

‘To keep the body in good health is a duty... otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear.’ – Buddha



Key West banana leaf at Riverwalk in Naples. SUBMITTED PHOTO



The Mediterranean at The Dock SUBMITTED PHOTO

Four restaurants receive Blue Zones approval in Southwest Florida



Cauliflower steak at Shula's SUBMITTED PHOTO



Powered grilled veggies at Mel's Diner. SUBMITTED PHOTO

By Kate Hampton
Blue Zones Project of Southwest Florida

Many people are surprised to hear of four restaurants in Southwest Florida that have earned Blue Zones Project approval: The Dock at Crayton Cove, Riverwalk at Tin City, Shula's Steak House and Mel's Diner.

These restaurants are either known for their delicious servings of local seafood, tenderly cut sirloin, or good, old-fashioned American comfort food like burgers and fries. And yet all four restaurants are focused on providing healthier options for their customers.

But why, when they have such a following already? How many times have you gone out with a group of friends or co-workers and one has a gluten sensitivity, is a vegetarian or only eats a plant-based diet? Often, it's these individuals who have the most difficult time at restaurants, trying to find something that fits into their dietary restrictions. Even more frequently, it ends up being these individuals

that choose the restaurant.

By offering options that suit a range of tastes and diet preferences, these four restaurants not only can retain their primary customer base, but can expand their offerings in order to serve new customers.

That's what Blue Zones Project is all about, not taking away from the amazing menus that already exist, but adding more options to be more inclusive to everyone.

In fact, as of July 2019 all four of these restaurants have sold a combined total of 20,024 Blue Zones-inspired dishes. Each restaurant has at least three Blue Zones-inspired dishes, but a few favorites:

■ At The Dock at Crayton Cove you can find the Mediterranean dish, a combination of grilled polenta, zucchini, squash, tomato, baby sweet potatoes with a warm Mediterranean vinaigrette.

■ Riverwalk at Tin City offers a Key West Banana Leaf. A blend of sweet plantains, black beans, steamed brown rice, pineapple

salsa, Cuban onions and chimichurri all served in a banana leaf.

■ Shula's Cauliflower Steak is a major hit. With grilled cauliflower, topped with heirloom tomatoes, basil oil and tomato coulis, it's worth substituting your standard filet.

■ Mel's Diner has no less than 14 dishes that qualify as Blue Zone-inspired! But, the most popular is the Power Grilled Veggies. With fresh grilled onions, peppers, mushrooms, broccoli, zucchini, yellow squash and tomatoes, and served with a cup of black beans and a side of salsa, this dish will fill you up and leave you satisfied.

If you haven't visited these restaurants in a while, if you're wanting to try something new, or if you still think plant-based eating means a salad, be sure to pop in and try a Blue Zones Inspired dish.

It will definitely make you think twice about how exciting and flavorful healthy eating can be.

Kate Hampton is with the Blue Zones Project of Southwest Florida.