

# Smooooth! Our intrepid writer heads out on a smoothie bowl crawl

Once upon a time I lived in Hawaii and worked as a dolphin trainer. I made \$8 an hour and could only afford to eat PB&J and canned vegetables, but I made it a point to save my money for what I considered very special treats: smoothie and acai bowls. These were my “splurges,” the best reward after a long summer day. They were the closest thing to brunch I could afford, and there was one particular spot I would go on my mornings off because they made the best acai bowls, topped with house made granola, an assortment of freshly cut fruit and a drizzle of honey.

What is acai, exactly? If you’re anything like my parents, you can’t pronounce it but know it’s good for you. Which is true. Acai berries come from South America, most notably Brazil, and are rich in antioxidants. They are pronounced “ah-sigh-ee” (please practice this) and offer an energy boost, enhanced immunity and detoxification. When pureed and mixed with other fruit, they become smoothie-like. In order to be considered a “bowl,” they are, well, poured into a bowl and given toppings, from sliced fruit and granola to peanut butter and chia seeds. I scouted RI and found a surprising number of options. Here are my thoughts on the best smoothie bowls of RI.

Personal note: I asked that bowls be made with almond substitutes, when applicable, due to an allergy. Orders were placed “for here,” and for this reason, I include the type of bowl given: plastic, biodegradable, ceramic, etc, both for environmental reasons and for ease of eating.

**Hometown Poké** - Everything about this restaurant reminds me of Hawaii, including their acai bowl — it’s most authentic to my original experience and in my top three favorites of this list. The smoothie itself is a deep purple, and I know the acai is legit when I need a mirror to check my teeth for berry skins. This bowl comes topped with sliced bananas, mangos, blueberries, nut-free granola and a drizzle of one of the best honeys I’ve had in RI. It’s served in a real bowl (not plastic) and the portion size is perfect. (\$) 185 Camp St, PVD



Kwench

**Kwench** - I was surprised to see so many fresh fruits behind the counter, considering it’s a franchise, but according to the website they try to source locally. They have eight types of bowls, including a build your own, which can be made with either acai or pitaya. I had never heard of “pitaya,” so naturally I

chose it. It turns out to be another name for dragon fruit, and it came out startlingly pink and sweet. I ordered The Kennedy Plaza, their most popular bowl, blended with banana, peanut butter, strawberry and coconut milk, and my choice of toppings: granola, blueberries and strawberries. It was served in a plastic bowl, which made it difficult to eat, but extraordinarily filling. The smoothies are good, but I wouldn't come for the ambiance. (\$\$) 155 Westminster St., PVD



### **Cool Beans**

**Cool Beans Café** - Come for the ambiance. The ocean is a hearty stone's throw away and inside there's a decidedly California surf vibe: chalk painted walls and burlap bags, seascapes over the couch seats. They have one version of the acai bowl (blended with almond milk, strawberries, bananas and topped with granola, fresh berries and coconut) but you can customize your order by adding more toppings, such as peanut butter, hemp protein or cocoa nibs. I opted for cacao nibs. It's served in a wooden bowl larger than my head, to which I exclaimed, "Holy Bejesus, this thing is huge!" It's easily the biggest bowl of the bunch, and you can bet I ate it all. (\$\$\$) 18 Kingstown Rd, Narragansett

**Shayna's Place** - This is THE place to go on a Sunday. Every seat was full when I arrived on a rainy afternoon. Their "I'm Alive!" acai bowl is blended with bananas, blueberries and almond milk, topped with GF granola, coconut flakes, bananas, fresh berries and chia seeds. It was served in a plastic bowl, and though it's usually harder to eat this way, the toppings weren't piled on but distributed in neat rows, so it was a solid choice. (\$\$\$) 45 Brown St, North Kingstown



### **Coffee Connection**

**Coffee Connection** - Given the busy location on a crowded street, this café is surprisingly cozy. They offer three types of acai bowls, including one with avocado, which is something I'd never seen before. Although tempted to try it, I was more intrigued by "Theobroma," a blend of acai, coconut, cacao, mango, raw cashew, banana and coconut milk. It came topped with granola, banana, cacao nibs and coconut chips. It looked and tasted like a chocolate smoothie: the breakfast of champions. It was served in a wide opaque plastic container, the kind in which you might take home extra lasagna, and it kept me full for most of the day. (\$\$\$) 1744 Mineral Spring Ave, North Providence



**Glow Café and Juice Bar** - This is the newest of all of the locations, opening only a month ago near Providence College. It's nothing to look at from the outside, but the interior offers a distinct Marley-esque vibe, colorful and welcoming, and scented with coconut. They have four smoothie and acai bowls. I got

the classic, made with an acai blend powder, but I was most intrigued by their Friar Pride Bowl, which is made with activated charcoal. It's pitch black but tastes fruity, and comes topped with coconut, blueberry, almonds and cookies. A student fav. These are served in compostable bowls that are quite small — I'd be comfortable



Glow

eating two, but that could just be me. (\$) 389 Admiral St, North Providence

**Wicked Fresh Café** - I drove by here many times without realizing it was a healthy café in what appears to be an old Arby's. They sell Fully Rooted Juice and sweet potato toast, which I'd like to come back and try. Six acai/smoothie bowls are on their menu. I tried the New Englander, a blend of coffee protein powder, bananas and coconut milk (*not* acai, but the only coffee flavored bowl I saw). Served in a plastic bowl, it came overflowing with granola, sliced banana and a half bag of chocolate chips. I'm a little wary that there were almonds in my granola, so I would proceed with caution if you have an allergy. (\$) 1345 Hartford Ave, Johnston

**Sydney Portsmouth** - Just like the Providence location, it's like



Sydney Portsmouth "Gold Coast" and "Barangaroo"

stepping into Australia — this spot could win for aesthetics alone. But unlike Providence, this space has a great deck for outdoor seating and feels more like walking into a home than a coffee shop. With four smoothie bowls bearing iconic names, like Byron Bay and The Gold Coast, this easily made my top three. I was lured by the Gold Coast's unusual ingredients: mango, banana, turmeric and coconut milk

(they were *very* conscientious of my allergy). Golden in color, it came topped with chia seeds, agave, toasted coconut, granola, cacao nibs and bee pollen. Yes, you read that correctly — bee pollen! Talk about a super food. These bowls are healthy and delicious, not too sweet, and Instagram worthy. (\$\$\$)  
8 Russo Rd Rte 114, Portsmouth



Flat Wave

**Flat Wave** - I begin and end my list with Hawaii — this little shack has the North Shore written all over it. Surfboards on the walls and great outdoor seating, this place has an array of tacos and Asian flair, and they even sell shaved ice, a popular Hawaiian treat. They offer seven types of acai bowls, including one topped with Nutella. I chose the tropical bowl because I craved pineapple. The acai was served frozen, more like a sorbet than a smoothie, and I waited an hour for it to melt in order to mix the granola and other toppings. It was served in a compostable plastic container and tasted *very* sweet. I imagine this would be a big hit with younger folk. (\$\$\$) 1130 Acquadneck Ave, Middletown