

Native Foods

Delicious, Plant-based Entrees and More!

By: Maggie Downs

Looking for a place to veg out? Native Foods in Palm Springs has fresh, delicious, plant-based dishes to please every palate — even meat lovers.

“One thing that surprises some people is that even though the menu is plant-based, 85 percent of our guests are omnivores,” says co-owner Andrea McGinty. “They just genuinely like the food here.”

McGinty and husband Daniel Dolan, who are based in both Rancho Mirage and Chicago, fell in love with Native Foods long before they acquired the restaurant company.

Twelve years ago, McGinty was at a bank in Palm Springs when her stomach began growling with hunger. The bank teller recommended Native Foods, located nearby. After a quick glance at the vegan menu and unrecognizable foods, McGinty nearly walked out the door. She was stopped by a manager who insisted, “Just try the Scorpion Burger.”

“It was awesome,” McGinty says. “I had never tasted anything like it before.” The burger is made with blackened tempeh, a fermented soy product, slathered with chipotle sauce and served with avocado, romaine, carrots and onion on a freshly baked bun. The Scorpion burger won her over, and McGinty became a regular at the restaurant.

Years later, when Native Foods founder and then-executive chef Tanya Petrovna was looking to open more restaurants and expand the company, McGinty and Dolan bought it. Since then, Native Foods has grown to be a nationwide, fast-casual food phenomenon, with 17 restaurants peppering the country and more locations coming soon.

The restaurant's concept is chef-crafted, casual vegan cuisine, all under \$10 and served in less than 10 minutes. Salads are robust and inventive, like the Ensalada Azteca, which starts with a bed of romaine lettuce topped with fluffy quinoa, piled high with avocado, jicama, toasted pumpkin seeds, cucumber salsa, drizzled with robust mango-lime vinaigrette.

The Handholds are a diverse collection of creative sandwiches and wraps, including old favorites like a Classic Deli Reuben or an Italian Meatball Sub. Or you may want to go for something super SoCal, like the Baja blackened tacos.



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Native Foods' bowls transform stick-to-your-ribs fare into something virtuous. The popular Soul Bowl features hearty red beans and rice, topped with steamed vegetables and kale, and dressed with homemade ranch and tangy BBQ sauce, plus cornbread on the side. The real star of the bowl, however, is the crisp, southern-fried Native Chicken, a faux meat product that is crafted in-house and could trick even the most devout chicken eater.

Wash down your meal with Lavender Lemonade, Watermelon Fresca or Native Iced Tea, a hibiscus and wild berry tea, lightly sweetened with organic agave syrup.

For dessert, try a cupcake, a peanut butter parfait or double chocolate brownie — all free of refined sugar, dairy and cholesterol.

The typical crowd ranges from health-conscious eaters to posh weekenders visiting from Los Angeles, explains McGinty. “The idea of a vegan restaurant has really evolved,” she says. “It's not granola anymore.”



That could be because so many people are purposefully seeking healthier fare. Numerous studies suggest that swapping meat for some plant-based meals may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, some cancers, diabetes and obesity, in addition to reducing environmental impact.

The restaurant released a new cookbook in January, “Native Foods Celebration Cookbook,” a 362-page, mouthwatering book with 152 easy-to-follow recipes. The cookbook takes the reader through a full calendar year of festive food, from New Year's brunch to summer barbecues.

“Birthdays, Christmas dinners and summer grilling get-togethers don't necessarily require meat or dairy, but they do require flavor, which is what we're giving readers,” notes McGinty. “We're also giving them a reason to celebrate.”

Native Foods also features fun, free cooking demonstrations, so visitors can create tasty meals at home. To bring even more goodness into the community, Native Foods celebrates Native Community Days every month — two days during which a portion of sales goes to a local charity, typically an organization that supports environmental concerns, animals, children's nutrition or community gardens.

Hours: Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.
Location: Smoke Tree Village, 1775 E. Palm Canyon Drive in Palm Springs.
For more information, call 760-416-0070 or visit nativefoods.com