

6 BEST Vegetarian Dishes on the South Coast that even meat lovers will like!

Costa Rican Tortilla: all vegetarian black beans and rice, queso fresco spread and fried sweet plantains; hot-pressed in a flour tortilla – only at Mirasol's Cafe.

“Is bacon a vegetable? Are French fries?”

Americans have a love affair with meat. They want a side of bacon to go with their bacon. They will wrap their turkey bacon in bacon. Our love for meat borders on obsession: we have meat-lovers pizza, a Pu Pu Platter has only meat in it, and we love our Italian subs that have five different types of sliced meats. Even those who are vegetarians often eat food that mimics meat in texture and flavor, with meat substitutes like veggie sausage, Tofurkey or even Mock Duck. We are ALL in the pursuit of *umami*, or savoriness, and meat seems to have it in spades.

Whether a vegetarian or a meat lover, passion can come from both positions and proponents of both can have reactions that border on extreme. A radical vegetarian will lecture you on the suffering of animals as you are eating your burger, and an extremist meat-lover will order extra bacon on his burger and chew it with his mouth open for you to see. If you are the same room as these two combatants, tension will rise as the comments go from light jabs to ideological warfare – eventually war breaks out. Hyperbolic, but it conveys the point.

Now, there was a time when most vegetarian products tasted like cardboard cakes sprinkled with salt. However, times have changed and there are actually some products that have *umami* and taste delicious. No, really.

Why bother with eating a vegetarian diet – whether in the form of tempah, tofu, or Tofurkey – or simply including more vegetables in your diet? At this point, it's virtually redundant to say: it's healthier. Better for one's cholesterol, blood pressure, longevity.

So, here's the rub: why can't we enjoy both? Do we have to be only a meat-lover or a vegetarian/vegan? Do we have to go cold turkey? Pun intended? How about having whole meals, or even days, where we eat vegetarian? I know meat-lovers will think it's "crazy talk," but there are dishes you can eat, and places that you can eat at, where you won't even realize you didn't take a single bite of meat, yet love the meal.

Having said that, this list is **my** opinion. I am not a vegetarian, but I would consider myself a proponent – I often go a day or more of making an effort to not eat meat and when I do eat meat, I make an effort to eat smaller portions. As I find more places and dishes, it becomes a less daunting task. If you are a vegetarian, or a vegan you may have better dishes or spots – ones that I am unaware of. By all means, share your top destinations or dishes. In fact, if you are a vegetarian this list will evoke a "Duh!" moment for you. In particular, it's for those who, like myself, are trying to eat healthier or perhaps moving towards becoming a vegetarian.

Well, enough of my blathering. Let's do delicious.



Perfectly cooked falafel, which you can get with tabouleh

*and chick pea salad
making it a meal fit
for a king! (Lebanese
Pita Pocket)*

01. Combo Plate at Lebanese Pita Pocket

The Lebanese Pita Pocket truly is a hidden gem. Because it's tucked away in a plaza where it's "hard" to see from Route 6, it often gets overlooked. I'm not sure how long this family has been operating there, but I've been going there for a decade easily. It's a shame how overlooked this place is, because the food there is phenomenal.

The menu has a lot of options, but if you get one of the **combo plates** (\$9.25), you get to pick a "main" and two sides. If you make that main, their mouth-watering, cooked to perfection Falafel, and make those two sides the *tabouleh* and the chick pea salad, you just got yourself a completely vegetarian/vegan meal. I can't tell you how amazing this combination is – you have to have it. Tell your boyfriend that Falafel is Lebanese for "meatballs." He'll never know.

Oh, for good measure throw in the grape leaves, which are out of this world good, or some of their made from scratch hummus. Of course, you have to complete this perfect meal with some Baklava.

02. Huevo Ranchero at Mirasol's Cafe

My office...er, Mirasol's Cafe has a number of vegetarian options. My personal favorite, since the day it opened is the **Huevo Ranchero** (\$6.50) – Black bean and corn salsa, guacamole, sour cream, cheese and a fried egg. It's a massive sandwich and so savory that you won't even notice there isn't any meat. However, if you need texture you can add the veggie sausage – which, I kid you not, has the texture and flavor of the real deal. I actually prefer it over proper sausage.

Of course, you have to have one of the three “secret” hot sauces – white/mild jalapeño cream, green/medium, orange/habañero blast your face off. With the addition of these sauces and the veggie sausage, you are whisked away to that happy place and will never even realize you didn’t eat any meat.

On occasion – and never often enough – Mirasol’s will have a special called the **Costa Rican Tortilla**: all vegetarian black beans and rice, queso fresco spread and fried sweet plantains; hot-pressed in a flour tortilla. If it was a regular offering, it would supplant the Huevo Ranchero – it’s that good.

03. Buffet at Ayur-Shri

OK, this is one of my go-to spots. One of my favorite places on planet earth. Anyone who is a vegetarian or vegan knows Indian cuisine all too well – there is no culture on earth that focuses on this particular diet more. India is massive, indeed it’s a sub-continent and the second most populous nation on earth, that will soon become *the* most populous nation on earth. This translates into hundreds of millions of cooks creating recipes that revolve around an astounding variety of vegetables producing an equally mind-boggling array of dishes.



The Saag Paneer is one of the the highlights of the buffet packed with vegetarian and vegan options, at Ayur-Shri Indian Cuisine.

So, it should come as no surprise that Ayur-Shri does some amazing things with vegetables. While you can order off the menu, they have a daily buffet that will change your life. There are too many things to list, so I will take the easy way out and say that the **buffet** is the “dish.” If I have to pick one dish on the buffet that you have to try, it would be the *Saag Paneer*: “Spinach cooked with homemade cheese, fresh herbs and spices.” The pakoras, the samosas, the white soup, the chutnies, the mango lassi...oh, man.

04. Tostada at No Problemo

No Problemo has a **tostada**, \$6 for the small, and \$8 for a large serving that is as big as your head. “A Bed of Black Beans & Rice, with Corn Chips, Green Leaf Lettuce, Salsa, Cucumbers, Roasted Red Peppers, Cheese, Sour Cream & Scallions, Served with Cilantro Lime Dressing.” If you eat one of these, you’ll yell out things like “Ay, caramba!”, “Aye, yai, yai!” and “Olé!” If you top it with the Nick Dompierre Hot Sauce, you’ll be barking “No más!” Duran, you cut me deep.

Be sure to wash it down with one of two homemade Sangrias, that are always on tap. I should also mention the Plantain Quesadilla which is absolutely ridiculous.

05. Sivalai’s Tofu with Curry

Sivalai Thai Restaurant is another hidden gem on Sconticut Neck Road in Fairhaven. There are actually a few really decent Thai Restaurants in the area, but Sivalai is my favorite. I have fond memories of arriving and Nahni and Chris coming out from behind the counter, scooping up my daughter, hugging her and bring her to the table. Thailand is dubbed the “Land of 1,000 Smiles” for a reason: they are generally a happy people.

What Sivalai does well, is not just provide one of the warmest, friendliest atmospheres anywhere on the South Coast, but they make fresh, unbelievably good, AND beautifully presented Thai food. One dish that shines in particular is the

Tofu /w Curry Sauce (\$8.50 lunch, \$10.95 dinner). You get a choice of Panaeng, Red, Massaman, and Green Curry. The difference in flavor profile among the sauces is negligible, and the name of the sauce usually refers to the medley of vegetables in the dish. My personal favorite is the Green Curry: Thai green curry with coconut milk, bamboo shoots, carrots, bell peppers, zucchini, Thai basil leaves, and Tofu served with white rice – though the Sticky Rice is preferable.

Honorable mention should go to the bi-monthly buffet, where you can not only enjoy an orgy of vegetables and fruits, but if you have never had Thai food (Oh, the humanity!) or have a friend that needs a little coaxing, come to the buffet and give it a go.



Stare at this fig sandwich at your own risk! (aggiesplace)

06. Hangman Hut's "Fig Deal"

Hangman Hut is one of those off-the-beaten-path spots, "way" out in Marion – in fact, we wrote a spotlight called just that in 2013. It's a beautiful drive – unless the police pull you over for being in the passing lane, preparing to turn left. "Why are you in the passing lane if there are no cars to pass?" "Answer: because I am about to turn left." True story, but I digress.

The Fig Deal is Fig Compote, Apple, Goat Cheese, Greens, Balsamic Vinegar and you can have it on your choice of bread, which is everything under the sun from white, wheat, rye,

bagels, and even Portuguese Bolo. Words do it no justice. Proprietors Dina and Bill Quinlan are two of the most thoughtful, generous people you will bump into, making the overall experience there a consistently spectacular one.

Know of some other vegetarian or vegan dishes? Who did we miss on the list? Feel free to add a comment below and set us straight!
