

# Pita Jungle – Take a healthful dining adventure on the wild side

BY STAN KALSON

In 1994, three friends with Mediterranean backgrounds started the original Pita Jungle at 1250 E. Apache Blvd., Tempe, Ariz., (480) 804-0234. Now, they have expanded to Chandler, Ariz., where they face a lush green area on the lake at 1949 W. Ray Road, (480) 855-3232.

Pita Jungle is dedicated to serving the healthiest and freshest foods. All orders are made from scratch with the freshest vegetables, fruits, grains, beans and meats. No microwave ovens are used in food preparation, and canned and frozen foods are verboten. Original works of art by local artists are displayed in each location.

On Friday and Saturday nights at the cozy and romantic Chandler location, a live jazz band of ASU music graduate students performs.

Pita Jungle's cozy atmosphere creates a friendly gathering place for those wanting to enjoy dishes like Lentil Fetoosh Salad: lentils and rice cooked with caramelized onions over a tossed salad of romaine lettuce, tomatoes, red onions and toasted pita crumbs in a lemon vinaigrette dressing. The Portabelló Mushroom Burger is made from

grilled marinated portabelló mushrooms served on a whole-wheat bun with dijon mustard. The Mediterranean Platter contains hummus, baba ganoosh, tsatziki, taboule, feta cheese, grape leaves, falafel croquettes and green beans served with pita bread.

Vegans will be happy drinking smoothies made with soymilk. There are a variety of tofu and seitan dishes to delight the entire vegetarian community. Other Pita Jungle



favorites include veggie wraps and Garlic Marinated Chicken Breast served in pita bread with lettuce, tomatoes, onions and pickles.

Pita Jungle's Chandler hours: Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 9:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Tempe location: daily 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.

During a recent visit the following comments were shared with me about Pita

Jungle: "I love the great fresh taste of the food"; "The food looks and tastes incredible"; "This is the place to meet people"; "The place jumps with atmosphere and decor"; "This is the only place in the Valley with such a unique blend of tastes and flavors"; "The staff is definitely down to Earth"; and "I enjoyed watching the lake."

Try the Pita Jungle, an adventure you will want to have again and again.

The following are some simple healthful recipes provided by Pita Jungle to try at home:

## BABA GANOOSH

### Ingredients:

- 1 medium eggplant (about 1 1/2 pounds)
- salt, pepper and cumin to taste
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 3 tablespoons tahini
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

### Instructions:

Place eggplant on a baking sheet and bake at 350° F for about 45 minutes or until tender. Peel and chop pulp very fine. Add salt, pepper, cumin, garlic and lemon juice. Mix in tahini until you have a smooth paste. Marinate for 30 minutes. Drizzle olive oil over mixture and sprinkle with additional cumin before serving. Dip pieces of pita bread into mixture.

## HUMMUS

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups cooked garbanzo beans (use fresh for authentic hummus; requires about three hours of cooking time or use canned beans when in a hurry)
- 1/4 cup reserved bean liquid
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- salt to taste

- 4 tablespoons tahini
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

### Instructions:

Puree cooked garbanzo beans in a processor or blender, adding the bean liquid until mixture is a smooth, creamy puree. Place in bowl and add lemon juice, garlic and salt to taste. Gradually add tahini to form a thick, light paste. Marinate for 30 minutes or more to allow flavors to increase. Sprinkle with parsley and drizzle with olive oil just before serving.

## LENTIL FETOOSH SALAD

### Ingredients:

- 1 onion, chopped
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 2 cups cooked lentils, cooked
- celery and cilantro
- 1 tablespoon garlic, finely chopped
- cumin, salt, pepper and lemon juice to taste
- 1 cup brown rice, cooked
- chopped romaine lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber

### Instructions:

Carmelize onions in oil. Add lentils, celery, cilantro and garlic to onions. Heat through. Add cumin, salt, pepper and lemon juice. Mix the lentil mixture with cooked brown rice. Serve on a bed of chopped romaine lettuce, tomatoes and cucumber.

Dressing: Blend lemon juice, olive oil, turmeric and garlic, to taste. Serve with lightly toasted pita bread triangles

*Stan Kalson is the founder and director of the International Holistic Center, Inc., and has been active in the greater Phoenix holistic community for 22 years. His Holistic H.E.L.P. Handbook contains many recipes for healthy living. You can now find the Year 2000 Holistic Resources on the Internet at [www.holisticresources.org](http://www.holisticresources.org). (602) 287-0605.*