

pickleball and alcohol

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Walking through the front doors of Smash Park in West Des Moines, the looming slogan of “Play. Drink. Eat.” caught my eye immediately. The spacious venue had an atmosphere that was incomparable to other restaurants. The smell of burgers and beer floated through the air, and the sounds of pickle balls smacking rackets echoed from the courts on either side of me as friends and coworkers hollered trash talk back and forth.

Stacks of board games were tucked in a corner, and giant Jenga towers were being assembled at tables. I was surprised to find an area of couches where people held controllers and were playing old Nintendo video-games. The indoor trees with twinkling lights added to the playful atmosphere. From what I could see, this is a jumbo play place for adults.

After getting familiar with the place, I became confused. Very few people were actually sitting and eating. Most were immersed in conversation and playing various games while sipping on drinks. My friend and I wandered around for a bit, watched a few points of a pickleball match and scanned board game options. Eventually, we discovered the kitchen, which was located in the back of the establishment behind the main-level bar. A gigantic menu board hung from the wall. The menu contained typical bar food like fried pickles and cheese curds but also had some surprising options like fire-roasted rotisserie chicken and hearty salads. We ordered at a counter that resembled a fast food restaurant and gave our phone numbers to the woman helping us. She let us know that we'd receive a text when our food was ready.

Although the atmosphere was lively and attractive, the food was a letdown. I ordered a Pickle Burger, which promised a quarter-pound burger with fried pickles, honey sriracha coleslaw and provolone cheese. My burger was missing the coleslaw and seemed sloppily thrown together. My friend ordered rotisserie chicken with their house rub and pesto pasta on the side. The house rub was sweet and unexpected; I wasn't a fan. I was excited to try the pesto pasta but was let down when it was cold and tasted slightly like dish soap. On the other hand, the tater tots I had were great, but that's an easy one. Although it was reasonably priced, I wasn't impressed



with the food.

After eating, I looked over the extensive drink menu Smash Park had to offer. Full menus of cocktails and unique shot combinations convinced me that they were much more focused on the quality of their drinks than their food. They also had a slew of options when it came to spirits and wine. There were two different menus for beers on tap. The Hall housed the lower-level bar and game courts, while The Deck was home to the 21 and over section, picnic tables and a second bar.

When leaving, the outdoor courts labeled “The Yard” stood out. Bocce ball and shuffleboard courts were spread out around the establishment, as well as boards and bags for corn hole. The outside looked just as fun as the inside. If we hadn't stopped by on a chilly, rainy weekday, I'm sure it would have been swarming with activity.

Smash Park is different from your regular bar and restaurant. They've cracked the code that drinking and yard games go hand-in-hand. If you're going to Smash Park, don't show up expecting a typical, restaurant-style meal. Plan to stay awhile, have a few drinks and bring some friends you wouldn't mind beating at a game of pickleball.

