

Restaurants-tips for finding delicious vegan food

If in a local/non-chain restaurant, here are some tips on what to order. Feel empowered to ask that dairy and meat be omitted and for vegetables to be substituted at no charge instead. Chefs welcome the opportunity to be creative. Owners welcome the opportunity to create a situation to have positive reviews posted and get customer referrals.

Tips before you go

-Use Happy Cow to find a vegan friendly restaurant. If you find a vegan friendly restaurant, add it to Happy Cow.

-Call ahead during a restaurant quiet time and ask them about items on their menu. Example: Is the broccoli cooked in butter or steamed. Ask them to look at package ingredients because the staff will not know. Example: Please look at the flour tortilla package and can you tell me if it has "lard" in the ingredients list. In this way, you can select a restaurant with options AND know what your options are before you arrive.

-Remember, most wait staff has no idea what vegan means. So be specific. Ask if a dish contains meat, milk or eggs. Be specific with dairy. Many people do not know that dairy = cheese, cream, sour cream, milk, butter.

Thai: Probably the easiest to eat vegan IF they disclose what dishes are made with fish sauce. Some stir fry sauces are made in advance with fish sauce and cannot be made vegan when ordered so ask. Menus contain many vegetable stir fry dishes with tofu as an add on option. Fried rice can be made vegan by omitting the egg. Most curry dishes are vegan. Most vegetable spring rolls are accidentally vegan. For religious reasons most Thai restaurants know what vegetarian and vegan mean.

Chinese: Order from the menu as most buffet dishes are cooked with dairy (butter), even the vegetables. Ask that tofu be substituted for meat for any favorite dish and they will, even if tofu is not even mentioned on the menu. So, for example, you can order General Tso's chicken with tofu instead of chicken. Or get the mixed vegetable stir fry dish with your favorite sauce. Most vegetable spring rolls are accidentally vegan. Vegetable fried rice and vegetable lo mein can be made vegan by omitting the egg. Caution, some restaurants bulk cook their fried rice with egg so it cannot be made vegan. None of the soups are vegan nor are the won ton. Verify the vegetable dumplings are vegan because some are made with fish sauce or kimchi that contains shrimp.

Japanese: Vegetable sushi, vegetable gyoza, ask about the miso soup. If they cook vegetable fried rice to order then it is an option, just ask if it can come without egg. Noodle bowls like ramen or udon, just make sure it's a miso broth and to substitute meat with tofu.

Indian: Most Indian restaurants are very familiar with vegan requirements and have a large selection of vegan or easy to make vegan dishes. Just be sure they do not include milk, butter/ghee or cheese. Most naan is not vegan unless the restaurant has a large vegan customer base. Roti and vegetable samosas are almost always vegan. The fried foods may be vegan, just ask.

Greek or Middle Eastern: Almost always vegan is falafel, hummus, baba ghanoush, pita bread, baked vegetables, vegetable kebab, salad, rice pilaf, and small vegetable dishes, like olives, stewed eggplant, or sautéed greens.

Italian: Ask to verify but often these dishes happen to be vegan: Pasta in marinara sauce, salad, Minestrone Soup. **Watch Out For:** Fresh Pasta (may have eggs); breadsticks-verify not cooked *with* butter, ask that the butter on the outside be omitted. Ask that salads NOT have cheese on top and omit croutons (has dairy).

Pizza: There are many chains now that offer vegan cheese. MOST chains use a crust recipe that happens to be vegan. If vegan cheese is not available, order a veggie Pizza without Cheese or veggie calzone with no cheese. Pizza places are used to *substituting at no additional charge* a vegetable in lieu of cheese.

Mexican: Veggie fajitas, veggie or bean burrito; Beans, Rice, Tortillas, Salsa. Some even have a vegetarian section of the menu so just ask that cheese and sour cream or cream sauces be omitted. Some even have fried potatoes that can be added into an entrée instead of meat. Corn tortillas are vegan as are the chips and salsa.

Watch Out For: Beans (make sure they are not cooking with meat or lard), rice (make sure it's not cooked in chicken or beef broths); verify that flour tortillas have no lard.

Ethiopian: Like Indian restaurants, most are very familiar with vegan requirements and have a large selection of vegan or easy to make vegan dishes.

Grills: Bell Pepper or veggie Fajitas, Vegetarian Chili (without cheese), Salad

Watch out for: Make sure veggie burgers are actually plant based and do not have dairy or egg added. Tell them not to butter your buns! Ask them to read the bread label to ensure the buns happen to be vegan.

Salads-Caution-most cream salad dressing have egg or dairy or both and croutons are made with butter. Ask to see the dressing label.

Anywhere: Just ask that the following dishes omit cheese and sour cream and are not cooked in milk, butter or lard: Oatmeal, Salad, Baked Potato, French fries, hash browns, Corn on the cob, Steamed Mixed Vegetables, white or brown rice. Mashed potatoes are always made with dairy.

When you find a restaurant that has or will make vegan options, be sure to go onto google and yelp and give a great 5 star review and point out the specific vegan dish(s) they offer! It will help the business, especially since yelp sorts restaurant recommendations based on owner restaurant payments unless customers can overcome that.

You can also review on Trip Advisor. And if you want to overachieve, add one to Happy Cow! Adding the word vegan to the headline and in the review lets owners know we are potential customers and lets those transitioning to vegan know that vegan options are available.