

Merriman's
Opelo Plaza, Waimea
Lunch 11:30AM-1:30PM figure \$20-30
Dinner 5:30PM-9:00PM figure \$50-100, reservations required

{written June of 2008}

If Waimea has a five star restaurant, it is Merriman's. It is perhaps one of the ten fanciest restaurants on the island of Hawaii, perhaps one of the hundred "best" restaurants in the United States, and likely one of the thousand best restaurants in the world.

It is the restaurants that locals recommend to tourists when said tourists are looking for a fancy night out on the town, and for their part, it is often the only restaurant tourists know of in town before they arrive. To say Merriman's is a local institution or a legend is an understatement, but with all of that said, I have absolutely no craving to eat there. None. Nada.

And its likely nothing specific about the place. The wait staff is attentive and polite, and although they do that introduction thing, "Hi my name's Brett and I'll be your server this evening," pretty much every other place on the island does that as well, so it's to be expected at this point. I suppose if I was looking to be negative, I could say that the place is noisy, but once again, my companions have never complained, so maybe I am just looking for something to gripe about. And yes, even I will admit that try as I might, that something isn't going to be the food, the stuff is top notch.

I guess bottom line, I don't like the price tag. If you're going to DO Merriman's--dinner, wine, and dessert--you really are looking at \$60/each +tip. It's a lot of money, and basically after eating there a time or two, I'm not taking away a world class experience anymore. For the same money I can eat nearly anywhere on the island, and so the question becomes, is Merriman's THE best restaurant on the island, and for me the answer is an unequivocal no. I'd rather eat at O's Bistro (hot Asian fusion cuisine at half the price in the downtown Kona at the

Safeway shopping center), Alan Wong's (just fantastic and priced to match in the Four Season resort, a.k.a. Hualalai), or the Pesto Café (expensive for pizza, but cheap compared to Merriman's at the end of the road, right before the paddle club in Kawaihae).

All of which is not to say anything negative about Merriman's, but if you're going to take me out, and drop \$60 on me, I'd much rather eat at the Four Seasons, thank you very much, and afterwards we can take a stroll on the beach... of course, that's a 45 minute drive away from Waimea. If you want to eat in town the selections are more, let us say, limited.

{Yep, I still continue to eat at Merriman's, out of towners are still buying, so I'm still eating. I recommend the appetizer sampler plate myself -- a meal unto itself with a price tag to boot. Also of note, Alan Wong's (in the Four Seasons on the Big Island) and O's Bistro (down in Kona) have both closed in the interim. And it's been so long since I've eaten at Pesto's Café that I'd forgotten completely about it... don't even know if it's still in business. But I will be in Waimea in a few days, weeks, or months. And guess what? God help me, I'm looking forward to that sampler plate.}

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