelers, both Parks sought to bring to Hawaii the aspects they admired most from some of the best bars in the world. Reservations are highly encouraged, even up to a week prior as this snug spot fills up quick. [www.barleatherapron.com](http://www.barleatherapron.com)

If you're looking for live jazz music, **The Dragon Upstairs** is the place to go. The cozy, funky spot boasts a rotation of local musicians including Honolulu favorites the Chris Yeh Quartet and Gypsy 808. The club also brings in DJs spinning Motown, funk and soul. [www.thedragonupstairs.com](http://www.thedragonupstairs.com)

**Manifest** by day is an art gallery and café and by night a cocktail bar featuring Honolulu’s best selection of whiskey. Young professionals start their days here with a cup of coffee or dirty chai (chai with a shot of espresso), and end them here with perfect old fashioneds or lighter cocktails of vodka, rose, aperol, pineapple and lemon, along with a spin around the dance floor. [www.manifesthawaii.com](http://www.manifesthawaii.com)

In the heart of Honolulu’s Chinatown is **Next Door**, Hawai‘i’s underground art and music haven, hosting everything from jazz and hip hop to electronic dance music, heavy metal, and everything in between. [www.nextdoorhi.com](http://www.nextdoorhi.com)
Find one of the island’s best wine lists at **Tchin Tchin!**, where outdoor patio nestled among Chinatown’s buildings and illuminated by twinkling string lights attracts a chic and savvy crowd.  
www.thetchintchinbar.com

**Flashback to Chinatown’s Past**
Chinatown isn’t just about the new hot spots: it has long been a gathering place for Chinese immigrants as well as new immigrants looking for community. You’ll see men playing mah jongg along River Street, and hear Tagalog and Vietnamese spoken at the marketplaces where families have been shopping for decades for fresh produce, fish and meat. Step into one of the older establishments for a taste of the past and still vibrant, multicultural present.

A third-generation spot that began in 1945, **Char Hung Sut** continues to open daily at 5:30 a.m. to a crowd of locals and visitors waiting for their fill of manapua, pork hash and rice cake.  
www.charhungsutrestaurant.com

Browse the lei shops on Maunakea Street, where strands of colorful tropical flowers hang in the cases for special occasions, from weddings to birthdays to graduation, and just because. **Cindy’s Lei Shop** is one of the oldest in Hawai‘i and sells everything from fragrant pikake to orchid haku lei (worn as a crown) to the more intricate watermelon butterfly lei, woven with pink and green orchids.  
www.cindysleishoppe.com

The custard pies at **Lee’s Bakery & Kitchen** are so beloved that the Wednesday evening before Thanksgiving, customers already start lining up on King Street for first crack at the pies that will emerge from the ovens in the morning. The lines are less intimidating the rest of the year, but the pies are still phenomenal—a soft, barely set custard in a flaky crust.

**O‘ahu Market** opened its doors in 1904 and is still the place to go for fresh meat, vegetables and people watching. This market is a must-see for foodies searching for unique delicacies, such as pig snouts, tripe and chicken feet.

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