

GOING GREEN IN JERUSALEM

Don't eat meat? You'll do fine in the iconic Israeli city once you find the Village Green

Former MediaCorp Radio Gold 90FM DJ **STEVEN SHALOWITZ** is on a round-the-world journey after leaving Singapore. Having left Amman without a towel, the Chicago resident moves on to Jerusalem.

MY 2005 round-the-world journey marks the second time I've left everything behind to embark on an adventure.

The first time was in 1997. After having lived in China for years, I left the Middle Kingdom to explore Indochina before I moved to Singapore.

My first stop was Hanoi, where I celebrated my new-found freedom with dinner in one of the city's finer restaurants. I ordered a local chicken dish that proved to be disappointingly inedible. I sent it back for a bowl of noodles.

The second night I gave chicken another try. Sadly, the chicken was unfit for human consumption.

I should probably explain here that being Jewish, I was raised in a home where we followed our faith's dietary laws, known as *kashrut*, and therefore only ate food that was *kosher* (think *halal* for Muslims). I never ate pork or shellfish, which are forbidden, but did eat beef and chicken outside my home that wasn't *kosher*.

Whatever it was – a sudden distaste for undercooked and tough meat or two Vietnamese chickens in a pre-avian flu era sending me a message to become more spiritual – I decided to go vegetarian on the spot.

That was on Jan 26, 1997.

A MEETING WITH MEAT

I subsequently embraced my new eating regimen – experimenting



GREEN OUTSIDE AND IN: The Village Green offers healthy, meat-free food in a pleasant, sun-baked setting.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVEN SHALOWITZ

with tofu and seitan, and acquiring a taste for *nato*, the often-avoided fermented soy beans found in Japanese restaurants.

Somewhere last year, all that changed. During an interview with celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain, author of *Kitchen Confidential* and *A Cook's Tour*, I asked what he had against vegetarians. He felt that unless people gave up meat for religious reasons, they were missing an entire cultural experience.

Meat, he opined, can be found in most dishes in virtually every society. Not to eat, for Bourdain, is to not partake in our collective human heritage.

Perhaps he had a point.

outofoffice explore with attitude

While eating meat never made sense to me, I nevertheless secretly salivated over the carnivorous dishes coming out of the kitchens of my co-religionists in Singapore for Sabbath and holiday meals.

I succumbed to Bourdain's philosophy and tasted my first morsel of meat in seven years (chopped liver, actually) shortly after that fateful interview and vowed that any meat I ate would have to be *kosher*.

So, on this, my latest odyssey, when I returned to Jerusalem after my travels through Jordan, where *kosher* meat is unavailable, I couldn't wait to bite into a Big Mac: McDonald's in Israel is *kosher*.

FORGET THE BIG MAC

I planned to enjoy my Happy Meal on a park bench, watching the world go by.

That is, until I saw others eating under the sun at Village Green in the heart of Jerusalem's commercial district.

Not a park; a restaurant. And not any restaurant – a vegetarian restaurant.

Falling under the magical spell of the vegetable, I reverted to my

old ways and joined the health and environmentally-conscious in the restaurant's buffet line.

I marvelled at the choices and wondered why I had ever returned to eating meat.

That Anthony Bourdain: What did he know?

My tray was crowded with a cup of cream of butternut soup, a plate heaped with spinach and tofu pie, organic spaghetti, and baked vegetables with peanut-ginger and lentil-coriander sauces on the side. A tempting pineapple and fig muffin picked up at the end was my one-way ticket to carbohydrate nirvana.

I couldn't help but share my excitement with the man standing next to the till – one of the restaurant's owners, Barry Sibul.

The 54-year-old was responsible for the menu, which reflected his love for food.

He drew a healthy dose of inspiration as much from his years of studying Herbal Medicine in Britain as from his own home kitchen, where he sits down to meals with his wife, Nadine, and their four children – all vegetarian.

For South Africa-born Sibul and his business partner, Koby Meltzer – both trained as special education professionals – it's not just about offering innovative meatless meals.

Village Green opened in 1991 and seeks to give back to the community through its hiring policy, offering positions to the handicapped.

Leaving nothing on my plate, I promised Sibul that I'd be back.

With so many choices and only four more days in Jerusalem, could I really sample all the items on the ever-changing menu? And what about all those sinful desserts, like the mocha cheese cake, the lemon meringue pie and the date-nugget biscuits?

Well, let's just say I never did have that Big Mac.

IN ADDITION...



KOH MUI FONG

CAN'T *SCAPE THE IDOLS: Olinda (left) and Daphne will be performing at the youth hub with various other talent show finalists over the weekend.

CAN'T *SCAPE THE STARS

It will be idols galore as finalists from Singaporean talent shows perform their latest hits at the Lime Sonic Bang Concert presented by Swatch.

The concert will be held at *scape, the youth hub behind Cathay Cineleisure Orchard, tomorrow and Sunday, from 6.30pm and 9pm.

The performers include *Singapore Idol* alumni Olinda Cho, Maia Lee, Daphne Khoo and Leandra Rasiah; *Project SuperStar* finalists Tan Wei Lian, Kelly Poon, Hong Jun Yang and Chew Sin Huey; as well as Khairul, Azmir, Fauzie and Khairil from *Anugerah 2005*.

Bands such as The Observatory, Electrico, Ronin, Bonafide Vintage Flav'r and Wicked Aura Batucada will make appearances, alongside winners of Funkamania and Jam X 2005, NRA Altitudes and Turning Point.

Special guests, Saw Loser – formerly known as Pug Jelly – and Aussie band Stars Don't Fall will also be belting out their hits.

HANTU IN THE HOUSE

Theatre group Teater Ekamatra presents a humorous ghost story, *Lelembut*, which means "the unseen" in Malay.

The story explores the Malay psy-

che, in which magic, mysticism, taboo, superstition and the supernatural are brought to life by word of mouth.

Lelembut will be staged at the Esplanade Theatre Studio today and tomorrow. Tickets from Sistic.

CHUA'S STILL PAINTING

Winner of the Singapore Young Artist Award 2001 Anthony Chua will hold his seventh solo exhibition, *Still Painting*, at the Telok Kurau Studio Gallery from tomorrow until Dec 12.

The presentation showcases 50 artworks created over the past two years.