



Hawai'i

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Vegetarian on the Volcano

A new café adds fresh local flavors to a famous hot spot

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY BILL HARBY

Café Ono

19-3834 Old Volcano Road, Volcano
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volcangardenarts.com

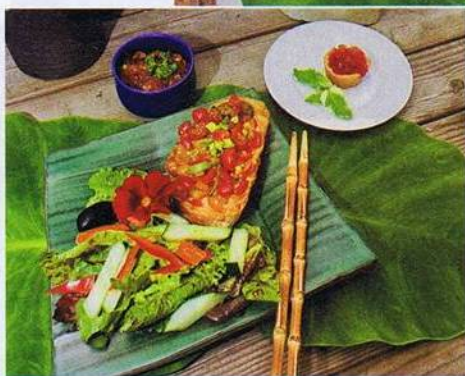
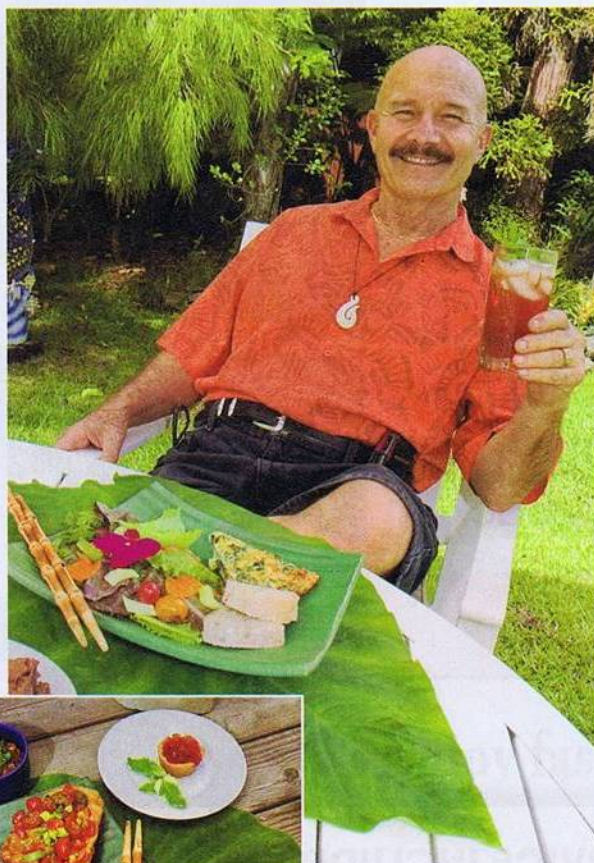
- **Prices:** Starters, \$6.50; entrées, \$10–\$12; desserts, \$1–\$3.50
- **Service:** Casual
- **Setting:** Garden fresh
- **Best dishes:** Chili; mixed greens; locally made pastries

Food is art," says Ira Ono, an artist who runs Café Ono, the newest eatery in Volcano Village on Hawai'i Island.

This man with a Hawaiian name—who also manages the café's attached art gallery, Volcano Garden Arts, and the bed-and-breakfast cottage out in the garden—hails from New York City. He came to the Islands in 1968, when his last name was still Kaufman. (Ask him to describe how he became Mr. Ono—it's a sweet story, and it'll give you an excuse to chat with the charming guy.)

As an artist, Ono makes everything by hand, including his clay masks and collages (which are fashioned from recycled materials). That's how his menu is created, too. No, nothing is recycled, but everything is handmade. And fresh. And local. And vegetarian.

No wonder Ono describes his food as "green cuisine." The menu is short but full of bright flavors—chili and soup du jour; salads of organic greens,



Ira Ono (above), owner of Café Ono, enjoys quiche and mixed greens in the restaurant's garden. Other favorites: veggie chili and the open-face hummus sandwich (left).

or sweet potato, or pasta, or beans and potato; quiche; and open-face sandwiches of hummus or egg salad topped with tomato-basil salsa.

"Some people are afraid of vegetarian food," says Ono. "They think they're going to get a dry, gray soy-burger." But there was nothing dry or gray about lunch on a recent sunny day. (Eat alfresco in the beautiful garden, and you'll get to converse with

Earnest, the delightful maître d'—if you speak goat.) The chili was tasty and colorful with crisp corn kernels and fat glistening kidney beans, missing only the fiery spice you might expect from a restaurant on top of an erupting volcano.

The mixed greens snapped and crunched like they were picked that morning. Indeed, the colorful nasturtiums were right from Ono's garden; he's experimenting with three varieties for color and taste. The balsamic vinaigrette that topped the greens and flowers was light and poised between sweet and sour.

The open-face hummus sandwich was almost too beautiful to eat, covered with luscious little red and yellow tomato halves on three-seed bread from

a cottage baker down the road. Next time, I'll ask to have the bread toasted so it stands up to the moist mix.

For dessert, locally made pastries are worth a splurge. The 'ohelo berry mini-tart was two bites of crunchy crust and luscious jammy fruit from berries picked right in the neighborhood.

All in all—the menu, the host, the setting—onolicious. ■