

Sam Choy / Incline Village, NV

Spicy Guava Margarita

Raspberry Riptide

Hawaiian Meatball Sauce

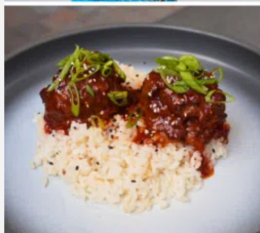
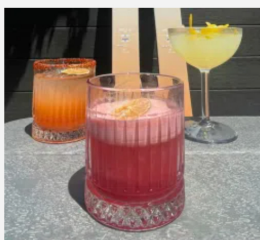


Photo Credit: Sam Choy

Alpine Aloha

Celebrity chef and Hawaiian culinary ambassador Sam Choy has opened restaurants all over the world. In his loftiest venture yet, he brings his signature warmth and island-inspired cuisine to Lake Tahoe's Incline Village.

Sam Choy's Ohana Diner at Bowl Incline is as much an attraction as the renovated retro-chic bowling alley and arcade where it's located. Running a restaurant in a bowling alley may seem out of step for a James Beard Award-winning chef, but as Sam told SFGate, he got his start cooking at a bowling alley café in Kona.

In the past several decades, he's established a small empire of restaurants in Hawaii and the Pacific Northwest as well as Guam and Tokyo. He's a Food Network star and the host of "Sam Choy's in the Kitchen." He's published 11 cookbooks and counting, most recently the 2024 release "Sam Choy's in the Kitchen Family Recipes."

Sam and his head chef, Gary Swenson, emphasize high-quality ingredients and seasonal flavors at Bowl Incline. Sam, the self-proclaimed "godfather of poke," turns everyday fare into island-style favorites with his signature shoyu or spicy poke in nachos, tacos and bowls. He makes Hawaiian Meatballs with The Perfect Purée Carmelized Pineapple barbeque sauce, cilantro lime crema and sesame seeds.

More than food, Sam Choy's Ohana Diner brings Hawaiian tradition and aloha spirit to high-altitude Lake Tahoe (at 6,223 feet above sea level it's the highest alpine lake in North America and coincidentally just 12 miles from Lake Aloha). Taco Tuesday, Tiki Thursday and frequent birthday

luau bring people together over food deeply rooted in Sam's Hawaiian heritage.

Paradise Found

Tropical fruits native to Hawaii such as passion fruit, guava, and pineapple give Sam a rich palette for vibrant, sweet and savory creations with The Perfect Purée. "I love to incorporate the bold, fresh flavors found in traditional Hawaiian dishes and use The Perfect Purée's products to capture that essence," he says.

Mango, for example, appears in a refreshing cocktail or a dessert that evokes the sunny, tropical spirit of the islands. "By combining these elements, I create dishes and drinks that celebrate the unique flavors of Hawaii while showcasing the quality and versatility of The Perfect Purée," Sam says.

Alison Hollman, Bowl Incline's director of fun (aka events), says Sam Choy's had been using purees from a variety of companies and even making some in-house with variable results. Now, there's no guesswork. "The Perfect Purée makes our process so much simpler and the product comes out perfect every time," Alison says. "Making craft cocktails with The Perfect Purée is a no-brainer for us."

Pro Tip: Stay True to Your Culinary Identity

Sam's genuine aloha spirit comes as naturally as his cooking style. He advises fellow culinary professionals to be authentic. "Don't be afraid to infuse your personality into your creations," he says. "Whether it's a twist on a classic dish or a signature cocktail, staying true to your culinary identity will resonate with your guests. By prioritizing quality ingredients and authenticity, you can create memorable experiences that reflect your unique culinary perspective."

He notes that the foundation of authenticity is knowledge. "Know your ingredients. Invest time in understanding the ingredients you love,"

Sam says. “Explore local farmers’ markets or specialty shops to find the freshest produce, spices, and artisanal products. This not only enhances flavor but also supports your community.”

Exploring farmers’ markets helps him find the best local ingredients, Sam says. “Embrace seasonal ingredients,” he says. “Cooking and mixing drinks with what’s in season not only improves flavor but also allows for creativity as you adapt your menu throughout the year.”

It’s particularly important for culinary students and young chefs to establish a mindset of curiosity and continuous learning. Make exploration and experimentation a habit, Sam advises. “The culinary world is vast and ever-evolving, so always be open to new techniques, flavors, and cultures,” he says. “Don’t be afraid to experiment and make mistakes – each experience is an opportunity to grow. Also, take the time to build relationships with your peers, instructors, and mentors; they can offer invaluable insights and support. Remember, the journey is just as important as the destination, so enjoy every step along the way!”

