



THE BEAUTY OF THIS PARK IS EMBODIED IN
THE HEART OF THIS COMMUNITY.

Shopping in Kapaʻa

Eclectic finds in eastern Kauaʻi

BY DARLENE DELA CRUZ ■ PHOTOS BY LEAH BALL



Sabrina Bounsall Curtis browses the Larimar stone collection at South China Sea

On Kaua'i's eastern shore, a humble town makes its map mark. A 15-minute drive along Kuhio Highway leads you from the island's main airport in Lihue to the Royal Coconut Coast, a title given in homage to the emerald palm groves studding Kaua'i's eastside. It's said that some of these trees date back to Kaua'i's plantation era, commodities significant to Island royalty.

Left of your driver's seat is a view of the "Sleeping Giant," Mount Nounou, that watches over fields of agriculture at its foot. Through the passenger's window, vistas of pristine Pacific blue are intermittently broken by modest "old Hawai'i"-style storefronts and multi-story resorts shaded by the area's namesake fronds.

This is Kapa'a.

In spite of its quaint plantation town charm, Kapa'a (meaning "the solid" in Hawaiian) is slowly becoming a popular hub for tourists and locals. Think of it as an on-the-beaten-path locale for off-the-beaten-path everything: Kapa'a has grade-school science and art exhibits at the Kaua'i Children's Discovery Museum, grill-your-own S'mores at Scotty's Beachside BBQ, an orchid abundance at Orchid Alley, historic churches and cemeteries, among other things.

"Kapa'a has gone through a lot of changes over the years," says John Davison, a Kapa'a resident since 1978 who started an art gallery in the town four years ago. "It's



Artwork by Winston Kawamoto



Whimsical pieces showcased in John Davison's gallery



A shopper snags a great find at Hula Girl

experiencing a boom now with a lot of interesting business. But it (still) feels like old Kaua'i."

One of Kapa'a's biggest draws is its eclectic shopping scene. Kuhio Highway is lined with a sort of small-town "strip mall" full of diverse mom-and-pop boutiques. A block-long walk yields modern Hurley skater T-shirts, hippie hemp wear, minerals and stones, ukuleles, artwork and handmade items from as far as India — all housed in wood-board buildings that display their generation-spanning duration.

With that, here are some noted spots that showcase the diversity of Kapa'a's shopping.

Kawamoto Store

What was once an old Maytag Home Appliance Center on Kuhio Highway now houses artwork by Davison and Winston Kawamoto. The Kawamoto store is a relic of old Kapa'a, dating back to 1954. Since then, the Kawamoto Store has served several different functions — as a grocery store and Schwinn bike shop — becoming in the '90s a showcase for the fruits of Kawamoto's spare time hobby.

"I turned the store into a place to show my art," Kawamoto says. His oil-based portraits of people line one half of the store space.

The other half belongs to Davison. A painter himself, Davison's Island-inspired work stands alongside his wife Hayley's intricately carved koa furniture. Jewelry and other

whimsical handcrafts from Kaua'i artists also are available at Davison's gallery.

"I like art with a sense of humor," Davison says.

4-1322 Kuhio Highway. Call 808-821-8022.

Hula Girl

Housed in the Kawamura Building is a haven for Hawaiian gifts. Tiki mugs, Hula Girl coffee and other kitschy items sit among Paradiso and Pineapple Moon Hawaiian shirts, silk ties and Hinano casual apparel. A photo of Elvis looks down at Hula Girl shoppers while the vintage Avanti aloha shirt sported by The King in the picture can be purchased a few racks away. Hula Girl also carries aloha shirts with the classic Primo Beer print, reminiscent of one of Hawai'i's favorite drinks.

Fashionistas will also enjoy the selection of fancy Donna Rico dresses, which sales clerk Tabitha Booth says are popular for special occasions.

"Locals come here for weddings," Booth says.

4504 Kukui St. Call 808-822-1950.

South China Sea Trading Company

Beautiful handbags in its window offer passersby a glimpse of this store's stunning jewelry and accessories, including handcrafted hairclips and souvenirs. South China Sea's shop also shimmers with silks finely made into traditional Asian Chong Sum dresses.

"We offer gift items and clothing with an Asian theme. Some are imported, some of the jewelry is made locally," says South China Sea clerk Linda Lopez.

One of South China Sea's unique offerings is Larimar jewelry. Larimar is an extremely rare gemstone only found in the Carribbean. The stone of varying bluish hues — the highest quality being a volcanic blue color — is a recent discovery, with its mining having begun in the '70s. South China Sea offers Larimar set in rings, bracelets and other forms.

4-1354 Kuhio Hwy. #2. Call 808-823-8655

Divine Planet

Located in the Kaua'i Village Shopping Center, Divine Planet offers Asian-imported items as well. However, the store's selection of skirts, tops and dresses are hip enough to mold seamlessly into mainstream fashion. The store has oversized totes made from rice bags, as well as pashminas and even home accessories. Divine Planet also will customize jewelry with its extensive inventory of exquisite beads.

Credit its owner Sonja McGinnis' tastes for Divine Planet's eclecticism. She and her husband Mike began the store four years ago and travel frequently to Asia to acquire items for the store.

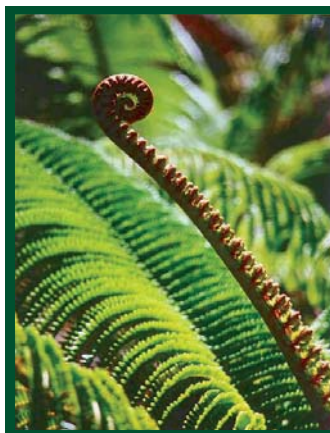
"My husband and I combine my love of shopping and his love of travel," McGinnis says. "We buy what we like."

Divine Planet also carries Kaua'i calcite, an orange-brown gem said to calm and relieve frustration. Unique to Divine Planet as well are high-quality leather wallets made from stingray skin.

4-831 Kuhio Hwy. Call 808-821-1835.



Fine imported fabrics at Divine Planet



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Please bring a rain jacket, as walk takes place rain or shine
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