

# what's the big deal with açai bowls?



Written By: Brynn Martin | Photos By: Jack Buttjer

As a society, we're constantly looking for the next big thing. So, after scrolling through my social media and coming across aesthetic pictures of berry bowls overflowing with toppings, I was intrigued. Health nuts and fitness experts were endorsing these bowls and calling açai a "super food." I had to see what all the hype was about.

Big Açai in Valley Junction is nestled on 5th Street among other restaurants and antique shops. Upon walking in, I was immediately greeted by the man behind the counter and asked if I'd ever been there before. He explained to me the different sizes of bowls I could choose from and what ingredients they had to offer. A menu behind the counter showed how to build your bowl step by step and included a list of smoothie options for anyone who wasn't in the mood for a bowl.

A classic bowl included açai, granola, banana and an additional ingredient of your choice. Ingredients included different berries, chia seeds and bee pollen. I also had the option to add a number of protein boosters. I chose to add blueberries and coconut shavings to mine.

A separate menu offered a number of sweet and savory options, including avocado toast. I'd been dying to try a genuine avocado toast for a long time. I chose to order the "Nutty almost Chicken." It included avocado spread, red pepper flakes, cilantro lime cashew cream and a poached egg on top. The classic bowl and the toast together cost a little over \$11.

While waiting for my food, I wandered around the establishment. Little tables and barstools dotted the front room along with murals and an area for merchandise. A hallway past the main counter led back to an open space that held more seating and an area where customers can play corn hole. Twinkling lights were strung near couches, throw pillows and picnic tables. It was a comfy atmosphere, and the murals on the walls added an exotic, vacation-like feel.

Another thing I noticed was the number of teenage girls in the establishment. The place was overflowing with young girls chatting and snapping pictures of their bowls. I concluded that Big Açai must be the place to hang out and meet friends if you're young and bored.

After my name was called, I grabbed my food from the front bar and hunkered down on one of the couches in the back. Both my bowl and the toast looked delicious, and I'm happy to say they tasted even better than they looked. The açai puree was sweeter than I expected. I didn't realize how quickly I was eating it until it was gone. The toast was pretty messy with the poached egg, but it was still crunchy and full of flavor. I couldn't feel my lips from the pepper flakes, but it was worth it.

Overall, I was extremely satisfied with the food and atmosphere of Big Açai, but I couldn't help but wonder, how could something that was advertised as healthy taste so good?

At the front of the establishment, I found serving sizes and nutritional information on the organic açai puree and granola. According to the American Heart Association, the maximum amount of added sugars you should eat in a day are 37.5 grams for men and only 25 grams for women. After doing some math, I came to the conclusion that the approximate cup of açai in a classic bowl contains at least 30 grams of sugar, the granola on top contains at least 10 grams, and the fruits added on top are guaranteed to contain even more natural sugars. Even though it is uncertain if these are added sugars or not, that is a lot of sugar either way.

I was very satisfied with my experience at Big Açai. It was a little pricey, but worth it if you don't make it a habit. In regard to how healthy açai bowls are for you, I recommend looking deeper into the ingredients added to your bowl to make sure you're getting what you think you are.

**nutty almost chicken:**  
avocado spread, red pepper flakes,  
cilantro lime cashew cream and a  
poached egg

