



# Hawai'i



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AAA HAWAI'I ANNUAL REVIEW

Baking With Maui's  
Sweet Bread Ladies

## Worth Its Salt

**Fresh seafood is the star at this modern oceanfront restaurant**

BY JOAN CONROW

### Red Salt

**Ko'a Kea Hotel & Resort**  
2251 Po'ipū Road, Kōloa  
(808) 828-8888; koakea.com

- **Prices:** Starters, \$10–\$16; entrées, \$24–\$48; desserts, \$9
- **Service:** Knowledgeable, friendly, attentive
- **Setting:** Contemporary, upscale yet relaxed, and decidedly romantic, with soft lights and a view of the sea through tall French windows
- **Best dishes:** *Togarashi*-crusted seared 'ahi; pan-seared opah; liliko'i-ginger crème brûlée

Thoughtful best describes the dining experience at Red Salt. Linen cocktail napkins, a strikingly minimalist presentation, and an innovative melding of flavors and textures offer proof that careful attention is paid to every detail, with memorable results.

An example is the *togarashi*-crusted seared 'ahi, an elevated version of a classic Island starter. The chef places a tiny wedge of mandarin orange on each tender slice of tuna, lays them on a bed of *wakame* (seaweed), and offers a sesame-ginger dipping sauce to create a sweet-hot taste sensation. Another standout appetizer is the single plump scallop, which is given a quick pass over heat to form a golden crust. Its delicate flesh pairs well with the faintly fruity liliko'i beurre blanc, pea shoots, and crispy Okinawan sweet potatoes.

The soups—a warm bisque made from Hamakua mushrooms and a delicate gazpacho—arrive in pitchers. The server pours them into bowls that contain, respectively, a morel croquette and a cube of cucumber and Serrano



At Red Salt in Kōloa, starters like the delicate seared diver scallop with liliko'i beurre blanc set the tone for an elegant dinner.

ham salad. The salad falls apart in the gazpacho, adding to the taste and texture. Two kinds of roasted beets sit alongside a mix of local greens, pickled onions, pine nuts, and goat cheese to compose a hearty salad with slightly sweet overtones.

A hefty fillet of opah, perfectly seared and moist, crowns a heap of king crab home fries. The whole-grain bread, served with unsalted butter and a tiny bowl of Kaua'i red salt, is good for sopping up every drop of the dish's sake-spiced coconut broth. The rack of lamb—medium is advised since the kitchen tends toward rare—is appropriately pink. Neat orange dices of mango gelée enhance, both aesthetically and gustatorily, the exotic

smoky-sweetness of the dark tamarind glaze, while the buttery Israeli cous-cous and cauliflower is an intriguing side dish. Other noteworthy entrées are the mahimahi with black rice and avocado-ginger salsa and the pork tenderloin with guava barbecue sauce.

The food at Red Salt is satisfying, yet remarkably light, which leaves room, fortunately, for dessert. The float is a fun concoction of root beer gelato and O'ahu-made cream soda, served with a warm dark-chocolate-chip-and-macadamia-nut cookie. But it's the delectably creamy liliko'i-ginger crème brûlée, with its thin caramel crust and zesty caramelized ginger, that provides a suiting finale to an exquisite meal. ■