



SAVOR



Pan-Seared Atlantic Salmon at Emeril Lagasse's Fish House, MGM Grand



Conscious Cuisine

Las Vegas chefs unveil a new wave of wholesome dining options for health-conscious guests watching their waistlines – even on vacation.

By ANNELESE KLAINBAUM | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAIME BIONDO

You've rolled into town, checked into your room and unpacked your bags. It's finally time to unwind, celebrate with friends and indulge in the Vegas restaurant scene you've heard so much about. However, if you're following a strict diet or honing your six-pack in preparation for the summer season, you've probably set a few ground rules for yourself: steer clear of buffets, hide that mini-bar key and stick to salad greens.

Fortunately, there's no need for total sacrifice thanks to a group of chefs who are setting their butter-laden traditions on the back burner and welcoming calorie counters of all stripes to their restaurants. From low-calorie offerings to meatless dishes, these chefs are bringing better-for-you options to the forefront of their menus.

Restaurants are beginning to catch on that special requests from health-conscious customers are more than just a fad. For some diners, they're a requirement. Many chefs are getting ahead of the curve by designing specialized menus and dishes that cater to a myriad of dietary personalities. Others are revisiting their regular menu options to ensure dining at their restaurants is exciting for everyone at the table, regardless of dietary preference.

For chefs, taste always comes first. That's true even for dishes that meet gluten-free or vegan standards. Using seasonable ingredients as a springboard for inspiration, the chefs we spoke with are creating dishes that satisfy on all levels.

It's no easy task to choose a restaurant for a group with particular dietary needs. At MGM Grand, **Emeril Lagasse's New Orleans Fish House** is a smart pick for your "flexitarian" friends who may be eating less red meat but still want to indulge at a celebrity chef hot spot.

Starting out at the raw bar with a few oysters or peel-and-eat Creole shrimp won't derail a strict diet, and you'll be blown away by the clean flavors from

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the seafood here. It's all sourced daily and everything on the menu is graced with that zippy kick that is expected from Emeril Lagasse.

Chef de Cuisine Heath R. Cicerelli has learned from the best, and he says that premium ingredients are the starting point for any winning menu item, regardless of whether it's a low-calorie dish or a calorie-packed one. "Any good dish begins with the quality of products used," he said.

The chef's Pan-Seared Atlantic Salmon is a favorite low-cal menu option. A sensible portion size and loads of fresh vegetables make this dish a totally satisfying option.

It's served with sautéed sugar snap peas, cherry tomatoes and arugula and dressed with a savory olive vinaigrette. Chef Cicerelli finishes the dish with Spanish and Mediterranean olives, a tangy white wine *agrodolce* and a drizzle of estate-pressed Spanish olive oil.

Practicing portion control is just as easy at **Julian Serrano** at **ARIA**. A native of Madrid, Serrano brings the cuisine of his Spanish heritage to life through a menu of both traditional and "new style" tapas – small plates of flavorful appetizers designed for sharing with friends.

Throughout the past few years, the chef has poured his energy into crafting vegetarian and vegan tapas menus that are every bit as indulgent as the regular menu. The restaurant has become known in the blogosphere as *the hot spot* for adventurous gastronomes of the non-meat eating variety.

Serrano especially loves the Roasted Red Peppers, which he seasons simply with a sherry vinaigrette made with a hearty dose of fruity extra virgin olive oil. "Roasted red peppers are a major ingredient in Spanish cuisine, and it's a great, healthy – even vegan – representation of Spanish cuisine," he said.

There are so many small plates to choose from here, including Brava Potatoes, Marinated Olives, Roasted Marcona Almonds and the classic egg-potato-onion Spanish Tortilla.

For a refreshing change, vegetarians and vegans can even enjoy the chef's signature dish. Serrano's veggie-loaded, green pea-studded Paella is served from the traditional, shallow steel pan that's still used in Spain today.

When flavor is skillfully built into a dish from the bottom up, the most healthful meal can seem like a gastronomic dream come true. For fresh, bright,

layered flavors, authentic Mexican cuisine is always a good choice. We're not talking about a taco "salad" piled high with ground beef, cheese and sour cream all packed into a fried tortilla shell. We're talking grilled meats and seafood bursting with citrus notes, topped with fresh veggie salsas and dabbed with house-made hot sauce.

Leave it to two ladies from Los Angeles, Chefs Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger, to create a light and healthful menu that transplants you to the Santa Monica farmers market. You'll find their "modern Mexican" cuisine at **Border Grill**.

This casual cantina seems to have it all: ensaladas, platos pequeños and patio dining at Mandalay Bay, where real sand and wave pools are part of the Vegas beach experience. It's just the place to get motivated for bikini season.

Border Grill Executive Chef Michael Minor serves



Caramelized Scallops at PRIME Steakhouse, Bellagio



Roasted Red Peppers at Julian Serrano, ARIA



Branzino at The Pub, Monte Carlo

up his famous "Al Pastor"-style Kobe Beef Tacos here. Inspired by his latest visit to Mexico, these gourmet tacos are the antidote to Tex-Mex fast food.

"In the Yucatan, tacos like these are all over the place," he said. Traditionally, the meat is slow-roasted over a spit, similar to a vertical rotisserie used for kebabs or gyros. At the restaurant, he marinates the meat with Guajillo peppers and guacamole. They are served on a handmade corn tortilla alongside well-seasoned black beans and salad greens.

Using tortillas made of corn – instead of flour – makes this dish an option for gluten-free diners. Chef Minor says that just about anything on the menu here can be made gluten-free since the restaurant's main focus is on the meats, veggies and salsas. "My team of chefs is very well trained in taking care of our guests...we developed a gluten-free menu and take great pride in serving it," he said.

The chef's gluten-free Portabello Mushroom Multitas are piled high with marinated mushrooms and braised greens, and there are tons of veggie-friendly dishes here, like the Roasted Potato Rajas Relleno (a poblano pepper stuffed with creamy, sautéed potatoes). Whether you're a carnivore or a "turkeytarian" seeking a healthy fix, their Meatless Monday menu specials can't be beat.

When it comes to fine dining, steakhouse territory is tricky business if you're watching what you eat. Celebrity Chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten may be known for the killer Bone-In Ribeye and Truffle Mashed Potatoes at **PRIME Steakhouse** at Bellagio, but a little known fact is that he built his personal culinary style around inventive, light cuisine that features vegetable juices and flavorful broths.

Vongerichten and Executive Chef Sean Griffin continue to honor that creative spirit in seafood and vegetable dishes that are every bit as impressive as the filet. It's easy to find something on the menu here that won't spoil your diet, even if your companions are pouring on the béarnaise sauce.

"Scallops are always a guest favorite for their sweet and delicate flavor," Chef Griffin said. His Caramelized Scallops are a standout amongst the seafood entrées, and they are best enjoyed on a warm spring evening in PRIME's garden patio. Earthy, roasted beets and a vibrant spring onion vinaigrette complete the dish, and it's all topped with a handful of pistachios to add a subtle crunch.

Chef Griffin proudly noted that PRIME is committed to offering vegetarian and vegan menu options and that, like Border Grill, many of their dishes can be prepared gluten-free upon request.

If you've committed to healthy eating, you probably



Kobe Beef Tacos at Border Grill, Mandalay Bay

Whole Grain Vegetable Pasta at Public House, Luxor

live by a few hard and fast rules to keep yourself in check when dining out. We're taking a wild guess, but steering clear of "comfort food" is probably one of them.

At **Public House**, the gastropub at Luxor, it'll be easy to stand your ground against traditional fried fare because you've come for the Whole Grain Vegetable Pasta, one of the best vegetarian options in town. Rabbit food it's not; whole grain penne, basil pesto sauce and loads of fresh veggies such as

with a cool beverage. Chef Cooke recommends the Bee's Knees whiskey cocktail or a craft brew such as Anchor Steam's Liberty Ale.

The Pub at Monte Carlo also has big screens and a great selection of beers, with a casual feel that's ideal for big gatherings. Even here, where most patrons will Build-Your-Own-Burger for dinner, you can find healthy options that will fill you up and satisfy your cravings. Executive Chef Timothy Radigan's philosophy is to keep things simple, and to let the

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sun-dried tomatoes, spinach and mushrooms make a hearty meal that can be enjoyed while watching the game.

It's true that vegetarianism and sports do co-exist here at Public House, but this is also a great dish for those health-conscious "flexitarians" who just want to consume less meat. After all, it's not about eating less of something – it's about eating more vegetables.

"We specially created this for vegetarian sports fans," said Corporate Executive Chef Brian Cooke. This incredible pasta dish should be washed down

food speak for itself. Look for grilled, low-fat meats and seafood here, such as the Branzino.

"It's a European sea bass that we serve atop grilled zucchini, yellow squash, onions, roasted red peppers and tomatoes, all tossed with basil and chives," said Chef Radigan. It's a clear winner for those sticking to high-protein, low-fat meals.

No matter what the reason for sticking to lighter, health-conscious fare, let the experts take it from here; after all you're on vacation in Vegas and there are plenty of other decisions to be made. ■

Download Healthy Recipes from MGM Resorts

Have a craving for the salmon by Emeril Lagasse or for Julian Serrano's tapas? Download MGM Resorts' latest mobile app, "Healthy Eating, Healthy You," for free access to nutritious recipes from resort and celebrity chefs. Emeril's Oven Roasted Salmon and Wolfgang Puck's Grilled Summer Vegetable Salad are just a few of the recipes you'll find in this database, which was originally designed by Chairman and CEO Jim Murren for MGM Resorts' employees and their families. The popular app has become the go-to for healthy home-cooking recipes and dietary information, and it's now available to all resort guests.

To download it to your iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch, search "MGM Resorts" or "Jim's Plate" in the App Store.



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