

A VEGETARIAN IN EUROPE

Worldly Delights

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The film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* epitomizes the prevailing attitude in Europe toward vegetarians and vegans: “What, you don’t eat meat? No problem, we have lamb!” Cue the laugh track, unless you’re the vegetarian or vegan longing to experience Europe’s food culture as much as its architecture, museums, nightlife and shopping. The good news is that this cliché is changing, with cafés and restaurants finally clueing in that this is no longer a niche market, but a viable, money-spending segment of society that wants delicious, plant-based options beyond a salad.

The Dietitians of Canada estimates that 4% of this country’s population is vegetarian. Some would double that number, which of course doesn’t include vegans, in addition to ‘flexitarians,’ who dabble in both meat-based meals and veggie fare. We spoke to restaurateurs in Europe, as well as vegetarians and vegans who love to eat well while travelling, to get their top nosh picks.

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LONDON

It's unanimous. Everyone we spoke to cited **London** as having a spate of delicious vegetarian and vegan options that are creative, flavourful and won't necessarily break the bank. Part of the reason has to do with the wide variety of ethnic eateries offering Indian regional cuisine, Vietnamese, Malay, Thai and Indonesian delights. These are very veg/vegan-friendly cultures that know how to make pulses, vegetables, fruits and grains glorious!

inSpiral (inspiralled.net)

This café is known for its creative, fresh takes on vegan food using seasonal, organic produce. It's on the must-visit list of vegan chef and cookbook author Doug McNish, who says, "My former boss had nothing but great things to say about how delicious and healthy it was." The eatery's PR manager Katie Clare says, "inSpiral believes that a vegan diet is best for the planet and we make our food stand out with its creativity, optimum nutrition ingredients and artisan eye." Forget flavourless, 'beige' stereotypes – here, the corn pasta and slow roasted vegetable lasagna with vegan béchamel has avowed meat-eaters lining up for a serving. Or how about a raw Brazil nut loaf served with mushroom gravy and a side of marinated Brussels sprouts? Co-author of the e-book *Tiny Treats* and vegan cook Lisa Pitman also loves the café's "decadent desserts full of healthful, nourishing ingredients." Home-made vegan ice cream, truffles and cakes galore abound on the dessert menu.

Whole Foods Market (wholefoodsmarket.com/stores/kensington), especially the Kensington location, offers vegan treats like marshmallows and truffles, as well as raw passion fruit cheesecakes, raw banoffee pie and yogurts in flavours such as rhubarb, currant and gooseberry.

Maze by Gordon Ramsay

(gordonramsay.com/maze)

If you're looking for romantic dining *à deux* or simply feel like indulging, opt for the vegetarian menu at the celebrity chef's London restaurant. The food here is French via Asia in tasting-sized dishes, with white-glove service in a beautiful interior designed by David Rockwell.

OXFORD

Cherwell Boathouse

(cherwellboathouse.co.uk)

When in iconic **Oxford**, head to this family-owned and operated working boathouse/restaurant dating back to 1904. Situated on the **River Cherwell** and lined with 80 traditional handmade punts, it's the perfect backdrop for a creatively prepared, delicious vegetarian or vegan meal (it serves proteins as well). Food and travel writer Kat Tancock had a memorable lunch here, where apart from plant-based dishes, it also caters to those with food allergies or sensitivities (gluten, lactose, nuts).

ZAGREB

Kredenc'a (kredenca.hr)

Tancock spent time in **Zagreb**, where she discovered this raw-food restaurant. "Surprising for Canadians – a raw-food restaurant with lots of wine and a smoking room. But when in Rome, you know?" she says. In Tancock's opinion, the vegan sushi rolls with daikon rice and chocolate *palačinke* (Croatian-style crêpes) with a fresh berry sauce are standouts.

AMSTERDAM

Caf-Vino (caf-vino.nl)

While not strictly vegetarian, this pretty café with a sunny terrace offers a lovely selection of vegetarian fare because, as owner Ariena de Peuter says, "we see an increased demand for it." Much of her clientele is also flexitarian, folks who want a delicious veggie option on occasion. The organic and fair-trade choices range from produce and wine to juices and coffees, appealing to the eco-conscious patrons who walk through Caf-Vino's door.

VEGETARIAN HUNTING AND GATHERING

Having a rough go finding a vegetarian or vegan-friendly eatery? Our intrepid diners dish their top tips:

In most European cities you'll find chestnut and other nut roasters, where you can stock up on delicious bags of the hot treats, says Tancock.

When dining at restaurants that are not necessarily vegan, chef McNish scans the menu for dishes that have ingredients he likes. "For example, if there's a dish composed of meat, lentils and vegetables, I will ask if they don't mind sautéing vegetables together with lentils and having a big side salad to go with it. The key is to be flexible and to look for an alternate source of protein to leave feeling full and satiated."

In Naples, Pitman enjoyed "the most incredible pizza of my life. It was simply crust, basil, tomato sauce and a drizzle of olive oil. I encourage people to keep their eyes open for simple, traditional meals that may just happen to be animal-free."

Do some dining research at bappycow.net – a great source of options for plant-based foodies.

Hit grocery stores or check out ethnic restaurants, where you're likely to find a falafel, some avocado maki, a tofu stir-fry or a veggie curry to keep you satisfied.