



Kombucha on tap at top San Diego restaurants

By Allison Keltner 10:42 A.M.AUG. 25, 2016



Kombucha served at Encontro North Park

If you've dined at certain San Diego restaurants recently, you might have noticed something different on the drink menu—and not the latest fruit-infused IPA or mescal cocktail. More and more restaurants, including **Fig Tree Cafe** in Pacific Beach, Hillcrest and Liberty Station, **Encontro** in North Park and **Farmer's Bottega** in Mission Hills, are adding kombucha to their menus, and customers are eagerly drinking it up.

Kombucha (pronounced “kom-booch-ah”) is called many things: an “elixir of life,” “mushroom tea” (because the bacteria and yeast used to brew it resemble a mushroom cap), an alternative to beer or energy drinks and the latest health fad. Originally from Asia, kombucha is made with tea, sugar and a culture of bacteria and yeast. It's brewed in a process that's similar to making beer (which might

explain why it's gotten so popular in San Diego), and the fermentation process produces probiotics (good bacteria), vinegar and B vitamins.

Its purported health benefits, which include digestive health, a stronger immune system, faster metabolism and more, come mostly from the probiotics found in the drink. "We think it's a healthy and refreshing replacement for soda," said Katie Geppert, general manager at Encontro. "Not to mention it's delicious."

Johan Engman, owner at Fig Tree Café, and Fernano Tovar, manager at Farmer's Bottega, agree. "Anything healthy with fabulous flavor tends to jump up on the popular trend list," Tovar said. Kombucha has some natural carbonation and a "sweet-tart" flavor, but citrus, ginger or other fruit flavors can be added. "It is an acquired taste," Tovar said—so don't despair if you don't love your first sip. Ask if you can try a different flavor.

Engman introduced kombucha at Fig Tree Café's Pacific Beach location about two years ago. Customers loved it, and they added it to their other locations. In addition to convincing customers to try kombucha because of the many health benefits, "we've done a pretty good job selling its hangover benefits," he said.

Fig Tree Café, Encontro and Farmer's Bottega all serve kombucha from Oceanside-based Living Tea Brewing. Their Ginger Kombucha is a favorite, according to Engman and Fernano Tovar. The restaurants rotate other flavors (served on draft) like Mango, Strawberry Ginger, Blackberry and Açai.

Fig Tree Café and Farmer's Bottega have added kombucha to their bartenders' arsenal as well, with specially craft kombucha-based cocktails. Ginger kombucha is used in Fig Tree Café's house Mule cocktail, and Farmer's Bottega has created a kombucha mojito (mint, lime, rum and ginger kombucha) and kombucha mule (mint, lime, orange liquor, lemonade and ginger kombucha). To your health!