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## *Cafe review* *by Jill Dupleix*

# Putting the yum into a vegan yum cha

Recent animal rights protests around the country led Prime Minister Scott Morrison to brand the activists involved as “green criminals”. Hmmm. If there are any scary vegan militants here eating yum cha at Bodhi, they’re very well disguised as cocktail-drinking couples, peaceful Indian and Chinese family groups, city corporates, out-of-towners and the odd Buddhist monk.

Vegan yum cha, you say? Is that a thing? Yes, and has been since Bodhi opened in Chinatown in 1988, with third-generation owner Heaven Leigh opening this incarnation in Cook and Phillip Park in 2000. But is it old-vegan (mock meats and TVP), or new-vegan (aquafaba and booze)?

### Space

It’s a delightful place to be, with well-spaced tables on a broad terrace under mighty Moreton Bay fig trees; the beautiful Gosford sandstone spires of St Mary’s peaking into the pastel blue, cloud-scudded sky. Tucked into a retaining wall like a troglodyte’s cave is a steamy kitchen and a few cosy tables, but outside is the place to be. It’s relaxing, too, as there’s no need to order. Trays of steamed, fried and baked dumplings come by regularly, allowing the body, soul and mind to live in the moment.

### Food

The kitchen follows Buddhist practices in using no animal products whatsoever, and dishes are free from onion, chives, garlic, leeks and spring onions (regarded by Taoists as being inflammatory). But it’s still quite surreal, because the dumplings look just like meat-based ones, with stripy pink “prawns” sticking out of deep-fried yam dumplings, and chilli-red “sausages” peeping out from soft white buns. Mock meats feel a bit last century, but Bodhi is pushing forward with alternatives to gluten such as konnyaku or soybean. It’s also slightly surreal when the tray-bearers announce

“barbecued pork buns” and “Peking duck”, leading most diners to say, somewhat startled, “but it’s not pork, or duck, right?” You can do worse than order by colour alone: green tea dumplings with pretty green skins, crimson beetroot dumplings, and luminous Halloween-orange pumpkin-shaped dumplings,

complete with a clove for a stalk and a not-too-mulchy filling of mushroom and chestnut. Things can get a bit samey without the diversity of meat, seafood or onions, but there are clear success stories: frizzy frights of woo gok with hearts of mashed yam, and excellent spring rolls tasting sweetly of cabbage, that don’t pretend to be anything they are not.

### Coffee

Beans are specially roasted for non-dairy milks (high acidity can cause plant-based milk to curdle) by vegan coffee roaster Aldo Cozzi of Sydney’s Flying Pig Coffee. A caffe latte with almond milk is smooth, mild and rounded, tasting more of almond milk than coffee, and a piccolo with oat milk is dark, twangy and lukewarm. Teas are a stronger option in terms of cultural relevance.

### Drinks

The fact that there’s a drinks list at all speaks volumes for veganism’s new demographic. Rum-based Bananatini cocktails are popular, and a damn good Thirsty Vegan beer on tap is made by Asahi. Wines are mostly local, vegan and organic, and drinks service is slow, in a “slow food”, “slow wine” sort of way. Take it as a



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gentle Buddhist reminder to  
practise mindful drinking.

## Bodhi

**Address** Shop 2, 4 College Street, Sydney,  
02 9360 2523, [bodhirestaurant.com.au](http://bodhirestaurant.com.au)

**Open** Mon-Fri 11am-3pm; Sat-Sun 11am-4pm;  
Tue-Sun 5pm-10pm.

**Loving** Sitting in the shade of the Moreton  
Bay figs.

**Not getting** Why it's so hard to get a drink.

**Vegan factor** 100 per cent across food and  
drinks.

**Overheard** Nothing! Tables are so far apart,  
eavesdropping is impossible.

**Caffe latte** \$3.50.



**Bodhi magic:** Outside under the Moreton Bay fig trees is the place to be at Bodhi; (below)  
steamed vegan dumplings of many colours. Photos: James Brickwood