

VEGAN & VEGETARIAN restaurant guide to Eastern Connecticut

including Middletown, Hartford & New Haven

updated **JAN 2024**



by Mark Mathew Braunstein

Keeping the **Rant** in Restau**Rant** :

The Vegan Curmudgeon's Guide to Eastern Connecticut Restaurants, east of the Quinnipiac & Connecticut Rivers (while also including Middletown, Hartford and New Haven)

updated **JAN 2024**

this unabashedly biased directory with rhetoric that ranges from hyperbole to calumny is posted at: www.MarkBraunstein.Org

and more specifically at: www.markbraunstein.org/vegan-in-connecticut

You can find most of my reviews that are listed here, and many more of mine for outside of Eastern CT, on Happy Cow at:

<https://www.happycow.net/members/profile/mark%20m%20braunstein>



veg & veg-friendly & non-veg & veg-unfriendly restaurants,
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Old Saybrook:

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Stonington:

- Stonington Village Farmers Market – Carnivore but Veg-Friendly

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- Willimantic Food Coop – Carnivore but very Veg-Friendly

Everywhere:

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Reader discretion is strongly advised: Your potentially most nourishing food is what you prepare yourself...at home. Most restaurants, including vegan and vegetarian restaurants, add too much salt and concentrated sweetener and motor grade oil to the foods they serve you. How much is too much? Even one grain of salt is too much salt (so take my advice with a grain of salt). And any concentrated sweetener is too much sweetener, especially agave, which is a scam. And any oil with the possible exceptions of raw flax and raw hemp is too much oil, especially canola, yet another scam. (I confess that at home I do consume maple syrup, coconut sugar, flax oil, and hemp oil.) Restaurants do provide a more enjoyable dining experience than sitting home alone eating raw sprouts. (Though I enjoy sitting home alone eating sprouts, I obviously also enjoy dining with friends at restaurants, else this restaurant guide would end right here.) And restaurants are all the more enjoyable when their owners and chefs are themselves vegheads or at least try to cater to vegheads. Hence this restaurant guide.



in BRANFORD:

What a great city to host G-Zen! While an affluent bedroom suburb of New Haven, it still has small-town New England charm, right down to the town green.

© **Darbar India** <http://darbarindia.com> **separate VEGETARIAN menu**

Entry last updated 2022:

Same as most Asian Indian restaurants, Darbar’s provides a separate section on its menu for Vegetarian appetizers and another for Vegetarian entrees. What differs here is that its Vegetarian sections are listed first, and its Non-Vegetarian (yes, that is what they call it!) second. At least until 2011 when G-Zen opened down the street, Darbar’s served the very best Indian vegan food I had ever eaten. And the waiters here all “spoke vegan”, so they were able to walk us through what’s vegan among the vegetarian section. Not only was the food outstanding, even the metal dinnerware was elegant and unique.

As this restaurant is in Branford only a few blocks from where G-Zen used to be until it closed in 2022, I stopped eating at Darbar, hence my use above of the past-tense verbs. In fact ownership of Darbar’s has since changed hands. Though I can attest that the online menu sections as mentioned above have not changed, maybe the food has, because on Yelp the reviews now are mixed, and one reviewer complained that her waiter was clueless about what had dairy and what did not. So, even if you really love Indian cuisine, as of 2011 I can’t attest to Darbar.

in DANIELSON:

A cutesy small city with small-town New England charm. Try to visit the town green around Halloween when it fills with homemade scarecrows, a fun sight to see.

© **HEIRLOOM FOOD COMPANY** www.eatheirloomfood.com
very very VEGAN-FRIENDLY

Entry last updated Sept 2022:

This unique eatery is a pleasant surprise in a cutesy small city with small-town New England charm tucked away in Connecticut’s Quiet Corner. (Try to visit around Halloween when the town green fills with homemade scarecrows, fun to see.)

The food is whole grain, fresh, mostly organic, mostly local, and mostly vegan. Quote: “At Heirloom all of our recipes begin vegan. That means, with the exception of two items, everything at Heirloom can be ordered vegan. All of our soups, baked goods and prepared foods are always made vegan.” Heirloom speaks fluent vegan, as you can choose either cow cheese or vegan cheese.

Enhancing the outstanding food are its three idyllic eating areas. (Even the parking lot is idyllic.) While the indoor dining area is small, it hosts many nooks and crannies that serve as booths, creating an intimate dining experience. The patio and the shaded deck overlooking Main Street both provide for outdoor dining. Exotic plants from nearby Logee’s Greenhouse (worth your visit) decorate both indoors and outdoors. During growing season, the outdoor plants are especially bountiful. As are the plant-based foods.

They serve breakfast and lunch, with hours recently extended to 5pm. Lunches consist primarily of salads, sandwiches, and soup. The soups are thick, luscious, and satisfying. Order the underpriced bowls, not cups. The sandwiches are tall and meticulously crafted with always

excellent ingredients. To truly appreciate the contents, I eat them by drilling down layer by layer with a fork. The salad bowls are wholesome and huge, with many choices for underpriced add-ons that make them larger still. My two favorite add-ons are the “bacon”-flavored and thinly sliced tempeh, and the mock tuna salad. I recommend buying the mock tuna from the fridge unit, and eating it right out of the container while you wait for your order. Yet, wait times are short, even during lunch. And the waitstaff are all friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable about all the ingredients. What’s impressive and endearing is that the person who takes your order often also prepares it, hence their thorough knowledge of the ingredients.

The cafe is only one mile off exit 38 of I-395, and is right on Main Street (look for its small street sign, as the building is set far back), with ample parking in its own lot. You might think this eatery would be a little known, but the good word has gotten around. Lunchtime gets very busy, so try to visit at times other than lunch.

in GRISWOLD:

I nickname it “Grisly Griswold” for it being a heroin haven where its addicts have overdosed themselves into many grisly deaths, second in the region only to Willimantic.

© **Mei’s Kitchen** www.meiskitch3n.com **Carnivore but with an all-Vegan submenu**

Entry last updated 2022:

When you’re driving northbound on I-395, Mei’s is a quick stop off of Exit 22. When driving southbound, to or from its shopping plaza requires a few more turns. Those few more turns are well worth your while. But please be advised that my review addresses only the vegan dishes on Mei’s menu, so if you are neither vegan nor vegetarian my review might not be worth your while.

It’s surprising to find here in this quiet corner of Connecticut a Chinese-American restaurant with a vegan submenu, and even more surprising to see such a restaurant in grisly Griswold, an unremarkable town, and in a rundown and aging shopping plaza whose anchors are two discount stores, namely a Dollar Tree (where everything, at least for now, still is a dollar) and a Job Lot, with a Tractor Supply Store (where they really do sell tractors) thrown in. What is remarkable is Mei’s extensive vegan submenu, here called “vegetarian” even though it’s more precisely all vegan. The veg menu half consists of an array of mock meats, so if you like mock meats this place is for you. While I shun mock meats, to my good fortune the veg menu’s other half consists of vegetables, either with or without tofu.

Most Asian-American eateries are no more a safe haven for vegheads than any other ethnic eatery. You often can find these fish and other sea animals listed right on their menus in their so-called vegetarian sections. I shudder to guess what ingredients are not listed, for instance furtive fish, clandestine clam, or covert oyster in the sauces. Thai-American restaurants are the worst offenders, as fish lurks in all their sauces. Decades ago, when I still tried to eat at random Asian restaurants, all too often the food I was served failed my sniff test, despite the waiter’s assurances. I smelled something fishy in their curry or garlic or brown sauces, and so never ate at that restaurant again. And then at another restaurant, and another, and another, until I eventually stopped trying. Asian eateries are no more a vegetarian safe haven than any other ethnic eatery.

Mei’s is different. Mei’s passes both my sniff and taste tests. It’s vegetarian menu really is all vegetarian and, even better, all vegan.

The red sauces in Asian-American eateries are either too sugary sweet and or spicy hot for my tender palate, so at Mei's I stick with the veg dishes with brown sauces. Among those, I highly recommend the Mixed Vegetables, the Tofu with Mixed Vegetables, the Sautéed String Beans, and best of all the Triple Green. Note that the Triple Green appears in the Vegetarian section of the printed menu, but in the Healthy Specials section of the online menu. And note that the Healthy Specials (steamed rather than stir-fried) section includes many vegan dishes, too. For the nutritionally minded, be aware that same as at any Asian-American restaurant, Mei's brown sauces are comprised of sugar, salt, starch, and oil. For the truly nutritionally minded, you can always stick with the Healthy Specials section. While I usually shun the aforementioned white food-like substances, I publicly confess to my indulgences once or twice a year here at Mei's.

Also be aware that its squeeze packets of so-called soy sauce are hydrolyzed vegetable protein (HVP), not brewed soy sauce. As a public service, I list here its ingredients: water, salt, vegetable protein, corn syrup, caramel color, sodium benzoate. The company that manufactures it is W.Y. Industries. Note the truth-in-advertising in its name, the word *Industries*, not *Foods*. So don't grab those squeeze packets of fake foods. Furthermore, when I place my order online, I mention to omit the fortune cookies (made of white flour, white sugar, and white salt).

Here's some real food. Brown rice. Any restaurant that serves brown rice garners my award as a gold (or brown?) standard to elevate it above all others. The nutritional difference between brown and white might be slight, but our shunning white rice and seeking brown makes an important social statement. For one-dollar more, Mei's serves brown rice, simple to prepare, yet easy to ruin. Mei's brown rice is perfect, and packed above the brim in those "traditional" Chinese restaurant white cardboard takeout containers with wire handles. The entrée containers, however, are made of microwavable plastic. They, too, are packed to the brim, so portions all are generous, each entrée enough to feed two people, making the prices not just reasonable, but quite low.

Whether you eat-in or takeout, everything is served as to-go. Mei's hosts a spacious dining area, but of hard resin tables and chairs like in fast food joints. As there is no waitstaff, you must serve yourself, so you might as well do takeout. Consumer tip: when I place my order online and add a generous tip in advance, Ms. Mei always adds to my order two free vegetable rolls. And by the way, Mei (pronounced "May") is an absolute sweetheart.

in GROTON:

Nicknamed "Rotten Groton" for good reason, except for Noank, a storybook village enclave of Groton, just south of Mystic.

© Chipotle – Carnivore (veg-unfriendly, stay away)

Entry last updated 2022:

I was curious about Chipotle's long publicized Vegan Bowl, mind you, not the Vegetarian Bowl, as I have been a vegan since 1970. I observed franchises open closer and closer to me, first Manchester and Glastonbury, followed by Middletown, and then most recently Groton. So finally in October 2020 it was time for me to donate my body to science and to sample the Vegan Bowl with Brown Rice. (The Brown Rice option was what won me over, as I shun white rice, the same as I shun white flour and white sugar.) Chipotle's proprietary "Sofritas" of the Vegan Bowl are shredded bits of tofu, nothing like sorrowful mock meats, industrialized non-foods that make a mockery of veganism, and that I also avoid.

As a big eater, I ordered two bowls. My first bowl was fine, the brown rice was dry and hard and somewhat undercooked, but still edible, and everything else was otherwise enjoyable. I especially appreciated that nothing was too spicy hot, not even the two salsas. But the second so-called Vegan Bowl held a shocking surprise. A single thin but two-inch long piece of steak. Yes, steak. No mistaking the steak.

I can understand that cross-contamination might occur if the server used the same ladle for dishing out a Keto Bowl or a High Protein Bowl as for dishing out a Vegan Bowl. That would be a measure of the server's inattention or apathy. But the piece of steak was way too big to stick to the underside of the ladle and too long to remain unseen atop the ladle. I hesitate to hurl unjust accusations, but I must admit that I suspect the cook intentionally slipped that piece of meat into my second Vegan Bowl. And there's no telling whatever else might have been of animal origin in a less visible form.

We vegans and vegetarians must always be vigilant when eating out. Even if my accusation about the intentional addition of steak is unfounded, this incident reminds me to always favor veg restaurants over those merely veg-friendly. For the latter, all their items labeled vegan should add the advisory: "Manufactured in a facility that processes animal body parts. May contain meat."

I must emphasize that my experience impugns the reputation of only the outlet in Groton, not of Chipotle in general, and not of the outlets in nearby Middletown or Manchester or Glastonbury. I still might yet sample a Vegan Bowl elsewhere, but never again in Groton. Meanwhile, you vegan customers anywhere should be vigilant for cross-contamination of meat in the Vegan Bowl.

As for the Groton outlet, consult Yelp! and you will see more one-star reviews than for any other listing on Yelp! Others berate this Groton eatery for other reasons, so stay away from here.

☉ Pokémoto – Carnivore but very Vegan-Friendly

Entry added 2023:

Until recently, I was oblivious to the Pokémoto national chain of franchises, of which 12 are located in CT, including its mothership café in New Haven. Unlike other fast-casual omnivore eateries, the servers here speak fluent vegan. And while omitted from online menus, in the café the vegan sauces are clearly labeled V for Vegan. The Chojang and Unami Shoyu sauces are vegan (but sadly, Sesame Ginger is not). The Chojang is too spicy hot and the Unami too garlicky tart for my tender palate. Among its signature bowls differentiated by their proteins is the vegan Tofu Bowl. While the soft tofu is unseasoned and "raw," it at least is organic and is finely sliced into appetizing slivers. Edamame comes paired with the tofu to provide it with more toothsome substance. Next time, I will order the more wholesome Edamame alone.

The base of the bowls is white or, very thankfully, brown rice. The brown rice is served straight from the rice cooker, unlike at Chipotle across the street that microwaves (and dries out) its stale brown rice. I do not impugn the reputations of other Chipotles, only of Groton's. Steer clear of the Groton Chipotle. Consult the mostly 1-star reviews and mine on Yelp, and you will wonder how it remains in business. But back to Pokémoto.

Unjustly, the Tofu Bowl costs the same as the other signature bowls that are high-priced dead animals. If avocado were an ingredient as in the Chicken Bowl, then its same price would be justified. (Pokémoto, are you listening?) Thus you fare better to Build Your Poké, which also provides a base of salad greens instead of rice, and a wider choice of vegan toppings, including sea vegetables. When choosing toppings, perhaps I strained the patience of my server to indulge my request for a lot of just one topping rather a little of several. I suppose if you generously tip

your server and if they remember it, they will reciprocate your generosity next time you return, but my theory requires further testing.

No complaint from me about the clear plastic container provided for takeout. It is elegantly shaped, and its plastic lid fits tightly enough for repurposing at home. Seating is provided, but the chairs and tables fit only leprechauns, so consider takeout only. While I won't likely again patronize this particular outlet when am home, I am pleased to have found this chain of eateries to which I can resort as a pit stop while on the road. This is a welcomed eatery worthy of patronage by vegans, vegetarians, and anyone concerned about eating nourishing foods.

© **Thai Sawasdee** <http://www.thaisawasdeecuisine.com> Carnivore (stay away)

Entry last updated 2018:

A typical Thai restaurant which has the typical pitfalls for vegetarians and vegans alike. Despite a section on its menu labeled *Vegetarian*, ALL their sauces in this section contain fish stock, and same for most of the soups. This I learned from the Caucasian waitress who was kind enough to interrogate the cooks, few who spoke fluent English. Despite its inviting upscale interior in a downscale strip mall, this Thai restaurant, like most if not all Thai restaurants, should be avoided.

A note about meals at Asian restaurants:

Please indulge my digression and perhaps xenophobic condemnation, but I have learned not to trust the wait staff at Asian restaurants. Both a cultural chasm and a language divide separate American vegans from Asian wait staff. Identifying yourself as a vegetarian is literally meaningless to most of them (which means, they do not know what the word means). They seem not to understand that clams and oysters and lobsters and shrimp and squid and octopus and fish all are animals (and that eggs are products of animals). You often can find these animals listed right on their menus in their so-called vegetarian sections. I shudder to guess at the ingredients that are not listed. Years ago, when I still attempted to eat at random Asian restaurants, despite the waiter's assurances all too often the food I was served failed my sniff test. I smelled something fishy in their sauces, and so never ate at that restaurant again. And then never again at another restaurant, and another, and another. Beware clandestine clam and insidious fish in their curry and garlic sauces. Asian restaurants are no more a "vegetarian safe haven" than compared to any other ethnic cuisine. Hoping otherwise is fooling only yourself.

© **Mirch Masala** (Asian Indian) <http://www.mirchmasalaus.com> Carnivore (stay away)

Entry last updated 2009:

Mirch Masala is worth a try if you consume calves' milk. It offers easy parking just outside the door and has really nice ambience indoors, which I suspect was formerly an English pub. As is true with most Indian restaurants, MM offers a Vegetarian section on its menu, with almost all the dishes prepared with cream or butter or milk. Vegans must ask the waiter a lot of questions, as you'll learn that milk is even in the (alas not brown) rice. If you beg, they will prepare rice just for you without milk, as they do try to be very accommodating to veganism, though I suspect that was mostly because the waiter mistakenly interpreted my aversion to dairy was due to allergies. After all their accommodating, their few dishes that could be served vegan were merely mediocre. Of several Asian Indian restaurants, I highly recommend only **Darbar's** located on Branford's town green, but Branford is 40 miles away, so a bit of a trek. Plus, while in Branford, you would do better to patronize the all vegan G-Zen.

in GUILFORD :

While the Shoreline Diner nor Foodworks nor Three Girls Vegan Creamery are near the town green, but rather on Route 1 right off an exit of I-95, try to visit the cutesy town green as long as you're in town.

© **Foodworks Food Store – Carnivore but very Vegan-Friendly**

Entry last updated 2022:

An excellent health foods store, which offers a vast array of vegan products unavailable elsewhere, for instance it carries the locally-made Three Girls vegan cheeses. And Foodworks is especially well stocked in the raw foods category. For instance, it carries Living Tree Community Foods nut butters, whose raw almond butter and raw tahini are the very best on the marketplace (really!). The selection of OG produce is limited, but its fresh juice bar, which includes wheatgrass juice, and its freshly prepared in-house takeout items compensate.

Foodworks may have a reputation for high prices, but I dispute that. Rather, it carries specialty items that inherently are so expensive that for instance CT's two food co-ops do not. In fact, many moderately priced items cost less at Foodworks than at Fiddleheads Food Coop.

Among the food stores in eastern CT, Willimantic Food Coop ranks number 1, Foodworks' two stores in Old Saybrook and in Guilford tie for number 2, and Fiddleheads Food Coop ranks number 3. The selection of produce is best at Willi, whereas Fiddleheads' produce is better than Foodworks. But Fiddleheads stocks more meat than all three combined, so that is a big minus for Fiddleheads. For oldsters, Foodworks offers a little-publicized very generous senior citizen discount, a whopping 15%. Compare that with Willi's 5%, and Fiddleheads zero. So for oldsters, Foodworks' prices are even less than Fiddleheads'.

Note that the store in Guilford is very easy on-off from its exit off I-95.

also in Guilford:

© **Shoreline Diner & Vegetarian Enclave** separate VEGAN menu <http://www.shorelinediner.com>

Entry last updated 2018:

I offer them a dozen thank you's for advertising the word VEGETARIAN in their name's subtitle and VEGAN on its billboards, and for having done so for 30 or more years. And I offer them a hundred thank you's for an entire column on the menu labeled vegan, not merely vegetarian. So far, so good, until you find that the menu offers many (but not solely) conventional white and greasy American diner fare. An exception was the hummus platter, with its accompanying pita bread of whole wheat, but you had to know to ask for whole wheat. (I italicize "was" because in 2013 the hummus platter, which was my favorite, was dropped from the menu.)

The previous owner was a vegetarian, but the present owner is not, so you must BE VIGILANT. That whole wheat pita (alas, no longer on the menu) on one occasion in 2008 was warmed on a grill that cooked meat and so absorbed its smell, if not its grease. The waitress defensively denied the possibility, impugning my olfactory nerves, until she smelled the pita too. Beware also the vegan pancakes served with packs of calf milk butter on the side, which makes me wonder with what the pancakes were grilled. (Oil or fat or lard or margarine or butter? Even if oil, it's probably questionable canola oil, so all of them are unhealthful choices.) And the sides for the vegan entrées often are not vegan, for instance, the mashed potatoes are made with butter and the coleslaw with mayonnaise.

While I do not go out of my way to eat here, I do stop here late night (open every night until 11pm) after a long haul from NYC on I-95, as it is just off the easy off/on exit. Off the exit, you turn left onto Route 1, drive barely half a mile, and just before the cellular and water towers you're there. But if you turn off I-95 before 7pm, you're better off stopping at Foodworks, halfway between the exit and this diner. A very well stocked health food store, Foodworks also offers refrigerated takeout dishes prepared in-house with all its high quality ingredients clearly listed on the container.

2015 Addendum: The number of entrees on the vegan menu has been reduced. Among the remaining entrees, TVP, the fakest of all fake meats, predominates; the choice of mostly whole grain bread or whole wheat pita has been dropped; the tempeh in the tempeh reuben is just an unenhanced slab of tempeh, and it served on bread that is only minimally whole grain. Am I the only vegan to notice a marked decline in the nutritional quality here? Nevertheless, when you're passing by on I-95, this is still worth a late night stop, because it is open until 10pm, past the bedtime of all-veg eateries.

also in Guilford:

© **THREE GIRLS VEGAN CREAMERY** ALL VEGAN
www.threegirlsvegan.com www.facebook.com/threegirlsvegan phone: 860-896-0411

Entry last updated 2021:

Begun in 2016 with sales only by mail order and to retail stores, in 2017 Three Girls opened a storefront for direct sales, but only on Sundays. Since then, it has been incrementally expanding both its schedule and its menu, so check its FB page for hours and menus. in 2021, it also opened a satellite café in the downtown area of Guilford, with a more limited menu, but still the same nutritionally abysmal menu as its mothership café.

As a real-foods vegan, I am not a fan of their fake cheeses laden with coconut oil and cashew, nor of their mock meats made of devitalized wheat gluten, which is whiter than white flour. Coconut oil is fine as a condiment or lubricant but, as a primary ingredient, like any oil it poses health risks, and its mouth-feel is like a glob of clay. Similarly, cashews occupy the lowest nutritional rung of the nut family, in part because they never are raw. But I do recommend the almond ricotta cheese, which harks back to my youthful days during the 1970s when I fermented my own almond cheeses until abandoning the practice due to too many spoiled batches. 3 Girls applies temperature controls better than I did because I applied none, so the fermentation in their almond cheese is perfect. As proclaimed on the storefront logo: Fermented and Perfected.

In addition to vegan cheezes and mock meats, they offer entrées made with their cheezes and mock meats. While those surely taste great, they are laden with white flour and most are deep fried. Ditto the desserts of white flour and white sugar. I would not lambast the menu if nutritious alternatives were also offered, but aside from one almond cheese few exist. Still, many vegans don't seem to care about eating junk food, because the store was busy all three times I shopped there. Am glad for 3 Girls that so many wayward vegans lust for fried foods and sugar, but I fear for their customers' health, because too much of it eaten for too long will make them fat and sick and malnourished.

I wanted so much to love their many cheeses and main dishes, but as of 2020 I have given up and have abandoned them in frustration because of 3 further objections. No expiration dates are indicated on the cheese containers. Lists of ingredients are printed so small as to be impossible to read. When confronted with such fine print in food stores, rather than strain my eyes I simply do not buy such products. Also, prices are listed nowhere inside the store. Nowhere. Rather than ask the salesperson to read aloud for me the ingredients and to recite for me all the prices, I have resolved, sadly, not to shop here again. A loss for both of us.

Lucky for me, I speak from a position of privilege, because two other all-vegan cafés are closer to me that never serve fried foods or mock meats, and so offer much more from which I can choose.

in Hartford:

Pity the Capital city, with only one vegan restaurant.

© **Fire-N-Spice Vegan Restaurant ALL VEGAN**
www.fireandspiceveganrestaurant.com

Entry updated Nov 2023

Initially, this tiny café was a satellite of the restaurant on Sisson Av, which I loved. The mothership closed so this is now the main event. Same as the Sisson site, you'll find delightful Rasta vibes inside where the food is good, the prices are low & the neighborhood is safe & racially balanced. Half Black, half White & half Hispanic. Here, too, the building's shack-like infrastructure is crumbling. (Blame the landlord, not the café owners.) Do blame the owners for overstating this tiniest of cafés as a restaurant.

Visitors to downtown may not be find this worth the trip far afield. You do drive past the glitzy architectural monuments to Hartford's glory as capitol to CT, of curiosity to sightseers. I regularly visit the Wadsworth Atheneum, CT's largest art museum, so ate here often until 2 years ago when G-Monkey opened in West Hartford. Yesterday, I revisited Fire N Spice. Not much has changed.

A narrow counter & 2 barstools with bicycle seats allow for eating in its small lobby crowded with people in line for takeout. If you eat indoors, unlike at New England's other vegan Rasta cafés, your meal is served on ceramic dishware with silverware, which is a plus. Seasonally, 1 or 2 tables with chairs lurk outdoors streetside, but your order still is takeout. When not conducive to eating outdoors, if you live afar you must eat in your car. If you must, at least there is ample street parking.

As at other vegan Rasta cafés, you choose cafeteria-style from an array of maybe 15 dishes. The Small platter comprises 3 selections, the Medium 5, the Large 8. The menu on the signboard is static. Mock meats & tofu are featured. Tempeh is listed on the signboard but is seldom in stock. As a whole-foods vegan, I shun mock meats, favor tempeh, but will settle for tofu. Of the vegetables, 2 are white potatoes, 1 is sweet potato & 1 is cabbage. Skip the okra, an almost inedible bust here. Everything else is fine, except for some dishes too spicy (Fire!) for my tender palate Check online for listings of ingredients.

Stated bluntly, the food is uninspired, almost routine Americanized Rasta vegan café fare. Not Americanized insofar as affordability. You will get your money's worth here. You'd think they would want to boast about their prices, yet prices are listed neither on the signboard nor online. Still, it is mostly akin to home cooking. Little tastes outstanding, not much looks appetizing, but at least most dishes are wholesome, nourishing & truly vegan. In Jamaica, Ital food is natural food, vegan except for fish. Years ago, I toured Kingston & inland Jamaica for an article I wrote for Vegetarian Times about Rastafari and veganism, so about the fish mine is the voice of experience.

Still, Fire-N-Spice is way better and probably closer than Lion's Den, Hartford's other Rasta almost-vegetarian (beware the fish) café, so do give Fire-N-Spice a try. Its credit card app does not allow tipping, so be sure to bring cash to tip your always very friendly and accommodating servers.

☉ Lion's Den "Vegetarian" Restaurant – Carnivore but Vegan-Friendly

www.facebook.com/pages/lions-den-vegetarian-restaurant/113290038703858

no website nor is its lonely FB page updated

Entry last updated 2018:

Ignore the name of this eatery. Do not believe everything you read. With only four barstools at a narrow counter, this is a café, not a restaurant, and it is definitely NOT vegetarian. (Nor will you find any lions here.) Codfish defaces several menu items, and that cod is real live dead fish, not mock meat. Fifty years ago, pescatarians could get away calling themselves vegetarians, but now? In 1982, when I traveled in Jamaica to research and write an article about Rastafari and Vegetarianism, I found that many Rastas did not define themselves as vegetarians and that those who did still ate fish. Much to my dismay. (Much to *Vegetarian Times*' dismay, too, as the editor paid me in full for the article, but never published it.)

Located in Hartford's North End, this is hardly a tourist destination. While most ethnically white visitors to Hartford seldom venture into this ethnically black 'hood, it is safe, during daylight hours anyway. It is the scant parking that is cause for concern. There is no street parking here. The café is located in a small three-store strip mall which includes another eatery. Its own parking lot is small and often full, especially around lunchtime, and its few parking spaces are quite narrow.

Despite the above admonitions, and with the demise of Hartford's Fire & Spice mothership (its satellite small cafe remains open for take-out), I persevered in the interest of donating my body to science and I entered the Den, intent to dine on its vegan offerings. The whiteboard has some half-erased and all-illegible scribbles, so no menu there. There is a single small printed menu encased in plastic perched on the very tall counter (perhaps to thwart robbery) where it is hard to read without straining your eyesight. Vegetarian or Vegan? the friendly fellow behind the tall counter asked me. I answered, Vegan, and asked for the vegan sampler. Medium or Large, he asked? Medium, I answered. He did not ask, Eat-in or takeout? So Styrofoam platter for all. But what he dished out onto the Styrofoam platter looked very Large, and cost only \$10 at that. (Cash only, he had advised.)

I was served two kinds of beans, three varieties of mock meats (which I usually avoid but, remember, I am experimenting in the interest of science), each in its own sauce, collards garlic greens, and a large bed of white rice. White rice rather than brown may serve as some kind of social statement. I am glad to report that nothing was overly spicy, that the mock meats were tender, and that the sauces were flavorful. I am sure to eat here next time I am back in the 'hood, though that may be a very long time.

in MADISON:

On picturesque Main Street, and right next door to Madison Cinema, an arthouse movie theater, much more arty than most of the flicks shown at Mystic Cinemas.

☉ **Life Bowls** <https://lifebowlst.com> **ALL VEGETARIAN**

Entry last updated 2018:

A small café that specializes in fruit salads (very Californian!) and almond-milk smoothies, all vegan except for bee pollen, honey, and whey protein. They also drive a seasonal food truck. They usually offer a daily soup and daily special that both are vegan. Its interior is small and cramped with limited seating, so dine here only when seasonally comfortable to eat outside on the benches and tiny tables in front of its entrance.

in MIDDLETOWN:

Ethnically-diverse and working-class, Middletown has many things to commend, and the hustle and bustle of Main St is one of them. ION on Main St is another.

Ⓢ ION Kitchen and Bar (formerly called *It's Only Natural*)

Daily specials on its Facebook page: www.facebook.com/IONRestaurant

Entry last updated December 2023:

Opened in 1987, ION is a culinary survivor and an icon of vegan cuisine during most of its three-and-a-half-decades-long legacy. As a faithful patron since 1988, I have witnessed ION 1.0 pass through four ownerships with three partnerships and thereby undergo many transformations, now too many and too long ago to warrant recounting here.

It evolved into ION 8.0 in September 2013 when it relocated a few blocks north up Main Street, eerily close to its original location from which it had moved 15 years earlier. Due to increased competition from nearby latecomer veg restaurants and therefore a reduced customer base (in marketing, that is called “cannibalism”), in order to compete ION downsized both its menu and its space. I’m thankful that ION adapted, but lament the loss of most of my favorite dishes. I also miss its spacious outdoor deck which provided me with a secluded environment for many memorable meals with cherished dinner companions, even in winter, a testament to the courage of my dinner companions and to the endurance of the often scantily clad waitresses. Auspiciously, it also adapted a name change, from *It's Only Natural* to *ION*, what I label truth-in-advertising, as it had wandered far from its roots as a beacon of natural foods.

On the very positive side, the new space is cozy and, during the day, sunny if you sit near the plate-glass windows. Some new plush seats are really comfy, almost like living-room sofa chairs, a welcomed upgrade from the narrow rickety wooden chairs of its former location indoors (on its outdoor deck, the stools were sturdy, like those at picnic tables) and that of many other veg restaurants.

One very heartening change soon after its move which I hail is its decision to dump cow cheese as one of its three cheese options, which it had offered for almost ten years. So ION 8.5 then had reclaimed its legacy as a truly vegan restaurant.

Early in 2014, it incarnated into ION 9.0 when the menu changed to fit the specialties of its new chef, rather than the new chef adapting to the specialties of the restaurant. ION rewrote a new and slimmer menu, yet again. Some savory entrées and apps added just a year earlier were edged out. Only the wine and beer list had lengthened, neither of interest to me. That newly truncated menu tended toward spicy Tex-Mex, unfortunately for me not among my favorite ethnic cuisines. Its once high nutritional standards had descended several notches. Most of the dishes were pan-fried or deep-fried, and highly refined tofu and overly processed seitan had edged out more wholesome tempeh. (The remaining remnant of tempeh is now found only in the deep-fried “crab” cakes, which contain so little tempeh that you would never know unless told.) Whole grain bread and pasta gave way to totally white flour. There was not much choice outside of fried foods and Tex-Mex and tofu and seitan and wine and beer. No wonder ION shifted its name from *It's Only Natural* to *ION*, as little there qualifies for even the loosest definition of natural foods. I suppose that is where its customers have shifted, and so ION changed with them. (Or, maybe, only I have changed?)

In early 2016, ION briefly ascended into ION 9.5, that incarnation come full-circle upon the part-time return of masterful head chef Ken Bergeron. Oldsters will remember Ken as the founder of ION when it debuted in 1987. Ken had migrated the menu out of Texas and Mexico and into Europe and Asia and then back into New England. If you had been disappointed with ION in the

past, all surely was forgiven with Ken's return. But alas, his mid-sexagenarian health was failing, so his return was brief.

In mid 2016, Tex-Mex, fried foods (its most egregious abomination was fried dough as a cardiac-arrest special), toad food tofu, and satanic seitan (with a sprinkling anew of dreaded hyper-processed TVP) returned to dominance at ION 10.0. So did mock meat. Fried food is kiddie food, and I guess I've grown up (or old?). I eschew mock meat, which make a mockery of vegetarianism. Of course, I eat neither, but I would prefer to eat meat that tastes like soy beans than soy beans that taste like meat.

By late 2017, my few favorite items disappeared. And beware the desserts, all unabashedly made with white sugar and white flour. Except for the salads (and who but those who eat out every day ever order salads?), nothing on the 2018 regular menu appealed to me. Alliums abound in just about every entrée, and even in sides, for instance onions in the coleslaw that elsewhere seldom has onions. (I happen to shun onions, garlic, scallions, ramps, and shallots.) The choices were between pan- or deep-fried, between white flour or white sugar, between mock meats or fleece cheese. Even the bean burger, like the crab cake, is fried. In order to disguise all the frying, many items are called "crispy" rather than "fried." The sandwiches all come on white bread and with salted sweet potato fries, which I formerly was able to substitute with mashed potatoes. But mashed potatoes have been dropped from the menu. The wine and beer menu actually exceeds the lunch and dinner menus. In 2019, ION had totally fallen off the wagon and began serving hard gin and vodka. As an unabashed cannabis connoisseur, I seek shots of wheatgrass juice, never served here.

Agreed, I am a mindful eater with high nutritional standards. But little on the menu for me was a loss both for ION and for me. Plant-based should mean the entrée is based upon a plant and so bears close resemblance to the vegetable from which it was made. Instead, ION 11.0 was committed to serving vegan food for vegans who do not like eating vegetables.

In June of 2021, ION 12.0 turned a new leaf when yet another pair of new owners bought the business on an installment plan, so the former owner still has a presence in the background. One year after their purchase, as of 2022 the amended full name of ION has now become *ION Kitchen and Bar*. They retained the name ION in order to continue its legacy as CT's oldest vegan restaurant. With them came the return of whole-grain buns, of burgers other than of mock meats, of rice that turned whole grain again, and of an array of sides all comprised of wholesome vegetables, albeit swimming in oil. For instance, if you miss the signature Brussels sprouts of the former 21 Oak in Manchester, you'll be heartened to find them resurrected here at ION, though at ION swimming in oil.

Best of all WERE its two burgers and buns. I rated them the best vegan burgers in all of CT & RI. Yet in 2023 both of their ingredients were overwhelmingly adulterated with devitalized wheat gluten (what ION has obfuscated under the name Seitan), an ultra-processed non-food glue that is whiter than white flour. From 2021 to late 2023, for two years I thought I had found vegan burger nirvana here. But no longer. Both the chickpea cutlet and the mushroom burger have become chewy shadows of their former selves. The chickpea cutlet devolved into a piece of leather. And no longer can I taste the mushrooms in the mushroom burger. So once again, I no longer have anything worth eating at ION.

My lamentation about ION veering away from wholesome and natural foods is less about ION's redirection and more about veganism's embrace by popular culture and therefore veganism's divergence from whole foods which popular culture has yet to adapt. ION simply is rolling with the waves and following the trends of the broader vegan population, evidenced by the weekend crowds that fill its room. ION is ever on a see-saw. It is a work in-progress, even after 35 years. Especially after 35 years. Perhaps someday tempeh will return to its menu, tofu and fried foods be reduced, and seitan and mock meats eliminated altogether. Perhaps. Until then, when I eat at ION it is only because I am passing through Middletown anyway. ION formerly was my

destination. Now it is only my pit stop. I look forward to the day that ION 13.0 reclaims its legacy as not just a vegan restaurant but also a natural and whole foods restaurant. Meanwhile, if you were disappointed in the past with ION's long wait times or crotchety wait staff or inconsistently prepared food, you must keep on waiting for ION 13.0.

2023 Addendum: The artwork on the walls usually rotates, but one painting had remained a fixture for nearly two years. It was a larger-than-life-size portrait of a male in full frontal nudity. I am oblivious to its nudity at the groin. But I found disturbing the macabre animal skull that substitutes for its head. It was appropriate as a poster for a horror movie. And more fitting for displaying in a butcher shop or a crematorium, but certainly not in a vegan restaurant. While that gross painting was relegated to the restrooms area (am not kidding you), I am vexed that it was not removed from the premises altogether and donated to a funeral parlor or crematoria. With that painting still hanging on the wall, albeit an obscure wall, a question hangs in the air. Whose mind is more disturbed? The painter's, the proprietors', or mine?

also in MIDDLETOWN:

© **AROY THAI GARDEN – Vegan**

<https://www.roythaigarden.com>

<https://www.yelp.com/biz/thai-gardens-middletown>

https://www.instagram.com/roy_thai_garden/

Entry updated Jan 2024:

Formerly a conventionally carnivorous Thai restaurant that, like all Thai-American restaurants, served fish sauce in nearly all of its traditional dishes, in March of 2023 its newest owner (its third in 3 years) and vegan chef converted the restaurant to veganism. Its new name, Aroy Thai Garden (note the singular), similar to its former name, Thai Gardens (note the plural), causes needless confusion. Thus customers have posted their online reviews (and photos) for one under the acct of the other. On Yelp, newer reviews under its old name. On vegan-haven Happy Cow, older reviews under its new name. (Only its Instagram acct has it right, where the new owner posts photos only of her all-vegan dishes.) Puzzled and confused? So am I.

Puzzle Number 2. It is heartening but also puzzling to be treated to two all-vegan restaurants both hosted in the middle of Middletown on the town's same Main Street. Can both survive such nearby competition vying for such a specialized clientele? Will one drive the other out-of-business, or will both be driven into insolvency? An odd business environment. Odd, too, is that both are closed on Mondays. You don't need an MBA to recognize the advantage in being open on the very day when your direct competition is closed.

Puzzle Number 3. The entrées on its online menu offer the choice of 4 kinds of rice, none brown rice, yet brown rice is offered as a side dish. If brown rice acts as a gold standard for a restaurant's food's nutritional merits, then this restaurant does pass such a test, but with puzzlement.

While mock meats predominate and fried foods abound, the menu is so extensive and varied that much still is offered with its array of wholesome vegetables as main courses. My lunch date and I tried two such dishes of all veggies, and both were well prepared, though the sauce of one did taste strange, or should I say, different.

Vegans such as I, even those who shun fried foods and mock meats, are confronted with a dilemma. Dine up the street at tried-and-true good ol' all-vegan ION, with its low nutritional standards? Or dine at Aroy where a vast banquet of new and exciting dishes of wholesome veggies awaits our sampling. Questions, questions, troubling our minds and challenging our palates.

January 2024 update:

Returned today for my 3rd time here and witnessed an interesting scene. Two "mixed gender" married couples, all nearing retirement age and clearly old friends, sat down and engaged in animated conversation while waiting for the waiter to appear. Upon his entry, he asked them if they knew this was now a vegan restaurant (unlike a year or more ago, when they last were here). They said they did not know that, and without any discussion among themselves and almost without any hesitation, they got up and left. I asked the waiter if that has happened before. He said, yes, almost once a day.

also in MIDDLETOWN:

© **UDUPI BHAVAN** ALL VEGETARIAN

www.udupibhavanct.com

www.facebook.com/Udupi-Bhavan-100862656625787/ (FB page is seldom updated)

Entry last updated 2021:

Asian Indian cuisine with its white flour, white sugar, white rice and red hot spices is my least favorite ethnic cuisine, so I may not be in a good position to rate this all-vegetarian cafeteria-style restaurant. There, my "full disclosure."

After eating here three times in the 1990s, I had concluded that I much prefer American Natural Vegan to Asian Indian Vegetarian, and so thereafter I instead always ate at the nearby It's Only Natural. But upon adopting ION as its moniker, ION has rightfully deleted the word "natural" from its name, and my evaluation of ION has transitioned from disappointment to disbelief. Because of all its fried foods and white flour and mock meats, there now is little left for me to eat at ION. So, says I, why not again give Udupi Bhavan a try? And in September 2018, that is exactly what we did. And I'm glad we did.

Restricted to what is vegan and vegetable-centered, there still is much from which to choose. (Much more than at ION.) While the Vegetable Korma and the Chana Masala both came with identical curry sauces, the sauce was not overly spicy, and so much to my liking. (And remember, I generally do not like Indian foods.) While potatoes predominated among the assorted vegetables of the Korma, all those vegetables, even the potatoes, were good. Plus, because we informed him we are vegans, the kind gentleman who served us knew not to include the cow-milk-based raita with our meal, even though it is listed on the menu as included. While there were no substitutes offered nor discounts off the price of the entrees, neither did we ask for that.

If you concentrate on the reasonably priced food rather than upon the paper plates and plastic dinnerware and dull view out the window of a strip mall, you are sure to have an enjoyable and, more importantly, nourishing meal here. Just follow Main St south, and leave ION behind you.

also in MIDDLETOWN:

© **It's Only Natural Market** – – Carnivore but Veg-Friendly

www.itsonlynaturalmarket.com

Entry added Oct 2023:

Shopping at this health food store after dining across the street at the restaurant ION has always been an added treat. While it may seem small in terms of square footage, its aisles are narrow and its shelving units are sky high, so a lot gets packed into this small space.

When ION is closed, it is great to be able to stave off hunger by shopping here for the to-go vegan deli items prepared in-house. In the past, those deli items ranged from bland to ok, and always too garlicky and oniony for my tender palate. Recently, however, upon the retirement of their old cook, they hired a new chef who is adding an array of new and imaginative vegan items,

all stellar. I especially recommend the Ginger Teriyaki Tofu, which rises beyond its humble tofu origins, and the Superfood Salad, a coleslaw with a cauliflower base. I look forward to trying more of the many other new items.

in MYSTIC:

Traffic is always congested and parking is always elusive in downtown Mystic, especially in the summer, so don't say I didn't warn you.

© Karma Kitchen & Juicery very VEGAN-friendly

www.facebook.com/mykarmacleanse (daily specials are only infrequently posted here)

www.karmakitchenmystic.com (a flashy interface with little info except for its menu)

Entry last updated 2020:

Who can discuss Karma Kitchen without also discussing Biologic +, previously also in Mystic and just three blocks away, until KK drove Biologic out of business? Obviously not I.

Opened July 2016, a mere four months after and three blocks away from **Biologic +**, it was hard to fathom how two juice and smoothie veg cafes with overlapping menus could thrive in such close proximity when just half a year earlier none whatsoever existed in Mystic. Locating a second juicery (that's what KK calls itself) on practically the same street is bad timing, or bad luck, or bad karma. While both could thrive during congested tourist season in downtown cutesy Mystic, after Labor Day such cannibalistic competition spelled doom for one of the cafes. A higher-end Starbucks and a lower-end Dunkin' Donuts can survive side-by-side because most Americans consume caffeine and many even worship the drug as the centerpiece to their meals. Thus both Starbucks and Drunken Donuts can flourish because of a large demand for coffee. But for juice? Bio was more esoteric because it was all organic and all raw and all vegan while KK is more populist because its fare makes no claims about organic and is not all raw and not even all vegetarian. But how many Mystical or stoned-in-Stonington folks patronize smoothie and juice bars? Sum and substance, two years later Biologic + closed down. Am sorry to see it go.

KK has more indoor seating than did Bio, but KK's molded plastic chairs are just as uncomfortable as were Bio's stools. Thus, like Bio, KK is more set up for takeout. KK's menu is more varied and expansive than was all-vegan Bio's. KK is vegetarian except for a single chicken item and some egg on its face. Like Heirloom Food in Danielson, KK has largely bypassed the dairy barn. And KK offers many cooked items while Bio's was mostly raw, if not all raw. So there was enough for KK to distinguish itself from Bio after all. And where KK surpassed Bio is in its parking. KK has its own parking lot behind its building, accessible from around both ends of the building in which it is located. And, even better, its rear entrance connects with its parking lot. Not to mention, during warmer seasons, to some outdoor picnic tables.

Oh, in case you're wondering, the solid-food dishes here are okay.

also in Mystic:

S&P Oyster Company— Carnivore with separate Vegan menu

<https://sp-oyster.com>

Entry updated 2022:

The newspaper local to Southeastern Connecticut, called The Day, ran a January 2019 article not about the restaurant in general, but specifically about its newly initiated vegan menu. Living 15 miles away, I duly put this fancy eatery on my list of 1001 restaurants to visit before I die. Yet,

view its sparse Vegan sub-menu online, and you'll see that aside from the 2 salads there are only 6 dishes, 3 sides, and 1 dessert, that's hardly more than you'd expect to find at any other restaurant that does not build up such high expectations. Hey, Oyster Guys, at first I decided that I likely would die with this clam shack still on my to-do list.

Not until three years later, in April of 2022, did a non-vegan friend and I decide that it was time to die, or I mean, time to check out that Vegan sub-menu. We arrived at 2pm on a weekday during non-tourist season and innocently expected to be seated. Instead we were politely informed that without advance reservations our wait to be seated would take up to half an hour. Non-resolute, we decided to sit that one out, and instead ate on the cheap at Karma Kitchen just down the block.

Four months later, during the summer season when downtown Mystic descends into one eternal traffic jam, a vegan friend and I were more resolute. We made advance reservations, again for 2pm on a weekday, intending afterwards to see a film at the quaint Mystic Cinema. Whereas a line of hungry people lacking reservations again was waiting outside the restaurant, my friend and I were immediately and very efficiently ushered in by the caring and attentive waitstaff. So if you plan to eat here, be sure to make reservations!

And be sure to wait for when the season and weather allow for seating on the outdoor patio, because from there you can gawk at the line of tourists parading along the drawbridge, traveling faster afoot than the parallel car traffic jam inching alongside them. And did I say that there's a Vegan sub-menu to be had here? The food is unique even for vegan cuisine, is very good, and is elegantly presented, though portions are quite sparse, but don't dine here just for its food. Dine here for the tourist-mecca Mystic experience.

Mystic Salad Co. – Carnivore with very Vegetarian friendly

Facebook page only, which is seldom updated and informs of nothing more than its hours:
<https://www.facebook.com/myssaladco>

Entry recorded February 2023:

You might recall Mystic Salad Co.'s location as the former site of all-vegan Biologic + that closed a half year before MSC opened in June 2019. Whereas Biologic tolerated but discouraged dine-in with its 4 unstable high stools, MSC is solely takeout. Instead of eat-in, along the canal right outside its front door there are ample benches where you can have laptop picnics.

The menu comprises one customized salad and one soup. Nothing fancy. So unlike Mystic's Pizzetta or S&P, this is not a destination eatery that might lure you to endure the traffic turmoil of downtown Mystic. Rather, eat at MSC because you're already ensconced in Mystic and you seek an inexpensive but nourishing lunch.

MSC could qualify as all-vegetarian except for the one topping of chicken available at a surcharge. The soup the day I was there was vegetarian, as noted on the small chalkboard. The only other signage is a handwritten listing on a whiteboard of the 8 or 9 dressings, of which several are vegan, but to know that you must ask. (MSC, can you take a hint?) The salad is basic salad bar fare, like in some fast-casual restaurants pre-Covid, but you don't serve yourself. Instead you instruct the very gracious server of your choices. The base is one of three greens, including baby spinach. Among the 16 or so toppings, a few are cheesy, but the majority are vegan, consisting half of canned vegetables, including beets and artichoke hearts, and half of fresh raw vegetables, including mushrooms. Among the three canned beans is edamame soybeans, a pleasant surprise. To top it off you choose from 4 sprinkles, including for a nutritional boost raw sunflower seeds and raw pumpkin seeds. After you select your dressing, the server tosses it all together and serves it in a compostable paperboard container.

The size of the salad is large, even by this whole-foodist vegan's standards. And its price is enticing, especially by tourist mecca Mystic's standards. And unlike the rest of downtown, parking on this one-way side street is ample. The name Mystic spawns a mystique in some tourists' minds, the way the name Vermont evokes wholesomeness. Hence many Vermont-based food companies add the word Vermont to their names. For touristy reasons, Mystic Salad Co. does the same with the word Mystic. Add the word Salad, and here you've got wholesomeness, too.

A quick and inexpensive yet highly nourishing meal for all.

in NEW HAVEN:

What is it about New Haven that it has only with difficulty been able to support a good veg restaurant? The few good ones always have come and gone very quickly, while Claire's, at its best only mediocre, has been here forever.

© **Edge of the Woods** (no website, just a blog) **ALL VEGETARIAN**

Entry last updated 2018:

A family-owned vegetarian health food store that carries meat only in the dog and cat food (same as the wonderful Willimantic Food Coop previously did, but Willi now no longer is veg), Edge offers a good bakery and an excellent warm buffet with everything clearly labeled either vegan or dairy. Seating is available, but it is cramped and uncomfortable, so it's a stretch to call this place a restaurant. Highly recommended for takeout. Only OK for eat-in.

© **Claire's Cornercopia** www.clairecornercopia.com **ALL VEGETARIAN**

Entry last updated 2024:

Since 1975, Claire's has remained an integral part of New Haven's dining scene that almost always has lacked an eat-in vegan restaurant. Kudos for its longevity. Ten years ago, in 2014, Claire's dipped its toes into the 21st Century by increasing its proportion of vegan entrées, as well as offering vegan cheese as an alternative to all its cow cheese dishes. (Until then, you could substitute cow cheese only with blah tofu). The very informative online and wallboard menus instruct which otherwise non-vegan dishes can be made vegan, and that extensive menu exists in reality, not just on paper. Took a while for Claire's to accommodate vegans. Until around 1999, Ms Claire offered tuna, but removed it from the menu. On the other hand, soon after that she opened Basta, her dead-meat restaurant next door. No loss to the vegan community when a few years ago it closed down. A chef need not be a veghead to creatively cook veggies, and at times Claire does creatively cook veggies.

Most other vegan reviewers understandably berate this place, but I rate it Fair rather than Terrible. You simply must choose wisely from among its extensive menu. On the plus side, you can view some of the standard entrees and most of the specials in a display case near the registers, and doing so is more edifying than the inscriptions on the wall boards. Yes, you sometimes can judge these books by their covers. For instance, one memorable daily special, a nut loaf with mashed potatoes, looked better than it sounds, and tasted better than it looked! Most entrées come with a cutesy small loaf of spongiform bread that is allegedly whole wheat but that looks exceedingly white. Tell the cashier who takes your order to skip the bread, as it is unfit to feed even to the birds.

The seating is cramped and uncomfortable, even after it expanded during pandemic pandemonium and added space between tables. The staff behind the counter works in even

more cramped and stressful quarters, so be sympathetic to them. When you pay by credit card, there's no option to add tips, so bring cash for the tip jar. They deserve it. Worse for them than for us who stay for only an hour, the noise level inside compares to a college dining hall, which might be heartening if that evokes memories of your youth. Just don't meet here for a date. Try to claim a seat by a window where you can enjoy the view of the Yale and New Haven communities parading by, and can thereby take your mind off the sometimes bland, industrial-quality food, in which case you can actually enjoy not only sitting here, but also eating here.

Except on Sundays, finding nearby parking in this corner of the city can be futile, so be prepared for a long walk and, also except on Sundays, a hefty payout to the parking meter. You may be better off not even trying, and instead taking the short drive or long walk to all-vegan (but not eat-in) **Ninth Square Market Caribbean Style**.

Also in New Haven:

© **Ninth Square Market Caribbean Style**
a/k/a Caribbean Style Vegan ALL VEGAN

www.caribbeanstylevegan.com

Facebook page, seldom updated

www.facebook.com/ninthsquaremarketcaribbean

Best to phone ahead.

Entry last updated 2021:

New Haven draws me as a frequent visitor to the Yale Univ Art Gall, and after my visits I always used to eat two blocks away at Claire's Cornercopia. Once snagging an elusive parking space at Yale, I did not want to have to later search for another space at Ninth Square, the name of the New Haven neighborhood after which this Jamaican café is named. But much to my delight, parking is plentiful at Ninth Square, especially on Saturday, either just around the corner or in the garage directly overhead, its entrance literally right next door. So, except on Sunday when this café is closed, no more Claire's for me!

While I had sampled this café's food at three different crowded Compassionfests since 2016, many conversations and distractions were happening all around me, so I could not fully experience whatever it was I was trying to eat. At long last, in 2019, I ate at the café itself. (In art history terminology, that is called "in situ.") I had arrived soon after opening, just ahead of a steady stream of lunchtime customers. Inside the café, I happily was able to sit down and direct full attention to what I was eating. The food is great! And nourishing and satisfying and underpriced! All the varied dishes are perfectly prepared. Nothing too spicy, too salty, too sweet, or too oily. (Also, no detectable onions or garlic, a big plus for me, because I shun alliums, yet so many restaurants shove alliums down their customers' throats.) I have returned twice more since my first visit, and was equally pleased each time.

The Large platter is 7 dishes, the Medium platter is 5, both topped with medallions of plantains. The owners, a married couple, are vegans who, when they opened this café early in 2017, assumed they would need to serve some meat to remain financially afloat. But, after half a year, they decided otherwise and transformed their menu into an all-vegan affair of Jamaican cooking served cafeteria-style. Unlike at New England's other all-vegan Rasta cafés, namely Fire N Spice on Capitol Av in Hartford (distinct from its now shuttered Sisson Av location), Shandal's in Bridgeport, and Belmont in Worcester, and at the almost all-veg Lion's Den in Hartford, here mock meats do not predominate. I avoid mock meats that make a mockery of veganism. Highly processed mock meats have no place in true Ital food, so why American Rasta cafés serve so much of it puzzles me. When I ate at Ital cafés in Kingston, Jamaica, no mock meats were served.

Here omitting the mock meats as well as the rice, I still have an ample array of wholesome veggies from which to choose. This is not true for the other Rasta vegan cafés here in New England. And just on the Medium platter, I get stuffed, but not bloated, evidence of the frugal use of oil. Quite simply, this is the best vegan Rasta food I have eaten both here and in Jamaica.

While this café has a very small table and a corner counter, it is more designed for takeout. In fact, even if you eat-in, your meal will still be served in disposable aluminum round bowls. Three of the four aforementioned Rasta cafés and Ninth Square all have in common the same flimsy aluminum bowls with, if for takeout, the same clear plastic round lids. Is there is an academy from which all these Rasta chefs have graduated at which all have taken a fraternal pledge to serve everything on this same inelegant dishware? Or do all these cafés simply lack dishwashing facilities? Anyhow, as long as you are being served here in takeout dishes, you might as well do takeout.

in NEW LONDON:

Rundown old New London, formerly just a dump with nowhere for vegheads to eat, has made a turn for the better since 2007, evidenced by Fiddleheads, and former Right Path Organic Café.

© **FIDDLEHEADS Natural Foods Coop** Carnivore but vegan-friendly
<http://fiddleheadsfood.coop>

Entry last updated 2022:

I'm a member of both Fiddleheads Foods Coop, and of Willimantic Food Coop, Connecticut's only two food coops, yet only 28 miles from each other. Founded as an indoor farmers' market in February 2008, during the next 3 years its core staff remained all-volunteer, which stands as a testament to community cooperation and to each individual's idealism. After 3 years, its finances became stable enough to pay several employees, but its workforce still was largely volunteer. After 7 years, all the staff were on the payroll. After 10 years, it built an in-house kitchen for takeout (I loathe the term "grab and go") foods supervised by the masterful chef who formerly ran Mangetout. Many of her vegan dishes, especially the hummuses, are tantalizing. The array of vegan dishes, clearly labeled "Vegan," has been expanding every month. The chef, however, needs to aim for better accuracy in her lists of ingredients. For instance, of the over 25 ingredients in the excellent Peanut Soba Tempeh dish, called the Energy Bowl, brown rice is listed third, yet nary a single grain can be found.

After 11 years, Fiddleheads is so firmly established institution that New Londoners probably wonder how they ever survived without it. (I know how I survived. I shopped at Willimantic Food Coop.) Its meteoric rise is both amazing and heartwarming! I respect and am grateful to all those who volunteered along the way (I know them because I was one of them!), to its present paid staff who work for organic peanuts, to its board members who still volunteer their time, and to the local farmers who sell their produce here.

While all of its produce is organic, Fiddleheads actively promotes the consumption of dead animals, with whose bodies its freezers and fridges overflow. I literally must hold my breath when walking past its Death Row open fridge. If you are a vegan or vegetarian, you might consider patronizing instead Willimantic Food Coop, 28 miles north of Fiddleheads. Willi's meats at least are confined to three freezer doors, less than half that as at Fiddle, where beef jerky confronts you even at the checkout counter.

Among the farmers who sell directly to Fiddleheads, many also sell dead animals. If there's one farmer at a farmers' market and he sells live produce and also dead animals, I will buy his produce. But if there's two farmers selling live produce, one who sells also dead animals and one who sells only produce, when given the choice I will patronize solely the one who sells only

produce. Thank goodness when we on behalf of better unborn farm animals are given the choice. So given the choice between shopping at Fiddleheads Food Coop and Willimantic Food Coop, my preference is clear, though due to prohibitive car mileage, I shop at both.

Good news for vegans! The selection of vegan cheezes at Fiddleheads far surpasses what Willi offers. Also, from its own in-house kitchen, Fiddleheads now offers many “grab ‘n go” items in its fridge that are clearly labeled either vegetarian or vegan. And many of them are outstanding both for their wholesome ingredients and for their taste.

It's important to shop at either Willi or Fiddle, because both offer a welcomed alternative to shopping at hardly-Whole Foods. After all, with the demise of Garden of Light in Glastonbury (due not to Whole Foods moving into town, but to its customers abandoning it for WF), Connecticut's one remaining all-veg food store, **Edge of the Woods** in New Haven, is just too far away. So let's be thankful for Willi and Fiddleheads (and the two Foodworks in Old Saybrook and Guilford), without which we'd be forced to patronize hardly-Whole Foods.

also in New London:

© **Jasmine Thai** www.jasminethainl.com Carnivore (stay away!)

Entry last updated 2012:

Jasmine Thai on Bank St, away from the center of downtown, is comfortable and spacious and sunny and offers easy parking. Its menu has an entrée section allegedly *Vegetarian*, but beware the 3 sauces: Amazing Sauce is amazing in how much sugar is contained in its syrup posing as sauce, Volcanic Sauce sounds too hot for me to dare to try, and the Garlic Sauce has fish stock, which you learn only by interrogating the right waitress, as most of the other waitresses as well as the hostess will placate you by telling you what they think you want to hear. In other words, they lie to you. (All the Curry Sauces on the rest of the non-Vegetarian menu have fish stock too, as fish stock is usually the basis of all curry dishes served in Thai restaurants here in the Northeast USA). While i wish i could recommend this place, in the end the little food that *really* is vegetarian is only mediocre, so eat here only if you want a nice cozy place to enjoy the company of and engage in intimate conversation with your dinner companion. And nope, no brown rice (nor do i know of a single Asian restaurant in the New London area except for the short-lived Kong Foo in Norwich that offers such an option).

A note about meals at Asian restaurants:

Please indulge my digression and perhaps xenophobic condemnation, but I have learned not to trust the wait staff at Asian restaurants. Both a cultural chasm and a language divide separate American vegans from Asian wait staff. Identifying yourself as a vegetarian is literally meaningless to most of them (which means, they do not know what the word means). They seem not to understand that clams and oysters and lobsters and shrimp and squid and octopus and fish all are animals (and that eggs are products of animals). You often can find these animals listed right on their menus in their so-called vegetarian sections. I shudder to guess at the ingredients that are not listed. Years ago, when I still attempted to eat at random Asian restaurants, despite the waiter's assurances all too often the food I was served failed my sniff test. I smelled something fishy in their sauces, and so never ate at that restaurant again. And then never again at another restaurant, and another, and another. Beware clandestine clam and insidious fish in their curry and garlic sauces. Asian restaurants are no more a “vegetarian safe haven” than compared to any other ethnic cuisine. Hoping otherwise is fooling only yourself.

also in New London:

© **The Social Bar + Kitchen**– Carnivore with Vegan options marked on menu www.socialnewlondon.com

Entry last updated 2019:

The Social deserves praise for emblazoning on both its front and rear facades the words *Vegetarian and Vegan Options* in lettering large enough to read from a car zooming by. So after two years of zooming by, and on a Monday when all-vegan Right Path Organic Café just a block away is closed, I decided to donate my body to science and conduct some animal experiments (the animals being my dinner companion and me) by trying some of their veg options, marked on their menu with two green leaves for vegetarian and four for vegan.

To avoid any misunderstandings, I introduced ourselves as vegans to our waitress. The Brussels (misspelled on their menu singular *Brussel*) Sprouts and Tofu Bites, both *flash-fried* (whatever that means), were oily but good. But beware the Garden Burger (and guilty by association, the Black Bean Burger). I gagged after I swallowed one mouthful (my meal mate, a cautious female, did not swallow). I am quite sure it was fried on the same grill as the meat burgers, as the smell of meat permeated its crust. (I can't attest that it tasted like meat, because after 53 years I have scant recollection what meat tastes like.) I very diplomatically voiced my concern to our waitress, who to her credit apologized with not a hint of defensiveness. She inferred that they usually are attentive to keeping meat out of the vegan dishes, and she suggested that I could speak to the manager about my concern, but I declined her kind offer. Yesterday was the Monday after the very busy Sailfest weekend, so maybe the cook was in recovery mode from being overworked, and maybe otherwise is attentive to keeping meat out of the vegan dishes, but just not yesterday. I hope not to discourage either the owners or the cooks from trying to accommodate cranky vegans such as I. But if I ever return here to share a beer with a friend, I just won't eat anything.

We vegheads must always be vigilant when eating out. Even if my accusation is unfounded that animal fat permeated the so-called vegan burger, this incident reminds me to favor veg restaurants over those merely veg-friendly, where all items on their vegan menus should add the advisory: "Manufactured in a facility that processes animal body parts. May contain meat."

also in New London:

© **Saeed's** (Middle Eastern) www.saeedsmarket.com Carnivore but vegan-friendly

Entry last updated 2022:

Originally located downtown on Bank Street, Saeed's has been in business since at least 1987, when I moved to this area. Longevity speaks volumes. Its newer store on Ocean Av is sunny and spacious and, though now far from downtown, still worth your visit.

Every 5 years, I have given their house-made hummus and the baba ganoush a try, only to be disappointed each time by both for being way too salty, inedible to my taste. Last year, on my 5-year try, the baba ganoush once again was way too salty, lacked any taste or chunks of eggplant, but even worse this time it had chunks (not bits, but chunks) of raw garlic that I was compelled to remove and discard. I have resolved to give up on their hummus and baba ganoush. But I have not given up on everything else that Saeed's has to offer, and that is much.

Rather, I shop here for their grocery products, for which the selection is expansive. Though Mediterranean and Middle Eastern specialty items predominate, it really is an international foods market as its name claims. For instance, the roasted buckwheat is imported from Russia. From Russia! Have you ever seen anywhere else any food that was imported from Russia? And it just happens to be an excellent roasted buckwheat.

Surprisingly, you will find here even foods of a health food store brand, but not necessarily at the same prices of health food stores. Indeed, prices here are usually less than you'd expect. For instance, the oversized cans of stuffed grape leaves are remarkably underpriced. So consider this store a vegan's delight.

☉ **Swad Tandoori** (Indian/Tibetan) **Carnivore (stay away)**

Entry last updated 2016:

This restaurant was formerly called Northern Indian Restaurant and was shut down in June 2016 due to the owner's tax evasion. It was reopened by another member of the same Tibetan family as a Himalayan restaurant. (Incidentally the former restaurant was actually Tibetan, not Indian, therefore equally Himalayan.) Then in the fall of 2016 that second restaurant very quickly failed and closed due to lack of business. Then the original owner, assumedly having paid his debt to the IRS, bought it back.

The original owner's former restaurant's vegan or made-to-be-vegan dishes all were inedible, so his reincarnated restaurant cannot bode well for vegans. The menu looks suspiciously similar as before, just with the tandoori clay oven added. I do not intend to give it the benefit of the doubt and try this place even once. Why would any veghead want to eat here with the stench of flesh in its air that spews outdoors onto the sidewalk?

also in New London:

☉ **Spice Palette** (Indian) <https://thespicepaletteus.com/veg/>
Carnivore but vegan-friendly

Entry last updated 2022:

You might think that Indian restaurants would provide a safe haven for vegans but, with ghee and cream so ubiquitous, my experience has proven otherwise. Spice Palette offers many vegan choices, and those are clearly labeled right on the menu with a V for Vegan. Also important, the waitstaff all speak fluent "vegan" here.

Long overdue, New London can now boast of a restaurant with worthy vegan options for the days and hours when Right Path Organic Café is closed. (All the sauces at Jasmine Thai contain fish; 2Wives dropped whole wheat pizza crust and hummus from its menu; The Social Bar grills their so-called vegan burgers alongside meat; and on both of my visits to Swad Tandoori's former incarnation, their few vegan entrées were questionable and inedible.)

For your first time here, you really must dine in person to fully luxuriate in the beautiful presentation of the food on the elegant dishware. Even the dining room is beautiful, so if you insist on takeout, then at least step into the larger dining room on the right. It's hard to imagine that a fast casual Italian local restaurant chain was formerly housed here.

Among the five vegan entrées that I so far have tried that are listed among the menu's Vegetarian section, all were good. Even the accompanying delicately flavored basmati rice, though white rather than my preferred whole grain, was good. I did notice that several of these entrées ordered in person during lunch had a better vegetable to sauce ratio than when I ordered for takeout during dinner. Takeout was more like soup. Different chefs?

Do you recall the outstanding Brussels sprouts served at the very vegan-friendly but sadly short-lived Café Otis in Norwich? On Spice Palette's Soups & Salads section, the Tandoor Brussels Sprout Salad rivals those from Café Otis. Note that though it is not labeled V for Vegan, I was assured by both my servers all three times that I ordered it that it would be prepared vegan just for me.

I have yet to try any of the vegan selections on the Biryani & Rice section, but they all hold promise to be appealing. Note that Vegetable Biryani is marked V for Vegan, but paradoxically lacks the Green Leaf symbol for Vegetarian. As the restaurant has been open for less than a

month, discrepancies on their debut menu are understandable, and surely will be corrected over time.

Distinct from other New London eateries in the heart of downtown, prices here are reasonable, the building is fully accessible, and parking in its own private lot is spacious.

in Niantic:

The Natural Food Store – Carnivore but Veg-Friendly

www.naturalfoodst.com

Entry last updated 2020:

Its storefront appears small, but the store, while narrow, is long. And the aisles are narrow and the shelving units tower overhead. So this deceptively tiny store actually stocks all the basics, and then some. In business for more than 33 years, it is amazing how little known it is to residents of SE Connecticut outside of Niantic. Its generic name is no help.

During its more than 33 years, it has moved its location within downtown Niantic three times, most recently to Hope St, so that surely contributes to its obscurity, as Hope St is merely four blocks long. Apparently, residents here are short on hope.

in OLD SAYBROOK :

© SHAKAHARI -- Vegetarian

No website nor Facebook page

Entry added Feb 2022:

Shakahari is Sanskrit for “vegetarian.” Thus this is an all-vegetarian café. Its online menus (note the plural) of 6 apps, 4 breads, and 8 entrées are as short as this restaurant is small, but it provides ample choices for vegans. Half the dishes already are vegan, and most of the vegetarian dishes can be veganized.

They maintain no website nor even a Facebook page, only two confusing and conflicting online menus. The Square Site online menu that at the time of my writing that Happy Cow links to neglects to inform you what is vegan. The totally different Open Menu online menu that Yelp links to does differentiate vegan from vegetarian. You’d think that with no website or FB, the café would resolve the two conflicting menus. Either way, for more info you must phone them or go there in-person. Yet, when you’re there, there’s no printed menu, only the online order menu, an inconvenience for their prospective customers.

Reviewers on Yelp, who mostly are carnivores, lauded this restaurant during its Act One (more about this 2-act play in a moment). If you like Asian Indian food, then you, too, might appreciate this restaurant. But if you are indifferent to Asian Indian food, you might remain indifferent to this restaurant. Asian Indian is my least favorite ethnic cuisine, so I am not in a good position to rate this restaurant. Only because it is all-vegetarian did I eat here yesterday and did I bother to write this review.

Preparation times are longer than usual, so if you place your order in-person I suggest you then go shopping at Foodworks a mile away on the same Route 1, and then return 45 minutes later. Still, if you do stick around and wait, its intimate seating is conducive to quiet conversation. So, unlike other small cafés, this is a very worthy place to meet for a dinner date.

First opened August 2016, it closed 17 months later due to a kitchen fire in January 2018 (Act One). After a nearly 4-year hiatus including 2 years during Covid, it reopened October 2021 (Act Two). There must be an interesting story behind that long intermission.

If you do not navigate with GPS, you can easily pass by its inconspicuous white signage and its short strip mall shared with Himalaya Café that sits perpendicular to Route 1. Its location is even harder to spot if you approach from the east from downtown Old Saybrook. So when on the road, keep a watchful eye for it.

© **Foodworks Food Store – Carnivore but very Vegan-Friendly**

See the listing for Foodworks under **Guilford**, its other store.

in STONINGTON :

© **Stonington Village Farmers Market Carnivore but Veg-Friendly**

www.facebook.com/Stonington-Village-Farmers-Market-163108413730842/

for downloadable hi-res floorplan of the Velvet Mill: www.thevelvetmill.com/map.html

Entry last updated 2020:

With many farmers markets in Eastern CT, including indoor winter markets in Andover, Coventry, and Storrs (and let's not forget that Fiddleheads in New London started out as only an indoor winter farmers market), Stonington's stands out in both size and variety. From November to April, it is held inside the (unfortunately hard-to-find) Velvet Mill. Well worth your visit even if only just once. Of the many veggie farmers, three are OG, and occasionally even a microgreen farmer appears here. Also artisans and bakers. Just be advised that, it being winter, much meat and eggs also are sold here, but the meat at least is out of sight in footlocker coolers. Despite the dead bodies, the mood is always festive and the crowd always energetic and friendly. Some of the other year-round shops are open during this event, too.

My only complaint about both the summer and winter markets are all the goddam dogs loitering around and cluttering the aisles with their dog owners, who must be very insecure people, so must show off their pedigree animals for, if not all the world to see, then for other insecure dog owners to see. Some come only to schmooze, yet must lug their dogs to schmooze along with them. I suppose dog ownership counts as a status symbol with other dog owners, but certainly not with me. Indeed, I know someone who totally avoids the Stonington Market precisely because of all the goddam dogs.

Held on Saturdays 10am-1pm. But many customers arrive and seem to be served much earlier, so if you want to find easy parking for the indoor winter market try to arrive by 10am. And if it is snowing or had snowed the day before, don't even bother going, because the parking lot will be a mess and many spaces will be clogged with mounds of plowed snow.

in STORRS / MANSFIELD :

This college town has become even more congested with the opening of its new pedestrian shopping mall right around the corner from Chang's, but fortunately parking is still easy to find at Chang's.

© **Chang's Garden** Carnivore but Vegan-Friendly w/brown rice

Entry last updated 2018:

Please indulge my digression and forgive my possible xenophobia, but I have learned that Chinese and Thai restaurants are far from the "vegan safe houses" that many deluded vegans mistake them to be. Both a cultural chasm and a language divide separate American vegans from Chinese and Thai wait staff. Identifying yourself as a vegetarian is literally meaningless as so many waiters seem not to understand that clams and oysters and lobsters and shrimp and squid and octopus and fish all are animals. You often can find these animals listed right on their menus in their so-called vegetarian sections. I shudder to guess at the ingredients that are not listed. Especially beware insidious fish in Thai curry sauces and clandestine clam in Chinese garlic sauces.

That said, I am happy to report that Chang's is indeed a vegan safe house, in part because the co-owner is a lapsed vegetarian. I have eaten here numerous times, and can attest that all the wait staff speak fluent and often native English, so fully understand the meanings of the words "vegan" and "vegetarian." And even better, there are many vegan dishes from which to choose, some of them quite unique. For instance, simple but outstanding is the bok choy dish, which consists of whole baby bok choys halved lengthwise, dressed in a savory sauce. The mushroom dishes also are excellent. And though not listed on the menu, brown rice is served at no extra charge, so be sure to ask for brown rice. I dare say that this is the only Chinese restaurant in the whole of eastern Connecticut at which I dine. Enough said!

© **Fenton River Grill** Carnivore but Veg-Friendly

Entry last updated 2021:

The printed menu, not the online menu, clearly marks Vegetarian dishes with a V. Be aware that dishes such as Brussels sprouts and the Tofu & Vegetables Rice Bowl lack a V for a reason. I learned from a hostess who happens to be a vegetarian that the Brussels sprouts are made with fish sauce, so one can assume the same for the Rice Bowl. You'd expect as much in a Thai restaurant, but not in a restaurant that serves standard American fare. While the fried potatoes are labeled with a V, are they fried in the same oil as the meat and fish?

In any case, the one outstanding dish that is clearly named Vegan is the Vegan Shepherd's Pie. I would describe it more as very interesting than as very good. *Connecticut Magazine* happened to highlight this vegan dish in its July 2021 issue, including its complete recipe, at:

https://www.connecticutmag.com/food-drink/recipes/recipe-this-vegan-shepherd-s-pie-is-a-delightful-departure/article_c2ee6500-e683-11eb-a4c7-8394be0782e2.html

Its spacious, bright, and beautiful interior looks more like one big bar than a restaurant, so if you frequent bars you will feel at home here.

in WESTBROOK:

© **Shayna B's by the Sea** ALL VEGAN

<http://shaynabsbythesea.com/>

Entry last updated 2023:

I have been an acolyte of Shayna B since its vagabond origin in meals-to-go and baked goods delivered to Fiddleheads Food Coop, Willimantic Food Coop, and Stonington's year-round farmers market. When it made a home in a sit-down café in Old Saybrook, I rejoiced. Even better, in 2021 it moved into larger quarters with a veranda that offers sheltered outdoor dining overlooking a wetlands. Picnic time!

I had long relished those wholesome and flavorful grab-and-go entrées. While it still sells readymade entrées to-go, now it serves more selections that are not easily transportable. The soups are always excellent and underpriced. Smoothies and fresh juices are now served. No mock meats here, fake foods that make a mockery of veganism. Among the entrées, Shayna B excels in its salad bowls and pizzas. I don't give a hoot about gluten, and find most gluten-free bakery items bland and chalky, yet even its brown-rice-flour pizza crust tastes good.

I mourn the recent deletion from its menu of its outstanding Mac n' Cheeze. (Life is tough!) As a replacement, I lust for the Hawaiian Pizza, made not with highly acidic tomato sauce, but with freshly baked cherry tomatoes among its luscious veggie toppings. Best of all is its sunflower-seed cheeze that excels any fake cheese in the markets. But recently I have succumbed to a new object of my desire, the Nourish Bowl, comprised of roasted vegetables.

Almost all dietary regimens and allergies and snobberies can be accommodated here. My food sensitivity is to all alliums (garlic, onions, et al), causing me indigestion, which in turn causes, oh never mind. I'm thankful that in most dishes except the soups the alliums can be omitted. If you abide by yogic dietary doctrines, you'll be thankful too.

Most so-called natural foods restaurant desserts are made of white flour and white sugar. Such white plagues belong to the dustbin of nutrition. But even as a nutritional elitist, I do indulge in maple syrup or coconut sugar. At Shayna's, one daily dessert is sweetened only with those, so worthy of indulgence. Sweet!

Note that its small outdoor signage is inconspicuous, so the café is easy to pass by. It shares its parking lot with a boat showroom, so look for drydocked dreamboats.

in WILLIMANTIC:

I love little Willi! This is a hippie town without being hip.

© **WILLIMANTIC Food Coop** Carnivore but **VEGETARIAN-friendly**
www.willimanticfood.coop

Entry last updated 2022:

I'm a member of both Fiddleheads Foods Coop in New London, and of Willimantic Food Coop. If you are a vegan or vegetarian, you might consider patronizing only Willimantic Food Coop, 28 miles north of Fiddleheads. Willi is worth your patronage because until late 2010 its foods were all vegetarian. But its meats at least are confined to one freezer door, rather than four times that as at Fiddle. Beef jerky even confronts you at Fiddle's checkout counter. If Willi could remain vegetarian for 30 years, Fiddleheads could have too, but Fiddleheads never even tried.

Among the farmers who sell directly to Fiddleheads, many also sell dead animals. If there's one farmer at a farmers' market and he sells live produce and also dead animals, I will buy his produce. But if there's two farmers selling live produce, one who sells also dead animals and one who sells only produce, when given the choice I will patronize solely the one who sells only produce. Thank goodness when we on behalf of better unborn farm animals are given the choice. So given the choice between shopping at Fiddleheads Food Coop and Willimantic Food Coop, my preference is clear, though due to prohibitive car mileage, I shop at both.

Willimantic Foods Coop is a blessing. It offers the best variety of OG produce in CT (Fiddleheads' selection is good, but plays second fiddle to Willi), and every day, not just on delivery days. Plus, it is open on weekdays until 8pm (same as Fiddleheads).

In 2005, the Willi membership voted on a carnivore initiative to allow the coop to sell meat, and meat was overwhelmingly defeated. (Yay!) Yet in June 2010, a cabal of carnivores won another vote promoted by and conducted with obvious bias by the carnivore President of its Board of Directors, which advocacy by its Prez was a violation of the coop's charter, silly little rules of no consequence, but of dire consequence was the results of the vote. This second time, meat was voted into office by way of a pre-order buying club that slipped in through the coop's backdoor by perpetuating the myth of so-called "more humane meat." (A more accurate appellation would be "less inhumane meat.") Their premise was that its suppliers of locally killed meat will treat their deadstock better than does industrial agribusiness. Maybe better, but how much better, and by whose standards? The vote was ushered in with few mechanisms for oversight except by the farmers' own avowals. Hogwash and bullshit. The "meat locker" initially at least was sequestered to the back of the store, where gentle vegetarians were not compelled to see it, and so were not affronted by its presence, and thereby not reminded of Willi Food Coop's tragic fall from innocence. But that too has changed. As of 2014, meat was now sold openly in a cadaver freezer for all to view, and for us to lament. And in 2017, meat expanded into a second cadaver freezer unit. In 2019, into a third.

So, in 2019, it became a toss-up between Willi and Fiddle in regards to shunning flesh foods. (Or maybe not, as Fiddleheads offers also freshly-killed fish, rather than only frozen.) Whether you shop at one or at both, it is important to shop at either, because both offer a welcomed alternative to shopping at hardly-Whole Foods. After all, with the demise of Garden of Light in Glastonbury (due not to Whole Foods moving into town, but to its customers abandoning it for WF), Connecticut's one remaining all veg food store, **Edge of the Woods** in New Haven, is just too far away. So let's be thankful for Willi and Fiddleheads (and the two Foodworks in Old Saybrook and Guilford), without which we might be forced to patronize hardly-Whole Foods.

One thing more. During the pandemic pandemonium of 2020, Willi Coop closed its doors to shoppers, yet stepped up and met the challenge of providing members and non-members alike with curbside pickup. Its parking lot turned into a veritable racetrack starting line with car engines all revving to takeoff. Yet the staff mastered their new job descriptions as parking lot jockeys, and everyone remained well fed.

EVERYWHERE:

📍 **Wendy's** Carnivore but Vegan Baked Potato

Entry added 2021:

The flourishing number of veg restaurants that dot the culinary landscape in Connecticut are a blessing for us all. The most famous is Bloodroot in Bridgeport, the most celebrated is G-Zen in Branford, the rawest is Right Path in New London, the all-vegan oldest is ION in Middletown, and the all-vegan newest is 21 Oak in Manchester. Add to our good fortune the several online guides that help us locate those veg eateries. Naturally, all those directories omit from their listings the chains of greasy fast-food restaurants on whose menus meat predominates. Just because McDonald's serves salads (hold the bacon, hold the chicken, hold the cheese, hold the mayo, hold the dressing) hardly makes it a worthy venue for enjoying a vegan meal. Best to drive through the drive-thru. Yet same as for veganism, fast food is here to stay. During long road trips, there might be times when you do not want to go hungry. In those dire cases, you can resort to the takeout window of a fast-food joint and have delivered right to your car window a gluten-free, oil-free, salt-free, dairy-free, wholesome and filling meal, all embodied within the humble oblong form of a baked potato.

So next time you're famished and a long way from home, drive up to a Wendy's outlet and order a Baked Potato with Nothing on It, meaning no sour cream and chives, no butter, and no margarine. Or as expressed in the vernacular, "no nothing." While a Baked Potato with Nothing on It does not appear on Wendy's menus or signposts, the tidily uniformed cashiers have never been baffled by my order. They all inherently know to enter into their computer and to charge for my charming Baked Potato with Nothing on It the same as for the basic Sour Cream and Chives Baked Potato.

With a base price of \$1.59 in eastern Connecticut (your own local mileage may vary), after tax and tip that comes to an even \$2. Sadly, few carnivores ever tip the staff at fast-food joints, so when I do the recipients really do appreciate it. And they don't just say it, they actually show it. When I say, "Keep the change, sir!" their mouths broaden into smiles and their eyes light up. In more opulent food establishments, 20% may be standard, but when the norm is zero percent the staff consider that especially generous. Tipping generously, indeed excessively, is a strategy I long have employed during those rare events when I live dangerously and risk eating outside of the safety zone of a veg restaurant.

First, I identify myself to the waiter as a vegan. A generation ago, when not even vegetarians knew the word "veganism" or its tenets, vegans had to define its meaning. But times have changed. Next, upon ordering I accordingly seek the waiter's advice about what on the menu is either already vegan or can be veganized. (A baked potato or any other food that does not require a list of ingredients is likely a trustworthy food that requires no such interrogation.) Later, when I leave a large gratuity, I also leave the waiter with the impression that vegans are very generous tippers and maybe even very nice people. Count that as one vote for veganism.

Yet by patronizing a burger eatery, are we not voting for and subsidizing the sales of burgers? Not quite. Wendy's actually loses money on me as a solo driver. Think of all the staff time taken and, sorry to say, all the packaging wasted on a single transaction for a single low-cost item. Is not my time, too, wasted? Not quite, again. On a long car trip, weary drivers need to take breaks to perk up their flagging energy not with the short-lived spike of caffeine but with the lasting sustenance of a simple meal.

Ungarnished with any glop, a spartan baked potato is a wholesome food high in vitamin C, potassium, dietary fiber, and antioxidants, yet it contains no sodium and no fat or oil. That is, when it is baked, not half-baked, not boiled, and not fried. And not microwaved. Thankfully, as boasted on its online menu, "All of Wendy's baked potatoes are oven-baked for a full hour."

On the downside, the Wendy's baked potato is not organically-grown, which is especially unfortunate because potatoes are one sure food where, especially in the peel, you can taste the difference between OG and not. On the plus side, the baked potatoes served at Wendy's are not products of genetic modification. In 1996, Monsanto first marketed GM potatoes but Wendy's along with McDonald's refused to buy them primarily due to consumer skepticism. Monsanto soon dropped that hot potato. In 2015, another company has unleashed into the marketplace a potato genetically modified to be optimized for frying, not baking. Yet Wendy's has not yet rescinded its past ban.

You might not relish the simple taste of an unadorned, naked potato. If so, ordering a Potato with Nothing on It then provides you with the perfect opportunity to put something on it yourself. When you place your order for your primal potato, you can request at no extra cost some mustard or catsup or salad dressing or pepper. You can even ask for a double dose of any of those condiments. I prefer the mustard. Unlike catsup, the mustard contains no sugar or corn syrup. And unlike dressing, the mustard contains no motor grade oil nor dairy. The mustard comes in a plastic cup, not a tiny sliver of a foil packet, so a single serving of mustard is proportionate to the size of the potato. The full order I recite is, "One Baked Potato with Nothing on It, and some mustard on the side, please."

While the size of that container of mustard is uniform, the size of the potato does vary from region to region. In order to standardize the price despite the wide range of costs of living nationally, the price stays the same. It is the size of the potato that changes. For instance, if you embark on a trip down I-95 starting in icy Connecticut and head to sunny Florida, the potato grows larger as you travel farther.

In addition to getting your potato, count on receiving some novel responses from the wait staff, ranging from the positive to the amazed, but never the negative. Smiles or chuckles, yes. Sneers or snickers, no. One smiling server, not the cashier I had tipped, with one hand gave me my takeout bag and with her other hand gave me an enthusiastic thumbs up. Maybe she was thinking, "Now there's a customer who knows what to eat!"

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Three decades later, *Radical Vegetarianism* endures as the seminal work on ethical vegetarianism. *RV* was three steps ahead of the masses when first written, and still is. It's just as relevant today as it was in 1981, if not more so. -- *Veg News*, Nov-Dec 2011



IN MEMORIAM – all these all-VEG restaurants have closed

Veg restaurants in Eastern CT have very poor track records for longevity. Nationwide, the failure rate of all restaurants, not just veg restaurants, is for 1 in 4 closing after just the first year. So no surprise about the dismal statistics about all-veg restaurants.

I moved here in 1987, and back then there was only ION, Claire's, and Bloodroot in all of CT. Paradise opened circa 1995 in Willimantic. Ahimsa in New Haven

opened in 2008, followed by G-Zen which opened in Branford in 2010. The other veg restaurants in eastern CT that have closed are arranged here from shortest lived (3 months) to longest:

1 - Café Live in Willimantic, all vegan and almost totally all raw, Dec 2010 to March 2011, **3 months** and even then during its final month half the times they closed on whim, so really only 2 months (Also in Willimantic, circa 1995-97, all-vegetarian Paradise lasted almost 3 years. Its exact dates were too early for me to precisely remember or to be found documented on the internet.)

2 – James Farmacy Organic Café in Old Saybrook, May to Oct 2016, **6 months**

3 - Kong Foo in Norwich, all vegetarian and almost totally all vegan, Nov 2010 to Aug 2011, **9 months**

4 - Hide Tide Juice Bar in Mystic, vegetarian, 2018 to early 2019, at most **12 months**

5- Kate's Café in Mystic, all vegetarian and nearly all vegan, Sept 2012 to Sept 2013, **12 months**

6 - Café Otis in Norwich, not all vegetarian, but extensive and excellent vegan options, as its owner was vegan, March 2019 to March 2020, **12 months**

7 – Dutch's (vegan cupcake bakery) in Pawcatuck section of Stonington, closed Oct 2021, **12 months**

8 - Red Lentil in New Haven, all vegetarian and almost totally all vegan, July 2011 to Oct 2012, **15 months**

9 - Shakahari Vegetarian Indian Restaurant in Old Saybrook, all vegetarian, August 2016 to Jan 2018, **17 months** (though it reopened 4 years later in March 2022, it seems to be barely hanging on)

10 - Ahimsa in New Haven, all vegan and much raw, March 2008 to Oct 2009, **20 months**

11 – Vegan Bodega in Hartford, all vegan, 2020 to June 2022, less than **24 months**

12 -- Pataka Vegetarian Indian Food in New Haven, Oct 2020 to Oct 2022, **24 months**

13 - Biologic + first as a juice stand in Stonington, then in a storefront in Mystic, all vegan and mostly raw, in Mystic 2016 to Dec 2018, **28 months**

14 - Six Main in Chester, all vegetarian, mostly vegan, and much raw, until its final months when it introduced fish on its menu in a failed attempt to stir up new patronage, May 2012 to Sept 2014, **28 months**

15 – 21 Oak in Manchester, all vegan, initially highly nutritionally oriented, but its nutritional standards slackened over the years, until it featured mostly fried food and donuts (Do Nots), July 2014 to Dec 2021, **6 ½ years**

16 – Right Path Organic Café, all vegan, Nov 2015 to May 2023, **7 1/2 years**

17 – Not Only Juice, all vegetarian, March 2015 to March 2023, **8 years**

18 - Fire N Spice's main storefront on Sisson Av in Hartford, all vegan, closed March 2018, **9 years**

19 – G-Zen in Branford, all vegan, closed after **12 years**.



in BRANFORD:

What a great city to host G-Zen! While an affluent bedroom suburb of New Haven, it still has small-town New England charm, right down to the town green.

G-Zen www.g-zen.com **ALL VEGAN**

Closed April 2022, in preparation of its reincarnation as G-Monkey in West Hartford in June 2022

After 22 years at It's Only Natural (ION) Restaurant, its masterful head chef sought new challenges, so he and his wife in 2011 opened G-Zen, initially a sort of Neo-ION, as half its menu was the same, but with new and more imaginative names. What could have been better than ION? Two ION's!

Yet who can refrain from making comparisons? (Obviously not I). Many new dishes initially did distinguish it from ION, and with each passing year more and more. For instance one entree here is all raw, with many side dishes raw too. Decor and dinnerware are more elegant and opulent than at hippie artsy ION. (You decide which better suits your personality.) I do prefer the "vibes" (yeah man, am a hippie) of ethnically-diverse and middle-class Middletown to that of predominantly Caucasian and affluent New-Haven-bedroom-community Branford, and prefer the trip to Middletown on scenic and lightly traveled Route 9 rather than on industrialized and truck-choked and traffic-jammed Interstate 95.

The food at G-Zen is outstanding, and it is primarily for the food that one chooses any restaurant. Every entrée is flavorful and often unique, if not invented by the masterful chef then surely perfected by him. Everything is delicious, nutritious, nearly wholly wholesome, mostly organic, much of it raw, beautifully presented, graciously hosted, and totally vegan. This very well could be vegan heaven!

For the curious: Gen Z, short for Generation Z, was a name coined in 2012, whereas G-Zen was a name conceived for this restaurant that opened in 2011, so G-Zen intended no allusion to the generation that was born between 1997 and 2012. So what the heck does G-Zen mean. G-String, maybe. Green Zen, maybe. But, oh, Gee, where the heck is the Zen in G-Zen? Ain't in the food. While Zen itself espouses no specific diet, macrobiotics does originate from Japan, and Zen Buddhism, too, originates from Japan. While Zen is not macrobiotic, macrobiotics initially did embellish itself with allusions to Zen. Yet G-Zen's menu, except for one entrée, hardly adheres to macrobiotic principles. Quite the opposite, it offers a welcomed array of many other cuisines, including raw foods dishes.

Nor is there any Zen outside of the food. While mandalas decorate G-Zen's walls, among the several sects of Buddhism that incorporate mandalas into their art, Zen Buddhism is not one of them. So Zen ain't on the walls either. Likewise, the only Buddhism in its Buddha Brunch is in its name. Why not also a Dhammapada Dinner and a Lao Tzu Lunch? Same as does Right Path Café, G-Zen embraces the mere outer trappings of religion and philosophy to make a sale. Religious zealots might brand this as sacrilegious, if not blasphemous. Philosophy professors would classify this as pragmatic. Capitalists know this as mere marketing tools. I, for one, find the hocus-pocus pseudo-religious hype of both Right Path and of G-Zen ridiculous and pretentious.

Zen or not, every entrée here is beautifully presented, though the portions tend to be small, so maybe that's where the Zen comes in, because the body mass of most Japanese has traditionally been smaller than most Caucasians. In any case, the nutritional standards are high. So are the prices, sky high, upwards into the stratosphere. The prices at G-Zen exceed my wildest imagination as well as my finite finances. Sure, we all know that organic food, especially organic

produce, can cost twice the price as conventional. Yet the portions, especially for the desserts, tend to be tiny, so that effectively doubles those prices yet again, effectively to four times, not just to twice. Clearly its intended clientele is the affluent bourgeoisie, a social class from which I, though no less decadent, am excluded. While one can be decadent without being affluent, to dine at G-Zen it helps to be both. Yet no matter how limited your own finances or lowly your social standing, just as everyone deserves to visit heaven even if only once, surely you can splurge to eat here even if only once. Because, again, this could be vegan heaven!

In preparation for your singular visit, ignore the extravagant marketing claims on its website and FB page, enough to ruin anyone's appetite. Take them with a ton of Himalayan pink salt. Their unrelenting bragging tries to convince you that theirs the best veg restaurant in the entire Milky Way, braggadocio that can be hard to stomach and surely belies any claim to its hocus-pocus about Zen. G-Zen can lay claim to being the best veg restaurant in Connecticut, but Connecticut is the third smallest state and its entire population is one-third that of just NYC. And NYC hosts several comparable restaurants. Some busy beaver at G-Zen does excel at milking social media dry of all its potential. But blabbing about oneself all over social media is a poor measure of true social worth.

Hey, G-Zen, no one loves your food because of all your hype. Rather, we love your food despite all your hype. Tone down your ingratiating and self-aggrandizing braggadocio and we'll love your food even more.

in HARTFORD :

© **Fire-N-Spice Vegan Restaurant ALL VEGAN**
Its Sisson Av LOCATION CLOSED DOWN MARCH 2018.

As of this March 2018 update, their www.firenspiceveganrestaurant.com website has been permanently down for over 2 years, and their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Fire-and-Spice/486470638054523> for its 248 Sisson Av location had not been updated since July 2017

My 2010 first impression: Dining at a restaurant soon after it has first opened provides an incomplete conception of its virtues and shortfalls but, even worse, our waitress told us this was her first day on the job there. Judging from her inept service, I would venture to say this was her first day ever working as a waitress anywhere. Still, her enthusiasm compensated for her lack of skill or experience. So now on to the food. A slick website whose template comes from a more conventional veg restaurant boasts an extensive menu, yet on this Saturday night only 4 of the 15 entrees were available. Zero appetizers, zero soups, zero raw foods menu, and only one flavor of smoothie, which my dinner companion said consisted almost entirely of unripe banana. Zero, zero, zero ... "because it was busy today and we ran out of everything." So the online menu is merely a figment of the chef's imagination. In reality, what is actually offered is similar to that of a homey restaurant in Kingston, Jamaica. I speak from experience. When I ate in Kingston where the Rastas of Kingston eat, there were only three dishes from which to choose. So we ordered all four dishes, all which were fine examples of Jamaican cooking, in generous portions, and inexpensive at that. So the food is good, but don't expect much variety.

My 2017 second impression: No misleading online menu, because nothing online, so no false impressions from their website. But some cautioning first impressions. While the neighborhood is out of the way (read, ethnically black) from where most out-of-town visitors (read, ethnically white) to Hartford seldom venture, it is safe. It is the scant street parking that is dangerous. Exiting on your driver's side, you risk you or your door being clipped by cars speeding down this narrow street. Having survived that, stepping onto their walkway leading to their front door puts you in further peril, as the steep cement walkway is caving under and the untrimmed bushes impede passage. As you step past their front door, beware the missing floor tiles in the vestibule that might trip you up. Fortunately, if you persist past these sad signs of urban decay and landlord neglect, once inside you will find a clean and welcoming interior.

Food is served cafeteria-style, so not surprisingly the dining area, though small, is much like a dining hall. So don't come here with a hot date. Do come here for a hot meal. The food is wholesome and all vegan, the choices are plentiful, and the servings are generous and inexpensive. This Jamaican-based cuisine has been Americanized, which for us honkies is a good thing. Spices are mild. The vegetables are familiar, nothing more exotic than okra. Several tofu dishes here for you, if you like tofu. The tempeh and tahini dish is especially good, and I prefer tempeh over tofu. From among the 3, 5, and 8 combo platters, choose the 8 combo platter, which costs only \$13, and will surely fill you. If you pay by charge card, be sure to bring some cash with which to tip the very gracious server, as their charge card receipts do not enable adding tipping.

in late 2016, a second, smaller offshoot from the Sisson Av location was recently opened at 491 Capitol Av, just down the street from the, yes, state capitol. It is set up only for take-out, and open only until 3pm. As of March 2018, its Facebook page had not been updated since April 2017.

© **Vegan Bodega ALL VEGAN**
THIS café CLOSED DOWN June 2022 after 2 years in business.

Parkville Market (PM) is integral to experiencing Vegan Bodega (VB). If you'll try anything once and nothing twice, do visit PM at least once.

Unlike typical food courts in indoor shopping malls, PM is more like Faneuil Hall in Boston. Newer, smaller, more compact, and more festive, PM packs an amazing variety of food stalls. All local vendors, no national franchises here. Even without the allure of one all-vegan food stall, PM is worth visiting. If you're wary of exposure to Covid in closed quarters, know that its modern HVAC filtration system addresses viruses. Its effectiveness is attested by the odors of burning meat, not even of odiferous grilled steak, from the other food stalls' kitchens hardly permeating the dining area. An upper-level area offers private enclaves where you can retreat from the crowd and its din. And ample seating awaits outside.

Just as PM offers a wide selection of ethnic cuisines, so does VB. As you'd expect from its name, VB adds a Latinx flair but is still international in scope. Sadly, mock meats and fried foods predominate. I shun both, yet I found just enough choice among its other dishes. Salads and Juices offer a nutritional boost. The portions of each Plate or Special serve enough to feed two people, so prices are quite reasonable. I tried the Mixed Veg and (brown) Rice. Of its 5 protein choices, 3 are mock meats, so I settled for General Tso's Tofu, way too sugary sweet. If I try it again I will select Salt & Pepper Tofu.

Even if you dine there, it's all served for takeout. Other reviewers complain about the plastic containers. I prefer it as much more efficient than flimsy aluminum that easily collapses or paperboard that gets soaked and drips. Most people just trash those anyway, whereas VB's sturdy plastic containers with secure lids can be repurposed at home.

VB's kitchen is small. When it's busy, be prepared to wait for your order, during which you can wander around to explore other food stalls to marvel at what others eat. Oxtails! Curry Goat! Fried Oreos! Twisted Meatballs! BLT Dog! Lobster Pasta! Crab Legs! Nutella & Banana Fried Dough! Fried Dough Pizza! Chicken N Waffles! Salted Caramel Espresso Martini!

Unfortunately, chaos reigns in the parking lot. Its sloped layout is hodgepodge and its painted lines already faded. Rules go unenforced, so flouting is widespread. Sociopaths park illegally in nearby spaces reserved for service vehicles, or for the handicapped, or for electric vehicle charging. Civilized drivers are relegated to far corners, and then as pedestrians risk injury from cars backing up willy-nilly. PM management does a commendable job of maintaining order and cleanliness inside. It needs to extend its thoroughness outdoors too. I was there mid-afternoon on a weekday, yet parking posed risk. I shudder to imagine it on a weekend. For a single food stall, I hesitate to endanger myself to the deplorable parking lot twice, so will probably try VB only this once.

in MANCHESTER :

© **21 Oak** www.21oakmanchester.com **ALL VEGAN**

THIS café CLOSED DOWN Dec 2021 after 6 ½ years in business.

My pre-pandemic pandemonium review:

Entering 21 Oak is like stepping back into the past, namely 25 years ago into It's Only Natural. I mean this as a very good thing. Think back to 1990, when Ken Bergeron was still the head chef and owner of ION 1.0 at its original location on Main St, a block north of where ION 3.0 recently relocated. The décor was simple and yet comfortable, the vegan food wholesome and appealing (Ken, along with most of his faithful customers, had transitioned out of macrobiotics), the portions generous, and the prices just right. Likewise now for 21 Oak. Eerily, Shawn the head chef and owner of 21 Oak even bears a very striking resemblance to Ken both in looks and in peaceful demeanor.

While Manchester may be out of the way, once within Manchester 21 Oak is easy to find, a half a block off Main St in the center of downtown. The restaurant is small (seats 26), hence the menu is short, but covers the breadth of American vegan eclectic cuisine. Vegetables and grains take the center stage that they deserve. My one complaint is the white flour flatbread, which however can be substituted with wholesome and oil-free Mary's Gone Crackers, so do ask instead for the crackers. Among the appetizers I highly recommend the "signature" Brussels sprouts. Even when not in season, the Brussels sprouts here are delectable. (I recommend also the beet chutney, the sweet potato mash, and the barley cakes, but those were dropped from the ever-changing menu.)

When it first opened in 2015, it maintained with the very highest nutritional standards. For instance, no mock meats and no deep-fried foods. Years later, it has descended several notches. For instance, one or two mock meats, which make a mockery of vegetarianism, have crept onto the menu. A peak at its Facebook page would give you the false impression that it has become a donut shop. Yet, 21 Oak is still way up there in nutrition heaven compared to most other veg eateries in CT. For example, it now offers fresh veggie juices.

While desserts (and donuts!) vary daily, I liked the raw vegan cheesecake, which initially in 2015 cost only \$6. For the same quality (though not all OG) and same quantity, compare that with \$15 charged at the same time at G-Zen. While G-Zen may be the *best* veg restaurant in CT and RI, that does not mean I rate G-Zen as my *favorite*. Rather, I rate 21 Oak as my favorite veg restaurant in CT and RI. And apparently it has become others' favorite restaurant too, as there sometimes are long waits just to sit down. So if you plan on eating during dinner hours, on weekends you might want to phone ahead to check on wait times.

Nov 2021 addendum:

When the pandemic pandemonium hit in March 2020, its online menu changed to mostly fried foods and several mock meat dishes of seitan, and has remained that way ever since. And sad to say, the quality of the few remaining nourishing dishes has deteriorated. For instance, the formerly outstanding Brussels sprouts dish all three times I ordered it in 2021 were simply not cooked enough. Disappointment all around. No surprise that one month later, it closed down.

in MYSTIC:

Kate's Cafe **ALL VEGETARIAN & MOSTLY VEGAN**

THIS café CLOSED DOWN SEPT 2013 after exactly 1 year in business.

The words VEGAN and VEGETARIAN were blazoned across its signage (nice!), which risks alienating carnivore customers, but Kate said she wished to "tell it like it is." Though a small café open only until 4pm, the menu still offered much variety, especially for breakfast from 8 to 11am. The breakfast menu was more diverse than that for lunch, which was mostly salads and sandwiches and soup. In the one year during its short run, I ate here three times for lunch (good) and once for breakfast (even better). The grains and breads were whole grain, and whole food tempeh largely displaced junk food tofu, hurray! The chef is highly skilled and wildly imaginative, indeed her talent is more deserving of a larger venue than this tiny café provided her, so let's hope she soon finds a new kitchen to call home.

Seating was cramped, six comfortably, eight squeezed, so you could not engage in meaningful discourse or intimate conversation here with your meal mate. When the weather and season smiled upon us, you could sit outside at two shaded tables and upon several lounge chairs, though only steps from busy street traffic, which at times includes roaring trucks. Due to its cramped seating indoors and bustling traffic outdoors, Kate's clientele probably was mostly take-out, for which ample parking was provided next door in the pharmacy lot. To drive here you fortunately could bypass the traffic congestion of downtown Mystic by taking Exit 90 for the Seaport and Aquarium. While I never relish making trips to tourist clogged Mystic and thereby to add to Mystic's traffic congestion, I did look forward to eating here the few times I was in Mystic. Local Mystic folks did not keep this café humming with business, so we out-of-towner vegheads when in Mystic could no longer patronize Ms Kate's all vegetarian and mostly vegan Cafe.

BIOLOGIC + **ALL VEGAN**

THIS RESTAURANT CLOSED DOWN Dec 2018 after 2 ½ years in business.

Biologic with a plus sign is yet another eatery with a confusing name that baffles web search engines. In several European languages, "biologic" is the root for their words for "organic." But search engines don't care about that. Biologic is more than a juice bar and smoothie pit stop but is also a food café, so well worth your visit.

This first opened as a juice bar in 2015 in the Velvet Mill, which is hidden without any street signage in a far corner of a residential neighborhood of Stonington. Only if you were stoned in Stonington could you stumble upon it. Then, if you persevered and actually found the Velvet Mill, no one could find Biologic Plus, which was one big Minus, because its cramped quarters was fortified behind a heavy steel door that blockaded its own obscure private entrance on the backside of the Mill where no one would think to look for an entrance. Fortunately, after a year sequestered in its hideaway, Biologic took flight to downtown Mystic, where it is easy to find. But now, typical for downtown Mystic, motorists cannot find any parking.

Its new Mystic shop is beautiful and sunny inside, a vast improvement over its original site in Stonington which literally provided "standing room only." As a reward for those hardy souls who braved traffic on their long hikes from where they ditched their cars, Biologic + offers all-organic and all-raw snacks and apps, for instance collard wraps. Raw collards? Only for the brave! For those with less ironclad stomachs, if not some missing teeth, it offers a variety of smoothies and juices, again all-organic and all-raw, but all prepared in advance and sold bottled and chilled. In other words, you are stuck with their house blends. No special requests. Instead you have to settle for their proprietary formulas that they promote with hocus-pocus claims for cleansing your body if not your soul. With ginger or cayenne pepper among the long lists of ingredients, some blends really do cleanse at the very least your sinuses. Other ill-conceived blends are utterly ruined with added salt, not unlike cans of supermarket V-8 juice supercharged with sodium. While the affluent jet set of Mystic seems to have bought into Biologic's cleansing programs, the garden-variety vegan probably would be far happier with just a simple glass of orange or carrot juice, but for that we must look elsewhere. Biologic's blends predominate with fruits and carrots in order to mask the bitterness of the veggies. I speak only for myself, but I shun fruit juices, as I prefer to eat fruits whole to thereby avoid the fruit sugar rush. Jolt or not, vegetable juices are far more nourishing than fruit juices. I recommend the Signature Green blend, which has some pear but thank goodness no salt or pepper. Wisely, they are trying to appeal to a wider clientele than just me, and they indeed deserve to win that wider patronage.

And Biologic offers nut milks and smoothies. On any one day, Biologic actually serves many of the juices listed on its menu, whereas NOJ in Willimantic serves only one juice per day. And unlike NOJ, which serves eggs and cheese, Biologic is all vegan. Hurray for Biologic and a plus for vegans! Bio is setup more for takeout. You can eat-in but only uncomfortably, so better to consider sitting on a bench in the park right next door to them or along the scenic boardwalk right behind them. Good stuff both indoors and out.

Hide Tide Juice Bar Vegetarian

THIS juice bar CLOSED DOWN early 2019 after barely 1 year in business.

Opened 2018 (what, yet another juice bar in Mystic?), served only coffee, smoothies, and juices, open only to 4pm, and was located in the distant outskirts of downtown, where you at least could find parking. (Its shop in downtown Westerly, RI, offers more by way of meals, but all stuffed with cow cheese.)

in NEW LONDON:

Mangetout (mostly OG & 3/4 locavore & 1/4 vegan)

CLOSED as of Sept 2014: Closed on same day as nearby Six Main closed too, darn.

Organic Mangetout is spelled *ManGetOut*. Even more ill-conceived than its French name is its illegible logo, both which hardly foster commercial success, yet thankfully it indeed had succeeded commercially for six years until Sept 2014. Until the short run of Kate's Café in Mystic this had been the only restaurant in the New London area that placed the word *vegan* very clearly on its menu. It also was the only restaurant in hick town New London that served brown rice, rather than white. One-quarter of its standard menu was vegan, half its desserts and muffins were vegan, its one daily soup usually was vegan, and Elisa the chef/owner was especially attentive to "catering" to vegans. Parking can be scarce on this east end of State Street, but you can count on finding parking just around the corner on Eugene O'Neill Drive. Still, no matter how far you park your car, its dinners will be well worth your trek, and well worth your patronage.

Right Path Organic Café ALL VEGAN

Having resided in this area since 1987, I never thought I would live to see a vegan restaurant open in downtown old New London, but that miraculous event indeed did happen in November 2015. Has my earthly body attained Samadhi and my ethereal being ascended to Nirvana?

Long stuck up to its waistline in the nutritional mire of the post-1945 standard American diet, New London has caught up with the rest of the nation and entered the 21st century. The new wave of dietary awareness that was pioneered downtown first by Fiddleheads Food Coop and Mangetout Café has reached its crest with Right Path Organic Café. If you understand the wisdom of spending your dollars on collards rather than on doctors, this is the place to seek your sustenance. Right Path is not just a café but also a vitamin shop. Where are the vitamins? In the food.

Food here is all vegan and mostly raw or slowly dehydrated. Fortunately, the words neither Vegan nor Raw appear in the cafe's name, else its name alone would drive carnivores away from its doorstep. While its name Right Path subtly implies that carnivore restaurants all are on the Wrong Path, a premise with which I wholeheartedly agree, feigned humility calls upon us not to shout aloud about it. Yet, Self-Righteous Path Organic Café further espouses its supremacy in its menu. Menus should make my mouth water, but Right Path's makes my head spin. First-timers to the café often spend half an hour pondering the menu in total bewilderment.

Old New Londoners surely will find the veganism and raw foods and religious terminology all hard to swallow. If so, the smoothies and juices can appeal to a wider clientele, so the liquid fare does keep the café afloat. In addition to the juice blends listed on the menu, juices can be customized to your whims, to which the staff is very accommodating. My favorite is the all-veggie but non-carrot Radical. The wheatgrass juice is

especially potent and sweet. And the 200-proof ginger juice (only for the brave!) is quite unique among juice bars.

The solid fare all is wholesome and nutritious. The anagrammatic Calm Chowder is outstanding. The house made raw Kale chips are better than any in the marketplace, where most are just Stale chips. The salad bowls of fresh mesclun salad greens atop a bed of ginger-flavored brown rice with differing accoutrements all are excellent, while my favorite is the "Speech" with its added tempeh and delicately tamari-flavored and dehydrated (not roasted) almonds on a bed of perfectly ginger-seasoned brown rice.

If the dish's name "Speech" threw you off, or simply just confused you, you are not alone. When the chef prepares it, she is making a Speech. And when the waiter delivers it, she is giving a Speech. I try to hold back my sidesplitting laughter when I order up a side of intangible Liberation or a bowl of instant Wisdom. I would feel more comfortable ordering an entrée named Anorexia Nervosa or a smoothie named Paranoid Schizophrenia. The pretentious Sanskrit names of dishes such as Nirvana and Namaste that proselytize the tenets of the Dhammapada and the Upanishads offer few clues to their contents and would be just as informative if written in Hindi alphabet or in binary code. The dishes named simply Buddha (rather than Buddha's Delight) or Monk (rather than Monk's Bowl) must be intended for cannibals, surely not for vegans. ("Wow, that Monk was very tasty, he must have been a vegan.") In the same spirit of exploiting religion to promote a product, why not some order some caramelized Christ, sautéed Saint, or mashed Moses? If I am making a mockery of the menu, it is because the menu makes a mockery of Buddhism and Hinduism. Some dishes whose names are not mockeries instead are merely ridiculous. The hummus salad is called Action. Order it for takeout, and you are taking Action. The bagel sandwich is called Life. Order it for takeout, and you are taking a Life. I really wish I could order a cold dish of Ephemerality, of course to-go, but that dish may never arrive.

Fortunately, all the dishes both look and taste far better than their pretentious names all sound. And take note that after 3 years in business, in October 2018 it moved 5 blocks from its former location on State St to Bank St (meaning, its previous location on State St was on the Wrong Path). The Bank St location now is nearly 3X larger. Previously, it was beautiful and cramped. Now, it is beautiful and spacious, plenty of room for both customers and staff to breathe. (Oh, never mind, because Breathe is the absurd name of their bagel, which has a smaller hole than the huge hole behind the logic of its name.)

Long after the move, the menu has remained the same as before, with all the same ridiculous and incongruous names. But now there are specials almost daily, all of cooked foods, and the specials are posted on Facebook and Instagram, though on FB you need to scroll through all the daily clutter to find it. Sometimes the so-called specials are hardly special at all, but most times they are outstanding. My favorites are the Shepherd's Pie, the Lasagna, the Meatless Balls, and best of all, the Meatless Loaf.

A new freezer unit was installed in April 2022 that now offers frozen entrées and soups that previously were sold fresh as only daily specials. A few of the specials do not freeze well and so are not up to par as when fresh, but among those that do freeze well, the Meatless Balls initially were my favorite. Just defrosting them, I found them delectable as is. And when I resisted temptation and proceed to cook up the rest of them, they get even better. Contrary to the pan-frying directions listed on the container, because I never cook with oil at home, I simply heated them in a toaster oven, placing them directly on the metal wire rack. Each ball remained whole, with no crumbs. As an added bonus for me, because I shun all alliums, the Meatless Balls contain no onions, allowing the taste of the pecans to shine through. But, and here comes a big But. On my second purchase, the pecan taste was gone, meaning in the recipe the pecans had been reduced. On my third purchase, still no taste of pecan, but even worse, the heavy taste and odor of garlic. I could not eat past the first two balls, and discarded the rest. The Meatless Loaf, alas, does not freeze well, because it loses much of its savor.

Until 4pm, free street parking dependably can be found right along its block, with its storefront across the street from the historic Custom House that now houses the New London Maritime Society. By 6pm, all the nearby Bank St bars and restaurants draw lots of customers (customers that Right Path could have siphoned off had it changed the names of its dishes to not scare them all away), so if there is no nearby street parking, there is a municipal parking lot right behind its building, where parking after 6pm is free.

If you have not yet tried Right Path, now is the time. (Quick, before that cold dish of Ephemerality disappears forever!)

formerly in WESTERLY, RI (in 2013, it moved back to Narragansett, then closed there too in 2018):

Markos Restaurant www.markoskabob.com

Given the choice between eating in a meat restaurant that labels a dish as vegan right there on its menu, and another meat restaurant that just happens to have a vegan dish but does not boast about it, I choose the former over the latter. (Hence I eat at **Two Wives** and **Mangetout**, but nowhere else in New London.) A Middle Eastern restaurant originally from far away Narragansett, RI, opened May 2012 nearby in Westerly, but one year later, due to dismal business, moved back to Narragansett. It states its vegan and vegetarian dishes with the words VEGAN and VEGETARIAN right there on the menu, so the menu sure is alluring. And Markos is a genuinely nice guy, who manifests his genuine love for humanity through his food. His vegan fare is all first rate, but too bad he was on the far side of Westerly, and now even farther away in Narragansett. So regrettably I'm sticking with **Pita Stop**, which may lack the word *vegan* on its menu, but *vegetarian* clearly identified is good enough for me, and anyway Tony at **Pita Stop** is a really nice guy too.

in NORWICH:

Kong Foo Vegetarian Restaurant

Darn!, A great loss to the (obviously small) vegetarian community of SE CT, **THIS RESTAURANT CLOSED DOWN AUGUST 2011. ALL VEGETARIAN & MOSTLY VEGAN**

I love(d) this restaurant, not just its food, but also its decor. Its spacious interior is beautifully furnished and further adorned with a mountainous landscape mural in the style of the progressive art scene in China today (though painted by a Caucasian American). The tables are brightly lit, so you can fully appreciate the contents of your meal. Open the menu, and you might think you are seated in a typical American Chinese restaurant. Beef, Pork, Chicken, Fish, Seafood, and finally the Vegetable section, sometimes erroneously labeled Vegetarian, despite fish in the garlic sauce or oyster in the oyster sauce. But wait. At Kong Foo, like its many role models in Boston, Philadelphia, and NYC (in fact the owner already runs two similar restaurants in NYC, one right in Chinatown, where competition is fierce, so only the best restaurants stay in business), all these are mock meats, made of either wheat gluten or soy tofu. But such mock meats make a mockery of vegetarianism. I would prefer to eat meat that tastes like soybeans, than soybeans that taste like meat. (Of course I eat neither.) Remove the fiber and oil from wheat, and you produce white flour. Remove the starch and fiber from cane, and that's white sugar. Further remove the starch from white flour, and you've got gluten. Do the same to soy: tofu. Gluten and tofu are junk foods. So what if they are vegan foods too. You can fool your mind, but not your body. So better to confine your menu choices to the Vegetable section, same as you would do at any typical American Chinese restaurant, except here you need not fret about any hidden forbidden ingredients. If you wish to seek further assurance, ask Silvio (though I have not seen him there for some time now). He runs (or ran?) the show and speaks excellent English, and will elucidate all the contents for you.

With Silvio's generous guidance, I have sampled nearly all of the all Vegetable dishes, and I can attest that the food is excellent. Their Asian vegetables are both excellent and exotic, so exotic that I never before had heard of or seen some of them, whereas here I now order them repeatedly. A big plus is the option of brown rice, yay! But vegans beware, the food here is not solely vegan. While the few entrees containing egg are clearly labeled egg in their names, in addition to white sugar some cow milk lurks in the tofu cheese cake! Speaking of sugar, be prepared even here for standard Chinese American restaurant sauces comprised of motor grade oil, corn starch, salt, and sugar. At home, where I eat most of my meals, I never eat motor grade oil or white flour or salt or sugar (or tofu). Never. But in certain vegetarian restaurants, I do lower my standards, and my guard. I confess, I eat Kong Foo sauces. (And I can attest that I have survived!) Indeed the ginger sauce is excellent, and not too sweet, and the garlic sauce is superb and comes with the added benefit for me of actually not being made with any garlic, which I personally avoid.

If you are an adherent of whole foods, you still have much here from which to choose. So do make the trip to Norwich. And make it soon. It opened in November 2010, and now ten months later as of this writing in August 2011, I fear it will close by year's end. (SEPT 2011 – "famous last words," indeed it did close at the end of August.) While it attracts a respectable crowd for lunch, during dinner I seldom see anyone else dining there but for myself and my dinner companions. I did wonder about the financial wisdom of opening such a heterodox restaurant in Norwich, and surely now the proprietor, too, is wondering the same. (SEPT 2011 – neither of us need wonder any longer.)

Café Otis – excellent vegan options closed down March 2020

Nine years after all-vegetarian Kong Foo closed in 2011, Norwich had a café that put the sleepy city back on the map for vegetarians and vegans alike.

Upon the closure of all remnants of its shipbuilding and industrial heritage, Norwich has been suspended in a forgotten time. All the stately mansions and majestic churches that line Broadway and Washington St attest to its past glory, as does the palatial building that now houses Café Otis. A former public library when libraries were solemn temples of learning, its spacious interior heightened with gold leaf and Greek Revival ornamentation is alone worth your visit. Even the varnish-encrusted gloomy old portrait paintings contrasted with colorful Pop art prints are worth viewing.

As we value café's more for the eating than just the sightseeing, it's the food that will keep you coming back for more. The five meal menus are in constant flux, so will probably have changed by the time you read this. Of the five menus, Lunch offers vegans the most variety, and without having to endure the smell of all the meats served for Dinner when the knives come out, literally, because the plastic cutlery for Breakfast and Lunch are replaced by heavy silverware needed to slice up meat.

Lunch is served cafeteria-style, for which the server speaks fluent vegan with assurances that butter does not taint the vegetables. All but one or two of the Sides is vegan, all delicately flavored and though pan-fried not too greasy. Best of all are the Brussels sprouts. If you've been to all-vegan 21 Oak, you know Brussels sprouts as its signature veggie, but Otis' are even better! Given the choice of two vegan Proteins for the Hot Bowl, because I shun deep-fried foods I passed on the falafel, and settled for the oversized cubes of tasteless tofu. Blah! Otis really needs to dump from its menu that unadorned tofu. For a nutritional boost, skip the Hot Bowl that comes with only 3 Sides. Instead go for the Salad that comes with 6. Choose the salad greens other than kale. It is not baby kale, not massaged, and not marinated. Both the Salad and the Hot Bowl lunch options are underpriced.

A note about handicap accessibility: The side entrance near its private parking lot has a metal stairway that is more akin to a fire escape. Like many buildings in Norwich, this one is built on a steep hillside. You can also enter at the street-level front entrance. The incline on the sidewalks alongside it is very steep, so best to park across the street, on either side of gorgeous City Hall.

in OLD SAYBROOK :

JAMES FARMACY ORGANIC CAFE ALL VEGETARIAN THIS CAFE CLOSED DOWN OCT 2016.

Closed for several years with a Moroccan restaurant in between, the revived Pharmacy with its historic ice cream parlor interior now also serves juices, smoothies, and ice cream, all vegetarian with many vegan options, and mostly if not all organic, a sign of the changing times. Even the ice cream has

vegan options. Foodworks, a stellar health foods store also in Old Saybrook, has a juice bar but stops serving juices at 3pm, while James Pharmacy is open until 9pm! (Signage and website states 10pm, but do not count on that.) If you appreciate antiques and historic homes, this is worth a visit just for its interior which has preserved its 1910's pharmacy and soda fountain, fit for a movie set. That is, if you can surmount its steep staircase and open its heavy door and actually enter the place. If you are old enough to recall snacking as a child at such soda fountains in the 1940's and 50's, then you might by now be mobility-challenged, in which case you may need to forgo visiting this relic from a century ago. Its obstacle-course stairway and fortress-like doorway are as obstructive as they are historic. But more importantly, its organic food is historic, because before the 20th century all food was grown organically.

I first visited in late May 2016, before its official opening, when only juice and ice cream was being served, so I looked forward to visiting again when the full menu was available. But its startup has been slow. Upon my second visit in June, it had closed early. On my third visit in July, its juicer was broken. So I was able to sample only its vegan ice cream, which was okay, but I am not a worthy judge because I am not a fan of either sweets or ice cream. Other reviewers on Yelp complain that the service is slow, that many ice cream flavors are depleted, and one complained that it had run out of greens for juicing, so no juice. (If you consult Yelp, be sure to sort by Newest First, which is *not* its default, and read only the reviews posted since it reopened in June 2016.) This startup seems to be already running out of juice, in the colloquial sense. Sadly, the stairway and doorway do present a physical challenge to me, so I doubt I will make an effort to visit this ice cream parlor cum juicery again. Foodworks, nearby, never runs out of greens and its juicer always is working, and my interest in James Pharmacy is only in its juice. But my own dietary purity and mobility disability should not dissuade you from trying this new ice cream eatery, especially if you scream for ice cream, be it calves milk or vegan.

OCT 2016 UPDATE: This café never really opened because it never initiated, as announced, its intended daily soup and sandwich. The owner informed me in Oct that she would be closing for the season with a *chance* of reopening in the spring but, let's be honest, there is no chance.

also in Old Saybrook:

Shakahari Vegetarian Indian Cuisine ALL VEGETARIAN, and mostly VEGAN
THIS CLOSED DOWN Jan 2018.

"Shakahari" in Hindi means "vegetarian," and the word "vegetarian" in English is repeated in its full name. Nice! This opened in August 2016, shortly before James Pharmacy closed in Old Saybrook. Unlike James Pharmacy, Shakahari is far from downtown Old Saybrook, almost into Westbrook. If you do not navigate with GPS, you can easily pass by its tiny three-store strip mall that sits perpendicular to and set back from Route 1. Its location is even harder to spot if you approach from downtown OS, from the east. Adding to its obscurity, this mother-and-son-run small restaurant does not (yet?) have its own website. So check Happy Cow or Facebook or Yelp for more info, and check Open Menu for its menu.

The menu is as short (three apps and six entrées) as this restaurant is small, but there are ample choices for vegans. Half the dishes already are vegan and most of the vegetarian dishes can be veganized, as clearly marked on the menu. Some of the dishes include Indian vegetables you may never have heard of or never have tried. The elegant dishware adds a nice touch. Reviewers on Yelp, who mostly are carnivores, love this restaurant. If you like Asian Indian food, then you, too, may love this restaurant. But if you are indifferent to Asian Indian food, you might remain indifferent to this restaurant. Asian Indian with its gobs of white flour and white sugar and white rice and hot spices is my least favorite ethnic cuisine, so I am not in a good position to rate this all-vegetarian restaurant. I have tried one app, two of its breads, and three of its six entrées. Truth be told, I remain indifferent to this restaurant.

One night the dining area filled with smoke from something burning in the kitchen, which made all of us in the dining area tear and some of us cough. My nimble nose informed me that the smell was that of fried fish. Perhaps they were frying fish for themselves? Or for the Indian family with whom they obviously were friends who came to pick up takeout? Or for their Indian neighbors in the restaurant next door? After all, in India, only half of all Hindus are vegetarian, and among Indians who immigrated to this country the ratio of vegetarians is far less than half. Whether the proprietors of this restaurant are themselves vegetarian is a mystery that will remain unsolved. But, wait, there's something else. I question its authenticity. When I stood at the counter to pay for the meal, I could peer into the kitchen and saw sitting on a shelf a box of Bisquit. Looking up its ingredients online, I see Bisquit includes (still!) trans-fat and aluminum. Not quite what qualifies as authentic Asian Indian cuisine.

The reviewers on Yelp all say, and I agree, that the wait for the meal is long, so either call ahead or be prepared for a long wait. Or, place your order and leave to go shopping at Foodworks, only one mile away on the same Route 1. Still, if you do stick around and wait, its intimate seating is conducive to quiet conversation. So, unlike other small, local veg cafés, this is a very worthy place to meet for a dinner date.

in PAWCATUCK (a village in the town of Stonington):

Dutch's ALL VEGAN

An all-vegan bakery and creamery specializing in only two desserts: cupcakes and ice cream. This provides a step forward for omnivores who eat cupcakes and ice cream. But a step backward for vegans who usually eat neither. As I shun both white flour and white sugar, I have no intention of ever visiting this vegan eatery, tucked away in an obscure corner of a remote town. The farther away from me, the better.

in WILLIMANTIC

Café Live (Café Live is now Café Dead) ALL VEGAN

Darn! THIS RESTAURANT CLOSED DOWN MARCH 2010, a loss to the miniscule vegan community

Opened December 2009, everything WAS very promising about this new restaurant in town, except for its town. Willimantic hosts many outstanding features, such as my beloved vegetarian Willimantic Food Coop, a community arts center, the (now disbanded) commune-like Wrench in the Works, an indispensable head shop, for three years until January 2010 a hemp clothing shop, and an intermittently open used bookstore. Nevertheless Willimantic is a pizza and burger town, and I wondered about the wisdom of opening an all-raw and all-vegan café in Willimantic, as not even New Haven was able to support Ahimsa, an all-vegan though only half-raw restaurant. As her gourmet style of raw foods was very labor intensive and time consuming and therefore relatively expensive for Willimantic, the owner/chef, to survive financially, sorely needed to expand to cook foods too. She indeed did start out offering roasted coffee, a nod to drugs, because after all this is Willimantic, the heroin den of Connecticut. And even if she had added dairy for the café to survive, a lesson exemplified by the longtime vegan It's Only Natural, then I would have wished that she added dairy too. But my lament is too late. The cafe offered promise to be the most nourishing and, if your taste buds had not been corrupted by salt and sugar and oil and vinegar (the four staples of even vegans in America), the best tasting (except for some dishes with excessive salt) vegan food provided by any restaurant east of the Connecticut River. (ION along its shore is on its west bank.) But as of early March 2010, a mere 3 months after opening, it closed. I confess that I forecast its doom from the start, but I was optimistic and predicted it would last one year. Yet during its third month it already was closing for the day several hours before posted, and closing entire days seemingly on whim. All new restaurants open shop with great risks, as nearly half fail within two years. Owners of restaurants expect this risk. But no customers expect to risk finding a restaurant closed several hours earlier than posted. Had the owner simply shortened her hours to fit reality, her enthusiastic and faithful customers would not have lost their enthusiasm and their faith. Closing the café was of course at great economic loss for the owner, but also a heartfelt loss for the vegan and raw foods and natural foods communities. Indeed its closure after a scant three months may very well set some sort of apocalyptic speed record. Rest in Peace. Café Dead.

in NEW HAVEN:

Ahimsa ALL VEGAN Darn! THIS RESTAURANT CLOSED DOWN OCT 2009

Despite its misleading Hindu name, only one-third of its menu is Indian. All vegan, half raw, very expensive, and very very small portions, so order two dinners to feel like you've actually eaten one. Still well worth trying if only once, because the most memorable meal of my life was the "chef's special" New Year's Eve dinner. So hurry, because Ahimsa is likely to close down soon, as all four times in the past year I've eaten there, their spacious dining area remained nearly empty. NEWS FLASH: my prophecy unfortunately proved true. As of Oct 2009, hidden under its *Hours* webpage it discloses that it has "Closed for Construction," which a restaurant patronized by the Yale community might do in Aug or Jan, but not in Oct. A website is paid for annually, but a phone line monthly, and its phone number has been disconnected. And In December I've twice driven to its location during early evening, only to find it dark and closed. All the tables and chairs and fixtures remain as before, like a museum piece, looking like the owners fled in a huge hurry, or simply were locked out by their landlord. Now August 2011, its ill fate was sealed, as a new business, not even a restaurant, has opened in its place. So why the hogwash about construction? Wishful thinking maybe, the same wishful thinking that prevents me from deleting this listing, at least not yet. Farewell, Ahimsa, yours is still my most memorable meal!

n New Haven:

Pataka Vegetarian Indian Food ALL VEGETARIAN CLOSED DOWN OCT 2020 after 2 years in business

At long last, New Haven has finally come to support an array of veg restaurants that for decades a city with such cultural richness had long deserved. Pataka as its latest addition has tipped New Haven's scale. Some reviewers here complain that it is an overly Americanized version of Asian Indian ethnic cuisine, but I view that as an asset, not a fault. It offers the choice of brown rice and quinoa rather than just typical white rice, which counts a lot with me. Rather than a choice of degree of hot spiciness, all the dishes are mild, which is my kind of heat. And most of the names of the dishes are in plain English, rather than in Hindi and in need of captioning.

Though an independent eatery, its interior design and furnishings simulates that of a fast foods joint. While the interior walls are painted an austere bright white, more like you'd expect of a high school boys' bathroom (dunno about the girls'), a mural does decorate one wall. The outdoor patio overlooking the street provides seating for five along a single tall countertop. Seated on the front patio, you are afforded a view of the car and foot traffic on Broadway, three storefronts away. The bland beige tables and stools complementing the white walls are sturdy but almost brutishly heavy. In contrast, the vibrant colors of its front and side façades, website, printed menus, and indoor mural all are very alluring and welcoming.

The menu choices are well categorized, and they appear on the wall, in printed takeout menus, and on a touchscreen on which you can place your order. (I guess this is common in national chain fast food joints, but I have not been inside one in many decades.) Fortunately, I was able to bypass the touch screen and instead to recite my order to the real live human being at the cash register.

I generally dislike Indian food because of all of its white flour, white sugar, white rice, hot spices, and fried foods. Pataka's food is not typical of other Indian restaurants, hence I enjoyed Pataka's. It is inexpensive, of course all vegetarian, and thankfully mostly vegan, labeled "VE." Note that the sauce category actually comprises a major part of the meal, as it comes in a soup-size cup. I highly recommend the Coconut Masala sauce, which I indeed drank as I would a thick soup.

Street parking, though metered, is ample and easy, as the neighborhood is mostly residential. Note that its six steps up has very sturdy handrails, so should not present much of an obstacle for anyone with a mobility disability.

also in NEW HAVEN:

Red Lentil ALL VEGETARIAN, MUCH VEGAN THIS RESTAURANT CLOSED DOWN OCT 2012.

Open since July 2011, Red Lentil is truly a vegetarian restaurant (and truly a restaurant!), long needed in and overdue for New Haven. Its menu is more eclectic than ethnic, but with a leaning toward Asian Indian, and with a generous helping of dishes lifted from the menu of It's Only Natural (ION). Portions are generous, cost is moderate, and food mostly is good. Exotic dishes are excellent, and the more extraordinary the dish the better it is likely to be. But more conventional dishes do tend to fall short of my expectations. For instance, in the category of fried food (true confessions! though I hardly hunger for it, in my feeble old age I have relinquished abidance to my usually high nutritional standards, and I have been eating fried foods, but only at vegetarian restaurants, because you never know what else has been fried in that oil), their Gobi Manchurian (fried cauliflower) is outstanding, but their Sweet Potato Fries are disappointing, especially when compared to those served at nearby ION or G Zen. In Red Lentil's favor, theirs are half the price. On account of a multiplex movie theater directly across the street, even at night the metered street parking, in a word, sucks. You usually must resort to the cavernous parking garage directly overhead (really!) where parking is even more expensive than on the street. At least the cost of the meal, which is moderate, compensates for the cost of the parking. So be reconciled to feeding meters in addition to feeding yourself. After your long walk from your parking space, you'll be happy to find that seating here is spacious and comfortable, especially if you are seated at a booth. The wait staff does not rush you out of the place, not even when nearing closing, so you leisurely can sit and enjoy your company and the food, except for potential fiscal angst caused by that dang parking meter.

in CHESTER:

⊙ **Six Main** MOSTLY VEGAN THIS RESTAURANT CLOSED DOWN Sept 2014.

Opened May 2012, Six Main, named either for its address, 6 Main St, or for its onomatopoeia sounding *Sex Man* (?), like its name the restaurant is a paradox. Its menu is mostly vegan, the remainder is vegetarian, and much of it is raw. My kind of food. Yet the décor of the restaurant is not my kind of place. It was remodeled from the nearly windowless lobby of a former old bank, and still hanging from the ceiling are the bank's creepy chandeliers, yellowed with age. Its interior evokes my childhood memories of my grandmother's stuffy old home whose windows she never opened. Or my teenage memories of the lobby of an old bank which had no windows. I cannot fathom why anyone would want to retain the décor of a stuffy bank. I would much prefer to tear it down. Or to hold it up. Six Main's white tablecloths offer a marked contrast to nearby ION's stark tree trunk tabletops. Similarly, Chester's prim and proper Main Street contrasts with working class Main Street in middleclass Middletown, where next door to ION resides a head shop and next door to that a booze shop and across the street stroll streetwalkers and down the street patrol drug dealers. (My kind of town!)

Seated here nonetheless, I thoroughly enjoyed my several meals. The choices are limited, but adequate. Six Main's prices reflect its domicile in the center of ritzy Chester, a Vermont-like rural town beleaguered with Manhattan-like urban traffic congestion. (Parking is not a problem, however, thanks to its own parking lot behind its building. And be sure to check out the brook that abuts the lot.) While one can be affluent without being decadent, Six Main's wine and beer menu indicates its intentions to cater to the very decadent. A mixed demographic group indeed dines here. Young and sexy couples seated at the bar enjoy their meals as much as each others' company. Formally attired elderly couples, obvious members of the targeted audience of those white tablecloths, seem comfortable and satiated. Or perhaps all merely glow from the effects of the wine they are drinking. As I prefer to drink my grape juice straight, I would hope the wine list subsidizes the food prices, which nevertheless exceed my budget, and probably yours too. (Admittedly, my decrying its bourgeois decadence is more a comment about me than it is a review about this restaurant.)

September 2014 UPDATE: No doubt its weekday business was ailing, for instance when I last ate here June 2014 there were barely a dozen other diners during my entire dinner. So in an effort to expand its customer base, during the summer Six Main added sea animals to its menu. But too late. A few months later, it closed its doors.

in WILLIMANTIC:

© **Not Only Juice** VEGETARIAN

THIS cafe CLOSED DOWN March 2023 after 8 years in business.

March 31, 2023 note:

Remaining in business for 8 years is an enviable accomplishment among veg eateries known for a high rate of attrition. Congratulations to NOJ for its 8 years! Yet, during these past 8 years, this café's poor skills of communication have proven frustrating. This culminated with its announcement on a January 18 Facebook post that it was closing down "at the end of March 2023." What does that mean? March 22, March 30, or March 31?

I am writing this on March 31. That announcement was never been pinned to the top of its FB page, so was soon buried by a few other posts. Nor was its imminent closure ever announced on its website. Too late for that, because since March 29 or before, the website has been down. ("There has been a critical error on this website.") Its final FB posting was of some desserts on March 22. Appended to that post, two faithful customers asked if the café is still open, yet as of March 31 both queries have gone unanswered. A third customer wrote that she tried phoning, but no answer on the phone either. I emailed them on March 29 querying the same, but as of today, March 31, I received no response. No surprise there. Just now, just past 9am, I phoned, but my call was answered only by an ambiguous recording. No surprise there either.

As its closing time was 4pm, I made past efforts to be there by 3pm, only to find the door locked with no signage explaining why. Since early 2022, I stopped making any extra effort to arrive there by 3pm, consequently patronizing it less and less. No doubt, other needlessly inconvenienced customers stopped making the effort to patronize the café altogether. Hence its inevitable demise. I am sorry to see NOJ close down, especially as it goes out "not with a bang but a whimper."

(There! I vented my spleen!)

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At the start of the March 2020 coronavirus lockdown, NOJ closed the cafe and announced that it was going to transition into a takeout market. No more dine-in, only takeout, and not just during the lockdown, but also thereafter. Its old URL < www.nonlyjuice.com >, though still active, should mostly be ignored.

After a prolonged process, in March 2022 its reincarnation as a takeout market finally reached fruition. Ignore its online menu, as it is woefully incomplete compared to what is available when you shop there in-person. In person, most of its made-to-order menu of sandwiches, all on wimpy white bread, have reappeared from the former menu. Unfortunately for me, my favorite, the all-vegan lentil burgers on whole wheat buns with always unique and luscious sides, have gone missing. Daily specials, usually vegan, and daily soups, always vegan, are back.

Its refrigerator unit now offers many pickled items, plus many of its familiar juices and salads. A new freezer unit offers many totally new dishes, many of them vegan and all made with wholesome and nourishing ingredients. No mock meats here, thank goodness. The several frozen items that I tried were all fully cooked, so after defrosting I found no need to heat them up. I liked them all, and hope they become regular menu items so that I can look forward to buying them again.

Some of the in-house seating has been reinstated, but not the cozy armchair seating in the sunny backroom nook, nor the tables along the narrow hallway. Prices are not marked on the refrigerated grab-n-go items or on the frozen entrées, nor on any nearby signage, as though they want to keep the prices secret from you. Strange, because the prices are reasonable, so should be boldly advertised. At checkout, when you learn the prices only if you ask, they shake you down for a tip starting at 15% for the cashier who simply rang up the items you removed from the shelves yourself. I tip 20% when truly served, sometimes 10% when merely rung up. Seeking 10%, so being compelled to choose "other" for the tip, is a belittling attempt to shame me into feeling cheap. No prices marked on refrigerated or frozen items are turn-offs, too.

I used to look forward to eating in-house here whenever I shopped at Willi Food Coop. But with the loss of most of the seating, with the guessing game about prices, and with the tip shakedown at the register, my enthusiasm has dampened.

This is my review of the old café, not the new market:

Opened March 2015, in celebration of its 5th anniversary I am updating my review. During these 5 years, I have eaten here 30 times or more and have seen this café undergo many changes, especially in the juice dept. It almost never serves juice anymore. Not ANY Juice, please change your name! For reasons that no longer matter, I long ago stopped buying the juices, and obviously so did everyone else. Fortunately, as its ill-conceived name suggests, it's not only juice.

Few new veg eateries nowadays serve eggs, but Willimantic is a city lost in time, so NOJ's lacto-ovoism harks back to the 20th century. Soon after opening, it expanded its vegan offerings, among them an excellent lentil burger (baked, not fried)

served on a whole grain bun. Errant lentils tend to roll off the straight wooden board it is served on, so request a plate. The sandwich fixings are delicious. The side dish that accompanies the burger always is different and always is a treat.

Most of the non-burger sandwiches, two of tempeh, are vegan, but all come on bland white bread, so I stick with the lentil burger on a whole grain bun. Desserts almost always are vegan. I skip desserts. Instead, I recommend the foolishly-named Buddha Says Relax, a huge array of roasted veggies, all sweet unto themselves. Best of all are the daily specials, usually vegan, or vegan cheese can be substituted, previously for a surcharge but no longer surcharged. The daily specials can be quite exotic and always are luscious, but often sold out by 2pm.

For lacto-ovo-vegheads, this place is paradise. (Remember Paradise, Willi's veg café that lasted 3 years?) And now that overpriced juices went down the drain, everything is underpriced. At the end of the day, which here is 4pm, NOJ's lacto-ovism is a good thing, else it not survive in Willi, a burger and pizza town. (Think back to all-raw, all-vegan Café Live around the corner, which in 2010 lasted 3 months before turning belly up and becoming Café Dead.) Thankfully, NOJ is here to stay.

Patronize this café regardless of degree of your vegism, as the vegan menu has expanded over time. I always enjoy eating lunch here. And you will, too. Just be warned, once the owner leaves around 2pm, the staff turn up the volume and impose their choice of music upon others' innocent ears. Then, in order to be heard above their own din, they shout at each other in the kitchen.

While the front dining area is cluttered, more tables await along the hallway, which leads to a sunny nook with cushy sofa chairs. Plan on eating here before shopping at the stellar Willimantic Food Coop just 3 blocks away, and then you will have 3 reasons for coming to Willi. The 3rd reason? To gape in amazement at the Disneyesque four frogs of the Frog Bridge, also just 3 blocks away.

n WESTERLY, RI :

Maize n Manna Wholefoods ALL VEGAN

THIS RESTAURANT CLOSED DOWN Dec 2017 after 5 years in business.

This takeout café defies all the odds against its remaining in business, thank goodness. While only next door in bordering Westerly, RI, a scant 20 miles from New London, I never heard of it until it was open for more than a year, and such lack of publicity is one odd against it. Odd #2: its hardly memorable name is somewhat odd and difficult to spell out in your search engine. Odd #3: its location in the center of labyrinthine downtown Westerly where driving is challenging and parking is scarce and worse than New London is another odd, especially for takeout, because you may spend more time finding parking and walking to and from your parked car than actually placing your order and walking out with your meal. Odd #4: its limited menu of only two soups, two salads, two entrees, and two muffins is yet another strike against its survival. Odd #5: the heaviest blow of all is that its menu is all vegan. Repeat, totally vegan! (And gluten-free.)

Yet what assures its continued success is what counts: the food. It all is wholesome, delicious, and colorful. Considering the modest prices, the portions are generous. And the menu changes daily, therefore variety abounds, just not on the same day. So check its DeFacebook page for its menu listing, call in your order, have your passenger jump out of the car to pick up the order while you drive around the block, which will be a very long and circuitous block, and then head for a picnic in nearby Wilcox Park. Oh and don't forget to pick up your passenger, who after all has the picnic basket.



if YOU care to make recommendations of restaurants to add here, or you just want to yell and scream at me, you are invited to do so

Contact me on my website, thanks!

Updated **Sept 2023**

– Mark Mathew Braunstein
updates to this mini-guide are posted at:

www.MarkBraunstein.Org
www.markbraunstein.org/vegan-in-connecticut