

New Haven, Food & Drink

Ninth Square Caribbean Style in New Haven

— Mark M. Braunstein, 4.19.2025



Ninth Square Market Caribbean Style, New Haven, CT (Contributed)

NEW HAVEN – Ninth Square is the name of the residential neighborhood that is home to **Ninth Square** Caribbean Style café. As only residents of New Haven would understand the meaning of “Ninth Square” as a location akin to “Ninth Street,” the café also calls itself “Caribbean Style Vegan.”

When Elisha and Qulen opened their café in 2017, it was entirely vegan except for one or two meat dishes. A year later, they dropped that meat from the menu. Ever since, they've been patronized by a steady stream of enthusiastic customers, vegan and non-vegan alike.

In their food bar, stainless-steel food trays inside a glass case enable you to view exactly what's on the daily menu. You choose to fit your appetite. The large combo platter comprises your choice of seven dishes, the medium platter is five choices, and the small is three. The five items depicted in the photo of my medium-size plate are, clockwise from the top, grilled tofu, steamed broccoli, baked sweet potatoes, sautéed green beans with red peppers, and curried potatoes.

The above descriptions double as the simple names of the dishes. The food does not masquerade behind pretentious titles, nor does it appear flamboyant or pretend to be fanciful. What you're served are affordable and generous portions of delicious and nutritious food. Real food. Americans call this natural food. In the Rasta lexicon, natural foods are redefined as Ital foods. As you might adduce from the photo, the café's two owners are Rastas.

Among restaurateurs, married couples commonly team up as business partners. As the hostess, the wife often serves the public at "the front of the house." As the chef, the husband typically works unseen in the kitchen at "the back of the house." Elisha and Qulen pictured here are such wedded teammates. (Zoom in on Elisha's sweatshirt and you'll notice the imprinted motif of a man and a woman that auspiciously foretells their very pose in this photo.)

Both Elisha and Qulen are lifelong residents of New Haven. Born in Jamaica, Qulen has lived in New Haven since age nine. Elisha's parents were born in Jamaica, while she was born in New Haven. Both are genuine New Haveners, and their cuisine is authentic Jamaican Rastafari Ital.

“Ital” is derived from the word “vital.” To provide “vitality,” Ital food on your plate differs little from how it looks on the farm. Ital food is usually vegan, but not always. Only four of the five Rasta cafés in Connecticut and nearby Worcester are strictly vegan. As there is no Board of Ital Cuisine to issue certifications, Ital cooking does vary with the territory.

The Ital food served at Caribbean Style Vegan is, as its name attests, always vegan. It also is always nourishing, colorful, and skillfully prepared. Nothing is ever too spicy or too salty or too sweet or too oily or overcooked or undercooked. Grilled in a spicy barbecue sauce, even the jerk tofu is humanely spiced. With just the medium platters, I always feel satiated but never bloated, evidence of the frugal use or total absence of oil. Never drowned in oily sauces, the veggies remain visually recognizable and inherently flavorful.

Caribbean Style Vegan stands as my favorite of the seven Ital cafés in which I have dined both stateside and in Jamaica. At the two Ital cafés that I visited in Kingston, neither served any mock meats. Yet at some cafés in the U.S., their varieties of mock meats almost equal their numbers of veggie dishes. I am mystified that in our corner of New England they serve so many highly processed mock meats. Perhaps theirs is a concession to the typically American hunger for meat.

In contrast, Caribbean Style Vegan serves only a single mock meat. Elisha and Qulen uphold a higher standard. Grains, beans, greens, and root vegetables predominate. Most veggies are steamed; a few are sautéed; none are deep-fried. My kind of food.

For in-house dining, you’ll find two sunlit tables along the south-facing wall of plate glass window. Still, the café is more conducive for takeout. I have witnessed a steady flow of regular customers who sometimes place multiple orders of takeout meals to deliver to their families waiting at home. Yet even when other customers wait in line with you, the wait is always short.

For your first time here, Elisha is very helpful, patient, and informative. Busy with the many challenges of running a mom-and-pop café while also being a mom and pop, Elisha and Qulen seldom find time to update their social media accounts. So view only their website. Yet, the website menu is viewable only during open hours. To place an online order or simply to view the website menu, you must wait until 12 noon, Wednesday to Saturday.

Unlike elsewhere in New Haven, you'll find ample parking in this mostly residential neighborhood. The George Street public parking garage is directly overhead and its entrance right next door. Just around the corner, Orange Street offers metered street parking.

Or ditch your car. The café is halfway between Union Station's transportation center and the city's epicenter, New Haven Green, only a half a mile from both. As this stretch of George Street experiences little foot traffic, the pedestrians you do see here are probably on their way to or from Caribbean Style Vegan café.

Mark Mathew Braunstein, a vegan since 1970, is the author of *Radical Vegetarianism*, the first book to espouse veganism. You can download a free PDF of the Lantern Books 30th anniversary revised edition [here](#).