PICK A PAPAYA

Haven’t saved up enough for that Caribbean cruise yet? Your hula skirt’s still at the cleaners? Don’t despair.

Just pick up a papaya. For some reason, the tropical fruit has never been popular here. Maybe that’s because we’re too comfortable with our old tried-and-trues: our watermelon and blueberries and the apple-orange-banana clique. Maybe it’s because you can’t see a papaya’s deep orange insides or because a lot of folks don’t know how to eat them. For some reason, people just pass papayas by. Don’t.

Papayas are nutritional powerhouses. Each cup of cubed papaya has 2½ grams of fiber, about a 1½-day supply of vitamin C, and 28 percent of a day’s vitamin A, 14 percent of a day’s folate, and 6 percent of a day’s potassium, all for just 60 calories. And there’s no reason to stop at one cup.

But the best part is that subtle, sweet, tropical taste. Nothing like it. Just slice one open, scoop out the seeds, cut the fruit away from the skin, and squeeze on some fresh lime or lemon juice. You can eat it alone or mix it with other fruits (think mango, melon, pineapple).

For a refreshing salsa, toss diced papaya with black beans, diced red bell peppers, minced red onion, chopped cilantro leaves, and lime juice. Skip the black beans, and you’ve got the perfect topping for grilled chicken or fish.

Look for papayas that are at least partly yellow on the outside. (If they’re hard and green, they’re immature and won’t ripen properly.) They should give slightly to pressure, but not be soft at the stem-end or anywhere else. You can keep a partially yellow papaya at room temperature until it’s all yellow.

That’s your cue to slice the fruit open and indulge. No suitcase necessary.

TROJAN TURKEY

“Shaved turkey breast served warm on toasted 9-grain bread with melted cheddar cheese, basil pesto mayo and Applewood smoked bacon.” That’s how Applebee’s describes its new Fried Green Tomato & Turkey Club sandwich. “Slices of southern-fried green tomatoes give it an extra crunch,” adds the chain.

Hmmm. The fried tomatoes and the bacon might give you pause. But turkey breast, 9-grain bread, and basil sure sound like less of a splurge than, say, Applebee’s Reuben sandwich or its Roast Beef, Bacon & Mushroom Melt. Wrong.

The Turkey Club sandwiches 1,210 calories and 19 grams (a day’s worth) of saturated fat between the existing fat globules in your belly and arteries. The Reuben and Roast Beef have “only” 850 or 950 calories and 17 or 18 grams of sat fat. And the Turkey Club’s 3,980 milligrams of sodium (more than 2½ days’ worth) tops the other two (3,780 or 2,570 mg). Feeling bloated yet?

Those numbers don’t include the fries that come with the Turkey Club. What’s another 390 calories and 720 mg of sodium when you’re having fun? (Ask for a healthier side? Since you ordered a good-for-you turkey sandwich, you might not.)

What to order? Applebee’s has “Under 550 Calories” and “Weight Watchers” sections on its menu. All the items have far too much salt, but you could do a lot worse than a plate of Sizzling Asian Shrimp & Broccoli, Sizzling Chili Lime Chicken, or Cabernet Mushroom Sirloin.

When it comes to “healthier” items at chain restaurants, it’s all relative.

Applebee’s: (888) 592-7753