

## 'AMA'AMA Restaurant at Aulani: An Aulani Dining Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Whenever we go to Disney parks and resorts, I look forward to enjoying the finest dining the parks have to offer, and it was no different when we headed to Aulani, A Disney Resort and Spa in Ko Olina, O'ahu.

The fine dining here comes in the shape of 'AMA'AMA, a name that comes from a choice type of mullet fish native to Hawai'i that was immortalized in the 1930s song of the same name. As the name suggests, fish is one of the things you'll find plenty of on the menu. 'AMA'AMA serves contemporary island cuisine that mixes Hawaiian, Asian, and European flavors for a truly unique experience -- and best of all, it's all delivered in a beautiful, beachfront setting.

□ We dined at 'AMA'AMA twice for dinner, and once for breakfast during our stay, and I have to say every meal was a wonderful experience. We were lucky enough to snag beachfront tables at every meal, so I can't comment on what the view is like from elsewhere in the restaurant, but the tables did seem to be carefully placed to give everyone a good view.

□ The atmosphere is absolutely beautiful, with some breath-taking views, although as we were there in November, we didn't get the full experience at dinner, as the sun by then was setting earlier in the evening. That's something worth keeping in mind, as I have to be honest, it didn't even cross my mind. That's why I'm so glad we did head there for breakfast one morning, as the scene in front of us was pure paradise, with a beautiful white beach and a shimmering blue lagoon beyond. We watched people enjoying the resort, and even a wedding on the beach. Having said that, there's still a certain appeal about this setting at dusk and then at night.

So on to the 'AMA'AMA menu ... we're talking a similar style to the Signature restaurants Walt Disney World, such as the California Grill, in terms of regular changes to the offerings. When we dined there, I tried the Kamuela tomato soup with a mini truffled Brie cheese, and Portuguese sweet bread "sandwich," which is now one of my favorite Disney dishes ever. The flavors were just superb. The big eye tuna poke with rice chips and avocado was nearly as good, but not quite. I also tried a bit of the 'AMA'AMA seafood sampler, made up of sustainable-catch ceviche, crab leg, jumbo shrimp, and Goose Point oysters, and the thing was absolutely massive. Mind you, it needed to be with a \$26 price tag for an appetizer!

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□ Other options on the menu while we were there included the 'AMA'AMA chopped salad with crispy wonton strips, bacon, chopped tomatoes, avocado, eggs, furikake, capers, and house-made ranch dressing; the island field green salad with sea asparagus, Big Island hearts of palm, watermelon radish, heirloom cherry tomatoes, and papaya seed vinaigrette; and the crispy Singaporean pepper shrimp with green papaya salad and Thai ketchup.

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□ When it comes to entrees, fish is big on this menu, with three options, and only four meat options, which was a pleasant change for this non-meat eater. I tried the Hawaiian snapper with a fricassee of keahole lobster, artichoke, and Kahuku corn, served with white wine lemongrass sauce, although sadly, this wasn't to my taste. There was nothing wrong with the dish, I just wasn't enjoying the snapper. However, on our second visit I ordered the island seafood Thai curry served with Japanese eggplant and Choi Suni with Jasmine rice. This dish was served up table side, after it arrived in a bag, having been cooked in its own juices, and that made for a wonderful taste.

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□ On our visits, my husband sampled the beef filet with a braised short rib croquette, horseradish potato puree with espelette, and sauted island kale and bacon; and the Colorado rack of lamb, tomato couscous, root vegetables, preserved lemon, and lamb Harissa sauce, both of which he really enjoyed.

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□ When it came to dessert, we both absolutely fell in love with the same dish after sharing it on our first visit; the pineapple crêpe brulee in puff pastry with pineapple compote. I suggested sharing it when we returned, but my husband was having none of that, so we ended up with one each -- that's how good it was! I would have loved to have tried the apple-guava tart tatin with vanilla bean ice cream and Li-Hing Mui cotton candy, as it sounded fascinating, but sadly, as I'm allergic to apple, that wasn't an option. The chocolate cake with Kau'u coffee cream and caramel chard sounded wonderful, although I wasn't too sure about the Yuzu cheesecake with mixed berry compote, and whipped citrus panna cotta.

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□ The service here was exceptionally good, but then again, with such an impressive menu, you'd expect it to be. The meals we had were well timed; not too drawn-out, but long enough to enjoy and truly savor the food.

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□ As for the cost, it is comparable to Signature Dining at other fine dining Disney establishments. Including tip and a glass of wine each, our meals came to around \$200 for the two of us.

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□Turning quickly to breakfast, the menu was pretty expansive, and I struggled to decide what to go with. In the end, I got the tropical fruit plate with honey yoghurt, and the Hawaiian flavors "gift of bread," a pastry basket made up of guava fan, coconut cream pocket, croissant, and orange-macadamia nut muffin, and that was exactly the right choice. My husband helped me out with the bread, while sampling the corned beef hash served with two poached eggs and Aulani potatoes.

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□Amongst the other options were two eggs any style served with a choice of meat, and today's Hawaiian sustainable catch -- now that's something you rarely see on a breakfast menu! If that's too much, there was also an egg white omelette with smoked salmon and herb cream cheese, and three-egg vegetarian, ham, or cheese omelettes.

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□If you have a sweeter tooth, then you can get a Belgian waffle, buttermilk pancakes, or a whole local papaya. In a nod to the many Japanese visitors, there's a Japanese breakfast, made up of Misoyaki island catch, tamago, miso soup, steamed rice, dried seaweed, and pickled vegetables. And in line with the motto, "It's five o'clock somewhere," breakfast cocktails are on the menu!

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□All in all, 'AMA'AMA is a wonderful addition to Aulani, and for me, somewhere not to be missed during a stay there, as the location is unbeatable, the food is superb, and the service very attentive. Sure, it's pricey, but is it worth it? You bet!

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)*

Article last updated: 07-31-2014

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