

Today's 20 Hottest Casual

Everyday

Vegetarian Restaurants

Dining

The modern herbivore's life is similar in many ways to our omnivorous counterparts': we work long hours, enjoy active social lives, raise families, work some more, and somewhere in the scheme of things, we eat. Often, we dine at home, or maybe some wiggly tofu—are over.

BY ALLIE JOHNSON





“The beans and rice are still there—but they’ve come to life,” says chef Ken Bergeron, the author of *Professional Vegetarian Cooking*. Today’s rice-and-veggies meal would be, maybe, white bean cakes with a zippy roasted pepper sauce, accompanied by a salad topped with mahogany rice.

A growing demand for healthy foods and awareness of the health and ethical problems with dairy means vegetarian chefs are turning away from cheese and embracing vegan cuisine. They’re using organic ingredients and borrowing from other cultures’ cuisines to add flavor and richness.

While the spotlight often falls on the Millennials and Candle 79s of veg dining—special-occasion restaurants with gourmet flair—seldom does one hear about the local joints that make it easy for herbivores to take a break from kitchen duty, sit down to an affordable, tasty menu and enjoy some down-to-earth cuisine. With the help of VegNews readers throughout North America, we’ve selected a few of our favorite spots for everyday dining.

Lovin’ Spoonfuls

—Tucson, Ariz.

Ah, good old American food. Burgers. Club sandwiches. Tuna Melts. Sometimes, going vegan means saying goodbye to this type of good, old-fashioned comfort food—in restaurants, at least. But not at Lovin’ Spoonfuls. At this low-key, comfy spot, you can relive the meals of your childhood. For brunch, choose from waffles, French toast or an array of tofu scrambles—from country to Mediterranean to fiesta. Or stop in for a lunch or dinner of a Coney dog or some breaded “shrimp” in spicy dipping sauce. You can even finish your meal off with a banana split.

Dharma’s

—Capitola, Calif.

A vegetarian and mostly organic restaurant near the beach, Dharma’s is cozy, laid back and family friendly. Dharma’s—which used to be McDharma’s until its two former yoga teacher owners were sued by a certain fast-food giant—draws all kinds of customers, from surfers to European tourists to pop stars. Breakfast—Tofu Ranchero, Short Stack with Blueberries and more—is served every day. For lunch and dinner, the menu offers a range of options—from the Brahma Burger to the Tall Tostada to Five Treasure Chow Mein.

Grass Root Organic Restaurant

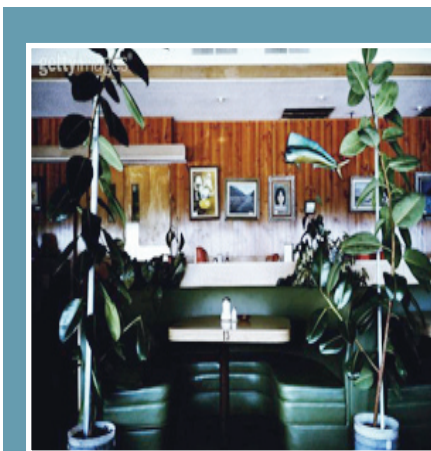
—Tampa, Fla.

Get to the root of good, healthy food at Grass Root Organic Restaurant. Menu items at this funky restaurant—housed in a 1920s building that used to be a baking company—are clearly marked raw, vegan or vegetarian. For a light meal, try the Miso Sipp—a raw soup made of coconut water, miso, spices and shredded Thai coconut. Also sample the raw sushi, made from nori, carrots, avocado and grapefruit. More substantial offerings include the raw burrito stuffed with “rawfried beans” made from sprouted sunflower seeds, or curried potatoes simmered in coconut milk and roasted veggie lasagna. Prices won’t break your budget, starting at just \$6 for an entrée.

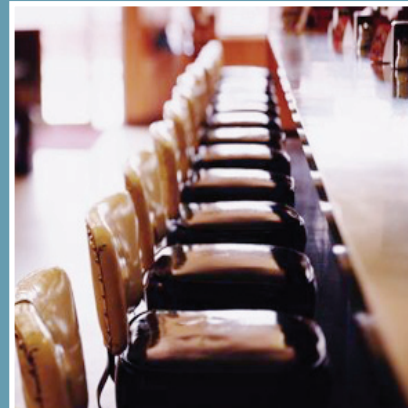
Vegetarian Paradise II

—New York, N.Y.

If you love fake meat, you’ll love Vegetarian Paradise II. A restaurant that bills itself as a marriage of Asian and Soul cuisines, its pungent, steaming fare satisfies vegetarians’ desire for comfort food with an exotic touch. Start your meal with Avocado and Crab Tartare—lime- and wasabi-infused avocado, red peppers and faux crab served on crackers. Or try the Collard Green Rolls stuffed with veggie ham. Then gorge on Paradise Cornish Hen—half a fake chicken served with lemon sauce, or



Citrus Chicken with Cashews. For something different, order the Stuffed Lotus Leaf packed with shiitakes and vegetarian duck or Taro Root Nests, stuffed with sweet and pungent pig-free pork.



Chicago Diner

—Chicago, Ill.

The Chicago Diner is a veggie institution in the Windy City—and for good reason. Its simple décor (neon and barstools) meets down-home American food with a gourmet twist. In business since 1983, the diner mixes it up by adding fun, new dishes such as Grills Gone Wild (hunks of grilled seitan in sesame teriyaki marinade with napa cabbage, broccoli and snow peas).

From brunch—mouthwatering tofu scrambles—to lunch that includes spicy Bayou Tofish and (faux) Chicken Parmigiana sandwiches—to dinner and dessert, you will always leave stuffed. Don’t skip their to-die-for desserts, such as Banana Poppysed Cake or Espresso Torte, even if you have to get them to go.

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Herbivore

—San Francisco, Calif.

Though this restaurant bills itself as “the earthly grill,” it’s more like veg heaven. A hip, minimalist atmosphere provides the perfect setting for a menu chock-full of casual yet elegant international dishes. From shawarma stuffed with house-made seitan, eggplant and potatoes to vegan ceviche made with lime-marinated oyster mushrooms to penne with lemon-herb cream sauce and capers, the menu features dishes for every whim. No matter what type of food you’re in the mood for—Greek, Mexican, Italian, Indonesian—you’re likely to find it on Herbivore’s expansive menu. And with very reasonable prices—especially for San Francisco—eating at Herbivore could easily be an everyday affair.

Native Foods

—Los Angeles, Calif.

Native Foods calls its selection a fusion of ethnic cuisine and healthy cooking, but we just say it’s yummy. The all-vegan restaurant (there are four locations in Southern California) may be best known for its Hot Bowls, which conveniently feature a total meal—a protein, a grain and veggies—in one dish. Los Angeles-based filmmaker and vegan blogger Eric Prescott says he often orders the Gandhi, a delicious mix of blackened tempeh, jasmine and brown rice, dried cranberries and wild curry sauce. Prescott loves the bowls because they combine decadence with health food. “You feel like you’re pigging out on barbecued seitan, so you get your junk food craving out of the way,” Prescott says. “But you’re still eating a well balanced meal. I’ve never seen anything like it at any other place.”

Nu Age Café

—Austin, Texas

A group of omnivores is standing on a street corner. One says, “Let’s eat vegetarian tonight.” No, it’s not the punch line of a joke—it’s what chef Kevin Dunn, a culinary instructor at the renowned hospitality education department of the Grand Rapids Community College in Michigan, envisions when veg food finally becomes just another type of cuisine, like Thai or Chinese, with wide appeal. “We have to make the food good on its own basis,” Dunn says. Well, the Nu Age Café is doing just that. Last year, a restaurant critic for the *Austin American Statesman* wrote, “The Nu Age Café is demonstrating that vegan fare can be just as delicious as any other form of cuisine.” It’s true—Nu Age’s mouthwatering dishes have exotic flair. Please your palate with Sierra’s Orange Spice Avocado Dip, Papaya Passion Salad with dried figs, macadamia nuts, marinated green papaya and passion fruit dressing or Lily Mushrooms, grilled oyster mushrooms with asparagus and lily bulbs topped with jackfruit sauce. Wash it all down with the house specialty, iced lemongrass-lime tea.

Soul Vegetarian

—Atlanta, Ga.

Soul Vegetarian’s menu sounds like something out of “Be Healthy”—Dead Prez’s homage to vegan soul food. “It’s all love,” the rapper croons as he waxes poetic about barbecued tofu, fresh vegetables and whole wheat. Soul Vegetarian’s fans rave about not only the food, but the warm service they receive while enjoying jazzy food with an Ethiopian flare, including tofu nuggets, riblets made from “kale-bone” (a seitan-style faux meat made in-house), organic greens and

IN THE RAW

Raw food isn’t just salads and sprouts, and it’s not just for raw foodists, either. Raw food has gone more mainstream, and even vegetarians and vegans who don’t eat raw all the time are likely to go out and enjoy a living-foods restaurant once in a while.

“Raw is now just another dining choice,” chef Kevin Dunn says. “I love raw cuisine because the flavors are right in your face. It’s so incredible and crisp and bright.” More and more, vegetarian chefs are borrowing ideas from their living foods counterparts—mixing raw elements into cooked meals. For example, Dunn likes to use a “parmesan cheese” made from pine nuts, developed by raw chefs, or to put raw nut paté in phyllo dough cups.



Chef Bergeron, who coordinates the food at the North American Vegetarian Society’s annual Vegetarian Summerfest, says that the raw section there started out small six years ago with “just a couple of salads.” It’s grown wildly, and now includes such creative dishes as strawberry and watermelon soup with cashew cream and fresh tarragon; avocados with vegetable stuffing; and marinated portobello mushrooms in a Spanish-inspired sauce of almonds, tomatoes, garlic and herbs. Bergeron always has to make extra, because attendees who didn’t sign up for raw meals always hit him up for samples.

“Everyone wants to come see what’s happening with raw,” Bergeron says.

split pea soup. For dessert, try the homemade soy ice cream or the carrot cake. It's so good you'll forget you're eating healthy.

Kung Food Express Café

—San Diego, Calif.

Many of us have dreamed of the day when we'd be able to motor up to a drive-through window and order a tasty meal with no worries about hidden beef fat or forking over money to a giant corporation that razes rainforests. Well, it's no longer a fantasy. At Kung Food Express Café, you can order an all-vegan meal from behind the wheel—and have the vittles in your hands in minutes. Nosh on a bacon cheeseburger, chili cheese fries, chicken tenders or a veggie burrito, and end your meal with a soft serve soy cone. Now, if only Kung Food's smiling beet logo were as ubiquitous as the golden arches. Hey, maybe one day.

Blossoming Lotus

—Kapaa, Hawaii

The Blossoming Lotus serves "vegan world fusion cuisine." And, chef Dunn says, "Fusion is here to stay. People are looking for something stimulating and different, something that sparkles the imagination." That's what you get at the funky, colorful restaurant that serves up raw and cooked vegan cuisine to the beat of world music. The Blossoming Lotus' mouthwatering starters include Sea Vegetable Salad with arame, avocado and cucumber tossed in piquant Japanese dressing, and Patrizio's Live Soft Tacos—jicama, cucumber, avocado and mango-papaya salsa wrapped in rainbow chard. For the main course, try Padma's Living Pad Thai with coconut meat noodles and almond-tamarind sauce or St. Patrick's Green Curry—a coconut-lime



Thai curry with steamed veggies and greens served with brown rice or quinoa.

Café Gratitude

—Berkeley, Calif.

Café Gratitude calls its offerings "a celebration of aliveness"—and they are. The menu reads like a list of affirmations to nourish your spirit along with your body. It's hardly possible to sample the "I am Divine" fiery carrot avocado soup without feeling a little heavenly, and after trying the "I am Vivacious" stuffed avocado with chipotle sunflower seed pate and spicy molé sauce, how can you help but sparkle just a bit?

Try "I am Accepting," a "stir-unfry" of steamed Bhutanese red rice with marinated raw vegetables, shiitake mushrooms, pine nuts, teriyaki almonds and scallions. Finish off your meal with "I am Magnificent" raw chocolate mousse. If the nourishing, organic food doesn't put you in a Zen-like state of mind, the side order of positive thoughts certainly will.



Java Green

—Washington, D.C.

If your idea of everyday food is nutritious, interesting and affordable, Java Green is the place for you. A restaurant that wasn't even fully vegetarian is now mostly vegan, thanks to persuasion from the group Compassion Over Killing. Their simple menu featuring nourishing sandwiches, filling soups and noodle dishes affordably priced between \$6 and \$8 has vegetarians and non-vegetarians flocking to the place. "There are days when the line is almost out the door," says Danielle Kichler, who's a fan of the Seoul Chicken Salad with veggie chicken, mixed greens, carrots, cherry peppers and spicy dressing. They also sell popular bento boxes—Japanese-style boxed lunches—and sweets from Sticky Fingers vegan bakery.

Hillside Quickie

—Seattle, Wash.

The sandwich is the ultimate convenience food: it's portable, delicious and easy to eat. But finding a vegan sandwich? It's easy at Hillside Quickie, which serves nothing but. Served on artisan or whole grain bread and topped with heirloom tomato slices, potato salad, onions and vegan mayo, sandwich choices include the Flaming BBQ Burger with barbecue tofu, the Crazy Jamaican Burger with jerk tofu, the Mama Africa Burger with millet and quinoa, the Tofu Strami Sub with thinly sliced faux pastrami and the Evil One Wrap with seitan steak, red and green cabbage and grilled onions. "The taste is mighty," says Valerie Jordan, a frequent sandwich shop patron. But, she warns, "It's not someplace to go in a rush. They are quite slow." Calling in an order and giving them 10 minutes extra guarantees perfect timing. Jordan says, "I always get my grub to go."



Watercourse Foods

—Denver, Colo.

Casual, warm and elegant, Watercourse Foods serves up all vegetarian food (most dishes can be made vegan) based on nutritious, wholesome foods. "I love opening their menu and knowing I won't have to modify anything or ask a ton of questions about the origin of their ingredients," says frequent customer Jamie Johnston, who adores every dish she's tried. Sandwiches and wraps such as the Po Boy made from a polenta-encrusted Portobello cap with chipotle aioli or the Dona Lee with herb-encrusted seitan, tomato and avocado are accompanied by a choice of two sides for just \$8.50. Pick from couscous, mashed potatoes and gravy, steamed chard, a cup of soup, French fries and coleslaw. Specials such as Tempeh Scallopini or Blackened Tofu are not much more expensive.

Sage's Café

—Salt Lake City, Utah

Sage's Café has the warm feel of a homey vegetarian kitchen. Focused on fresh seasonal foods, the only canned items Sage Café uses are tomatoes and coconut milk, and their sea salt is locally harvested. Start with their carrot butter crostini, taquitos with black beans and lime-tossed greens or mushroom escargot. Try the fresh herb pesto pasta, mushroom stroganoff, or the raw three-layer lasagna made with zucchini noodles, cashew cream, portobellos, tomatoes, baby spinach, black olives and basil pesto. On weekends, they serve blueberry flapjacks and other delicious breakfast foods. Sage Café can even accommodate diners in a hurry—your server can recommend items that can be prepared quickly.

Narula's

—Toronto, Ont.

Anyone who complains that vegetarian food is too expensive probably hasn't visited Narula's, a tiny hole-in-the-wall restaurant in the center of Toronto's Little India neighborhood. Here, a feast can be had for less than \$5. Chow down on fragrant veggie curries, succulent samosas and delicious aloo tikki—a potato cutlet stuffed with lentils, served with chickpeas and onions. And once a week, on Narula's "Toonie Tuesdays," the thali—a combination platter of curries and rice and flatbread—costs just \$2.52. The décor might be drab, but the food is colorful.

Food Swings

—Brooklyn, N.Y.

Health food, shmealth food. If that's your attitude, then vegan fast-food joint Food Swings might be your perfect everyday restaurant. "People tend to think of vegetarians as natural foods-type people, but there are a lot of them who want their junk food," says John Cunningham, consumer research manager for the Vegetarian Resource Group. (VRG's most popular pamphlet is its vegetarian guide to fast food.) If that's you, then you'll adore "The King"—the fried peanut butter and banana sandwich that might have helped do in Elvis. Or try Sea Styx—mock fish sticks with gooey tartar sauce—and Mac N Cheeze. If that's not enough, Food Swings proudly serves a burger called the Vegan Heart Attack.

Sunflower Restaurant

—Vienna, Virginia

As Hippocrates said, food is medicine. At Sunflower Restaurant, the food—which leans

Pay Tomorrow for a Hamburger Today

Cost is a reason some people use for not going vegetarian. While it's easy to prepare inexpensive vegetarian meals at home, it's true that vegetarians often don't have as many quick-and-cheap restaurant or take-out options as meat eaters. But does veg food really cost more—or does it just look that way?

In New York City's Candle Café, which is said to have the best veggie burger in town, the Grilled Soy Burger costs \$9. At Burger Heaven, a favorite among the meat-eating crowd, the Classic Beef Burger is \$5.95. Wow—a difference of \$3.05! Over time, that extra few bucks could really lighten the wallet. But is that meaty meal really as cheap as it seems? Here are some of the hidden costs of meat:

HEALTH

It's widely accepted now that many diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and some types of cancer, can be prevented with a healthy vegetarian diet. According to the US Centers for Disease Control, the cost of heart disease and stroke alone in the United States for 2005 is projected to exceed \$242 billion in health care costs and lost productivity.

SOCIAL

Slaughterhouses are among the most dangerous places to work, and they're staffed largely by immigrants. According to a 2005 report by Human Rights Watch on the US meat packing industry, many slaughterhouse workers have reported injuries that have caused scars, swellings, rashes, amputations and blindness. Some have died. The reported injury rate—20 per 100 full-time workers in 2001—was two and a half times the average manufacturing injury rate. "Any single meatpacking company which by itself sought to respect the