

VEGAN & VEGETARIAN restaurant guide to Eastern Connecticut

including Middletown, Hartford & New Haven

updated **Sept 2026**



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 **Sept 2026**

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,
listed alphabetically by city:

Branford:

Nellie's Restaurant – Carnivore but very Vegan-Friendly

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Swad Tandoori – Carnivore (veg-unfriendly, stay away)

The Social – Carnivore with alleged Vegan options highlighted

Spice Palette – Carnivore with Vegan & Vegetarian side menus

Niantic:

Natural Food Store – Carnivore but Veg-Friendly

Norwichtown:

Illiano's – Carnivore but Vegan-Friendly

Old Saybrook:

Foodworks Food Store – Carnivore but very Vegan-Friendly

Stonington:

Stonington Village Farmers Market – Carnivore but Veg-Friendly

Storrs/Mansfield:

Fenton River Grill – Carnivore but Veg-Friendly

Willimantic:

Willimantic Food Coop – Carnivore but very Veg-Friendly

Willimantic Brewing Company – Carnivore but Veg-Friendly

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Everywhere:

Wendy's – Carnivore but Vegan baked potato

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:

© **NELLIE'S Restaurant**
www.NelliesBranford.com
 very very VEGAN-FRIENDLY

Entry updated Sept 2026:

Nellie's is a surprising vegan-friendly restaurant in an equally surprising dockside location. Off the beaten path from downtown Branford, it is easily overlooked amid all the immense pleasure and fishing boats both moored in the Branford River and dry-docked on land and in colossal hangers. Given its maritime environment, you'd expect its menu would be heavy with fish and sea animals, yet it also offers many vegan options, in fact more vegan dishes than vegetarian dishes.

Don't be dissuaded by its nondescript name more appropriate for a horse, as in "Whoaaaa, Nellie." As evidenced by a streetside old signage, its more decorous former full name was Nellie's Green Restaurant, but somewhere along the way the word "Green" unfortunately got dropped from the name. Fortunately, its many vegan dishes were not dropped from the menu. They speak fluent vegan here. In addition to being marked with "V" for Vegan, the word "Vegan" stands out as the predominant first word in the names of the vegan dishes.

That's Vegan 'Crab' Cakes. Vegan Layer Dip. Vegan Ceviche. Vegan Tacos. Vegan 'Crab' Cake Wrap. Vegan Burger. There's also Avocado Toast, Guacamole and Chips, several entrées marked "VO," meaning Vegan Option by omission, and two salads and several side dishes, for instance Blackened Tofu, that all happen to be vegan without making a big show of it.

I recommend the Vegan Burger, which is a house-made black bean patty, not pre-fab Beyond Impossibility mock meat. It comes by default with potato fries, but faulting deep-fried food I was able to upgrade my burger with one of the several vegan side dishes, in my case the Grilled Zucchini, which was delectable. My soul-mate soy-mate lunch-mate ordered the Vegan Tacos and a side of Blackened Tofu, and she enjoyed both.

The spacious outdoor patio is larger than the ample indoor dining area, is fully sheltered from the blazing sun or dripping rain, and is perched right alongside the river, though during boating season the river is so cluttered with boats that it can hardly be described as picturesque. With the recent closure in nearby Westbrook of our dearly beloved all-vegan Shayna B's by the Sea, we intend to return to Nellie's to experience both Nellie's and the harbor during their quieter seasons.

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 Jan 2025:

Perched on a hillside on North Main Street, Heirloom is a café whose charm is matched by the picturesque town of Danielson that it calls home.

Catering to all sorts of niche diets, Heirloom Food Company is unique in this Quiet Corner of Connecticut. You want foods that are organically grown? You got it. Gluten-free? Yours for the asking. Locavore? Yes, sir. Vegetarian? Step right up. Vegan? Yes, ma'am. Natural foods? That's natural for Heirloom.

Only real foods here. GMOs? Never. Preservatives? No way. Hydrogenated oils? Nope. Ultra-processed foods? Not a chance. Salt shakers? Not on these tables. Fried foods? While some anomalous bags of outsourced potato chips appear on the menu, its own kitchen deep-fries nothing. You can see that for yourself because the open kitchen is located right behind the order counter. Heirloom has nothing to hide.

To outsiders, the two above lists may seem to be needless dietary restrictions. To the cognoscenti, these are mindful dietary choices. At Heirloom, choices abound. For cheeses, either cow cheese or nut cheese. For breads from a local bakery, either sourdough or sprouted wheat. Vegans with sweet teeth will be happy that all the desserts contain neither dairy nor eggs. Meat eaters, too, will be happy to be provided options containing turkey or tuna. Real meat, not mock meat.

All the food here is fresh and wholesome, often organically grown, often locally grown, mostly gluten-free, and almost all vegetarian. Whatever appears on the menu as vegetarian can be veganized because eggs are completely absent. Quote from its website: "At Heirloom all of our recipes begin vegan."

As a vegan foodie, I felt right at home when I visited soon after its debut in 2012. Before I even sat down, I knew I would want to come back. And I've done precisely that around thirty times, even though my travels seldom bring me to this corner of the Quiet Corner.

Only whole grains are served. That's brown rice in the veggie bowls, quinoa with certain specials, and whole wheat in the wraps. The veggie bowls and salads are wholesome and huge. Add-ons can make them even larger. My favorite additions are the thinly sliced Smokey Tempeh and the Mock Chick Salad, comprised of tiny cubes of roasted tofu. It's also sold refrigerated for takeout, so I whet my appetite on a container of Mock Chick while waiting for my order. Yet, the wait is never long, partly because the waitperson who takes your order often also prepares it, so nothing is lost in translation.

Weekly specials and weekly soups are posted on Facebook, Instagram, and the café's online menu. The soups are always thick and luscious. The veggie burgers and sandwiches are tall and meticulously crafted. To fully appreciate their contents, I eat them with a fork, drilling down, layer by layer. My favorite is the Beta Burger, made with beans, beets, grains, and almonds whose flavor and nutrition far surpass industrialized mock meats.

To my delight, all the meals at Heirloom abide by my food mantra. Delicious and Nutritious.

Three idyllic eating areas complement the food. (Even the parking lot is idyllic.) In addition to the sunny central dining room (depicted in the photo), the interior hosts two booth-like nooks that assure an intimate dining experience. Outdoors, the patio by the front entrance and the two-tiered shaded deck in the rear provide al fresco dining.

Though the outdoor deck overlooks Main Street, the building is set back from the street and inclined on a hill, so treetops buffer the motorized hum of the passing cars below. And unlike many cafés whose loudspeakers shatter the silence with imposed music, Heirloom remains peaceful and, except during busy lunchtimes, quiet. Quiet Corner indeed.

During summer, the exotic plants outdoors match the esoteric plant-based foods indoors. Year-round, the festive interior is furnished with potted plants, including vines crawling up the walls,

and adorned with party decorations, including streamers hanging from the ceiling. You might feel like you've walked in on a celebration. What's being celebrated is the food. And you.

You'd think that this eatery on the edge of town would be a little known, but the good word has gotten around. Lunchtime gets very busy, so try to visit at other times.

The café is one mile off Exit 38 of I-395. If taking this exit, you'll bypass Danielson's quintessential New England downtown. All four blocks of it. This exit does bring you past the town square, which is especially worth visiting around Halloween when it is occupied by an army of homemade scarecrows. Just don't let any advancing army of scarecrows scare you away from Heirloom.

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 2024:

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.

Dec 2024 update:

I found a hunk of meat, yes meat, in my Triple Green. Poor separation of kitchen utensils. I no longer can patronize Mei's, sorry!

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 2024:

If you have a penchant for Asian Indian food, Mirch Masala is worth a try. But with all the bland white rice and hot spices, Asian Indian food is my least favorite ethnic cuisine, so I'm not in an unbiased position to accurately rate this restaurant.

MM offers easy parking just outside the door and has really nice ambience indoors, which perhaps was formerly a British-type pub after an Asian Indian makeover. (It is after all housed in the same building as a chain hotel, the Indian-sounding Ramada Inn.) As is true with most Indian restaurants, MM offers a Vegetarian section on its menu, with half the dishes prepared with cream or butter or milk. Online, that section of the menu makes no distinction between vegan and vegetarian, but in person on the in-house printed menu the vegan dishes are labeled with a "V" both within this section and elsewhere on the rest of the menu.

When I previously ate here 15 years ago, there was no such V, and ghee or cream was cooked into all the rice, but during the interim this restaurant has ventured into the 21st century. (Indeed, 15 years ago, I had to make special request to prepare the rice without any dairy.) But same as 15 years ago, yesterday our three vegan main dishes (the okra, the vegetable curry, the chickpea

masala) all tasted identical, all were too spicy hot for my tender palate, and all ultimately were merely mediocre. For Asian Indian food with an outstanding all-Vegan submenu, I recommend Spice Palette across the river in New London.

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. 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.ThreeGirlsVeganCreamery.com

weekend specials posted on Facebook:

www.facebook.com/threegirlsvegan

Entry last updated March 2025:

The eponymous three girls of Three Girls Vegan Creamery are a mom and her two daughters. As its name suggests, it's a haven for vegans who hunger for the cheese-laden foods in which they may so heartily have indulged during their former omnivorous years. It's also a refuge for folks with allergies to casein or intolerance to lactose.

As the mom is ethnically Italian, it has diversified into a deli of Italian-American foods embellished with cheese. Think pizza and lasagna. Calzone and parmigiana. Stromboli and cannoli. For newly minted vegans nostalgic for those foods, Three Girls turns back the clock. And for anyone else who simply enjoys Italian cuisine, the café adds its own unique flair that just happens to omit cow milk.

According to the proverb, Rome was not built in a day. Nor was this creamery. It began modestly in 2016 by producing and distributing to retail stores only its vegan cheeses, not any foods made with them. A year later, the cheesemaker launched its first storefront and enhanced its menu to include Italian entrées.

Initially it was open only on Sundays, perhaps to appeal to Italian-Americans who reminisced about Sunday afternoon dinners at the home of their Italian nonna. On those initial Sundays, hungry customers patiently waited in long lines outside its premises that without GPS navigation could have doubled as a hideaway.

In 2019, the café moved to its present location wedged between a yoga center and an exercise studio. On heavily traveled Route 1, a half a mile off Exit 59 of I-95, it is now much easier to find.

And there is now more to find. At its new site, it expanded its open hours to five days a week and significantly expanded its offerings.

A decade ago, when Three Girls initiated its venture fermenting cheeses from nut milks rather than from cow milk, as an alternative food any nut cheese was still a novelty. Since then, many large nationwide food purveyors have overcrowded the marketplace with their own versions. Nowadays, most towns have at least one pizza parlor that provides the option of non-dairy cheese, so the uniqueness of Three Girls as a cheesemaker diminished. No longer merely a creamery, the café is now more a deli of Italian-American foods.

Three Girls presently ferments just three nut cheeses: cashew wheels, cashew mozzarella blocks, and an almond ricotta spread. I savor its almond ricotta in part because it harks back to my youth. Fifty years ago, nut cheeses were totally absent from the marketplace, so by following recipes formulated by the Hippocrates Health Institute I fermented my own. My two favorites I made from raw sunflower seeds and raw almonds. After too many spoiled batches, I abandoned the practice. Three Girls applies exacting temperature controls more successfully than I did, because I applied none. As it formerly proclaimed on its storefront logo: Fermented and Perfected.

Three Girls' two cashew cheeses also contain coconut oil, same as do almost all nut-based hard cheeses on the marketplace. Among all nuts, contrary to the false claims of cashew importers, cashews are never sold raw. (To neutralize the toxins in their shells during cracking, cashews are roasted.)

And among all vegetables, coconut and palm are highest in saturated fat content, so much that at room temperature they remain solid. Only one nationwide food purveyor does not include coconut or palm oil to solidify its hard nut cheeses. It uses olive oil, which solidifies under refrigeration.

Being a health nut who aspires to consume foods low in saturated fats and to eat all his nuts raw, I relish the almond ricotta cheese from Three Girls in part because it contains neither cashews nor coconut oil.

In addition to its nut cheeses, everything else served here is created inhouse, including mock meats made from wheat gluten. Along with the nut cheeses and mock meats served unadorned, it offers numerous entrées made with them. The café has so keen an understanding of the American palate as to serve most of its entrées fried, thus appealing to most Americans, vegan or not. Fans of fried food call that comfort food. Such foods indeed can be comforting as long as you don't make a steady diet of them.

As a health nut who avoids fried foods and mock meats, I have limited my indulgences to its veggie entrées that are not fried. My favorites include its potato soufflé and eggplant rollatini. These are luscious. I repeat. Luscious.

Beyond the realm of fried foods and mock meats, its bountiful iterations of pizza stand out. Influenced by its proximity to New Haven, it serves New Haven-style thin-crust pizza, locally nicknamed "apizza." The apizzas and many other entrées are made to order. In order to whet your appetite for those dishes prepared in the kitchen, consult the photos on its online menu.

Other entrées ready for takeout and intended to be heated at home are open to view in a refrigerated display case. The sights and smells can be so tempting that you might be unable to wait until you get home to eat them, in which case the staff will heat those dishes for inhouse dining. Still, the café is more set up for takeout, which accounts for the steady flow of customers who never stay long enough to sit down.

Its takeout menu also offers a wide array of desserts, all familiar dishes made unconventionally without dairy or eggs. As I shun sugar-laden desserts, I depend upon the authority of others. One fan informs me that its Tiramisu excels her expectations for that dessert, vegan or not.

The already lavish weekday menu expands on weekends. The weekend specials often include unique combinations that just happen to be vegan. For instance, on a recent weekend, combinations included not simply French onion soup and not simply mac & cheese, but French-onion-soup mac & cheese. Ditto, not merely lasagna and not merely egg rolls, but lasagna egg rolls.

Vegan or not, such combinations probably exist nowhere else other than in Guilford. Alerted on Fridays to the weekend specials posted on its online menu and on social media, many loyal customers wait for the weekend to make their weekly trips to Guilford.

in Hartford:

Pity the Capital city, with only one vegan restaurant.

© **Fire-N-Spice Vegan Restaurant** ALL VEGAN

www.FireAndSpiceVeganRestaurant.com

entry updated 2024:

Initially, this café was a satellite of the spacious restaurant on Sisson Avenue. After its mothership closed, this tiny offshoot became the main event. Same as at the former mothership, this building's infrastructure is crumbling. Blame the landlord. Do blame the chefs for calling this tiniest of cafés a restaurant. If you overlook that overstatement, you'll find delightful Rasta vibes inside where the food is tasty and nourishing and underpriced. While they should boast about their prices, none appear anywhere inside.

Same as at other New England vegan Rasta cafés, here you choose cafeteria-style from an array of around 15 varying dishes. The Small platter comprises 3 selections, the Medium 5, the Large 8. The menu on the signboard seldom changes. For instance, the tempeh long listed on the signboard is largely fictional as it never is in stock. (I shun mock meats, prefer tempeh, but will settle for tofu.) Tofu and mock meats in varying flavors are featured. Brown rice or quinoa form the base. Mac and (Daiya brand) cheese is a menu staple. Among the many wholesome vegetables served are cabbage, sweet potatoes, and two different preparations of white potatoes. Except for the okra, I have relished all their delicately flavored veggies.

Nothing is fried (hurray!), and except for the add-on patties not included in the platters, nothing is oily. For my tender palate, some dishes can be overly spicy hot (note the Fire and Spice in its name!), so ask your server about the level of heat. The always smiling servers are informative and accommodating. (The charge card app does not enable tipping, so be sure to pocket some cash to tip your deserving server.) The signboard and online menus provide listings of ingredients, including spotlighting on the signboard the dishes that omit alliums. This is a uniquely big plus for those of us with sensitive digestion. (Restauranters, are you listening?)

A narrow counter and three barstools allow for eating in its tiny lobby that is usually crowded with cheerful folks waiting in line for takeout. If you persevere and eat indoors, your meal is served on ceramic dishware with silverware. Seasonally, two streetside tables beckon outdoors, but your order still will be served in takeout containers.

When weather is not conducive for eating outdoors, you can always resort to eating in your car, for which there is ample street parking. If you come here from downtown Hartford, you will drive

past the glitzy architectural monuments of Connecticut's capitol city. As artifacts of Hartford's past glory, these sightseer curiosities are bonuses that are worth your extra trip.

© **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

Update for 2025:

It may have moved from its North End location in Hartford closer to downtown, but that is difficult to verify, as its Facebook and Instagram accounts neglect to update that and it maintains no website.

Entry last updated 2014:

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 tolerable, and that the sauces were flavorful. I might eat here next time I am back in the 'hood, though that might be never.

in MADISON:

On picturesque Main Street, and right next door to Madison Cinema, a former arthouse movie theater that survived by showing mostly Hollywood flicks.

© **Life Bowls** **ALL VEGETARIAN**

www.LifeBowlsCT.com

Entry updated 2025:

Opened by two natives of Madison, Life Bowls is celebrating its tenth year in their shoreline hometown. Their eatery began as a roaming food truck whose favored stop was in front of the Madison Town Visitor Info Center. In 2019, when the munchies mobile set down roots as a café, it didn't travel far. It settled a half a mile east on Boston Post Road (U.S. Route 1), in the heart of Madison's downtown. (In 2020, Life Bowls opened a younger sister café in New Haven.)

Life Bowls takes its name from its signature fruit bowls. Consistent with its motto, "Eat, Drink, and Be Berry," the café's showpieces are two California-style mixed fruit bowls of fruit pudding topped with various sliced fresh fruits (featuring strawberries), honey (or if you wish, agave), dried coconut (shaved into strips), and crunchy granola (crunchy indeed).

Think of the fruit bowls as ice cream sundaes without the ice cream. Instead of fat- and sugar-laden ice cream, the puddings are blended in almond milk with one of two oversized berries, the pitaya and the açai. I know what you're wondering.

Açai is a small purplish roundish berry that grows from Amazonian palm trees. It's twice the size and twenty times the price of a blueberry. Grocery stores sell açai berries only as a frozen purée that's more water than berries. Outside of jungles, it's served mostly in smoothies and, as you'd guess, in açai bowls. Don't ask me how to pronounce "açai." I've heard it several ways.

Pitaya, also called Dragon Fruit, is the size of a Hass avocado in the shape of an ovate mango. It grows on cacti in Central America. Even if you've never eaten any, you might recall seeing them in food markets due to their eye-catching purple or magenta skin with horn-like scales that would adorn dragons, if dragons were real.

Perhaps you consider bowls of fruit as suitable only for breakfast or as beach food. Beach food, did you say? By no coincidence, Life Bowls is just a ten-minute drive from Hammonasset Beach State Park, Connecticut's sandiest, largest, and longest state beach.

Because man does not live by fruit bowls alone, rounding out the short but diverse menu are salad bowls, oat bowls, veggie soups, fruit smoothies, connoisseur coffees, and sandwiches on bread from a local whole-grain bakery. The main menu imprinted on a large signboard is prominently displayed, while the daily soup and daily special inscribed on a small chalkboard are easy to overlook.

The daily soups, the pesto, the mayo, and the tzatziki are all labeled vegan. Except for whey powder available as an add-on, the menu is egg- and dairy-free, meaning no cow milk, not even for coffee. Except for honey that can be skipped and bee pollen that can be added, everything else is vegan. Life Bowls, however, keeps its near-vegan status a secret. It even seems to veil in secrecy that it's entirely vegetarian, as that word is omitted from its lexicon.

Distinct from other vegan and vegetarian restaurants whose food is just dressed up junk food, the Life Bowls menu scores high grades for nutrition. Sky high. No fried foods, no mock meats, and no white sugar. Everything served here is both delicious and nutritious.

Located on Madison's picturesque Boston Post Road, the café is across the street from R.J. Julia Booksellers and is next door to the Madison Cinema. The three form a triumvirate of lifestyle enrichment that alone make Madison worth visiting. Adding to the cultural scene are the dozens of contemporary sculptures that dot the downtown landscape called the Madison Sculpture Mile.

Two tables and a long counter provide seating indoors, yet nearly year-round most customers choose the outdoor seating on a patio just outside the entrance. Those five outdoor tables are not quite outdoors. An expansive portico stretches overhead across several storefronts to the left and right of the movie theatre.

That portico probably originally served to protect movie-goers during the primordial pre-internet days when patrons could not purchase tickets online, so braved the elements while standing in line outside theaters. It now pampers the patrons of Life Bowls. As though anticipating Life Bowls' daytime hours, the portico is punctuated with multiple skylights that keep the mood bright and cheery.

If you don't snag street parking in front of the café, the spacious parking lot behind the building can be accessed by a walkway along the theatre. Parking throughout downtown Madison is welcoming and free.

in MIDDLETOWN:

As both a college town and an urban center, downtown Middletown hosts a diverse community. That diversity is reflected in Main Street's vibrant restaurant and bar scene that caters to a variety of tastes, including vegan. In fact, no less than two all-vegan restaurants dwell on Main Street, and rounding out the locale is an all-vegetarian restaurant that has made a longtime home on the outskirts south of downtown.

☉ **ION Restaurant (formerly called It's Only Natural)**

www.ionrestaurant.com

Daily specials listed on Facebook and Instagram at @ionrestaurant

Entry last updated Dec 2024:

Founded in 1987, ION has been a culinary icon of vegan cuisine for most of its 37-year history. With four ownerships in three locations on Main Street in downtown Middletown, in 2013 it arrived at its third site just two blocks from its first home from which it had moved in 1998.

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.

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 seiten (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 (or perhaps they were only managers still under the tutelage of the owner, who reappeared in 2024). In 2022 the amended full name of ION had become *ION Kitchen and Bar*. They retained the name ION in order to continue its legacy as CT's oldest vegan restaurant. With the new owners 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.

Until 2024, best of all *WERE* 12.0's two burgers and buns. I rated them the best vegan burgers in all of CT & RI. Yet in 2023 both of their burger 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 had become chewy, leathery shadows of their former selves. The chickpea cutlet devolved into such a piece of leather that it was dropped from the menu. Good riddance. And no longer can I taste the mushrooms in the now leathery mushroom burger. And in 2024, the bun that formerly was whole wheat became white flour. A total step backwards. So once again, at ION 13.0 I no longer have any entrée worth eating except for the kale salad.

ION in 2024:

ION is ever-evolving. As a restaurant that served only vegan food, it was decades ahead of the rest of society. Until the rest of the culinary world caught up with it, it did endure some hard times. To keep its lights on and its stoves roaring, it sought to expand its customer base by just 20-percent. It did so by adding fish and dairy to the menu. Let's not dwell on that nine-year-long relapse. Eleven years ago, upon its return to Main Street's colorful north end, it dropped the last dairy item from its menu and thereby reclaimed its legacy as an all-vegan restaurant.

Each of its three locations has shaped the festive vibes that seem to flavor the food. Presently, it occupies a bright and spacious space. its comfy booths and open seating are matched with unique hardwood tables carved from longitudinal cross-sections of local trees. Name plaques

memorialize where those trees once stood. Tall and lush potted plants dot the dining area. Both the dead trees and the living plants echo all the plant-based food.

ION adds a vegan flair to typical American fare. When a Wesleyan University student who is vegan goes out to dinner with her visiting parents accustomed to eating meat, she takes them here. Able to identify with food familiar to them, Mom and Pop can better enjoy it. The crowds inside and sometimes lined up outside attest to the popularity of its veganized American cuisine as paired with hard booze. Except for two New Haven bars whose scant food menus are exclusively vegan or vegetarian, ION is the only veg restaurant in Eastern Connecticut that serves alcohol. Its regular menu includes few dishes with ethnic roots, so its food is as American as apple pie.

Some of its staples of Americana include pasta, mac n' cheese, mashed potatoes, and, no surprise, burgers and fries. The house specialty is sweet potato fries. The not-so-secret recipe? Soaking the large-cut taters in ice water for two hours or more before deep frying. Some customers order one portion of fries with their meals, and then a second helping for dessert. In between visits, some patrons lust for those sweet potato fries. Others have been known to dream about them.

The crab(less) cakes, mock meats, and much else are fried, sometimes posing under the codenames "seared" or "crispy." The mock meat, too, poses under a codeword, "seitan." For Sunday brunch, pancakes and scrambles round out the menu. You can praise it all as comfort food. Or decry it as junk food. Your choice.

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 seesaw. It is a work in-progress, even after 37 years. Especially after 37 years. Perhaps someday tempeh will return to its menu, tofu and fried foods be reduced, and seitan and mock meats eliminated altogether. Perhaps. I look forward to the day that ION 14.0 reclaims its legacy as not just a vegan restaurant but also a natural and whole foods restaurant. Stay tuned, folks!

also in MIDDLETOWN:

☉ **AROY THAI GARDEN – Vegan**
www.AroyThaiGarden.com

Entry updated Dec 2024:

Formerly a conventional Thai-American restaurant, in March of 2023 its Thai new owner and vegan chef converted the entire restaurant to veganism. Its former name was Thai Gardens (note the plural), its revised name became Aroy Thai Garden (note the singular).

After it had been a vegan restaurant for nearly a year, I witnessed an illuminating scene. Two married couples nearing retirement age walked in, sat down together, and engaged in animated conversation while waiting for their waiter. He soon appeared, and he greeted them by asking the perfunctory, "How are you?" and then, "Do you know that this is now a vegan restaurant?" No, none of them knew. With no discussion and almost no hesitation, in perfect unison they all stood up and walked out the door. I asked the waiter if that had ever happened before. He answered, yes, almost once a day. I dare say that the word "vegan" still strikes fear in the hearts of many Americans.

It is comforting and yet puzzling to be treated to two all-vegan restaurants both hosted in the middle of Middletown and both right on Main Street, just a half a mile from each other. ION has

been a Middletown landmark for 37 years. The upstart Aroy is the new kid in town. Vying for an esoteric clientele, can both survive such nearby competition? Will one drive the other out-of-business, or will both disappear down the tubes of restaurant history? An odd business environment, to be sure. Odd, too, is that both are closed on Mondays. You don't need an MBA to understand the wisdom of being open on the very day when your direct competitor is closed. Yet, in defiance of the odds, judging by the crowds attending both vegan eateries, both appear to be thriving.

While fried foods abound, unlike at ION the menu at Aroy is so extensive and so varied that countless choices still are offered among the array of wholesome vegetables served as main courses. The choices are especially dizzying for vegans who are accustomed to only slim pickings at most conventional restaurants. In case you're keeping score, there are 28 appetizers, 9 soups, 11 curries, 7 fried rice dishes, 11 noodle dishes, 11 stir-fry veggie dishes, and 8 desserts. Plus, 8 more specialty dishes defy any label or category. As far as my untutored taste buds can tell, all this authentically Thai. Plus, totally vegan.

Equally mind-boggling are the choices of Spice levels that range from cowardly 0 to fiery 5 (I prefer the merciful 1); the Protein additions that vary from tofu (steamed or fried, I choose steamed) to 8 iterations of mock meats (mock foods that make a mockery of veganism); and 5 varieties of Rice that include jasmine, butterfly (a Thai specialty made with butterfly pea flowers), riceberry (a Thai purple rice), sticky (also called sweet rice), and whole-grain brown rice (my gold standard for nutritional awareness).

During the less than two years since it opened, I have eaten here six times, ordering two main entrées each time, at least one of them for my first time. In addition, I have sampled food from my dinner companion's plates. While shunning all fried foods and all mock meats, I still have tried only a few of the many choices of wholesome vegetables dazzled before me. As yet, my favorites veggie dishes include the decorative Bok Choy with Teriyaki Sauce, the Eggplant with Basil, the Pad Prik Khing (a dry curry with green beans), and the Stir-Fried Vegetables. And let's not forget the veggie appetizers such as Avocado Spring Rolls and the Mango Spring Rolls.

In addition to the food, the décor, too, is distinctly Thai. Paintings, prints, and even travel posters on the walls portray scenes of traditional Thailand. Your only reminder that you are not seated in Bangkok is the view out the windows. The restaurant has two distinct halves, even two front entrance doors. The left half is especially luxurious and features three enclaves reserved for special occasions or for large groups. Or maybe only for royalty and celebrities. When she is not in the kitchen, the owner, who is a real sweetheart, often uses one enclave as her workstation from which he often circulates to greet and mingle with us diners. She ranks as one of Middletown's celebrities.

also in MIDDLETOWN:

© **UDUPI BHAVAN** ALL VEGETARIAN

Two distinct websites, the older one is clunky, the newer is more easily navigable:

www.CtUdupiBhavan.com

www.UdupiBhavanMiddletownCT.com

Entry updated 2024:

As both a college town and an urban center, Middletown hosts a diverse community. Its diversity is reflected in downtown Main Street's vibrant restaurant and bar scene that caters to a variety of tastes, including vegan. While no less than two all-vegan restaurants dwell on Main Street, rounding out the locale is Udupi Bhavan, an Asian Indian all-vegetarian restaurant that has made the outskirts of Middletown its longtime home for more than 30 years.

The name of this café, Udupi Bhavan, begs translation. “Udupi,” a distinct cuisine of South India, is named after a pilgrimage city famous for its Hindu temple. “Bhavan” is Sanskrit for a large palace. In Middletown, however, Udupi Bhavan is merely a small café. “Bhavan” is also a Sanskrit name for Krishna, the highest deity of Hinduism. This is worth noting because there are three Hindu temples within a short walk. One of them is located just around the corner within the same shopping complex, and another in the very same strip mall as this café, just three storefronts away, separated by an Indian food store. Welcome to Little India.

Comparing UB with its Asian cousin also in Middletown, Aroy Thai Garden, is a study in contrasts. The former is all-vegetarian, the latter all-vegan. Most of the patrons at UB are themselves Asian Indians, while most at Aroy are neither Indian nor Thai. Whereas Aroy serves five varieties of rice, one of them whole-grain brown rice, UB serves only white rice. Happily, three of UB’s five breads comprise whole wheat flour.

In addition, YB offers 8 stuffed-bread entrées, 10 appetizers, 10 uthappams (pancakes), 7 rice dishes, 17 curries, and 25 dosas (crepes). You read that right, 25 dosas. Dosas are a specialty of the distinct Udupi cuisine of South India, and Udupi Bhavan carries the torch for dosas.

UB provides no printed menu. Instead, a white chalkboard informs of specials and a black signboard with white push lettering informs of the regular menu. Both hang over the counter at which you place your order. The online menu is worth studying if you seek annotations and translations of the names of the dishes. Or if you have poor eyesight.

South Indian cuisine with its white flour, white sugar, white rice and hot spices is among my least favorite ethnic cuisine, so I may not be qualified to rate this all-vegetarian cafeteria-style restaurant. Nevertheless, I am happy to report that the dishes routinely are humanely spicy. Thankfully, I also can report that no mock meats are served here. This is a solidly vegetarian eatery, whereas mock meats make a mockery of vegetarianism. If restricted to what is vegan and vegetable-centered, there still is much from which to choose. While the Vegetable Korma and the Chana Masala, for instance, both are bathed in identical curry sauces, the sauce is not overly spicy, so to my liking. While potatoes predominate among the assorted vegetables of the Korma, all the vegetables are flavorful.

Thick with dairy in all the dishes, Indian restaurants in this country that have dipped their toes into the 21st century usually differentiate vegan dishes from vegetarian dishes. (Udupi Bhavan, are you listening?) The vegan dishes here are not labeled “vegan.” Nevertheless, the staff are fully knowledgeable of all ingredients, so can advise and accommodate pesky vegans. To be safe, I always inform the cashier that I am vegan, in which case they know for instance not to provide the milk-based raita with my meals, though it is listed on the menu as included.

A no-frills café, its sparse dining area is furnished like a school dining hall, so don’t come here for a hot date. Do come here for a hot meal, and a very affordable all-vegetarian meal at that. When dining, try to concentrate on the underpriced food rather than upon the paper plates and the environmentally-challenged plastic dinnerware. And try to ignore the closed-loop TV that broadcasts mostly ads. (Hint: the best way to avoid it is to sit right under it.) And try not to look out the window to the bleak view of a strip mall across the parking lot. Follow all three of my advisories and you are sure to enjoy your meal here.

Located far south of downtown Middletown, its inconspicuous strip mall is oriented perpendicular to the street, so easily overlooked. From downtown, follow Main Street south to where it becomes Saybrook Road. From Route 9, take Exit 21.

also in MIDDLETOWN:

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

www.itsonlynaturalmarket.com

Entry updated 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, you can 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>

you must scroll way toward the bottom of the Menus to find the Vegan sub-menu

Entry updated 2025:

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, when I viewed its sparse Vegan sub-menu online, I saw 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? During touristy summer season there's more, but during winter only 4 entrées and 3 sides. The food is unique even for vegan cuisine, wholly wholesome (no mock meats!), tastes 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.

also in Mystic:

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 updated July 2024:

You might recall Mystic Salad Co.'s location as the former all-vegan Biologic + that closed a half year before MSC opened in June 2019. Whereas Biologic accepted eat-in on a few unstable high stools, MSC is solely takeout. For "eat-out," you'll find ample benches along the canal right outside its front door where you can enjoy laptop picnics and watch the parade of tourists.

The menu comprises 1 customized salad and 1 soup, period. Nothing fancy. Unlike S&P Oyster Co. down the street, 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 & you seek an inexpensive but nourishing lunch where you can even find parking.

MSC could qualify as all-vegetarian except for one topping of chicken at a surcharge. The soups the days I was there were vegetarian, as noted on a small chalkboard. Another signage is a handwritten listing on a whiteboard of the 8 or 9 dressings, of which several are vegan (“non-dairy”), but to know that you must ask. (MSC, can you take a hint?) The salad is basic salad bar fare. You instruct the very gracious server of your choices, like at some fast-casual cafés such as the Pokémoto franchise in nearby Groton. The base is 1 of 4 greens, including baby greens. Among the many toppings, a few are cheesy, but the majority are vegan, consisting half of canned veggies, sometimes beets, and half of fresh raw vegetables, sometimes mushrooms. Among the three canned beans is edamame soybeans, a pleasant surprise. To top it off you choose from 4 sprinkles, including the nutritional boosts of sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, or walnuts, all raw. After you select your dressing, the server tosses it all together and serves it in a paperboard takeout 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 (\$11 as of July 2024). And unlike the rest of downtown, you’ll likely find parking on this one-way side street.

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, inexpensive, and highly nourishing meal for all.

also in Mystic:

Pop Over Eatery – Carnivore with very Vegan friendly

<https://popovereatery.com>

You might feel disoriented the first time you visit. Its décor is that of a fast food franchise, yet Pop Over has only one sister site. As at a fast food joint, you might think to proceed to the counter to place your order, yet this café offers full service. After you sit down and look over the menu, as a vegetarian or vegan you will feel right at home here.

This new eatery clearly identifies with “V” the vegan (not just vegetarian) items on its menu. Thank you, POE, for making life easy for us finicky vegans. Do note that while the V appears on some menu items, other vegan items sometimes puzzlingly lack V. Instead, the word Vegan is either included in the descriptions or listed right in their names. For example, no V for the outstanding Vegan Power [Salad] Bowl.

The salad bowls are fresh and nourishing, whose quality surpasses those served at nearby Mystic Salad Co, so the salads alone provide incentive for dining here. My first time here, my sweetheart who is vegan raved over the Vegan Mediterranean [salad] Bowl. On my second visit, I enjoyed the Vegan Power [salad] Bowl, while my omnivore friend equally enjoyed the Southwest [salad] Bowl. While the Southwest comes with cow cheese, vegans can omit that or substitute with Green Goddess Dressing.

Other dishes labeled V are sauteed or fried. The Fried Brussels [sprouts] are fried as advertised, but crisp, so not dripping with oil. Usually I shun fried foods, but my fondness for the Brussels sprouts at two all-vegan café’s prompted me to order it both times here. Beware its overload of salt. It totally ruined this dish my first time. On my second visit, I ordered it without any salt, and savored it.

In the excellent Roasted Veggie Hash, the veggies are sauteed, not fried, and served elegantly in the iron skillet in which they were cooked.

The Buffalo Cauliflower is roasted, not fried, but too sugary and spicey-hot for my tender palate. My girlfriend, however, liked it.

My first time, the Sweet Potato Burger was an amorphous glob of oily mush plopped atop a spongiform bun. On my second visit, I had it as a side without the bun, and it was much improved, crisp and unified.

The staff here are all friendly, accommodating, and helpful. Special thanks to Pam P., the owner, who wrote a very graceful response to the criticisms in my original review. Her benevolence inspired me to visit a second time and, for instance, to order the Brussels without salt.

POE's interior is bright and clean. When crowded indoors during lunchtime, two outdoor picnic tables perched on an incline beckon hardy folks, who can eat while laughing at drivers in the long line of stalled cars stuck in their own self-inflicted traffic jam while waiting for the upraised drawbridge to lower again. Only in Mystic!

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**

<https://EOTWM.com/food-bar>

many photos on Instagram @edgeofthewoods

www.instagram.com/edgeofthewoods/

ALL VEGETARIAN

Entry updated 2024:

New Haven has a problem, a vegan and vegetarian restaurant problem. Many fine full-service veg eateries in New Haven have come and gone in a rapid succession that exceeds the already high rate of attrition of veg restaurants elsewhere. While Claire's Corner Copia has endured, so has Edge of the Woods Market. But few people think of Woods as a café, only as a natural foods store. Time for that to change.

A New Haven landmark since 1977, Edge of the Woods was originally located on Edgewood Avenue near the edge of the woods of Edgewood Park, hence its eponymous name. More than just a mom-and-pop store, it is also a grandma and grandpa store. Its two generations of family members all are vegetarians. Like many finicky vegetarians, they probably don't want to promote the merchandizing of meat. So they don't. If you look hard, you'll find meat at Woods only in the dog and cat food. All the food they sell for human consumption is vegetarian. In fact, Woods is the only food market in Connecticut that is a safe haven for vegetarians, and is the second-largest such safe haven in the country.

More than just an all-vegetarian food store, Woods features a full bakery, an enticing hot food buffet served cafeteria-style, a made-to-order sandwich bar, a juice bar, and an abundant array of refrigerated prepared dishes ready for takeout. It also caters holiday meals by advance order. Both online and in the café, all menu items are clearly defined as either Vegan or Dairy. By some estimates, vegans now comprise half of the community of vegetarians, so Wood's nomenclature is especially appreciated by the ever-expanding legion of vegans. Many ingredients are further

identified as organic. Whereas its website displays only a single photo of a spread of its hot food buffet, many alluring and informative photos of its café foods can be viewed on Instagram.

The café is on the street level, but seating is available only upstairs on its mezzanine. Shoppers who find that inconvenient instead do takeout. (“Grab and go” is a regrettable term that sounds more akin to shoplifting, so here called “takeout.”) The fridge units stocked with prepared foods are praiseworthy both for their contents and for their clearly labeled lists of ingredients. Other food stores and food companies often print lists of ingredients in micro-type, probably because they have something to hide. As a mindful eater, if I can decipher a list of ingredients only by squinting, I simply do not buy it. (Food purveyors, are you reading this?) At Woods, however, the eagle-eyed need not become bleary-eyed. As though boasting, Woods clearly and legibly lists the wholesome ingredients of its dishes.

Measured from Claire’s Corner Copia as the epicenter of downtown New Haven, Woods is 15 blocks away. That’s a half-hour walk. Due to downtown traffic congestion, that’s also a half-hour drive, and that’s not counting the time it took to find a parking space near Claire’s. Rather than in downtown, Woods is located in a working-class neighborhood in a small strip mall that provides free and ample parking. Woods is set back inside the mall and the mall is perpendicular to Whalley Avenue, so it’s easy to overlook Woods and drive past it. Persevere and you will be rewarded with an affordable and nourishing meal. Pack a cooler to stock up so that you can be rewarded with many affordable and nourishing meals in days to come.

© **Claire’s Corner Copia** ALL VEGETARIAN
www.ClaresCornerCopia.com
 daily specials posted on Facebook @Claire’sNewHaven
 and on Instagram @clairescornercopia

Entry updated 2024:

Since 1975, Claire’s Corner Copia has served as an anchor of vegetarian cuisine in Connecticut. It deserves accolades for its longevity as a vegetarian eatery.

Until twenty years ago, vegans had little from which to choose, and could substitute cow cheese only with unadorned and unflavored tofu. Blah. To its credit, Claire’s has changed with the times. Nut cheeses now are routinely offered as alternatives. It has added so many all-vegan dishes to its menu that they equal or outnumber the vegetarian dishes. Except for the breakfast egg items and some dairy entrées, most vegetarian dishes can be veganized.

The menus clearly indicate both on the wallboards and online what dishes are inherently vegan and what can be adapted. What’s more, its wide-ranging menus are rooted firmly in reality, not just in the imagination of a wishful-thinking chef. “Out of stock” does not exist in the vocabulary of the menus at Claire’s Corner Copia. Cornucopia indeed.

The array of choices can be mind-boggling, even for vegans. It is easy to feel overwhelmed when trying to make choices simply by reading the many listings on its extensive menus. In person, you are better off viewing the display case to the left of the cash register. There you’ll see some of the standard entrées and most of the specials. WYSIWYG, so What You See is far more informative of What You Get.

You indeed can judge these books by their covers. For example, one memorable special was a veggie loaf with mashed potatoes. It looked far better than it sounds, and tasted far better than it looked! Even the mashed potatoes were divine. What you don’t see is that most entrées come with a cutesy personal-size loaf of house-baked bread, your choice of all-white or half-whole wheat.

Portions are very generous. When you order a side, you'll be served what other restaurants might dole out as an entrée. Expect a filling meal and, if you choose wisely, a nourishing meal. Just don't come here expecting a gourmet meal. The regular menu is familiar Americana with emphasis on eggs for breakfast, and on burgers and pizza for lunch and dinner. Noticeably absent are soups. Ethnic accents include Mexican burritos and quesadillas, and Italian pizza and pasta.

Little, if anything, is ever deep-fried. That's a big plus for your health. Rather than fried potatoes as sides, salads are served as sides. The regular menu does feature roasted potatoes tossed in oil, but not soaked in oil. The breakfast menu includes one mock meat made of ultra-processed wheat gluten that is whiter than white flour. That's one too many, but only one. Thankfully, several house-made burgers all are composed of grains and walnuts.

Claire's makes no claims about serving natural foods, just vegetarian food. Still, because of the breadth and depth of its extensive menu, you'll find more here that qualifies as natural foods than at most other vegetarian or vegan restaurants in Connecticut.

During pandemic pandemonium, Claire's expanded into the corner space that had formerly been occupied by a New Haven tourist office. While tables were added, seating remains just as cramped as before. Somehow, like stuntmen in a phonebooth, crowds still cram into Claire's, sometimes waiting in long lines just to place their orders. The lines move quickly because few people stay long. Everyone enjoys Claire's food, if not its ambience.

As a favorite lunch spot of the Yale community, Claire's can be considered an auxiliary part of the Yale campus. Little wonder the noise level during midday approaches that of a college dining hall. If such gentle din reminds you of the fond days of your youth, you just might appreciate it as added flavoring to your food. Just don't meet here for a date. Try to sit by a window where you'll be entertained by the Yale and New Haven crowds parading by, sure to add novelty to your dining experience.

Except on Sundays, finding parking can be frustrating in this congested corner where the New Haven Green adjoins the Yale campus, so expect a long walk. Also except on freebie Sundays, expect to pay ransom to parking meters. Despite the cost of parking added to your meal tab, you still will come out ahead because even for a cafeteria the food at Claire's is underpriced.

Sometimes even Claire herself can be seen clearing tables or tending to the cash register. She and her staff work behind the counter and in the kitchen that are even more cramped than your seating area. Show them your appreciation through the usual means, your tip. Yet there's no option to add tips to credit card payments, so bring cash to contribute to the tip jar. They deserve it.

Also in New Haven:

© **Ninth Square Market Caribbean Style**
a/k/a Caribbean Style Vegan ALL VEGAN
www.CaribbeanStyleVegan.com

Entry updated 2024:

Ninth Square is the name of the neighborhood in New Haven that this Jamaican café calls home. As only residents of New Haven would understand what the heck is "Ninth Square," the café omits the locale in its nickname, Caribbean Style Vegan.

When the vegan married couple opened this Jamaican Rasta café in 2016, they assumed meat was necessary for their new eatery's financial success. Just a year later, they made a leap of faith

by transforming their menu into an all-vegan affair. Ever since, they've been patronized by a steady stream of customers.

Ninth is a food bar with service like at a cafeteria. You choose according to your appetite. The Large platter comprises 7 dishes and the Medium platter is 5, both often topped with medallions of plantains. The food here is colorful, nourishing, and perfectly prepared. Nothing is ever too spicy, too salty, too sweet, too oily, or too overcooked. Omitting the few mock meats as well as the rice, you still have an ample array of wholesome veggies from which to choose. Veggies are the main courses. The veggies are visually recognizable, their flavors distinct and discernible, never smothered in greasy sauces.

Just on the Medium platter, I get stuffed, but never bloated, evidence of their frugal use of oil. The Jerk Tofu and the Rasta Pasta, almost standard fare among Rasta cafés, are lauded by customers far and wide. Root vegetables, brassicas, and whole grains predominate. Quite simply, this is the most delicious and most nutritious vegan Rasta food I have eaten both stateside and in Jamaica.

At Ninth Square, while mock meats are served, they do not predominate. That is not the case at other regional all-vegan Rasta (Ital) cafés, namely at Fire-N-Spice in Hartford, at Shandal's in Bridgeport, and at Belmont in Worcester. Ultra-processed mock meats had no place in original Ital natural foods. Mine is a white honky's voice of experience. I have eaten at Ital cafés in Kingston and have explored throughout inland Jamaica, never venturing anywhere near the tourist havens of Negril and Montego Bay. In Jamaica, I never was served mock meats. It mystifies me that American Rasta cafés rely so much on mock meats, mock foods that make a mockery of veganism. Perhaps they are trying to accommodate American palates. But not at Ninth.

While Ninth offers a few chairs and a table for eat-in, it is more geared for takeout. I have witnessed people placing orders for so many multiple takeout meals that either they were supplying large families or they were stocking up for the week. Nothing elegant here, just wholesome and nourishing and filling meals. Hence the steady flow of customers placing large orders.

This café is difficult to "follow." The owners are firmly footed in the here and now, attentive to the customers standing in front of them. The Facebook and Instagram accounts are seldom updated, so useless. Long vacation closings are never announced in advance.

The website menu is viewable only when the café is open. To place an advance order online or simply to view the website menu, you must wait until 12 noon, Wednesday to Saturday. By late afternoon on Saturdays, many dishes are sold out, so on Saturdays try to get here by midday.

Unlike in downtown New Haven, parking is plentiful in this mostly residential neighborhood, if not just around the corner on Orange Street, then in the George Street garage directly overhead, its entrance literally right next door. Or ditch your car. The café is a half-mile walk from Union Station.

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 the former Right Path Café.

Entry last updated 2024:

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.

After 16 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.

Until 2024, all of its produce was organic, now supplemented with produce staples for the financially-challenged.

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 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.

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 its front facade the words *Vegetarian and Vegan Options* in lettering almost 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 NORWICHTOWN :

© **Illiano's Grill -- Carnivore but Veg-Friendly**

<https://IllianosGrill.com>

Entry added 2024:

Authentically Italian and surprisingly Vegan, this branch of Illiano's is a rare treat. While the printed in-house menu clearly indicates which dishes are vegetarian and which vegetarian dishes can be customized vegan, the online menu does not. (This menu discrepancy is true at other eateries, too.) So I wrote to Illiano's and asked about their vegan options. In response, they sent me a PDF of the printed menu along with a personal reply. Quote:

"Our vegan options throughout the menu are identified with a little green leaf with the word Vegan. There are many choices. Our homemade pizza dough and our gluten-free dough both are vegan. We use Vevan vegan cheese. Our pasta options that have that symbol are made to order as a customer would like. For example, the Pasta Primavera, in lieu of cream sauce can be made with oil and garlic or a marinara. The Pasta with Wild Mushroom will be made in a marsala wine sauce without the cream. Salads and sides of veggies have not been marked with the Vegan symbol but can be prepared vegan as well."

After decades of driving past during my return trips from Willimantic Food Coop and often noting its parking lot overflowing with cars, I stopped and ate here just two days after receiving their thorough reply. It's all true, and more. Even better, the printed menu indicates that the pasta can be chosen as Whole Wheat. So we ordered a whole wheat pasta dish, which came with a side salad; a small Pizza, which was huge; and from among the Contorni (side orders), the Sautéed Broccoli, Mushrooms, and String Beans combo. In addition, bread and olive oil was provided for our table. We arrived famished, and departed full. While the entire meal was excellent, we especially liked the underpriced combo of sautéed veggies. Next time, I will order it in a double dose.

The welcoming and knowledgeable waitstaff are totally familiar with all the vegan options and the service was impeccable. In addition to our gracious waitress, a member of the Illiano extended family who spoke fluent English with a fresh Italian accent ambled by and greeted us. The interior is very cozy with a wall mural of Naples and other artworks, some signed by a member of the Illiano family, as though we were dining in their living room. We felt quite at home.

in OLD SAYBROOK :

© **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-oriented shopping mall, but Fenton is far south of the university and has ample parking.

- © **Fenton River Grill**
Carnivore but Veg-Friendly
www.FentonRiverGrill.com

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:

www.CtInsider.com/connecticutmagazine/food-drink/article/RECIPE-This-vegan-shepherd-s-pie-is-a-17046214.php

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 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.

TRIGO PIZZA

Carnivore but VEG-friendly

www.TrigoKitchen.com

Entry added 2024:

It's been said that an alcoholic can find a drink even in a desert. Can a vegan find a meal even in Willimantic? With the closure in March of 2023 of the all-vegetarian café, Not Only Juice (NOJ), Willimantic has lacked an eatery suitable for vegans. (Willi Brewing does not count, as its menu of industrialized mock meats are fake foods suitable only for mock vegans.) Now providing the option of vegan cheese on its pizza, Trigo may yet become a haven for vegetarians and vegans alike.

For vegans and omnivores alike, Trigo is a fun and friendly place to eat. Its attentive and informative waitstaff are especially friendly, and even the other customers are friendly. As a pizza bar, its booze menu is long, while its food menu is short. Yet in addition to pizza, it also offers a unique house-made hummus. The crudités that accompany it, too, are unique, namely white daikon in addition to traditional carrots and celery. I highly recommend the delicately flavored hummus. For my WFPB vegan dinner mate and I, the hummus was the main attraction. But for most people the pizza will be the main event. While I typically shun white flour, on the plus side its crisp crust is thin, so the white flour is minimal.

The postmodern interior décor is inviting. The sturdy wooden tables are noteworthy, but the teeny tiny plastic schoolroom chairs are suitable only for leprechauns. Those uncomfortable chairs were probably rummaged from a dumpster behind the local junior high school. Let's hope the antiquated chairs will soon be returned to that dumpster and be upgraded to match the shiny new tables.

Willimantic is a Pizza and Burger town, evidenced by its few vegetarian restaurants lasting so briefly. Paradise (Paradise Lost) lasted three years on Main St from 1995 to 1998. Café Live (Café Dead) on Church St was a record-breaker, barely 3 months in 2010. Not Only Juice (Not Any Juice) lasted 8 years on Main St from 2015 to 2023.

"Trigo" is Spanish (no, not Italian) for Wheat. (Wheat's binomial Latin genus name is *Triticum*.) Ironically, Trigo offers a wheat-free pizza crust, for a surcharge. What will inspire me to return here is a pizza crust made of whole grain, surcharge or not. Until then, Willimantic remains a white flour Pizza crust and white flour Burger bun town.

Willimantic Brewing Company

Carnivore but VEG-friendly

<https://willimanticbrewingcompany.com>

Entry added 2025:

Willimantic is a burger and beer town, exemplified in Willimantic Brewing Company. If you're a boozier, come here for the beer. If you're a teetotaler and vegan, seek sustenance elsewhere. Or

visit just once to enjoy the festive interior décor of this repurposed old-time post office. Or stay home and take the virtual tour on their website. If you do visit, opt for seating in one of the side rooms. The cavernous main hall is a beer hall that amplifies the boisterous loud talk typical of when friends booze it up.

While vegetarians will find many entrées here, for vegans the choices are dismal and few. Only one entrée, the Crispy Teriyaki Tofu Bowl. To WBC's credit, the word Vegan clearly identifies that on its menu. The accompanying cauliflower rice and the edamame are straight out of the freezer bags, and the pickled veggies right out of the jar. The "crispy" teriyaki tofu is sauteed on one side only, not deep-fried, which is a big nutritional plus. Those wedges of tofu were the highlight of our meal. Too bad there were so few of them, and the portions of the rest of the Bowl so small. In order to have eaten a full meal, I should have ordered two Bowls, not one.

Among the apps, Bethel Vegan Bean Dip is identified vegan in its name. That's it on the vegan side. The menu states in a sidebar that the Tofu can be substituted for meat in all Wraps, but then you must omit all the cheese dressings, too, thereby getting a whole lot less for your money.

The Vegetarian 3-Bean Chile, formerly vegan, now is merely vegetarian. A House Made Veggie Burger is likely not vegan, else it would have been duly identified. (Hurray to WBC for ditching what they formerly served, an industrialized commercial mock meat that makes a mockery of veganism.) Among the side dishes, perhaps the Brussels Sprouts are vegan, but we neglected to ask. By way of planting a plant-based seed in the minds of the chefs, we asked if any of the desserts are vegan. Indeed, a sugar-laden fried Plantain can be served vegan.

It's been nearly three years since all-vegetarian Not Only Juice closed down in March 2023. Outside of the excellent Willimantic Food Co-op, where you can snack on prepared foods delivered from Shayna B's and Yalla Hummus and Mindful Kitchen, romantic Willimantic still lacks a vegan eatery worthy for dining out.

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!"

Includes Broccoli Sprouts
Sprout Garden
Indoor Grower's Guide to Gourmet Sprouts
Revised Edition
Mark M. Braunstein

RADICAL VEG
RADICAL VEGETARIANISM
A Dialectic of Diet and Ethic
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www.MarkBraunstein.ORG

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, then New Britain, 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 1/2 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 mothership on Sisson Av in Hartford, all vegan, closed March 2018, **9 years**

19 – Shayna B's by the Sea, first in Old Saybrook, then Westbrook, all vegan, 2017 to June 2026, **9 years**

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



in WESTBROOK:

© **Shayna B's by the Sea** ALL VEGAN

Closed June 2026, in preparation for Christine's move to ION as one of its chefs

entry was current for January 2025:

Many restaurants offer samplings of vegan or gluten-free dishes, but few are fully dedicated to both. Shayna B's by the Sea stands among the few. All its food is both vegan and gluten-free, and its owner has skillfully donned both chef hats.

Like many small cafés whose owners serve double duty as head chefs, the singular charm of Shayna B's by the Sea can be attributed to its sole owner and master chef, Christine Reed. Veganism and gluten-allergy are two diets that pose unique challenges to restaurateurs. While restaurant goers may follow a vegan diet because they wish to, those who adhere to a gluten-free diet typically do so because they must. When the café owner or chef shares the same diet ethos as you do, her enthusiasm enhances the distinctive flavoring of the food.

Christine began her two culinary quests by delivering bakery goods to food stores and by vending at farmers markets throughout Eastern Connecticut. After garnering a faithful following, in 2017 she founded Shayna B's first home as a sit-down café. In 2021, SB moved from Old Saybrook to expanded quarters in Westbrook. Presently spacious inside and out, its large front entrance veranda offers sheltered outdoor dining with a view of shoreline wetlands and of the wetlands' abundant birdlife. (Birders, bring binoculars!)

Indoors, you're greeted front and center by long glass cases that display an array of gluten-free bakery goods. Folks who adhere to gluten-free diets flock here from afar for the breads, bagels, cakes, cookies, donuts, and other pastries. Most restaurant desserts, including natural food restaurant desserts, are routinely made with white sugar. As a vegan food snob, I shun sugar, but I do consume maple syrup and coconut sugar. At SB, at least one dessert is sweetened only with those, so worthy of my indulgence. Sweet!

The bakery goods that mostly qualify as desserts unjustifiably eclipse the more nourishing food. What you won't see in the display cases are the made-to-order meals prepared behind the scenes. Wholesome and flavorful, the vegan entrées just happen to also be gluten-free. They include salads and veggie bowls; pizzas and veggie burgers; sandwiches and wraps; smoothies and soups. Breakfast, served all day, features scrambles and pancakes.

The falafel and the tofu in some of the bowls or wraps are pan-fried, but nothing is ever deep-fried. In other dishes, oil (always extra-virgin olive oil, on SB's lists of ingredients abbreviated as EVOO) is used only sparingly. Salt is added

equally sparingly, so nothing ever tastes salty. All the meals served at SB are both delicious and nutritious. No mock meats here, only real foods.

Several fully prepared daily specials available for takeout are displayed in a glass case fridge separate from the bakery goods. The many regular menu items intended for dine-in are made to order, as you'd expect. Ignore the menu shown online. It's merely an outline and anyway obsolete. Better to rely on crowdsourcing. View the photos of the menu signboards that enthusiastic customers have posted with their online reviews.

Among the entrées, Shayna B's excels in its veggie bowls and pizzas. My favorites are the Nourish Bowl, comprised of roasted seasonal vegetables, and the Hawaiian Pizza. When I come here for lunch, I skip breakfast so that I can satiate my hunger with both entrées.

Unconcerned about gluten, I find bland and chalky the gluten-free bakery items sold elsewhere, yet SB's pizza crust made mostly of brown rice flour is tasty and exemplary. Mushrooms are among the Hawaiian Pizza's luscious veggie toppings, and instead of tomato sauce it is adorned seasonally with roasted fresh cherry tomatoes. Its cheese is not primarily coconut oil typical of gooey greasy nut cheeses sold in other marketplaces. Instead, it is made of miso and sunflower seeds. For two bucks more, I order a double dose of the delectable sunflower cheese. I strike it rich when sometimes the sunflower cheese is sold to-go, all on its own.

Almost all dietary allergies and snobberies can be accommodated, including nut-free (hence the sunflower seed cheese) and soy-free (in addition to soy-based tofu, SB makes its own pumpkin-seed tofu). My food sensitivity is to the alliums: garlic, onions, scallions, et al. I'm thankful that here in most dishes the alliums can be omitted. And if you happen to adhere to Hindu or certain yogic dietary principles, you'll be thankful too.

Almost once a month, Friday night dinners are served by advance reservation. Check Facebook or Instagram about those dinners. Almost every week, live music is featured, usually on Saturday afternoons, sometimes on Sunday afternoons. Phone to learn which local musicians are performing.

Note that its street signage is small and inconspicuous, so the café is easy to drive past. It shares its ample parking lot with a boat showroom next door, so look for its dry-docked dreamboats. If I owned one, Shayna B's would float my boat.

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 named 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 cafe 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

a float. 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, Reopened 2022, then closed down again 2025

Obsolete menu at: <https://openmenu.com/restaurant/7f511ae8-8dc0-11e6-8dee-00163eeae34c>

"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 café 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 abstinence 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!)

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.notonlyjuice.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.

in 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!

– Mark Mathew Braunstein
updates to this mini-guide are posted at:
www.MarkBraunstein.Org