

Plant power

Vegan cuisine is on the rise in the UK, but are resorts around the world waking up to this growing trend? Katie McGonagle reports

TRAVELWEEKLY
Think Sustainable



I-TAL restaurant,
BodyHoliday
Saint Lucia



Not so long ago, vegans daring to dine in a restaurant would earn looks of outright horror from chefs and waiters alike, while travelling abroad meant stuffing your suitcase with cereal bars or subsisting on fruit plates for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Now, the experience has been transformed, with vegan diets better understood and plant-based menus more available, especially in resorts catering to international clientele. There's still a way to go, but with vegans making up an estimated 2% of the UK population (according to YouGov) and many more embracing a 'flexitarian' approach to eating, it's worth knowing where to send clients in search of a vegan-friendly stay.

For strict vegans, you'll also need to consider cruelty-free amenities, spa products, leather-free furnishings and down or feather-free duvets – even bamboo-based bath or beach towels, as regular towels often used animal-based additives and dyes – which can often be accommodated on request.

CARIBBEAN COLOUR

Vegan diets might seem like a new-fangled fad, but they've been practised for centuries everywhere from India to Ethiopia, often linked to religious customs. That's also true of the 'Ital' movement that began in Jamaica's Rastafari community in the 1930s – adapted from the word 'vital', a clue to its focus on organic, unprocessed and additive-free foods – and which has spread throughout the Caribbean. Wellness resort BodyHoliday Saint Lucia has an exclusive I-TAL restaurant set amid its organic garden, offering a 12-person dining experience, plus an 'à la minute' cooking station so guests can pick their own vegetables and watch the chef prepare them for the freshest-possible flavours.

Or try: Also in Saint Lucia, Anse Chastanet has added Emerald's Restaurant, serving all-vegan tapas-style bites including crispy cauliflower accras (fritters) and mango chutney and bread fruit gnocchi. It has also introduced vegan options in its other eateries. ➤

DESTINATIONS

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL | VEGAN RESORTS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Seasons restaurant at Aleenta Phuket Resort & Spa, Thailand; Great Plains, Kenya (inset); Cora Cora Maldives; Great Plains, Zimbabwe

PICTURE: Andrew Howard Photo

EAT LOCAL IN THE EAST

Local ingredients get a fine-dining twist at fusion restaurant Seasons, which opened in February at beachfront boutique Aleenta Phuket Resort & Spa, reportedly southern Thailand's first totally plant-based restaurant. It's all about 'locavore' cuisine, with degustation menus that use ingredients from the area's farms and producers. Think slow-cooked shiitake mushrooms in red wine from the vineyards of Hua Hin, homemade organic yellow tofu seasoned with spirulina from nearby Paklok or an Andaman Sea risotto inspired by flavours of the coast.

Or try: The Sarojin in nearby Khao Lak added a dedicated plant-based menu this year after seeing a 15% jump in requests for vegan fare. It now features local ingredients such as sea grapes, wild mushrooms, pomelo, tamarind, coconut and cashew, plus cooking classes with local market visits (from around £90).

TEMPLE TUCKER

Venturing off the beaten track isn't anathema to eating vegan – in Japan, for example, staying in a Buddhist *shukubo* temple lodging is not only a unique cultural experience, with chanting priests and incense-filled rooms, but also offers traditional 'shojin-ryori' cuisine made without meat or fish. A key area for temple lodgings is the summit of sacred Mount Koya on the Kii Peninsula, part of the Unesco-listed Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route, and included on InsideJapan's Hidden Japan tour.

Or try: Nothing inspires meat-free eating more than seeing animals in the wild, so it's no surprise Great Plains

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safari camps – across Kenya, Botswana and Zimbabwe – have embraced the vegan vibe. Co-founders Dereck and Beverly Joubert switched to a plant-based diet a year ago and rolled it out across the camps, with new menus showcasing Africa's abundant fruit and vegetables.

ALL-INCLUSIVE FOR ALL

Vegans might think they need to skip all-inclusives to avoid paying for food and drink that will be off-limits, but that isn't always the case. Five-star Cora Cora Maldives on the Raa atoll has vegan options across its four restaurants and two bars, which fall under the 'premium all-inclusive' plan. Savour smoked aubergine and mezze platters at Spice Route-inspired Tazaa, vegan-style sushi and seaweed salad at Japanese restaurant Teien, Italian gazpacho at Acquapazza and Thai-style rolls or pineapple fried rice at Ginger Moon.

Or try: Michelin-starred dining and all-inclusive resorts don't always go hand in hand, but Paradise Cove Boutique Hotel has both. French chef Alexis Gauthier, a vegan since 2016, worked with the Mauritian resort to develop a five-course tasting menu that will appeal to vegans and non-vegans alike. It was added at The Cove restaurant earlier this year for a £50 supplement. **TW**

IN THE KNOW

In-room amenities: True vegan lifestyles go beyond what you eat to avoid all animal products. Emirates Palace, Mandarin Oriental in Abu Dhabi boasts the region's first fully vegan rooms, including welcome and turndown amenities, cruelty-free toiletries and vegan wine in the minibar, plus certified spa treatments and plant-based skincare products.

Specialist advice: Specialists such as Responsible Travel and US-based Vegvisits (which offers small-scale accommodation, with 10% commission for agents) offer a wealth of hotels and tours for vegan travellers and can often advise on complex requests.

Floating hotels: Plant-based restaurants and menus are popping up at sea too, with recent additions from P&O Cruises, Celebrity Cruises, Oceania, Windstar, SeaDream Yacht Club and Azamara.

BOOK IT

Hummingbird Travel offers a seven-night stay at Cora Cora Maldives in May from £2,875 per person, based on two sharing a Lagoon Villa on a premium all-inclusive basis. The price includes flights from Heathrow via Abu Dhabi, seaplane transfers and meet-and-greet. hummingbird.travel

InsideJapan's 12-night, small-group Hidden Japan tour features a stay at the Renge-in temple lodging on Mount Koya, starting from £3,990 per person (excluding international flights) with accommodation, domestic transport, transfers, cultural experiences and a tour leader who can advise on the vegan dining options. insidejapantours.com