Praise for Top Maui Restaurants

"This book is a treasure chest of information. This is the third edition of the book that I've purchased over the years, and each year James and Molly exceed my expectations and amaze me that they continue to seek out and find gems of restaurants on Maui. This book is more like a "Bible" than a reference book when it comes to providing valuable information, and the money that you'll save by following their advice and dining at the recommended establishments will pay for this book many times over. I'm sold on James and Molly!"

- Edward Mendelsohn, Weston, FL

"I love ur book. We just left maui and I used ur book for the second year in a row. U and your wife have the best advice."

– Alison, Sent from her Verizon Wireless BlackBerry

"This book is one of two guidebooks to Maui that we consider a must. Unlike the free guides readily available everywhere, the authors give you the straight scoop on a whole range of restaurants. It is very easy on Maui to find terrible restaurants and leave feeling ripped off. Even the bad ones are expensive. This guide led us to several places we would not otherwise have given a second look ... This wonderful, entertaining guide was worth every penny. It will be on our short list of "must brings" to Maui — unless there is a new version out."

– S. Piper, Portland, OR

"Not having visited Maui in 30 years, I had no idea where our family of four would be able to eat at reasonable prices. Given the fact that Hawaii, in general is so expensive, this wonderful book not only gave a comprehensive and entertaining review of Maui's offerings, but it was organized, thorough and easy to use as a daily guide ... This book made an important part of our trip less challenging and took away the stress and frustration of trying to find nice, clean and reasonably priced restaurants. I am so very glad we purchased this book — I recommend it highly — no one should travel to Maui without it!"

- Kraig and Debbie, York, PA

"We just returned from Maui with a well-used copy of this book! We are VERY frequent visitors to Maui (about three times a year) ... The book paid for itself the first new place we tried. James and Molly, mahalo nui loa!" - KIMBERLY SHAW, WAILEA, HI

"We have been coming to Maui for years, and love good food. We therefore have some experience regarding the good restaurants. However, because we bought this book, we happily dined at several restaurants that we would not have otherwise frequented. Besides being accurate, the Jacobsons write in a way that is entertaining and plain fun. They are obviously devoted foodies, and their descriptions of some of the dishes that they like best are such that you can almost taste them. As anyone who has been to Maui knows, food is quite expensive over here. You can spend a great deal of money at a mediocre restaurant just as easily as at a great one. This makes the purchase price of this book (about the price of an appetizer at a good Maui restaurant) a bargain. If you like good food, and are coming over here, buy this book!"

- PAULA A. WOOD, HILTON HEAD ISLAND, SC

"I'm a resident of Maui, and think this book is great. If I decide to go out to a nice restaurant I want to know that I'm going to get what I pay for. So far I haven't been disappointed by their recommendations. Thanks for bringing honest reviews about restaurants to Maui rather than having to rely on the Menu guide."

- LAURA A. BURGER, KIHEI, HI

"Just a note to thank you for the *Top Maui Restaurants* guide. My husband I used it extensively and found some great food – your guide was very helpful. Merry Christmas and Mahalo for the guide."

- GAE SELLSTEDT, VANCOUVER, BC

"I ordered your guide on-line. It is excellent. We are from Calgary, Alberta and have been to Maui twice but not for over 10 years, so your guide will come in handy when we visit again in April."

- Terry & Susan Winnitoy, Calgary, Alberta

"My wife and I spend a couple months on Maui every year, and we eat out every day, so we thought we knew a lot about Maui restaurants. I even have a website of my own reviewing Maui restaurants, hotels, condos, sights and activities, so I constantly try to keep up on the latest and best Maui restaurants in all price ranges. But this book, Top Maui Restaurants, taught me much more. It helped me find out about many excellent restaurants I was not familiar with even after years of going to Maui. It helped me learn about what are the best things to order at certain restaurants. It helped me choose restaurants based on what I most wanted for any given meal based on food types, ambience, and service. Most guides to Maui restaurants just tell you the basic facts (location, type of food, and hours of operation). This book of restaurant reviews gives you all of that, plus so much more, with detailed expert evaluations and opinions. It's like the difference between looking up a restaurant in the phonebook compared to reading a full-page review of that restaurant in a local newspaper. These authors know Maui restaurants!" - Maui Jon, Michigan

"My wife and I went to Oahu and Maui for our honeymoon and on the airplane ride there we both made our choices for which restaurants to visit. We visited one or two places a day and were pleased with all of them!! We only wish there was a book for Oahu because our trip there was disappointing every night for food, luckily we were in Maui for nearly 10 days of eating so we were able to end on a good note. We tried every level of food - from cheap eats like Guri Guri and Café O'Lei, to expensive and top-notch at Capische? and Spago. We only wish we had more time to try more places. Some places we never would have even known about with the best burgers and views and popular places where we may have gone already but wouldn't have ordered what we did without James & Molly's recommendations. All in all, phenomenal book with great picks and truly a must have for first-time Maui travelers. We'll be using it on trip #2 and if anyone we know goes this books is top on our list to let them borrow. Enjoy! Thank you James & Molly!"

- PATRICK FLYNN, BOSTON, MA

"I love the honest and artful writing style, as well as advice that is unbiased and never steers me wrong. I have found many excellent recommendations and new favorites in this book. I have also had my suspicions confirmed.... (Why did I think that meal was so average when this restaurant is supposed to be so great?). Great advice, a must have for visiting, or living on Maui if you appreciate great food!"

"My wife and I own two vacation rental condos in Kihei which we visit 2-3 times each year. I just bought this book as a digital download a couple of days ago and it is fantastic. I started by reviewing our favorite places as well as some expensive disappointments we have been to, and their assessments were right in line with what we thought. That has given me the trust to try their recommendations later this week and on future trips. I am buying two paperback versions to keep in our condos for our guests to use. This is a book that is fun to sit and read if you are a "foodie" who likes to read food magazines and books, or likes to watch Food Network TV shows. Since we're in Kihei we're heavy

on Kihei-Wailea eating with the occasional trip to Lahaina-Ka'anapali-Kapalua, and this will be our guide to choose excellent food on those trips ... Their inexpensive-moderate restaurant recommendations are helpful, and selecting one great "cost is no object" romantic treat makes this book completely worthwhile. On our last several trips to Maui we have spent well north of \$200 for dinner for two at high-end restaurants that left us completely disappointed. Ouch. It won't happen again! Buy it and enjoy!"

– Rob Meldrum, Edmonds, WA

Top Maui Restaurants

From Thrifty to Four Star

Indispensable Advice from Experts Who Live, Play & Eat on Maui

> by James Jacobson & Molly Jacobson with Shannon Wianecki



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Introduction

This book is born of desperate necessity and soul-searing, passionate love. It has taken seven years to write, decades to research, and was inspired by a glorious Maui sunset and an unforgettable meal.

The story is so magical and romantic you might not believe it. Even my own mother can hardly believe it happened to me. But everything I'm about to tell you is true. And it could not have happened anyplace else on earth but

Maui.

Several years ago James and I met on a beach on Maui. With our first glance, we were catapulted into an intense love affair. We each gasped a little in recognition of our connection; it felt downright

mystical. Our hands took the initiative and reached for each other. As they intertwined for the first time, James murmured "Where

have you been all my life?" (Yes, he really said that.)

I couldn't answer. I could only stare, like a wide-eyed child, then look away at the sky above his head still streaked with my first Maui sunset. The first quarter moon was already bright, and two stars popped out as his eyes twinkled.

He asked, "Are you hungry?"

I nodded; my head heavy on my suddenly weak neck. I was hungry. I was also struck dumb and a little dizzy. My arms tingled just above the wrist. Was my circulation cut off? But he persisted:

"Do you like sushi?"

This snapped me out of my moonstruck state. My head cleared and I spoke crisply: "No, I don't. I love sushi. But I have to warn you, I think most of what passes for sushi shouldn't be fed to a stray cat."

don't 'like' food. I love food. If I don't love it, I don't swallow."

"I

- Ego, Restaurant Critic, Ratatouille

James smiled and drew me to his side. We turned and faced the distant island of Lana'i, arms wrapped around each other, pulling our quickly beating hearts close together. Watching the sky shift from pink to indigo to velvet, he said, "That's my girl. I knew you'd drift in someday." The waves crashed louder and louder un-

When time started again, James took me to my first Maui restaurant. Following the petite hostess in her silk kimono through a large, lusciously draped room filled with long-haired beauties and a piano player pouring honey-sweet music all over the floor was like walking into my most private dream. We were seated at a table along the rail on the wraparound lanai (porch). Two waiters

til they were all I heard.

immediately hustled away for our drinks.

We toasted each other, tinkling our white porcelain cups brimming with warm sake. The miso arrived, and we drank the deep, rich, hearty broth straight from the bowl. We told our life stories and held hands in between plates of fish and bowls of rice. Our fingers and our chopsticks cradled the tender pink and yellow and white morsels before delivering them to our tongues, where they quivered a little before giving up their sweet ocean flavors.

Every once in a while I pinched my thigh beneath my napkin. Was this really happening?

We stayed until the pianist had retired, other diners had departed, and the lights were dimmed. As they cleaned and stacked and cleared, the servers brought us cool water, tiny coconut creams, and refreshing green tea, assuring us that we should stay until we were ready to go. It was clear to all of us that magic was happening, and no one wanted to interrupt it.

On the drive back to the beach, heavy perfume from plumeria trees lining Wailea Ike Drive rushed through the open windows. I asked James "Is this heaven?"

He smiled and said "I think so." I had never felt so content, relaxed, and beautiful.

After we parted for the night, I called

my girlfriends back on the east coast and woke them up one by one. As I giggled and swooned and stammered my way through the story of my first Maui evening, dozens of stars sprang from their places in the black sky above my car and streaked across the ridges of Haleakala in the most glorious meteor shower I'd ever witnessed.

Our **Top Maui Restaurants** review guide was conceived on that magical night, but we didn't have an inkling of it yet. Two months later, firmly established in our new love affair and still discovering the depths of our mutual passion for food, James and I were driving by "our" restaurant when we saw a "Now Closed" sign over the door.

I was shocked. How could this paragon of fabulous dining, unbelievable ambience, and stellar service have thrown in the towel?

James shook his head sadly, and a weary expression crossed his face. By this time we had eaten in several of the restaurants reviewed in this guide, and he explained carefully that each one of them — no matter how wonderful — were in imminent danger of closing due to the heavy overhead and high turnover inherent in the Maui restaurant scene. Restaurants on Maui, he explained, open and close overnight like tropical flowers. For as many superb restaurants as there are now, several times that number had failed since 1990, when he first arrived. The following week we took a beach walk after breakfast. I noticed a beautiful restaurant practically on the sand and asked him why he hadn't suggested going there for dinner yet. He wrinkled his nose and said "It's not worth it."

I was skeptical, and pressed him. I was hungry for Italian, I said, and I wanted a special night out to celebrate our two month anniversary. According to several of my guidebooks, it was one of the best restaurants on the island. James gave up with an affectionate shrug, and we booked a table for that evening.

To my surprise and growing horror during the meal, James was right. I won't go into detail here, but will leave it to your imagination until you read the review on page 155.

After we left, I stormed "Why didn't anyone warn me?! We just spent over \$200 on a meal that wasn't worth half that — at a restaurant I never would have **bothered** with in New York!"

The next day we were still talking about it, and the next, and the next. Watching my consternation grow at the "inaccuracy" and "unreliability" of tourist guides, James's author wheels started turning. The problem, he decided, was that I was relying on dining guides, not dining reviews.

What's the difference? A whole heck of a lot.

Dining Guides are primarily descriptive,

and are designed to tell you the Who, What, Where, and When of a restaurant. They leave out the essential How and the crucial Why.

A Dining Review, on the other hand, is written by an actual person (or in this case, two persons joined at the hip) with actual opinions and actual (hopefully good) advice. A good review does not just *describe* the restaurant. It also helps you decide if you want to *eat* at the restaurant.

We noticed that most Maui dining guides are actually tourist guides — in other words, advertising vehicles. Relentlessly positive reviews became suspect. How could a restaurant have no flaws, whatsoever? Not possible. Or, at least, rarely possible.

Of course, many visitors turn to the internet for restaurant recommendations. We love review sites when we visit other cities — but beware when you visit a tourist area, because many reviews are written by one-time diners, not by locals who have an idea of what the restaurant offers on a consistent basis. We found this out ourselves, when we visited Kaua'i this year. If we had relied solely on internet reviews to decide where to eat, we would have missed one of the best meals we've had this year (at the Kaua'i Grill).

On a recent visit to Paris, we were steered wrong so many times by internet review sites (even those written in French by locals) that we gave up even checking. Instead, we consulted a lovingly researched book written by ... voila! ... a local foodie. She steered us toward the best restaurant values and — oh, heaven — the Salon Saveurs food show, which takes place twice a year, and happily, was open during our stay. It took us two days to work through the hundreds of stalls, but we ate like royalty for the next six weeks. With Clotilde's advice, we found countless other places we would have waltzed right by otherwise.

What about advice from locals? Maui is a small island, and many who live here have chosen their favorite restaurants based on their affection for the owners, rather than the quality of the food. Concierges are too often compensated for steering you towards certain restaurants. We don't take comps of any kind, and while we are all for friendship, it's what's on the plate that matters.

James and I both come from food-obsessed families and are excellent home chefs. We've eaten in the best restaurants in America, Europe, and Asia — not once or twice, but repeatedly. This past year we spent six weeks in one of the culinary capitals of the world, Paris, just to ... eat and study. They say you have to invest 10,000 hours into an activity in order to become an expert; after twenty years of dining out almost every night (and most days) we each individually passed that milestone years ago.

My aunt was a restaurant owner and nat-

ural foods chef, so I grew up knowing about and eating healthy, organic food prepared to taste absolutely delicious. I started baking at the age of seven, and made all family birthday cakes, including my own. I cooked for my family when my mother returned to work, and I learned firsthand how challenging it can be to focus amidst chaos and infuse love into the food. I also learned how magical food is when you do it right, and how a good meal can pull a fractious bunch together.

Later I lived in Boston and then New York City, where I ate at the best restaurants (not necessarily always the most expensive) every single day of the week. I took cooking classes, read cookbooks from cover to cover (even though I wasn't cooking myself — I'm a perpetual student).

I've always had friends who loved good food — and my four years in New York City taught me that food can be the very best form of social entertainment. Even when I moved to Montana — not known for its high cuisine — I made a point of learning as much as possible about grass-fed beef, local produce, and the wonderfully sweet, wild-but-mild huckleberries the bears love almost as much as we do.

James's obsession with food started at his grandmother's kitchen table, at age five. He studied her cooking, trying to capture her recipes on paper. She was a French and German cook who had never written anything down, so his notes (he still has the "recipe book") include "Stir until arm grows tired," and "Pour flour into one of Grandma's hands, two of mine, until it overflows just a little." To this day he speaks in German when he makes us breakfast.

When James started his business consultancy he worked with restaurant owners so he could get complimentary meals (we have a strict anti-comp policy for our guide — much to the chagrin of our accountant). This allowed him to dine at the best restaurants in Washington, DC, where he was raised. He has taken cooking classes everywhere he's lived and traveled — including Le Cordon Bleu in Paris — picking up hundreds of techniques, ingredients, and culinary mindsets. He's even studied Ayurvedic Indian cuisine with Mother Teresa's personal chef.

Once he realized the desperate need for a genuinely insightful, useful, honest, advice-oriented Maui restaurant review, James suggested we draft a review of "our" two restaurants: the dreamy-butclosed Japanese place and the too-wellmarketed-to-die-a-natural-death Italian joint.

And that's how Top Maui Restaurants was born. The more we wrote, the more we wanted to write ... until soon we had over fifty reviews. We shared them with a couple of friends who were coming to Maui, and they called them "invaluable." We started selling our guide to people researching their Maui vacation online. (We still do.) Over the years the guide increased to over 200 pages. During that time, many people asked if there was a paperback book available. They didn't want to print out 200 pages from their home computers. We shook our head dismissively and said "Who needs another travel book to Maui?"

But the demand kept coming, and we finally gave in for the 2008 edition of the guide. This, the 2012 edition, is still the definitive dining review guide to Maui — and, to our continual surprise, the second best-selling guidebook to Maui.

We get mail every day from readers who have just spent time here and used this book. Their stories about the memorable meals they've had are touching and spur us to create an even better guide for each year.

To that end, we've added a new voice for this edition: Shannon Wianecki has joined us as a contributor. We've always relied on reports from foodie friends to flesh out our views on Maui restaurants — in a way, this book gives you a the opinion of about twenty Maui residents — but Shannon is the most-foodiest-offoodies. [NB:We hate the word "foodie." But it seems to have stuck.]

Shannon very recently left her eightyear post as the Food Editor at *Maui No Ka Oi*, a magazine known for its gorgeous writing and glorious photos. She's also judged cooking competitions, hosted restaurant award dinners, and lectured on food writing. Oh, and she's waited tables in several five-star restaurants, slung espressos, and been an Indonesian short-order cook. The daughter of a French-trained pastry chef, she has been working with food in one capacity or another all her life. She's written about it for *Honolulu*, *Modern Luxury Hawaii*, *Gastronome*, and *Vacation & Travel* magazines. Her book credits include *Fodor's Hawaii*, *Fodor's Maui*, *Freedom in Your Relationship with Food*, and *Simple Ayurvedic Recipes*.

Bringing Shannon on as a formal contributor meant that we were able to keep some reviews we would normally have to cull due to lack-of-freshness. Her own experiences with each restaurant, and some of her "behind-the-scenes" knowledge, have been worked into each review. We wondered, when this project began, if Shannon's views would not mesh with ours. We shouldn't have. As she put it, "I continue to find it eerie how often I agree with your opinions on each restaurant!" Shannon has also beefed up the tips in the Top Maui Tips section.

Everyone who visits Maui feels the magic that flows through this place. It's not just paradise on earth — not just white sand beaches, endless skies, warm breezes, swaying palm trees, lush rainforests, green volcanoes, whales, dolphins, and rum drinks.

There's something else at work here. We

don't want to get too woozy, but Maui can make you kind of ... woozy. It's so ... delicious. Like a coconut warm from the sun, cut open and spilling its milk down your throat, it's sweet. When you come here, you relax on some deeper level and life starts looking more manageable. Parts of you that may have been dormant wake up. Life looks ... good.

We want you to relax on your vacation, and then relax some more. Stressing out about food — about when, where, how much, or what to eat — should not be on your agenda. Let us guide you. We write these reviews as if we were writing to our friends, and we would never recommend a place that we wouldn't send our best friend to. (In case you think we're always positive, we include some less-than-glowing reviews, especially those of places that market themselves well enough to attract your attention but are not worth your time or money.)

We write with one audience in mind: you. If the place looks dirty, we say so. If the food is overcooked, we point it out. If the dessert is brilliant, we cheer and ooh and ahh. The better the restaurant, the pickier we get.

We can usually dine anonymously, although now, of course, some of the more savvy restaurateurs recognize us. Still, we stick to our no-comping policy and refuse to take advertising from restaurants (even though some want us to). We eat out an average of eleven times every week, rotating through restaurants to update our reviews.

Our friends think we're nuts. They're happy to help by dining with us at certain places, and they report their own dining experiences back to us, but they flat out refuse to eat at many of the restaurants we have to review. And those who work with visitors get every new edition of the guide.

Why? Because the number one question they field from visitors is "Where should we eat tonight?"

You won't be asking that question. You'll be spending your time on Maui lazing by the pool, trailing your fingers in the tidal basins, or snorkeling. Thoughts of where to go to dinner may enter your mind, but they'll quickly be answered by flipping through this guide.

At least, that's our hope. After all, Maui can be magic — and we wouldn't want its romance lessened in any way.

In 2007 James and I were married on Lana'i. One day during our honeymoon, we caught a glimpse of Maui and knew we were looking at the beach on which we met those years ago. We imagined looking back through time at our former selves at that magical moment and embraced as we had then, drawing each other close and feeling each other's hearts beating with the ocean waves. We thought of our home, just one block away from that beach, and sighed with contentment and happiness. It's our most sincere hope that you will have a magical time while you are on Maui, too. This book should help. James and I wish you shooting stars and glorious sunsets, and very, very good eating.

Warm Aloha, Molly Jacobson Kihei, Maui, Hawaii December, 2011

How Reviews are Organized

There are nearly four hundred restaurants on Maui, and while we've eaten at the vast majority of them, we cannot include them all in this guide. We review nearly two hundred restaurants in this section, all of which we think are important. Restaurants are important for one of the following reasons:

- 1. They are restaurants we recommend.
- 2. They are restaurants we do *not* recommend, but have been asked about. We used to leave these restaurants out entirely (that's why we named the book *Top Maui Restaurants*) but then we received so many questions about these places that we had to include their reviews to be of service. Some of these restaurants spend a good deal on advertising, which is why so many are curious about them. In other cases, the restaurant may once have been quite good — even "Top" — but has since fallen in our estimation.

Restaurant Information

Along with the review itself, we list the:

- Street address, City, and region of the island (South Maui, West Maui, etc.)
- Nearby landmarks
- Meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner)
- Hours (accurate as of publication)
- Parking
- Phone number
- Website

Helpful Icons

There are several icons used in reviews, designed to help you get information "at a glance."

This symbol indicates we would visit the restaurant even if we weren't reviewing it. A restaurant that has a great view and awful food cannot get this symbol, but a restaurant that serves terrific food in a dumpy location can. You will see that some "3 Star" restaurants get our Top symbol, while some "4 Star" restaurants do not.

[NB: Please don't take this symbol as a guarantee. Also, please remember that the symbol is given at publication time — and things can change. If you register your book at www.TopMauiRestaurants. com/2012 you will get our update email, which will tell you if any restaurants have been moved into or out of this category.]



This symbol indicates the restaurant is noteworthy in some way. It may be that we love breakfast (but not dinner), or

that the noodles are fantastic but the rest of the menu isn't ... whatever the reason, we like them enough to recommend them for certain things. Read the review to get the full story.

If a restaurant does not have either of these symbols, assume that we do not feel strongly enough to recommend you visit.

Star Ratings

We thought long and hard before we created our 5 Star system, which incor-

porates five different ratings. It's very difficult to pin down a restaurant into a single Star rating. Instead, we rate on five separate categories: Food, Ambience, Service, Love, and Value. Each restaurant can earn up to five stars in each cate-

Food –

How good is the food, and with how much skill is it prepared? Restaurants lose points for poor ingredients, lousy recipes, unskilled prep work, and over- or under-cooked food.

Love

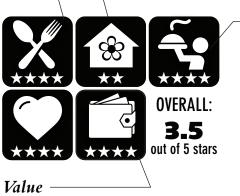
This rating reflects how much "love" we can feel in the restaurant and taste in the food. Love is hard to describe in words, because — like the emotion — love is primarily experiential: something you "know when you feel" (or in this case, taste). Remember how you felt when someone who loved you fed you something that tasted good? The feeling of being cared for and thought about is what we are trying to capture in this rating. That feeling can come through in a restaurant meal when the people in the kitchen and when it's a really loving restaurant, in the front of the house — genuinely care about your experience. They pay attention, and they get it right.

gory. Then we average the scores across the five categories to come up with an Overall Star Rating. The highest possible Overall Rating is 5 Stars, but no one has earned it (yet).

Here are the categories.

Ambience

What's the restaurant itself feel and look like? Generally, this rating will reflect how upscale the restaurant is. Beach shacks may score as low as 1 Star (although a clean beach shack would get 2 Stars and one with a gorgeous view might get 5 Stars), while high end restaurants could get as many as 5 Stars. Some restaurants with gorgeous views get to keep their Five Stars even if they have other flaws in decor, because we feel the overall impression is "Wow." Restaurants lose points for dirt, being stuffy, too windy, or in poor condition.



Service

How efficient, friendly, and knowledgeable is the service? (Also see the Tip on service in the Top Maui Tips section.) Restaurants lose Stars for indifferent or pretentious service (we think each is bad), slow service, and sloppiness or lack of courtesy.

Is the money spent worth the experience? Most restaurant critics don't really address this in their reviews — but most restaurant critics aren't writing for people dining on Maui, the most expensive place to eat out in America (according to a 2008 AAA survey). All Maui restaurants — with just a few rare exceptions charge at least 30% more than they could if they were on the mainland. (This is not just because we're a tourist market — it's also because rents are outrageous and food costs exorbitant.) This rating reflects how good a deal the restaurant represents when we take the previous ratings and the average cost of the restaurant into account. When we give a restaurant an average value rating — 3 stars — we mean that they give average value for Maui. If you see a 5 star rating, the value is extraordinary for Maui. A beach shack that quickly serves up bone-sucking good \$5 ribs might get 5 Stars for Value, while an expensive restaurant with pretentious service and so-so food might get 3 Stars for Value (or fewer). Accordingly, an expensive restaurant with stellar service and fabulous food and ambience could easily get a value score of 5 Stars.

Overall Score

This number reflects the five other ratings, averaged.

As you start comparing restaurants to each other, you will see why our system works: there are "Top" restaurants in every price range. What is most important to recognize is everything is relative. The real value in this scoring system appears only when you compare restaurants to one another. We stand by our opinions, but we don't expect everyone to agree with us. As objective as we try to be, our personal preferences can't help but be part of our experience. Like most restaurant critics, we feel that reviews should be seen as conversation starters, not as verdicts. Restaurants change. They get better and they get worse - and diners change, too. What was fabulous a few years ago may no longer be exciting.

Restaurant Prices

You might be surprised by how differently people perceive whether a restaurant is "Inexpensive," "Moderate" or "Expensive." After years of trying to educate people about our definitions, we have given up, and now just tell you how much entrées cost.

Every restaurant is rated from one to four dollar signs (\$-\$\$\$).

- **\$** The average entrée price is \$10 or less
- \$\$ The average entrée price is \$10-\$20

- **\$\$\$** The average entrée price is \$20-\$35
- **\$\$\$\$** The average entrée price is \$35 and up

Note that the \$ only refers to the average cost of the entrées on the regular menu, not the overall cost of the meal, including appetizers, desserts, drinks, tax, and tip.

Special Features

Certain restaurants have special features that you may be looking for. These are



usually covered in the review, but also through the use of symbols:

The restaurant has a view of sunset during most of the year (remember, the sun moves through the sky as the seasons



change, so the location of the sunset can vary).

The restaurant is either right on the water or there is an unobstructed view (for example, a beach walk or street) of the water.



The restaurant serves alcohol. The review usually indicates whether there is a full bar or just a beer and wine list.



The restaurant is near Kahului Airport (OGG).



The restaurant offers a children's menu and/or is loved by children. If this symbol does not appear, assume the restaurant is geared more for adults than children. This does not mean that your well-behaved child who is experienced at dining out is unwelcome — just check with the restaurant.

Reservations are recommended or even required. During very popular travel times like Christmas week, Spring Break, and the summer months, nearly every restaurant will be very busy, so you might want to call for reservations, even if this symbol is not there.

New York

The restaurant has made some level of effort to include vegetarian options. There is only one all-veg-

etarian, full-service restaurant on Maui (*Fresh Mint*). All others with this listing have either a separate vegetarian menu or are considered vegetarian-friendly because they are willing to modify their meals or methods for vegetarians/vegans. If this is a concern for you, please notify the restaurant ahead of time so they can note your preferences for the kitchen.



The restaurant usually offers a discount to diners who carry a Hawaii driver's

license or other state-issued ID. Sometimes the discount is only offered at certain times or during certain months.

The restaurant has a particularly romantic ambience and is good for a special occasion (for example a wedding dinner, honeymoon dinner, or anniversary).



The restaurant has a consistently good Happy Hour: good drinks and food, and sometimes, depending on location, a good sunset view.



The restaurant has live music on a regular basis.



American Express accepted

Discover accepted

MasterCard Accepted

VISA Visa accepted

CASH Cash only

A Note about Accuracy:

Travel information of any kind is subject to change at any time, especially information about restaurants on Maui. Restaurants open and close virtually overnight here, and we cannot guarantee that any reviewed in this book will still be open when you arrive, or that the hours, prices, and menu won't be very different. Just as an example, the night before this edition went to the book designer, we picked up some dinner at the only Chinese restaurant on Maui that we like. The owner informed us that they were closing at the end of 2011. Bummer! We pulled the review and had to find the many places in the book that we had mentioned East Ocean. All information is accurate as of publication — but for the latest updates you should register this book at www. TopMauiRestaurants.com/2012 and also pay attention to our email updates, Aloha Friday.

How We Review Restaurants

There are a great many food writers working these days — especially with the explosion of interest in this, the most primal of experiences. Many are very good writers, but not everyone approaches their work the way a journalist does. James' dad was a reporter, and he got the journalism bug early: the first time James hosted his own full-length radio show, he was only 16. He interviewed everyone from Supreme Court justices to pop culture icons like Dr. Ruth Westheimer to titans of industry like Ted Turner on a major talk radio station in Washington, DC. Molly wrote for the arts section at a Boston newspaper, and reviewed books for years ... so it never occurred to either of us that we would approach restaurant reviewing in any way other than that recommended by the **Association of Food Journalists**:

Every restaurant is visited multiple times. Every restaurant has been visited at least twice, and in most cases, three, or more, times before we pen a review. We do this because every restaurant can have a stellar day, and every restaurant can have a terrible day. If a restaurant is inconsistent over time, it is hard for us to recommend it unreservedly, and we say so. We refresh our reviews on a regular basis, and certainly as close to publication time as possible.

We pay for every meal. If the restaurant offers a discount to locals or has a special running, we take the discount (we are ethical, but not dumb). At times we have been comped a dessert or an appetizer by our server. Very rarely is this because we have been recognized as critics; usually it is because we are good customers. To this day, some of our very favorite restaurants clearly have no idea that we write about them.

We dine under cover when possible. We used to be able to be completely "under cover," and most restaurants on Maui still have no idea who we are. But Maui is a very small island, and there is less than two degrees of separation between us and most restaurateurs. When everyone goes to the same movie theaters, shops at the same stores, and goes to the same beaches, it is easy to get to know others. And because we have so many other projects going in our businesses, some have put two and two together and do recognize us when we walk in the door (even after we use a different name for the reservation).

[NB: We've always suspected that there isn't much a restaurant can do to improve their performance, even if they do recognize us. But we were proven correct a couple of years ago when a friend of ours told a very expensive restaurant (*Merriman's Kapalua*) that we were coming that evening — and that we had previously had several disastrous experiences. Despite the warning, we still had an awful meal with excruciatingly slow service and food so salty we were still reeling the next day.You can't send out for good food, or train servers, if you just don't have it together. By the way, things may be looking up at *Merriman's* based on our last meal there. See the review for more details.]