

## DINING

## Eclectic crowd attracted to Pita Jungle

By Carrie White

Tribune writer

Sweating buckets on the Life-cycle — and consequently looking for distraction — I came upon an intriguing restaurant in a local exercise rag.

Pita Jungle, as noted, was “new on the Tempe restaurant scene.” I like new and I liked the sound of the food, described as “Mediterranean vegetarian cuisine.”

Hi-ho, hi-ho, off to the jungle we go, my Mediterranean loving food friend as my cohort. She hadn't heard of the place either, but hmmm, the address was familiar.

“Do you suppose it's that restaurant we went to a couple of years back,” she asked? “You know, that Middle Eastern place?”

No, it wasn't. Pita Jungle is a new operation, though in the same complex as Tasty Kabob. (Actually the complex resembles an international food court of sorts what with Tasty Kabob, Pita Jungle, Filiberto's and Bageis and

Dreadlox.)

Hey, but this Pita Jungle place is seriously *happening*. And, true to what I had read, eclectic in its clientele — suits next to sandals, etc.

Tables out front were full, which was fine since I don't particularly like looking at the grills of cars while I eat. Inside, whoa, take me back Birkenstock! We're talking retro coffeehouse here.

And it works. For a lot of different kinds of people. Art work (for sale) hangs against mud-color walls, a scuffed brown paint also on the floor. Tile tables, wood chairs and exposed heating ducts contribute to the cause.

Toward the back of the restaurant are boards bearing the cafe's menu. Should there be a line, just grab a magazine or newspaper from the rack provided on the right. On the left, a help-yourself water/coffee/silverware counter. As we wait to order, Aretha Franklin gives us a spelling lesson.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner are served at the Pita Jungle. We were here for the noon meal and



## Pita Jungle

■ **ADDRESS:** 1250 E. Apache Blvd., Tempe.

■ **PHONE:** 804-0234. Fax: 804-0230.

■ **HOURS:** 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Mondays through Sundays.

■ **NOTEWORTHY:** Breakfast, lunch and dinner served. No smoking. No liquor license. Restaurant bills itself as natural, healthful and offering vegetarian cuisine.

**FOOD:** ★★★★★

**SERVICE:** ★★

**ATMOSPHERE:** ★★★

a wide selection of food options we were presented with — hot pitas, cold pitas, combination plates, salads and health burgers.

The Mediterranean platter (\$5.95) had been recommended in the snippet I'd read on the place and it hadn't steered me wrong so far, so that was that. Friend order a lavosh pizza (\$5.25) and we were given a number for placement on our table.

The raspberry ice tea (75 cents) is very refreshing and highly recommended from this corner.

Actually everything we had is highly recommended.

The Mediterranean Platter is a Middle Eastern food lovers delight. Little samples of everything (and there was a lot) didn't leave me overstuffed. There was a lovely lemony tabbouleh and a refreshing green bean salad, beans lightly coated with a tomato sauce. Sliced cucumbers accompanied the yogurt dip (tzatziki), this latter with a hint of dill. Very refreshing.

Other dips included hummas (made with chick peas) and the

baba ghanoush (made with grilled eggplant) with two large pitas to use as shovels. The falafel was gritty and fresh (you know when they're not because they taste like hockey pucks). The stuffed grape leaf, while not high on my favorite food list, was more filled with rice and spice than the traditional lamb and mint. A large hunk of feta cheese, some pickle slices and calamata olives filled out the plate already laden with food.

As to Friend's lavosh, I don't think I've ever seen so much cheese in one place! And big? My goodness! Wedges of tomato, red and green pepper, calamata olives poked through the melted mass of feta and mozzarella cheese, more mozzarella than the former. Try and pull a sample from this and you leave a trail of cheese across the table. Simple and yummy.

How long has Pita Jungle been there?

We were told a year. How did it take us so long to find out!