

Make Your Move at Pita Jungle

There's never been a moving-exercise in my group of friends that didn't end with a full-on, out-and-out gorging. I mean "moving" like when a friend, or a friend of a friend, "just needs a little help moving a few boxes," and seven hours later the obligatory meal, usually pizza and beer, is consumed in a state of exhaustion.

FOOD

Well, this time, we, the chosen ones, were in for a different treat. It seems my buddy, who has been a faithful Kogneeto friend since before I could butter my own bread, had it in mind to take his helpers to a place a little more upscale, but plenty downscale enough for a bunch of sweaty middle-agers.

Pita Jungle is a locally-owned, unique concept with equally distinctive fare, and a favorite of the Valley's many tasteful vegetarians. Oozing with the cred of the critics, the joint was destined to be fruitful and multiply when it

BY IAN KOGNEETO



The Jungle, propagating vegetarian delights Valleywide.

opened its first location in Tempe back in the early '90s. The growing chain recently opened its fourth location, which is in Phoenix. We went to Pita Jungle's Scottsdale location near the Harkins' Shea 14 Theatre on Shea.

Adding to its popularity, Pita Jungle conquers the seemingly impossible by attracting both the greenies and the meaties with offerings aplenty for the contrary clans.

Before we got started, we enjoyed an order of Tzatziki (\$3.75), a cucumber and garlic dip served with pita bread that hit the spot, but not too hard. Pinches of thyme and herbs give the Tzatziki a subtle, sweet and almost addictive edge of flavor. It went down nicely with a cold Red Stripe, and as you might imagine from their name, the pitas are always moist and fresh.

We spent a leisurely few minutes sipping our beers and taking in the local art on dis-

play and the groovy dining room design complete with an open kitchen. Staff at Pita Jungle come across much like the ambience: laidback, very capable and nicely lacking any formal pretense.

When our middle course arrived (yes, we were hungry) we found ourselves sinking our forks into a fruit orgy known as the Caribbean Salad (\$8.55), a fruit bouquet loaded with pineapple, orange, grapefruit, apples, strawberries and bananas. It was fruit for the soul for this famished four-some. Dig deep and find juicy, green romaine lettuce packed under the fresh and inviting blanket of fruit.

The menu at Pita Jungle offers a wide selection of pitas, including hot, cold, wraps or combinations, all with a healthy selection of ingredients to stuff them with. The strong Mediterranean influence is apparent, with falafel

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and hummus being two popular filling choices.

More Middle Eastern and European fare round out the pita section, as well as traditional American choices like the Philly Steak Pita (\$6.25), one of my favorites.

If you're not into pitas, there's always more at Pita Jungle. Another large section of the menu is dedicated to creative and equally scrumptious wood-fired pizzas. From the Curried Spinach Potato (\$6.75) to the Glazed Chicken Lavosh (\$8.65), I think you can gather we're talking variety. Traditional selections like the Pesto and the Herbs and Spices may look routine, but pack flavor anything but.

The seasonal selections of the day included a number of seafood dishes like Spicy Mango Shrimp (\$13.95), Shrimp Scampi (\$13.95) and good old-fashioned Fish Tacos (\$11.95).

Though none of us were likely still hungry, we weren't letting anybody off the hook, so when the waiter asked whether we'd be having dessert, the guest movers answered with a collective "yes."

I opted for the Raspberry Mango Cheesecake, which was every bit as good as it sounds. I thought to ask



my buddy if I could try some of his Baklava, the traditional Middle Eastern dessert, but let's just say we're close, but not that close.

Overall, Pita Jungle is a great stop if you haven't tried it, and frankly I think we're lucky to have such places dotting the landscape, though often few and far between.

I think you'll agree. ■

Pita Jungle in Scottsdale is located east of Scottsdale Road on Shea near the Shea 14 theaters. They can be reached at (480)922-PITA.