



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

18 March 2026

### SPRING WHAT'S NEW IN THE HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

**HAWAII** — Spring in the Hawaiian Islands brings new adventures, lush landscapes, and unique experiences across every island. From breathtaking scenery and thriving communities to one-of-a-kind cultural activities and events, each day offers visitors a chance to discover, connect, and celebrate the spirit of Hawai'i.

#### CULINARY

**James Beard Foundation Awards (Statewide)** semifinalists for 2026 include nine Hawai'i chefs and eateries competing for the prestigious national culinary awards. Chefs advancing to the final round will be announced on 31 March. Winners will be announced at an awards ceremony in Chicago on 15 June. The nominees and their award categories are:

- Outstanding Restaurateur: Peter Merriman of [Merriman's](#), [Monkeypod Kitchen](#), and others (O'ahu, Maui, Hawai'i Island)
- Emerging Chef: Bao Tran of [Giovedi](#) (O'ahu)
- Outstanding Bakery: [The Local General Store](#) (O'ahu)
- Outstanding Pastry Chef or Baker: Neale Asato of [Asato Family Shop](#) (O'ahu)
- Best Chef: Northwest and Pacific: Michele Di Bari of [Sale Pepe](#) (Maui)
- Best Chef: Northwest and Pacific: Ed Kenney of [Mud Hen Water](#) (O'ahu)
- Best Chef: Northwest and Pacific: Andrew Le of [The Pig and the Lady](#) (O'ahu)
- Best Chef: Northwest and Pacific: Sheldon Simeon of [Tiffany's Restaurant and Bar](#) (Maui)
- Best Chef: Northwest and Pacific: Yuya Yamanaka of [Paris Hawai'i](#) (O'ahu)

**Alan Wong's at The Kahala Hotel and Resort (O'ahu)** is set to open to the public on 8 April, marking the chef's return to a namesake fine dining restaurant. Guests hoping to be among the first to dine at the new restaurant from 25 March up until the public opening are invited to book the resort's Legacy of Aloha package, which includes restaurant reservations and a dining credit for the first two weeks of operation. Reservations for Alan Wong's at The Kahala Hotel and Resort are available now on OpenTable for dining on or after 8 April. [KahalaResort.com](#)

**Asato's Waikiki at Hyatt Regency Waikiki Beach (O'ahu)** debuted "Flavor Lab," an elevated dessert omakase experience located within Kings & Queens. This interactive, hour-long tasting journey (\$58) celebrates Hawai'i's nostalgic "small kid time" flavors through a curated four-course menu. Guests enjoy a "Taste of the Crack Seed Shop" sampler, a custom house made soda lab where they can create their own infusions, and artisanal Japanese-style shave ice (kakigori) featuring unique toppings, like Crème Brûlée or Li Hing Strawberry Crunch Cake. Reservations are required. [Asatos.com](#)

**Japengo at Hyatt Regency Maui Resort and Spa** is offering an exclusive Omakase Experience, featuring a chef-guided, multicourse tasting menu showcasing fresh local ingredients and nigiri. Designed as a culinary journey, the dinner combines the restaurant's Japanese cuisine with a sunset-view setting. Guests can enjoy the dinner, with wine and sake pairings available on select evenings. [Hyatt.com](#)

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**Maui Ocean Center** is now home to the newest location of Ululani's Hawaiian Shave Ice. Situated near the aquarium's entrance, the stand is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is not required to purchase shave ice, and guests may obtain a wristband at the front gate for access. The stand's menu features signature Ululani flavors, such as Hawaiian Rainbow (strawberry, pineapple, vanilla) and Broke Da Mouth (pickled mango and li hing mui), as well as a Maui Ocean Center exclusive shave ice flavor with calamansi, passionfruit and guava syrups. Ululani's also offers merchandise created exclusively for the new location.

[MauiOceanCenter.com](http://MauiOceanCenter.com)

**Piko at Outrigger Kona Resort and Spa (Island of Hawai'i)** is hosting two special holiday buffets for Easter Sunday and Mother's Day. The Easter Sunday Grand Buffet on 5 April, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., will feature a menu including carved rib of beef, leg of lamb, grilled fresh fish, steamed crab legs, waffles, and a dessert selection with a chocolate fountain. The restaurant's Mother's Day Grand Buffet on 10 May, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., will feature a prime rib carving station, steamed snow crab legs, fresh seafood selections, 'ahi poke, oysters on the half shell, made-to-order omelets, and a chocolate fountain as well. Reservations are recommended. [Outrigger.com](http://Outrigger.com)

### **Rum & Chocolate Tasting at House of Mana Up (O'ahu)**

Waikiki's House of Mana Up at Royal Hawaiian Center now presents a unique rum and chocolate tasting experience in partnership with Kō Hana Hawaiian Agricole Rum and Mānoa Chocolate Hawaii. The guided, 30-minute session invites guests to sip a curated selection of classic and cocktail pours of Hawaiian Agricole rum paired with handcrafted bean-to-bar chocolates, offering insight into each maker's story and craft. Tastings are available daily with reservations recommended; pricing varies for *kama'āina* and visitors.

[HouseOfManaUp.com](http://HouseOfManaUp.com)

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### **About HTUSA**

Hawai'i Tourism United States (HTUSA), managed by the Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau, is contracted by the Hawai'i Tourism Authority (HTA) for marketing management services in the continental U.S. The HTA, the state of Hawai'i's tourism agency, was established in 1998 to ensure a successful visitor industry well into the future. Its mission is to strategically manage Hawai'i tourism in a sustainable manner consistent with the state of Hawai'i's economic goals, cultural values, preservation of natural resources, community desires and visitor industry needs. For more information about the Hawaiian Islands, visit [gohawaii.com](http://gohawaii.com).

**Special note to media:** *HTUSA recognizes the use of the 'okina [ʻ] or glottal stop, one of the eight consonants of the (modern) Hawaiian language; and the kahakō [ā] or macron (e.g., in place names of Hawai'i such as Lāna'i). However, HTUSA respects the individual use of these markings for names of organizations and businesses.*

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