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26



PLANNER'S WORKSHOP

green scene

➔ Some meetings properties are beginning to add a new amenity to their offerings: on-site farms

Hotels That Harvest

By Alex Palmer

As the “farm-to-table” approach to dining has gotten more popular, resorts and hotels have begun to plant and cultivate their own crops. Dedicating part of a property to sustainable growing is not only eco-friendly, but can enhance a group’s experience.

In May, Waikoloa Beach Marriott Resort & Spa in Hawaii announced that it had planted 39 Kona coffee seedlings that it would be offering to guests when they are harvested. By September, the trees are expected to produce beans that could be offered to visitors, and in the meantime, the property’s chef has created a custom recipe for House Grown Arabica Coffee Bean Rub for guests to use in barbecuing and other kinds of cooking.

“It brings something to the property that is indigenous and unique to the Big Island and Hawaii — we’re the only state in the U.S. that produces coffee,” says Connie Flattery, director of sales and marketing for the Waikoloa Beach Marriott Resort & Spa. “It lets people enjoy a cultural experience of Hawaii that they might not typically associate with the island.”

The initiative was launched as a celebration of the 200th anniversary of Kona coffee in Hawaii, and the idea occurred to the property’s general manager when speaking with the head bellman, who owns his own small coffee farm. Tapping the bellman’s skill and other



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Connie Flattery, Waikoloa Beach Marriott Resort & Spa

local experts, Waikoloa Beach made sure the soil and other conditions were ideal for planting coffee trees.

The hotel is just the latest in this trend of resort farming. Carmel Valley Ranch, which sits on 500 acres of wooded parkland in Carmel, CA, has constructed and maintains an on-site apiary of 60,000 Italian honey bees working steadily to forage pollen and nectar from the flowers on the property’s 7,000 lavender plants.

Groups can take part in a beekeeping experience in which visitors can don a beekeeping

suit and get a close look at the bees in action. Visitors may be surprised to find hearing thousands of bees buzzing can actually be a soothing, even meditative, experience.

“Our resort is a very interesting business ecosystem,” says Brian Gipson, director of marketing for the Carmel Valley Ranch. “When someone chooses The Ranch, they make the decision to use her spending power to align with a company that supports local industry and strives to reduce its carbon footprint every step of the way.”

Of course, participants will also get a taste of the Carmel Valley Ranch Honey, and will also be given a travel-size lavender beeswax balm to take home.

Other properties boast much more expansive crops. The Hotel Chocolat in St. Lucia is set in the

cocoa groves of the island’s oldest plantation, Rabot Estate. It incorporates locally grown chocolate into meals, tours, and even spa treatments.

Blackberry Farm luxury hotel in Walland, TN is built on an idyllic 4,200-acre estate in the Great Smoky Mountains. Guests are encouraged to take tours of the farm with the property’s Master Gardner, join in a cooking demonstration, or sample Blackberry Farm’s private wine cellar.

A luxury farm may soon join a spa and golf course as a standard resort offering. **SM**