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Keep your showgirlish figure in Las Vegas

Staying healthy doesn't exclude you from trying the city's top notch cuisine

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Vegas.com

Let's face it. Whether it's shopping all day or partying the night away, everyone comes to Las Vegas to indulge to the fullest and that invariably includes eating. With thousands of restaurants in town serving every kind of food imaginable, the last thing on your mind is eating healthy.

But sometimes overindulging is not a good thing. The last thing you want is to be stuck in your hotel room with a stomach-ache. And for some of us, although we want to stay healthy, we also don't want to miss out on all the tasty cuisine Vegas has to offer.

Fortunately, Las Vegas restaurants offer a lot of variety. Eating healthy can be just as adventurous and creative as anything else.

Fun and tasty eats

Goopy, cheesy fries, one-pound burgers and big steaks may sound appealing, but they can leave you feeling bloated, heavy and sick afterwards.

On the other hand, you don't want to eat plain grilled chicken and steamed vegetables on vacation. Luckily, with the use of creative recipes, a lot of restaurants keep taste (as well as health) in mind.

Palazzo's Canyon Ranch Grill takes healthy food to another level. Instead of plain egg whites and oatmeal, breakfast items include whole wheat berry pancakes or the Healthy Elvis Sandwich (grilled peanut butter and banana). Canyon Ranch Grill replaces mashed potatoes and french fries with mashed soybeans and artichoke fries.

"Healthy food is our primary focus," said James Boyer, executive chef at Canyon Ranch Grill. "Most restaurants start with the question 'How is this going to taste?' [We] ask, 'Is this good for you?' Should you be putting this in your body?"

Chocolate lovers can also indulge in the restaurant's Fudge Fantasy soda without the guilt. A natural fruit sweetener jazzes up the chocolate syrup instead of sugar. Other flavors include blueberry, mango and lemon lime. Each order comes with a bottle of organic club soda and a flask of syrup, so you can customize the taste.

If you're planning to experience the natural side of Vegas at the Springs Preserve, Wolfgang Puck's Springs Café offers healthy dishes like rotisserie



Photo courtesy Canyon Ranch SpaClub

Eating healthy in Vegas

- Don't have time to sit for a fancy lunch or a fine dinner? Try Whole Foods at Town Square or Sunflower Market on Tropicana and Pecos (just a few minutes east of the Las Vegas Strip) for fresh, healthy food.

- If your friends aren't so health-conscious and want to go to a buffet, Planet Hollywood's Spice Market Buffet has a massive selection of healthy food, including a huge Mediterranean bar.

- Are you vegetarian but want to try one of the restaurant's signature meat entrées? Tofu, butternut squash and mushrooms are great substitutes. Bellagio's Michael Mina and Palazzo's Restaurant Charlie even have gourmet vegetarian tasting menus.

- Check to see if your hotel's spa has a fitness trainer. In addition to a good workout, trainers can offer nutritional advice.

- Last but not least, be adventurous! Eating healthy exposes us to creative dishes we've never had before. Don't be afraid to ask your servers questions. You're on vacation. They want you to have the best experience.

chicken on herbed cheddar cheese panini, a salmon BLT and Wolfgang's Famous Organic Chinese chicken salad, to name a few.

And forget greasy, deep-fried fish — rm seafood at Mandalay Bay is currently offering a Pacific halibut in a squash blossom ratatouille with warm gazpacho sauce. "It delivers the most flavor and won't punch you in the stomach," said owner Rick Moonen.

Vegas gets fresh

Freshness also plays a key factor in healthy eating. We may try and eat right, but don't think twice about where our food comes from. Forcing food out of its natural habitat not only causes destruction to the environment, but it isn't exactly the healthiest for our bodies.

Whether it's fish caught at the peak of its season or fruits and vegetables from locally grown farms, sustainably caught and grown food is becoming a growing

trend in Vegas restaurants.

"The closer we get in treating our environment with respect, the healthier our food is going to be and the easier our bodies will respond to natural foods," explained Moonen. "Sustainability is not that difficult. It can be accomplished and it tastes delicious."

"Eating healthy is more about being aware of where your food is sourced," said Peter Sherlock, executive chef at Springs Café.

In respect to seafood, Moonen noted that variety contributes to a healthy diet. "I encourage people to have diversity in their diet," he said. "If we all take a bull rush toward anything, nature's not prepared to have the entire human population get excited by it. Mix it up. Step outside the box. Stop eating nothing but shrimp, salmon and tuna. Come on, have a mackerel! Try the calamari!"

Springs Café also practices sustainably caught seafood methods: "We base our seafood choices on the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch Program to determine the best fish to prepare for our guests," said Sherlock.

In addition to sustainably caught seafood practices, many restaurants get their vegetables and fruits only from local farms. (Believe it or not, Las Vegas has local orchards.)

"I'm not really interested in a product taking a 10,000-mile plane ride," said Anthony Amoroso, executive chef at Bellagio's Michael Mina. "If you work with product that's seasonal and it's abundant [whether] it's coming out of the ground, tree or water in abundance, you're doing the right thing as far as trying to be sustainable."

By eating sustainable food, not only are you contributing to better environmental practices, you're also being good to your body.

Veggies, eat your heart out

Sizzling steak. Succulent seafood. Crispy, tender chicken. While these dishes may make carnivores' mouths water, they are a vegetarian's worst nightmare.

But veggie heads, fear not. While there are dozens of steak and seafood restaurants here in Vegas, it doesn't mean you have to eat like a rabbit. By giving restaurants enough notice, you may just have the best veggie dish of your life.

"It's never fun going through life eating green salads and pasta with tomato sauce," said Zach Allen, executive chef at Enoteca San Marco, B&B Ristorante and



Photo by M.H. Turkell/StarChefs.com

Rick Moonen, owner of rm seafood at Mandalay Bay, offers sustainably caught and grown foods.

Carnevino at Venetian and Palazzo.

Michael Mina offers a gourmet vegetarian tasting menu: "It's always been a part of the restaurant," Amoroso said. "[Vegetarians] are usually just as much of an adventurous eater as anyone else."

Part of this season's tasting menu includes items like heirloom tomato and summer melon. Vegetarian items are also available à la carte, as well as vegetable pot pies, vegetable stuffed pasta and risotto with vegetable stock.

"We also rotate the soup selections and offer seasonal veggies to keep it exciting," he added.

Replacing fish with butternut squash or meat with exotic mushrooms are also creative substitutes. Your friends may even steal a bite or two from your plate.

"I think one of the best meat substitutes is mushrooms," said Allen. "Often we will replace [our] braised beef short rib with oven-roasted porcini mushrooms."

The entrée comes with a salad of thinly shaved raw oyster mushroom, celery, lemon zest and freshly grated horseradish.

Many restaurants also cater to vegan diets by stepping away from dairy and egg products without sacrificing on flavor.

"We make a béarnaise sauce that's eggless and made out of tofu," Moonen noted.

Springs Café also offers a bevy of vegan options like golden tomato papaya gazpacho, mushroom and artichoke soup and tofu Greek salad.

"We customize vegan and even raw menus to a guest's likes and dislikes,"

said Matthias Merges, executive chef at Charlie Trotter, a restaurant based in Chicago with an outlet at the Palazzo. "With a little information we are able to spontaneously create menus for our guests."

To make your dining experience a bit easier, make sure to make these requests while placing your reservation.

"To come out with vegan products is not that difficult as long as we have warning," said Amoroso. "This gives us an opportunity to do something that works for you."

After all this talk about healthy eating, sustainable food and vegetarian dishes, is there really room for dessert — a healthy dessert at that?

Depending on which fruits are in season, rm seafood offers fruit soups. "It usually doesn't make the dessert list," Moonen noted. "It's more of a verbal special."

If you really want to savor a new or favorite treat, there is a way around it. "Do it in moderation," said Keena Staskal, a fitness trainer at the spa at Ritz-Carlton Lake Las Vegas. "Have half a piece of cheesecake instead of the whole piece. Or only eat half of your sandwich if you want to try dessert. Also remember that alcohol has calories too!"

On your next Vegas trip, you really can indulge in all food you want without the guilt. Healthy food can be just as fun as the sinful stuff.

"With a bit of creativity, imagination and understanding of food preparation, you can create delicious food preparations," said Merges.