

HASMITA NAIR

Jozilicious

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Can vegan food taste even more delicious than its meaty alternative?

I'VE ALWAYS admired vegetarians and vegans who make food choices with animal rights at the forefront of their minds. I consider myself an animal lover, but enjoy chicken too much to ever contemplate giving it up, so I take my hat off to those who are selfless enough to give up, not just meat, but also dairy, to contribute towards the movement of consuming less animal produce in South Africa.

Animal rights aside, the growth of the "meat free Monday" concept has led to many people switching to veggies, only on a more regular basis. Cutting out meat, even for just one day per week, helps prevent four leading causes of death: heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer.

What's more, eating less meat also helps minimise your ecological footprint (as livestock breeding has a detrimental impact on the environment due to greenhouse gas emissions), and will lighten the load on your wallet, as meat is relatively expensive.

If, like me, you want to move towards eating less meat, but aren't quite sure where to go (admittedly, the thought of preparing a tasty vegan meal at home is a little intimidating), these two Greenside restaurants will make you realise that vegan food can be just as delicious as meaty fare, if not more so.

Greenside Café:

Dimitri Gutjahr opened Greenside Café four years ago, when the vegan restaurant landscape in Joburg was barren. He conceptualised each dish on the menu, resulting in a food offering that is as rare as it is enticing. His focus is on dishes that burst with flavour, while remaining balanced and healthy. I was amazed at how unique each item on the menu was.

The highlight for me was our starter, the Raw Wrap, R36. Made of dehydrated apple and banana, it was filled with spirals of raw sweet potato drenched in a macadamia



Go green in Greenside

GUILT-FREE TRIP: The vegan food served at the Greenside Café is fresh, creative and delicious.

PICTURES: RISHAV NAIR



Mexican Pizza



Raw wrap with spiralised sweet potato and macadamia nut mayo and pesto

nut mayo and pesto, and topped with cucumber, avocado and tomato. We devoured the very generous portion, and then spent some time pondering over mains.

After much deliberation, I opted for the Victorino, R79, crispy sautéed tofu, brown rice with sprouts, wilted spinach, carrots and beetroot, while my husband went for the Mexican Pizza: R82, Napolitano with spicy beans, avocado, tomato and cashew nut cream. Pizza bases are homemade sour dough, and contain a mixture of whole wheat, rye and white flours. We found ourselves picking the dishes apart, trying to identify

the ingredients, while my carnivorous man was bewildered that no animal products had gone into such an enjoyable meal.

While sitting outside on the airy deck, we people-watched, spotting buff gym-goers picking up take-aways as well as a few regulars sitting at their favourite table and ordering without looking at the menu (Gutjahr greets most visitors by name).

For me, it was refreshing to look through a menu and know that each item has been well thought out and put together based on its nutritional value, instead of having to sift out one or two isolated healthy

options. Gutjahr makes an effort to source organic ingredients where possible, and does not compromise on quality.

Even dessert was relatively guilt free. The Raw Maple Cheesecake, R45, is made from cashews, vanilla and lemon, and sweetened with agave nectar (a low GI sweetener extracted from a cactus.)

Address: 34 Gleneagles Road, Greenside. Call 011 646 3444. Visit www.thegreensidecafe.co.za

Conscious 108:

Open for less than two months, this vegan restaurant has quickly gathered quite a fan base, and apparently 60 percent of them are meat-eaters. Apart from the food being good, the eatery's contemporary design is definitely a crowd-puller. Lights are draped over wooden beams, while floating shelves display a lavish dessert selection.

Owners Grant Nash and Misha Dhupelia are passionate about animal rights – even their pets eat specially produced vegan food! They opened Conscious 108 because they wanted to make this type of cuisine more accessible to the average Joburger. Aiming to prove that vegan food can be "normal", the

menu comprises homely, comforting meals like curries, gourmet bunny chows, sandwiches and burgers, mostly aiming to replicate meat dishes that we know and love. Soy or tofu products are used to replicate the "chicken" mayo sandwich, "beef" burger, hot dog or BLT, for example.

Bunnies are comprised of two freshly toasted buns – one is topped with your choice of curry ("beef", "lamb", "chicken" or beans), while the other is topped with a scrumptious potato and eggplant curry. I'm not a regular soya eater, so didn't enjoy the taste of the soya lamb bunny chow, R52, but I loved the butter bean bunny chow, R41, which was flavourful and spicy.

Lactose-intolerant folk will be thrilled at the prospect of dairy free ice cream, churned on the premises.

Other sweet treats include bubblegum or Oreo cupcakes, carrot cake, croissants and doughnuts.

Address: 108 Greenway Road, Greenside. Call 011 646 7250. Visit www.conscious108.co.za

Hasmita Nair was hosted by the establishments above for the purposes of this review. Visit her Jozi blog at joziliciousblog.co.za

Jozi is alive with the sound of music at the Teatro

HASMITA NAIR

I'M SURE you'll be as surprised as I was to find out *The Sound of Music* was a musical on Broadway before the iconic 1965 movie adaptation starring Julie Andrews – the soundtrack of which is undoubtedly the playlist to many of our childhood memories.

Since then, *The Sound of Music* has come full circle, and after a sell-out season in Cape Town it's wowing audiences in Joburg.

The South African cast's vocal talent is awe-inspiring, particular that of lead, wayward postulant and governess Maria Rainer, played by the talented Bethany Dickson.

She delivers her performance with gusto and charm (and a voice to match), making it hard not to fall in love with the character.

The real stars of the show are the Von Trapp children, whose roles are alternated among three sets of actors between the ages of eight and 14.

Without skipping a beat, the kids execute some pretty complicated dance moves, while singing their hearts out.

The creative choreography left me enthralled, from the heart-wrenchingly adorable children frolicking around each other to the wealthy socialites displaying impressive ballroom dancing.

The affection that grows between

Captain Georg von Trapp, convincingly played by André Schwartz, and his family throughout the story is particularly endearing, with the cast relaying the emotion well.

While there aren't any mind-blowing special effects, the production is still impressive, with my favourite scenes being those played in the elaborate Von Trapp villa (complete with exquisite chandelier), as well as the demure Nonnberg Abbey, with the Austrian mountainside in the background.

The Sound of Music is showing at the Teatro at Montecasino until June 8. Tickets are R150-R425.

To book, visit www.computicket.com.



Bethany Dickson as Maria Rainer (right), and the Von Trapp children