

For some karma-free grub, sample Be Lohas Healthy Cuisine Cafe's tasty, meat-free, organic dishes.

By MARK LEAN

MY eating habits have in the past decade been an accurate gauge of how curious my family and friends are. I've gone from a totally vegetarian regimen to a seafood diet, and before that I ate all kinds of meats, including the delectable foie gras (three servings in one sitting).

These days, I keep to a vegetarian diet that flirts with the occasional fish or prawn.

Naturally, all this makes for animated conversation topics for friends and relatives who have in the past enquired as to my aversion to meat.

"It can't be for health reasons because you drink so much wine and tequila," they would remark, before going for the kill: "It can't be for the love of Mother Earth either - you're always taking extra plastic bags from the supermarket on a Saturday."

Hmmm, but topics concerning bags and booze become irrelevant when I tuck into the Organic Nasi Lemak (RM8.90) at Be Lohas Healthy Cuisine Cafe in Damansara Uptown, one of a chain of seven outlets in the Klang Valley.

The dish is composed of wholesome brown rice sprinkled with toasted sesame seeds, turmeric-infused curry with mushroom-based "mock" meat, and a spicy salsa-tasting sambal with tender slivers of sautéed onions. It also comes with a palm-sized serving of colourful sliced and diced vegetables, including a small portion of sweet potatoes, all designed to maximise nutrient intake and regulate blood sugar levels. Clearly, this *nasi lemak* makes a convincing argument for going meat-free.

"It's one of our best-sellers," says Linge Lim, the vegetarian cafe chain's recipe creator. An author of vegetarian cookbooks, she says that a vegetarian diet needn't be boring. It shouldn't feature limited food types, either. According to Lim, colours and textures are important.

"We use soya beans and mushrooms to create alternatives to meat," she says, and adds that carcinogen-causing deep-frying is not allowed. "If you must deep-fry, ensure the quality of the oil is good."

Lim adds that grape seed oil is probably the best bet.

The next dish, the Loh Bamboo Charcoal Noodles (RM11.90), is a healthy version of the traditional *loh mee*. Instead of the usual noodles, you get charcoal *udon* wholesomely soaked in a starchy vegetable broth. Drip some vinegar into the bowl, and you get a rich, soupy and filling meal.

The silken, grey-coloured noodles are slurp-worthy and have an *al dente* bite - the same desirable texture of cleverly prepared pasta. When mixed in with tofu and cooked with



The innovative Be Lohas Soy Tuna Croissant.



A vegetarian take on nasi lemak.

Vege tasty

greens and slices of mock "fish", the noodles hit the right spot. It's comfort food that's hearty but not stodgy.

The menu at Be Lohas features both local and international offerings. The restaurant's nod to Thai cuisine arrives with the Thai White Tom Yam In Vermicelli (RM10.90).

Lim says her recipe for *tom yam* is derived from herbs like lemon grass along with whiffs of kaffir lime (*limau purut*). This dish goes easy on the chillies and is full of flavour-some tofu that has absorbed the soup's aroma, not to mention lightly cooked vegetables and thinly cut slices of pulverised soya protein.

The trick when selecting meat substitutes, Lim explains, is to go for the non-gluten options. There's quite a number of choices available, so anything non-fried and containing minimal additives is best. "Always read the label," she reminds.

The cafe's take on curry comes next. The Soy Milk Curry Claypot (RM14.90) is a happy celebration of fresh herbs, spices and soy milk. The dish eschews the conventional *santan* or coconut milk for a lighter and less conventional alternative. Freshly ground galangal, turmeric and chilli are added, giving the dish both the colour and texture of curry, but none of the heaviness and cholesterol-rich properties of coconut milk.

The dish is served with a bowl-sized portion of brown rice and accompanied with a melange of vegetables, deliciously mixing crunchy, chewy and soft textures.

For something continental, you can try the inventive Soy Tuna Croissant (RM13.90). The bread, baked from unbleached flour, sandwiches a tuna-styled filling crafted from soy. Tasting slightly sweeter than normal tuna, the putty is wrapped in sliced organic tomatoes, lettuce leaves and generous fistfuls of pea shoots, making for a quick and healthy snack.

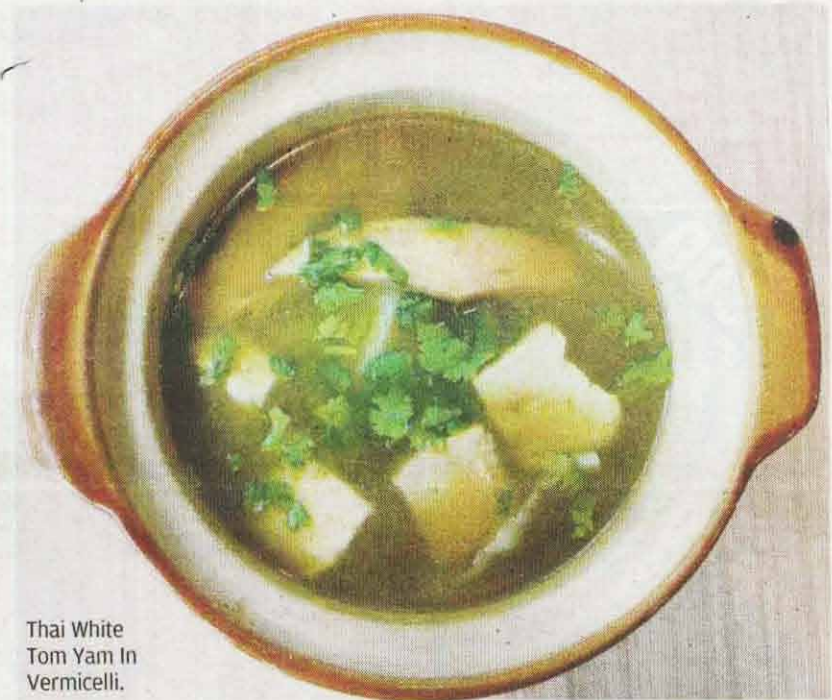
All in all, Be Lohas is a pretty interesting outlet for vegetarians and health-conscious eaters.

Be Lohas Healthy Cuisine Cafe

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Traditional yet modern: The hearty, not stodgy, Loh Bamboo Charcoal Noodles (pic below).



Thai White Tom Yam In Vermicelli.

