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# BETTER WHEN SHARED

In Downtown Kitchener, you'll find plenty of restaurants that offer great sharing menus.

Thanks to the modern trend of ordering a handful of sharing dishes instead of individual meals, diners now have more options to choose from than ever before. With more options, you feel more adventurous to try something you normally wouldn't eat. If you don't like a particular dish, you know there'll be one that you will.

But this trend is more than just about experiencing a variety of delicious food and flavours, it's also about creating a sense of community. We know food brings people together; it's even more so with sharing dishes. When you sit down and share a dish with someone else, it's an opportunity to put your phone away and explore food and conversations with new and old friends alike. It's an opportunity to connect with others while indulging in amazing food and drinks.

**Here are some tasty shareable options for your next Saturday night out.**



**Izna Donburi House**  
| 137 King Street E

Take a seat at the central communal table, where you and your friends can enjoy hearty Japanese comfort food alongside other diners, under dimly lit red lanterns. The wood panel walls, wooden tables and benches give the restaurant a warm, rustic vibe. From the open concept kitchen, you can spot the owner and chef, Chris Lee, in action.

Chris was trained as a Japanese chef in Korea. He prides himself in making everything hand-made and cares deeply about his patrons. He even created a dish - the Omurice, chicken fried rice topped with omelet - for the Kitchener community.

"I like to watch my customers' faces when they try my food. I want them to be happy," Lee says.

As he said that, I glance at a group of students sitting at a few tables down. Multiple dishes are laid out along the table, food is being passed around. I hear laughter - sharing dishes and caught up in their conversation.

### East African Café

| 50 Ontario Street S.

Afework Girmayie, the owner of East African Café makes you feel at home the moment you walk inside. The interior is very simple, with African paintings hanging from the mustard coloured walls and you can hear the sound of a television playing in the back. You feel like you're in someone's home rather than a restaurant. This is a small, unassuming place with a pleasant surprise — injera.

“Central to our dishes is injera, a yeast-risen flatbread on which various minced vegetables and savoury stews are served. Patrons use the injera, rather than utensils, to pick up morsels of food, usually from a large platter shared with family or friends,” Girmayie said.

Girmayie explains that sharing food is part of East African culture. Every day, family, friends and even neighbours sit down at a round table to eat together.

And Girmayie is bringing this sense of communal eating right here in Downtown Kitchener.

“When you eat with your fingers, you connect to your food,”he says.

Also, when you have a chance to taste every dish on the platter, you connect with others, through the shared experience of eating the food itself.

And through his food, Girmayie is connecting with the DTK vegan community. So much so that he'll be



East African Cafe

moving the Tuesday Vegan Buffet, normally offered at lunchtime to dinner time, in efforts to accommodate more of his patrons.

The dishes are mainly vegetarian/vegan with some meat options available. The portions are incredibly generous so be sure to come here on an empty stomach.

### The Grand Surf Lounge

| 87 Ontario Street S.

When you step into this tiny Tiki bar, you feel transported to a tropical destination. Exotic cocktails are served with the ubiquitous, colourful umbrella, dancing Hula-girl lamps give light to a dim atmosphere, and surfboards are used as tables.

When I was speaking with owner, Darryl Haus, he dropped the word ‘fun’ repeatedly throughout the conversation. And that’s what the atmosphere at The Grand Surf Lounge is like — kitschy and fun.

Think California surfer food meets Southeast Asia with lots of fresh flavours and a good kick of spice. The menu is very small and changes frequently. That’s what’s unique about this charming little place, as they work towards pairing the food and drinks together.

“I think the entire idea of our restaurant is about creating community. We play the music loud and the lights dim to make it a good party. So guests can come and share some food and drinks, discover the restaurant together and have a good time,” Chef Alex Krawczyk says.



The Grand Surf Lounge

“All the food I make is specifically made to be eaten with your hands, or occasionally chopsticks. I also make sure it’s all very shareable and people respond by often getting three or four plates for the table, rather than something for themselves.”

Food aside, The Grand Surf Lounge also offers 32oz drinks meant to be shared with others.

I was surprised to find out that most of their decorations, like the surfboards, were donated or on loan by their customers, further reinforcing connection and sharing between the bar and its patrons.

“We’re a great place for date night, being small and very intimate. I think we are the perfect fit for anyone looking to escape away to somewhere tropical, drink some boozy cocktails in parrot mugs and eat some intriguingly delicious food,” Krawczyk says.

When people converge around a table and share dishes, a real sense of community is created. Instead of being head-down and focused on your own dish, you’re engaged and interacting with others. You’re busy passing the food around, you’re curious about what the other dishes taste like.

It’s from this experience of communal camaraderie, where you’re sharing food, drinks and stories, that real connections are made.

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