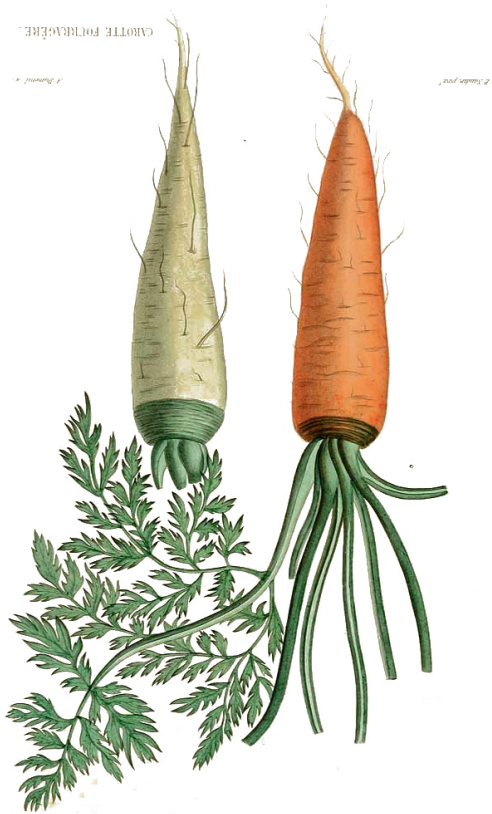


EATING VEGAN OUT



burger. It comes open face on a large oval plate, and the less you can see the burger and bun under the mushrooms, the better. The fries are relegated to their own plate. The veggie burger is rice based and really savoury, with peas, corn, and carrots. The mushrooms were indulgent, but I bet it's great with just lettuce and tomato, too. Be sure to ask for no mayo. I forgot.

I'm still getting used to remembering all the little details. I usually remember to ask for soy when I order a latte, but not always when I get iced coffee. STARBUCKS does soy milk, but not almond, which is my preference at home. The other day, though, a barista told me they're adding coconut milk. I'd love to try this in iced coffee, but in my favourite hot drinks--cafe latte and London Fog--I like something more neutral. Coconut milk is always coconut. Coffeeshops are one of the easiest places to be vegan. Non-dairy milks have been normal for decades now.

Sushi is another easy vegan meal, and it's cheap and plentiful here in the Lower Mainland. There are cucumber and avocado rolls, vegetable tempura, and

so many different tofu dishes. Try rolls with bean curd sheets instead of seaweed. Try the spinach gomaе with peanut sauce. Try miso soup and vegetable dumplings and edamame to start. And green tea, of course, which needs no dairy.

Before a concert downtown, my friend and I ate at JADE DYNASTY in Chinatown. I love Chinese food with friends because it justifies ordering a variety of dishes. By complete chance, this restaurant had a number of fake meat dishes. I haven't eaten a lot of fake meats yet. They're pretty expensive, and I usually prefer to cook for myself than eat frozen foods at home. On my friend's recommendation, we ordered a spicy fake chicken (because the heat helps maintain the illusion), broccoli with black bean sauce, as well as rice to go with. I was really impressed with the texture of the fake chicken--the heat did the trick.

Most pho places will have a vegetarian option. In my neighbourhood, PHO 77 makes one with vegetable stock, packed with noodles, carrots, bok choy, and a huge pile of bean sprouts, lime, and Thai basil to add to your liking. I like just eating the bean sprouts like crudite. A little hot sauce is necessary,

sandwich is hummus with cucumber, tomato, and romaine lettuce. I'm lucky where I live. Vancouver is a city of multicultural cuisine, as well as an environmental and health conscious place. It's a big city with a lot of choice. But when travelling, you can't always be sure of the comforts of home. Earlier this summer, we visited my great aunt in Sechart, a tiny coastal city north of Vancouver, accessible by the ferry. You might not expect to find the same kind of choice in a small town, but a lot of BC's small towns are populated by aging hippies. My aunt suggested STRAIT COFFEE, a cafe serving sandwiches and baked goods. Instead of the veggie sandwich, I tried the risotto pie, layered with beets, and served with a green salad. This isn't vegan--it has feta inside--but it was such a novelty, I wanted to try it, so I could try to make it at home. Eating vegan at home is easy and more fun than I thought it would be when I began this experiment. It's not only about adding new dishes to my repertoire, but adding new skills and techniques. Still, eating out is a great treat, and I'm so lucky for the variety in my city.

Lebanese for a fancier night out. They offer a number of small plates, so it really is best to eat with friends. I had their garden falafel, made green with a lot of vegetables, and served with hummus, red cabbage, avocado, and pita in the bread basket. The food went well with a homemade ginger beer, capped with the baklava sampler. I ate two pieces, then took the rest home to enjoy for the rest of the week.

My brother's bar of choice is STORMCROW on Commercial. We were only there for drinks, but ordered some fried cauliflower to snack on. Deep fried foods is probably what I crave most. I love fish and chips, fried chicken, and chicken fried steak when I'm travelling in the US. But this is an incredibly easy craving to satiate for vegans. Anything can be dunked into a batter (no eggs required--just use sparkling water or beer) and deep fried. It's about the grease and the crunch, not so much what's underneath.

We had eaten lunch earlier, at BON CHAZ, a sandwich shop which bakes their own bread. (They call them baguettes, but it's a pretty generic white bread.) Their trick is cutting two sections into the bread to make a kind of club roll. BON CHAZ's vegan

too.

Next door to PHO 77 is PENANG SZECHUAN CUISINE, a Malaysian restaurant. I went by myself, so I couldn't try everything I wanted on their menu. Their Gado Gado salad is bean sprouts, carrots, and celery thinly sliced, mixed with peanut dressing, and topped with fried tofu cubes. Their Thai Special Tofu is also crispy fried and tossed in a sweet sticky sauce with vegetables. I took my leftovers home and reinvented the dish with added ramen noodles and zucchini.

A lot of restaurants have at least one vegetarian option that can sometimes be made vegan by asking them to leave off the cheese. But you can get tired of a veggie burger. My absolute favourite cuisine to eat out has become Lebanese because there are just so many different options. Falafel gives me the deep fried indulgence that I crave, except it's pretty healthy. CRISPY FALAFEL in my neighbourhood is a tiny corner shop for quick takeout. Their falafel are dark and crunchy, their tabbouleh is loaded with parsley, and their dolma are vegetarian. The plate comes with many side dishes, almost too much food for one.

NUBA has a few locations downtown. This is

When I sat down to make a list of all the restaurants where I've been since I started eating vegan, I hadn't expected it to be this long. But I also couldn't believe that it's been almost six months. Some of these places are brand new to me. Some are old favourites, where I've had to try new dishes.

At any restaurant, vegans have to be confident enough to ask the staff to help you out and make exceptions. For me, too, just starting out and getting used to eating this way, I'm willing to be forgiving. Most breads shouldn't have eggs, and if the pasta is dried, it should be safe. But sometimes even the wait staff don't know. Don't be afraid to ask, but don't beat yourself up if you forget. Eating vegan is about increasing your awareness, which is an ongoing learning process.

This is a short guide for locals or tourists visiting Vancouver and the surrounding Lower Mainland. I've visited two old family favourites in the last few months: WHITE SPOT and FRESGO INN. WHITE SPOT is the local chain, a casual sit-down restaurant with lots of variety on the menu. Most people go, though, for the burgers. My old favourite is the

Legendary, which is just a basic burger, thin patty, and Triple O sauce, their signature mayonnaise-based topping. They do the best deep fried zucchini, called Zoo Sticks, which goes with Zoo Dip, also dairy based. I had never tried their veggie burger before. It's a portobello cap with sautéed peppers and onions. It comes with cheese and aioli, which I asked to be left off. WHITE SPOT offers all their burgers with lettuce wraps instead, but I ate the bun.

WENDEL'S in Fort Langley has a portobello burger, too. Ask them to leave off the bocconcini and garlic mayo, but the burger is juicy enough with balsamic onions and peppers, and the side is a simple salad with your choice of dressing, instead of fries.

FRESGO INN is an old school cafeteria-style diner. You order up front with your tray, then wait for your number to be called. (They just added a pager system--welcome to the 21st Century, Fresgo's!) They do a lot of everything, and it all comes on huge plates--sometimes on two plates. I knew I would be able to get a veggie burger here. Then I asked them to add a side of sautéed mushrooms (maybe butter? I kind of forgot to ask) because I love their mushroom