

# Pineapple History In Hawaii

Pineapple History in Hawaii: A Sweet Journey Through Time **pineapple history in hawaii** is as rich and vibrant as the tropical landscapes of the islands themselves. When you think of Hawaii, images of sunny beaches, hula dancers, and that unmistakable sweet and tangy fruit often come to mind. Pineapple has become synonymous with Hawaiian culture, economy, and cuisine, but its journey to becoming the "fruit of the islands" is a fascinating tale of exploration, agriculture, and industry. Let's dive deep into how pineapple carved its place in Hawaiian history and the legacy it leaves today.

## The Arrival of Pineapple in Hawaii

Pineapple is not native to Hawaii. In fact, it originated in South America, particularly in the area between southern Brazil and Paraguay. The fruit was first spread by indigenous people across South and Central America, reaching the Caribbean islands long before Europeans arrived.

## From the Americas to the Pacific

The pineapple made its way to the Hawaiian Islands in the early 19th century, likely brought by Spanish or Portuguese explorers or traders who had acquired it from South America or the Caribbean. The exact date of introduction is debated, but by the 1800s, pineapple plants were being cultivated on a small scale in Hawaii. These early plantings were mostly for personal consumption or local use rather than commercial agriculture. The fruit's appeal was immediate, however, as it thrived in Hawaii's warm, tropical climate with rich volcanic soil and ample rainfall.

## The Rise of Pineapple as a Major Crop

Although pineapple had been present in Hawaii for several decades, it wasn't until the late 19th century that it transformed into a significant commercial product. The turning point came with the arrival of James Dole, often called the "Pineapple King."

## James Dole and the Birth of the Pineapple Industry

In 1901, James Drummond Dole established the Hawaiian Pineapple Company on the island of Oahu. Dole recognized the island's potential to grow pineapple on a large scale and revolutionized the industry by employing modern agricultural practices and investing in canning technology. His company quickly grew, and by the 1920s, Hawaii was producing the majority of the world's canned pineapple. This boom was facilitated by advancements such as mechanized peeling and canning processes, which dramatically increased production speed and efficiency.

## **Pineapple Plantations and Hawaiian Economy**

The expansion of pineapple plantations brought profound changes to Hawaii's economy and society. Large plantations spread across the islands, employing thousands of workers, many of whom were immigrants from Asia, including Japan, China, the Philippines, and Korea. This influx of diverse cultures contributed to the unique multicultural fabric of modern Hawaii. The pineapple industry became a cornerstone of Hawaii's economy, alongside sugar plantations. It helped transform the islands from an agrarian society into a more industrialized and globally connected economy.

## **Technological Innovations and Challenges**

The growth of pineapple farming in Hawaii was not without its challenges. Cultivating pineapple on a large scale required innovation and adaptation.

### **Mechanization and Processing**

One of the key innovations was mechanization. Early pineapple cultivation was labor-intensive, involving planting, harvesting, and processing by hand. Over time, machines were developed to assist with peeling and slicing the fruit, as well as canning and packaging. This mechanization helped Hawaii maintain its competitive edge in the global pineapple market, especially during the mid-20th century when demand for canned pineapple soared.

### **Environmental and Economic Hurdles**

However, pineapple farming also faced environmental challenges. Growing pineapples requires careful soil management to prevent nutrient depletion, and large plantations sometimes led to issues like soil erosion. Economically, the industry had to contend with rising labor costs, competition from other countries (particularly the Philippines and Thailand), and changing consumer preferences. By the late 20th century, many pineapple plantations began to shrink or close, and production shifted to countries with cheaper labor.

## **Cultural Impact of Pineapple in Hawaii**

Beyond economics, pineapple has left an indelible mark on Hawaiian culture and identity.

### **Pineapple in Hawaiian Cuisine**

Pineapple quickly became a staple ingredient in Hawaiian cooking. From traditional dishes like poke bowls to Hawaiian pizza and tropical cocktails, the fruit's sweet and tangy flavor complements the island's culinary palette beautifully. Locally grown pineapple is celebrated in festivals and farmers' markets, where visitors and residents

alike enjoy fresh fruit, jams, and desserts.

## **Symbolism and Tourism**

Pineapple is more than just a crop; it's a symbol of hospitality and aloha spirit. The image of a pineapple is often used in Hawaiian decor, souvenirs, and branding to evoke warmth and welcome. Tourism also benefited from the pineapple industry. The Dole Plantation on Oahu, for example, has become a popular attraction where visitors can learn about pineapple farming history, enjoy pineapple-themed treats, and explore gardens.

## **The Future of Pineapple in Hawaii**

While large-scale commercial pineapple farming has diminished in Hawaii, the fruit's legacy remains strong. Today, small farms and boutique growers focus on cultivating high-quality, fresh pineapples, catering to local markets and visitors seeking authentic Hawaiian produce.

## **Revitalizing Local Agriculture**

There is growing interest in sustainable farming practices and reviving traditional Hawaiian agriculture, which includes pineapple cultivation. Farmers are experimenting with organic methods and heirloom pineapple varieties, aiming to preserve Hawaii's agricultural heritage.

## **Pineapple and Cultural Preservation**

Efforts to preserve the history of pineapple in Hawaii are also evident in museums, cultural centers, and educational programs. These initiatives help new generations appreciate the fruit's role in shaping the islands' history and identity. Exploring the pineapple history in Hawaii offers a window into the broader story of the islands—its people, economy, and environment. From humble beginnings as a transplanted fruit to becoming a global symbol of Hawaiian hospitality, pineapple continues to be an integral part of the islands' story, sweetening the cultural and historical landscape in more ways than one.

## **Origins and Arrival: Pineapple's Introduction to**

Pineapple's journey to Hawaii began not as an indigenous species but through deliberate human cultivation, marking a profound shift in the archipelago's agricultural and cultural landscape. Introduced in the late 18th century, the first documented arrival of pineapple (*Ananas comosus*) is attributed to European explorers and later solidified under missionary and commercial influence. Though native to South America—specifically the Amazonian and Guianan regions—pineapple reached Hawaii via Spanish and British

navigators who unknowingly transported planting stock during trans-Pacific voyages. By the early 1800s, Hawaiian farmers, particularly those engaged in taro and sugar cultivation, began experimenting with the tropical fruit, recognizing its adaptability to the islands' volcanic soils and subtropical climate. Early records from missionaries on Kauai and O'ahu note the fruit's slow but steady integration into local agriculture, where its sweetness and preservation qualities distinguished it from native crops. This initial phase laid the foundation for what would become a defining agricultural export and cultural symbol.

## **Cultivation Evolution: From Subsistence to Commercial**

The transition of pineapple from a novel curiosity to a cornerstone of Hawaiian agriculture unfolded through deliberate innovation and adaptation. Initially, small-scale cultivation occurred on family-run plots, where the fruit thrived in loamy volcanic soils enriched by traditional composting and intercropping practices. The true transformation began in the mid-19th century, driven by the expansion of plantation economies and growing global demand. American and European investors, recognizing Hawaii's climatic suitability, established large-scale plantations on Maui, particularly in the Wailuku and Kihei regions, leveraging irrigation systems and mechanized harvesting techniques adapted from sugarcane operations. By the late 1800s, Hawaii became the world's leading exporter of canned pineapple, a status cemented by the rise of companies like Dole and Del Monte. These operations not only mechanized planting, pruning, and harvesting but also introduced scientific soil management and pest control, ensuring consistent yields. The shift from subsistence to commercial cultivation reshaped land use, labor dynamics, and rural economies, embedding pineapple deeply into Hawaii's agricultural identity.

## **Cultural and Economic Significance in Hawaiian**

Beyond its agricultural role, pineapple rapidly embedded itself into Hawaiian cultural expression and economic life. The fruit's vibrant yellow hue and tropical sweetness made it a symbol of aloha spirit—offered in leis, featured in hula chants, and central to communal feasts. As a cash crop, pineapple fueled Hawaii's export economy, particularly during the early 20th century when canned pineapple became a staple in U.S. households. The "Hawaiian Pineapple Company," later Dole, became synonymous with the islands, shaping global perceptions of Hawaiian identity through branding and marketing. Pineapple also influenced labor migration patterns, drawing workers from Japan, China, Portugal, and the Philippines, whose cultural contributions enriched local traditions. Festivals celebrating pineapple harvest, such as the annual Pineapple Festival, underscored its dual role as both economic engine and cultural touchstone. This integration elevated pineapple from a mere commodity to a narrative of resilience, innovation, and cross-cultural exchange.

## Health, Nutrition, and Culinary Versatility

Pineapple's appeal extends beyond its sensory pleasures to tangible nutritional and health benefits, reinforcing its place in Hawaiian diets and global cuisine. Rich in bromelain, an enzyme with anti-inflammatory and digestive-support properties, pineapple supports gut health and protein metabolism. Its high vitamin C content, manganese, and dietary fiber make it a nutrient-dense fruit supporting immune function and metabolic balance. In traditional Hawaiian cooking, pineapple was used in both raw and cooked forms—grilled as a sweet side, fermented into vinegar, or blended into sauces that complemented taro, fish, and pork. The fruit's versatility enabled its incorporation into diverse culinary traditions, from poke to pineapple salsa, and into modern fusion dishes. Its low glycemic index and natural sugars also made it a preferred alternative in health-conscious diets, appealing to contemporary consumers seeking functional foods. This nutritional profile, combined with culinary adaptability, has sustained pineapple's relevance across generations and culinary movements.

## Challenges and Sustainability in Modern Pineapple

Despite its storied history, pineapple cultivation in Hawaii faces evolving challenges rooted in environmental, economic, and social dynamics. Climate change presents a significant threat, with rising temperatures, shifting rainfall patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events disrupting flowering cycles and increasing vulnerability to pests like the pineapple mealybug. Invasive species and soil degradation further strain production, requiring sustainable land management practices. Economically, small-scale growers struggle to compete with industrial operations that benefit from economies of scale and global supply chains. Labor shortages and rising operational costs compound these pressures, prompting innovation in automation and precision agriculture. Additionally, cultural concerns around land use and indigenous rights have led to reevaluations of historical land tenure, particularly regarding ancestral territories. In response, Hawaiian growers are adopting regenerative farming techniques, integrating agroecological principles, and exploring organic certification to meet market demands for environmentally responsible products. These efforts reflect a broader shift toward resilience, sustainability, and cultural stewardship in Hawaii's pineapple industry.

## Comparative Legacy: Pineapple in Global Context

Compared to other tropical crops such as mango, banana, and papaya, pineapple holds a unique position in both agricultural history and cultural symbolism within Hawaii. Unlike banana, which requires intensive humidity and is more susceptible to fungal diseases, pineapple demonstrates greater adaptability to Hawaii's drier coastal zones and varied elevations. Its early commercialization also distinguishes it from papaya, a later introduction with more complex post-harvest handling. Globally, pineapple became a

symbol of American tropicalization, yet in Hawaii, it transcended mere export status to become a localized emblem of identity. While bananas are often tied to tropical paradise imagery, pineapple reflects Hawaii's agricultural ingenuity and multicultural labor legacy. This comparative lens underscores pineapple's dual role: a globally traded commodity rooted in specific island ecology, and a deeply personal narrative of Hawaiian resilience, innovation, and cultural synthesis. Its enduring presence in Hawaiian life—from agribusiness to art—cements its status not just as a fruit, but as a living historical artifact.

Pineapple History in Hawaii: An In-Depth Exploration of Its Cultural and Economic Impact **pineapple history in hawaii** traces a fascinating trajectory from a minor curiosity to a defining element of the islands' agricultural identity and global trade prominence. This narrative intertwines with Hawaii's transformation in the 19th and 20th centuries, reflecting broader economic shifts, social dynamics, and environmental considerations. Understanding this history requires delving into the origins of pineapple cultivation in Hawaii, the rise of major plantations, and the fruit's enduring legacy in shaping the islands' economy and cultural landscape.

## **The Origins of Pineapple Cultivation in Hawaii**

Pineapple (*Ananas comosus*) is native to South America but was introduced to Hawaii in the early 19th century, likely by explorers or missionaries who recognized its tropical appeal. The exact timeline is somewhat debated, but most accounts agree that pineapple plants arrived in Hawaii around the 1810s to 1830s. Initially, the fruit was grown in small quantities, primarily for local consumption and as a novelty rather than a commercial crop. The favorable Hawaiian climate—characterized by consistent temperatures, abundant rainfall, and volcanic soil—proved ideal for pineapple cultivation. However, it was not until the late 19th century that pineapple farming began to evolve into a large-scale agricultural industry. The introduction of modern agricultural techniques and mechanization further facilitated this shift.

## **The Role of James Dole and the Rise of Pineapple Plantations**

A pivotal figure in pineapple history in Hawaii is James Dole, often dubbed the "Pineapple King." Arriving from the mainland United States in 1899, Dole recognized the commercial potential of pineapple cultivation on the islands. He purchased large tracts of land on Oahu and established the Hawaiian Pineapple Company, which would later become the Dole Food Company. Under Dole's leadership, pineapple production transformed from small-scale farming to industrialized agriculture. Innovations such as mechanized harvesting, canning processes, and improved transportation networks enabled the fruit to reach mainland markets efficiently. By the 1920s, pineapple had become a cornerstone of Hawaii's economy, generating employment and attracting investment.

# **Economic and Social Impact of Pineapple Industry in Hawaii**

The pineapple industry's growth had profound implications for Hawaii's society and economy. It contributed significantly to the islands' export revenues and helped diversify an economy previously reliant on sugar plantations. The industry also played a role in shaping labor dynamics, as plantations employed thousands of workers, including immigrants from Japan, the Philippines, China, and Portugal.

## **Labor and Demographic Changes**

The demand for labor on pineapple plantations prompted waves of immigration, contributing to Hawaii's multicultural demographic mosaic. Workers often faced challenging conditions, including long hours and low wages, a reality that sparked labor movements and unionization efforts throughout the 20th century. Plantation life shaped community structures, with many workers living in company towns that provided housing, schools, and social services. These enclaves fostered unique cultural exchanges and a sense of resilience among immigrant populations.

## **Technological Advancements and Agricultural Practices**

The evolution of pineapple farming was marked by continuous innovation. Early cultivation relied on manual planting and harvesting, but mechanization introduced by companies like Dole revolutionized production efficiency. The canning industry, which allowed pineapples to be preserved and shipped globally, was instrumental in expanding markets. Additionally, research into pest control, soil management, and crop varieties improved yields and fruit quality. However, intensive farming also led to environmental concerns such as soil depletion and pesticide use, issues that have prompted modern sustainability initiatives.

## **Pineapple's Cultural Significance in Hawaiian Identity**

Beyond economics, pineapple history in Hawaii is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the islands. The fruit became a symbol of Hawaiian hospitality and tropical allure, frequently featured in tourism marketing and popular culture. Iconic images of pineapple fields and plantation workers evoke a nostalgic connection to Hawaii's past.

## **The Tourism Industry and Pineapple**

As tourism emerged as a dominant sector in Hawaii's economy in the mid-20th century, pineapple played a dual role as both an agricultural product and a cultural emblem. Visitors often associated Hawaii with pineapple through souvenirs, culinary offerings, and festivals celebrating the fruit's heritage. The legacy of pineapple plantations has been

preserved in museums and heritage sites, such as the Dole Plantation on Oahu, which serves as both an educational center and tourist attraction. These sites help narrate the complex history of pineapple cultivation and its impact on Hawaiian society.

## Decline and Transformation of Pineapple Production

Despite its historical prominence, pineapple production in Hawaii has declined sharply since the late 20th century. Several factors contributed to this downturn:

1. **Global Competition:** Countries like the Philippines, Thailand, and Costa Rica began producing pineapple more cheaply due to lower labor costs and economies of scale.
2. **Rising Production Costs:** Labor and land costs in Hawaii increased, making local production less competitive on the global market.
3. **Shift in Economic Priorities:** Hawaii's economy increasingly pivoted toward tourism and services, reducing the emphasis on large-scale agriculture.

Today, only a small fraction of pineapple grown in Hawaii is destined for commercial canning or export, with much of the fruit produced for local consumption. The industry has shifted toward niche markets, including organic and specialty pineapple varieties.

## Environmental and Sustainability Considerations

Modern pineapple farming in Hawaii faces challenges related to sustainability. Intensive monoculture can lead to soil erosion, nutrient depletion, and pesticide runoff, impacting local ecosystems. Efforts to adopt sustainable farming practices are growing, including integrated pest management, organic cultivation, and agroforestry approaches.

Balancing economic viability with environmental stewardship remains a key concern for the future of pineapple agriculture in the islands.

## Legacy and Modern-Day Relevance

The pineapple history in Hawaii encapsulates a broader story of adaptation, cultural exchange, and economic transformation. While its role as a dominant export crop has diminished, pineapple continues to be part of the islands' identity and economy. Today, small farmers and entrepreneurs experiment with innovative pineapple products, from fresh fruit sales to artisanal jams and beverages. These efforts aim to preserve the fruit's heritage while responding to contemporary market demands. In essence, the story of pineapple in Hawaii is a testament to how a single crop can influence the trajectory of a region—economically, culturally, and environmentally—leaving an indelible mark on its history and future.

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## Roots of a Tropical Icon: Pineapple

The story of pineapple in Hawaii transcends mere fruit cultivation—it is a narrative woven into the islands' economic, cultural, and environmental fabric. Originating not from Hawaii itself but from South America, the pineapple (*Ananas comosus*) arrived on Hawaiian shores in the late 18th century, carried by Polynesian voyagers' distant kin or later by European explorers and traders. Yet it was not until the mid-19th century that pineapple truly took root—literally and figuratively—transforming Hawaii's arid eastern plains into one of the world's most productive sugar and fruit regions. This shift began not with a single farmer, but with a complex interplay of foreign capital, technological innovation, and labor migration, laying the foundation for an industry that would shape Hawaii's identity for over a century.

The introduction of pineapple to Hawaii was part of a broader Pacific exchange of crops and colonial ambitions. Although native Hawaiians cultivated native fruits like 'ōhi'a and breadfruit, European contact introduced new agricultural models. By the 1830s, missionaries and traders experimented with tropical plants, but it was the arrival of James Dole's first pineapple plants in 1899—initially as a side venture—that marked the turning point. Dole's vision extended beyond subsistence; he saw pineapple as a cash crop capable of feeding growing markets in the U.S. mainland. This foresight aligned with Hawaii's strategic geographic position, enabling rapid export logistics that gave Hawaiian pineapple a competitive edge in global trade.

## Industrialization and the Plantation Era

The true transformation came with industrialization. By the early 20th century, pineapple plantations replaced scattered farms, driven by mechanization, refrigerated shipping, and

corporate consolidation. The Hawaiian Pineapple Company—later Dole Food Company—emerged as a dominant force, constructing vast plantations across O‘ahu, Maui, and the Big Island. These operations were marvels of efficiency: mechanized harvesters reduced labor needs, while rail networks and cold storage preserved fruit quality during long sea voyages. This industrial model reshaped rural Hawaii, drawing thousands of immigrants—Japanese, Filipino, Portuguese, and Chinese laborers—seeking opportunity. Though essential to the industry’s success, their contributions often went unrecognized, overshadowed by corporate narratives that framed pineapple as a symbol of American progress.

Yet the plantation era also brought profound social and environmental costs. Land once used for traditional Hawaiian agriculture was converted to monoculture, disrupting indigenous ecosystems and water systems. Labor conditions were harsh, with workers facing long hours, low wages, and limited rights—dynamics that fueled early labor unrest and union organizing. Moreover, the heavy reliance on migrant labor created fragile communities, vulnerable to economic shifts and displacement. The pineapple, once a foreign import, thus became a dual symbol: a driver of prosperity and a catalyst for inequality, its sweet flesh shadowed by deep inequities.

## **Cultural Exchange and Identity Shifts**

Beyond economics, pineapple became a cultural touchstone, embedding itself in Hawaiian life through food, folklore, and identity. Locally grown varieties, such as the sweet ‘Malalai’ and ‘Puna’, developed distinct flavors tied to island terroir, fostering a sense of regional pride. Pineapple emerged in traditional dishes like “poke” and holiday feasts, blending with native ingredients to create new culinary traditions. Yet its presence also sparked cultural tension—while it symbolized island abundance for some, others viewed it as an emblem of foreign control, a reminder of colonial-era exploitation. This duality is reflected in literature and oral history, where pineapple narratives oscillate between celebration and critique, mirroring Hawaii’s ongoing negotiation between globalization and cultural preservation.

As the 20th century progressed, pineapple’s dominance began to wane. The rise of multinational agribusiness, labor cost inflation, and shifting consumer preferences challenged the plantation model. By the late 1980s, Dole’s focus shifted toward other crops and off-shore processing, while large-scale farming declined. Yet its legacy endures: Hawaii’s agricultural landscape remains dotted with abandoned fields, and the pineapple’s genetic and cultural imprint persists in local markets, festivals, and agricultural memory. The industry’s decline also prompted reflection on sustainability—less water-intensive crops, organic practices, and regenerative farming now offer alternatives that honor both land and community.

# Risks, Resilience, and the Future of

Today, pineapple cultivation in Hawaii faces intersecting risks: climate change threatens water availability and soil stability, while global competition and labor shortages challenge viability. Rising temperatures and unpredictable rainfall patterns strain traditional growing zones, forcing farmers to adapt or abandon ancestral practices. Yet innovations in precision agriculture, drought-resistant cultivars, and renewable energy integration offer pathways to resilience. Community-led initiatives, such as small-scale agroecology projects and cooperative farming models, seek to reclaim autonomy and preserve cultural heritage.

Looking forward, pineapple’s future in Hawaii hinges on balancing economic pragmatism with cultural integrity. While mass production may recede, niche markets—specialty fruits, heritage varieties, and eco-certified products—could sustain relevance. Equally vital is redefining pineapple not just as a commodity, but as a living symbol of Hawaii’s layered history: a fruit born in South America, planted by foreigners, cultivated by immigrants, and reclaimed by native and local communities. In this light, the pineapple’s story is not one of passive export, but of dynamic adaptation—an enduring testament to the islands’ resilience and capacity for reinvention.

## Legacy and Lessons from the Pineapple

The pineapple’s journey through Hawaii offers more than agricultural history—it reveals profound truths about identity, power, and sustainability. From its foreign origins to its deep integration into island life, pineapple exemplifies how global forces shape local realities, often in conflicting ways. Its industrial rise brought prosperity but also exploitation, while its cultural adaptation reflects both resistance and fusion. As Hawaii navigates a future marked by environmental uncertainty and cultural revitalization, the pineapple stands as a reminder: progress is not linear, and true resilience lies in honoring complexity—honoring the past while nurturing a sustainable, inclusive future.

## Questions & Answers About pineapple history in hawaii

| No | Question                                                                   | Answer                                                                                                                                      |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | When was pineapple first introduced to Hawaii?                             | Pineapple was first introduced to Hawaii in the early 19th century, around 1813, by Spanish explorers.                                      |
| 2  | Who is credited with starting the commercial pineapple industry in Hawaii? | James Dole is credited with starting the commercial pineapple industry in Hawaii after establishing the Hawaiian Pineapple Company in 1901. |

|   |                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | How did pineapple farming impact Hawaii's economy?                     | Pineapple farming became a major economic driver in Hawaii throughout the 20th century, creating jobs and boosting exports, making Hawaii known worldwide for its pineapples. |
| 4 | What role did the Dole Plantation play in Hawaii's pineapple history?  | The Dole Plantation was a key site for pineapple cultivation and processing, symbolizing the growth of the pineapple industry and tourism in Hawaii.                          |
| 5 | Why did pineapple production decline in Hawaii after the 20th century? | Pineapple production declined due to high labor costs, competition from other countries, and the shift of Hawaii's economy towards tourism and services.                      |
| 6 | How did pineapple influence Hawaiian culture and cuisine?              | Pineapple became a staple in Hawaiian cuisine and culture, featured in traditional dishes, festivals, and symbolizing the islands' agricultural heritage.                     |
| 7 | Are there still pineapple farms operating in Hawaii today?             | Yes, although much smaller than before, there are still some pineapple farms operating in Hawaii, focusing on specialty and local markets.                                    |

Hawaiian pineapple cultivation, James Dole pineapple, pineapple plantations Hawaii, Dole Food Company, pineapple industry Hawaii, Hawaii agriculture history, pineapple farming, tropical fruit Hawaii, pineapple exports Hawaii, history of Hawaii fruit crops

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