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## RESTAURANT REVIEW

# Hot tip for a raw deal

Shoreditch's new vegan eatery has plenty to offer, as **Feergus O'Sullivan** discovers

**152-154 Curtain Road,  
 Shoreditch, EC2,  
 020 7613 0007**  
 ☞ Old Street  
**Meal for two: £65**

SOMAYBE a "raw" chef sounds like an oxymoron to you. Or it makes you think: Madonna-ish faddy LA diet freaks?

Then, perhaps you should open your mind with a visit to Saf, Shoreditch's new vegan restaurant. Specialising in organic cocktails and vegan dishes not heated above 48 degrees centigrade, Saf is London's first standard-bearer for the celeb-attracting global trend for raw gourmet food. This trend isn't quite as exciting as it sounds.

While international chefs such as Chicago's raw food pioneer Charlie Trotter have done some envelope-pushing things with food dehydrators, Saf's dishes are generally either simple salad-type affairs or turn out, after all, to have been cooked (look for the tell-tale asterisks on the menu).

But I was intrigued by the presence of non-dairy cheese, made with cultured nut milks. Judging by the "pine nut parmesan" with my main, these ersatz cheeses aren't exactly

convincing, but still taste all

right and might be close enough to the real thing to appease a nostalgic vegan's dairy cravings.

As for the rest of the food, it's fresh and prettily presented, but a bit underwhelming. My main course of "lasagne" turned out to be stacked slivers of veg with sage pesto, said "parmesan" and hashed olives, a nice enough combo that tasted like a series of pre-dinner dips in search of a breadstick.

I couldn't help looking wistfully at my friend's plate of plumply stuffed pumpkin ravioli – real live cooked pasta! Still, it's nice to feel that "knit-your-own-beard" dourness hasn't permeated the place, with organic cocktails and complex desserts rich enough to feel indulgent.

The place boasts a bright, wood-lined dining room and courtyard at the back, and prices are reasonable. It's well put together, and anywhere that offers more choice for vegans has to be a good thing. If you ever find yourself asking: "Where can I eat something ultra-healthy, vegan-friendly and not wildly expensive in buzzy surroundings on the city fringe?", then Saf might just be your answer.

### TRY THESE...

#### Vitaorganic

Small organic restaurant has one of the best ranges of raw and living foods, plus fresh juices.

**74 Wardour Street, W1, 020 7734 8986**

#### Beatroot

Fresh salads, juices and smoothies are

best at this packed counter-service spot.  
**92 Berwick Street, W1, 020 7437 8591**

#### Spirited Palace

Intriguing Caribbean vegan restaurant sticking rigorously to Rastafarian "Ital" dietary laws. There are some interesting raw options worth seeking out.  
**105 Church Road, SE19, 020 8768 0609**



A good place for ...  
 upmarket vegans

**FOOD** ★★★★★  
**VIBE** ★★★★★  
**SERVICE** ★★★★★  
**VEGGIE CHOICE** ★★★★★



**A VEGAN LASAGNE**



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