

Sunlight burger from  
The Present Moment Café

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# Eat For Today

## Café serves raw, organic fare.

The thought of eating vegetarian cuisine doesn't naturally whet my appetite; though I like veggies, I was raised to think a meal was incomplete without meat. What's more, something about tofu patties and rice cakes is off-putting. So, in the spirit of being fair and balanced, I invited a friend who is a picky vegetarian to have lunch with me at **The Present Moment Café** (224 West King St., St. Augustine).

The vegan restaurant satisfied both vegetarian (my friend's) and mainstream (my) appetites with leftovers to spare.

The menu at the Present Moment includes neither tofu nor rice. It is a unique menu—no meat, fish or dairy. Most dishes feature nuts, salad or hand-hewn corn chips (these aren't Fritos, folks). Beverages include organic beer, wine, juices and shakes. Our server brought a carafe of filtered water infused with lemon and cucumber—a novelty that my friend and I both enjoyed—and recited the day's specials, which included a nut loaf and red-pepper tomato soup. Ultimately, we passed on the specials but the table beside us ordered four of them and they seemed to enjoy their meals (jokes about Kool-Aid wine and organic cardboard aside).

We started with A Middle East Peace Hummus (\$7), because who doesn't want peace in the Middle East? The appetizer was made from a blend of cashews rather than beans and served with a plate of fresh vegetables and those corn chips. With the bar's extensive juice and shake list, my friend and I made a point of ordering a glass each. I ordered the banana milk (\$6), made with almond milk, agave nectar and bananas. It was sweet, light and frothy. My friend ordered a Time to Shine, a juice blend of carrot, orange and ginger. Her drink took a little longer to make than mine because our server had to squeeze more oranges. It also was light and sweet, with a spicy kick from the ginger.

We had a tough time choosing our main entrée—she, because there was so much she wanted to try, and I, because I doubted I'd be satisfied with any of the choices. She settled on the kale avocado salad (\$7), and I honed in



Tacos of Life

on the Tacos of Life (\$10). The salad is a signature selection of the café's, tossed with red and yellow peppers, tomato and lemon-garlic olive oil and topped with candied pecans. She decided against adding a scoop of sea vegetables (\$2). The salad was satisfying just like the menu description said, and my friend could not finish the entire dish. My "tacos" consisted of a pine-nut chili and walnut purée, served with fresh salsa, guacamole, coconut sour cream and jalapeño vinaigrette on romaine lettuce leaves. Looking at the two lettuce boats, I was uncertain how to start eating because the leaves were overflowing with filling. I started with a fork, and later was able to pick up the lettuce leaves and eat it like a normal taco. In all, the mixture of ingredients was full of flavor and the portions large enough to fill my belly. I was full without feeling heavy or tired, without any desire for meat or fish.

We finished the meal with a pair of desserts: the Blueberry Parfait with Hemp Praline (\$7) and Chocolate Marble Torte with Drunken Banana (\$6). The desserts, like all our previous dishes, were beautifully presented. The parfait was layered in a martini glass with whole hemp-praline crackers as a garnish while the torte slices were sprinkled with cacao powder and served with a scoop of rum-poached bananas. The torte was not too sweet with a definite chocolate flavor, and the bananas, a perfect complement. The blueberry parfait was

good, but not stellar; honestly, the notion of eating hemp was what drew us. Industrial hemp farming is practically illegal in the United States, but the plant can be imported, and consumption of its seeds is one of its many uses. The seed is a source of protein, fat, vitamins and minerals, and vegans incorporate it into various recipes. It tasted nutty to me.

There were a handful of diners at the restaurant on the Saturday we visited; they represented a good cross-section of wine-drinking folk. We had our choice of seats, but I can easily imagine needing a reservation for dinner. The windows are curtain-less, making the room feel more spacious, and a mosaic of stained glass is strategically placed to obscure outside foot and auto traffic. Next door, the café operates a small market that sells some ready-to-go meals, organic ingredients and vintage clothing. New age music played in the background as a woman hacked away at Thai coconuts in the kitchen, but we were more interested in the stack of vinyl records that included greats like Huey Lewis and Joni Mitchell.

**Check: \$51.41** \*J

*The Present Moment Café is open for lunch Tuesday to Saturday from 11 AM to 2 PM, for dinner Tuesday to Thursday from 5 to 9 PM and until 10 PM on Friday and Saturday. The market is open Monday to Saturday from 11 AM to 5 PM. For reservations, call 827-4499.*