



POLYNESIAN PARADISE

LovaKava is an alternative tea bar dedicated to that calming root BY EMILY DUNNAN

Why would you drink a dirt-flavored tea made from powdered Polynesian plant roots? Because it feels amazing. The kava root, visually reminiscent of the weeds in my backyard, is a psychoactive substance prepared as a tea, paste, extract or powder.

The earthy taste of kava recalls either that one time you accidentally ate something covered in dirt, or things that are supposed to taste like dirt, such as Chinese *pu'ehr* tea — which also has psychotropic effects.

LovaKava, Eugene's new kava bar, regularly offers two blends of house-brewed kava tea: Vanuatu (calming and sedative) and Samoan (energizing and uplifting). The tea is made daily in a traditional wooden mixing bowl from Fiji and served in smooth coconut shells.

If you prefer a lighter effect, you can get kava extract added to kombucha (producing "kavabucha") or any of the delicious fruit smoothies on the menu. I tried kava extract in the chocolaty smoothie "Natasha's Pasha Love"; it felt a little like a caffeine high without the jitters.

But LovaKava serves more than drinks: Its vegan kitchen recently rolled out a winter menu including Hawaii hummus, "Captain Ahab" avocado toast and a hearty gluten-free black bean soup. Everything on the menu is under \$10.

Kitchen manager Cassie Powell says her favorite thing about working at LovaKava is the chill, Zen atmosphere. "It's not your typical bar. You can come in and relax without worrying about disorderly people," she says. Powell points out that it's also a good evening hangout for minors.

The earthy tones of LovaKava's interior match the flavor of its eponymous tea. Paintings by the "kavatenders" — kava bartenders — overlook tan beanbags, leather chairs and couches that face a corner dedicated to live performances. The bar hosts weekly live music events and open talent nights. ■

LovaKava is open noon to midnight Sunday through Thursday, and noon to 1 am Friday and Saturday at 120 W. Broadway. Kava happy hour — though you could argue every hour with kava is a happy one — is 2 pm to 7 pm Monday through Thursday. Find event announcements and more information at facebook.com/lovakava.

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