

MY GUIDE TO FOLLOWING A VEGETARIAN DIET IN SPAIN

MAINTAINING A VEGETARIAN DIET IN SPAIN

Not always an easy task

The handy and well written Lonely Planet's World Food-Spain suggests that a visiting vegetarian “must pack a small stash of vitamins and a big sense of humor” when Spain bound, and that Spaniards consider “dead pig a vegetable”.

If one doesn't eat fish or shellfish, keeping to a strict vegetarian diet while dining out in Spain does represent a distinct challenge, and one's daily diet may consist primarily of bread, eggs, potatoes and cheese. Many cooked vegetables are seasoned with animal fat, such as green beans (judías verdes), artichokes (alcahofas) and limas (habas) that are most often sautéed with mined ham.

However, strict vegetarian can help themselves by shopping for delicious items sold both in tins and jars in the city's markets, such as artichoke hearts, cardoons, white asparagus, Piquillo peppers, Marcona almonds, lemon stuffed olives, and by stocking up on the vast array of artisan cheeses to prepare an in-room vegetarian feast.



A typical fresh fruit & vegetable market in Spain – this one in Oviedo

In Old Madrid if one gets a hunger pang for a real veggie hot and cold buffet, there are 2 outposts of **Viva la Vida**, an organic market and café. These brightly decorated cafés offer a self-service buffet, one can eat in or take out, and price is according to the weight of what one selects. The two branches are found on Huertas, 57, in the Barrio de las Letras and on pretty Plaza de la Paja at Costanilla de San Andrés, 16. They keep long hours, very handy for starving, dedicated vegetarians (www.vivalavida.vg).

In Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Girona and many other cities, vegetarians should also look out for an outpost of the **FresCo** chain, a franchise operation that offers a veggie friendly self-service, all-you-can-eat buffet of soups, salads, pastas, pizzas for only 7.95€, at lunchtime, including drink (price for dinner a few euros more), www.fresco.com.

For vegetarian sandwiches, seek out a branch of **Rodilla**, the gourmet sandwich chain, where you'll find delicious sandwiches of cheese and arugula, cheese and quince, cheese and tomatoes and Caprese salads. You'll find a list of their shops across Spain at: www.rodilla.es.

You'll find a Rodilla in most malls and at Terminal 4 in Barajas airport.

Or for something in higher concept, more stylish, the latest offering of the Mallorca group, Madrid's most exclusive gourmet delicatessens, is the **Club Sandwich Café** that serves salads, baguettes, and fresh fruit in a modish setting (www.clubsandwichcafe.com). The goat cheese and vegetable sandwich, their vegetable baguette, onion quiche, blue cheese and nut salad, rice salad, gazpacho and vichyssoise will fill up vegetarians in style. The newest location can be found in the chic Salamanca shopping district on Ortega & Gasset, 33.

And finally, pizza and pasta lovers can fare well with the menus of the **Ginos** pizza chain; a member of the VIPS group, it provides several vegetarian options, including lasagna al funghi and farfalle primavera along with vegetarian pizzas.

The **VIPS** group also has opened several more fashionable trattorias, such as Lucca (Ortega & Gasset 29) in the Salamanca district along with its other line of sushi eateries, The Wok. Find all of their locations at www.grupovips.com.

SOME OF MADRID'S MOST POPULAR VEGETARIAN RESTAURANTS

***Yerbabuena**, Calle Bordadores, 3, handily located right off the Calle Mayor, this contemporary spot serves up a great value *menú del día* for only 13€, including bread, dessert and drink. (www.yerbabuena.ws)

***El Restaurante Vegetariano Internacional**, Santiago, 9, between the Puerta del Sol and Teatro Real, off the Calle Mayor-behind a dark wood façade with no name hides won of Madrid's little romantic vegetarian treasures. Its extensive blackboard menu offers very creative dishes such as a warm goat cheese and lentil salad.

***Isla del Tesoro**, Manuela Malasaña, 3, in the funky, boho Malasaña district would please non-vegetarians equally and offers an unbeatable, changing *menú del día*, Monday-Friday, for only 11€, which includes 3 courses, bread and a glass of wine or beer. Open for lunch from 1:30 - 4:00 and dinner from 9:00 - midnight. And you can make your reservations online. (www.isladeltesoro.net)

El Granero de Lavapiés, Calle Argumosa, near the Reina Sofia Art Museum. One of Madrid's first vegetarian eateries, it still serves a very reasonably priced lunch day *menú del día* for 12.50€. Open for lunch from 1:00 - 4:00 pm.

Vegaviviana on Pelayo in gay Chueca, serves creative, fusion dishes in a non-smoking environment. Open 1:30 – 4:00 for lunch and 9:00 – 11:00 for dinner, closed Sunday and Monday.

El Séptimo, Diego de León, 7, in the posh Salamanca shopping and residential quarter. While not completely vegetarian, it offers many dishes that are, such as their salad, pasta and quiche specialties, along with homemade desserts. It makes for a romantic, candlelight evening “date” spot, especially on weekends, when reservations are necessary. El Séptimo serves a daily lunch menu for 13.38€. It's open for lunch from 1:30 – 4:00 and for dinner from 9:00 - midnight. (www.elseptimo.com)

La Galette, Conde de Aranda, 11, also in the swank Salamanca quarter, is a very intimate, cozy, romantic little spot, founded in 1973 as one of Spain's first vegetarian tables. It opens Monday-Saturday for lunch from 2:00 – 4:00 and for dinner from 9:00 until midnight. For lunch it serves a *menu del día* for 10€.

Artemisa, Ventura de la Vega, 4, in the Barrio de las Letras section of Old Madrid, near the Plaza de Santa Ana has long been popular with tourists and now has another branch at Tres Cruces, 4, near the Plaza del Carmen. It's open daily from 1:30 -4:00 for lunch and for dinner from 9-midnight. And it does not close in August. (www.restauranteartemisa.com)

La Bio Tika, Amor de Dios, 3, in La Latina is vegan friendly and macrobiotic, with a small shop.

More vegetarian options can be found at www.happycow.net

SOME POPULAR VEGETARIAN EATERIES IN BARCELONA

***La Llavor dels Orígens**, with one location in the Left Eixample, Enric Granados, 9, and two in El Born, Vidriera, 6, and Passeig del Born, 4. While not strictly vegetarian, these very popularly priced restaurants do serve up some vegetarian items, such as their asparagus bisque, an orange, strawberry, raisin and nuts salad and tomato and olive *cocas* (like a mini pizza). All branches are open from 12:30-12:30. (www.lallavordelsorigens.com/index.php?len=en)

Juicy Jones, at Cardenal Casañas 7 in the Gothic Quarter is a vegan-friendly place with wildly decorated walls and a funky vibe, open from 10am until midnight.

Organic, Junta de Comerç, 11, in El Raval is another vegan-friendly eatery that has a vegan salad bar and lunch menu costing only 10€ from Monday-Friday and 14€ on

Saturday-Sunday. Dinner is a la carte only. It's open daily from 12:30 pm until midnight. (www.antoniaoorganickitchen.com)

More vegetarian/vegan options in Barcelona can be found at www.vegddining.com and a very complete list at www.sincarne.net. In general, the dining scene for vegans and vegetarians shines brighter in Barcelona than in Madrid.

To help travelers to negotiate their way through the often vegetarian unfriendly Spanish menus, I've prepared the following list:

Veggie items most often found in traditional Madrid tapas bars

- **Aceitunas** – *olives*
- **Pimientos de Padrón** - *little green peppers from Galicia - some hot, some not!*
- **Tortilla española** - *egg & potato omelet*
- **Patatas bravas** - *potato cubes in a spicy sauce*
- **Champiñones al ajillo** or “champis” for short - *sautéed mushrooms with garlic*
- **Ensaladilla rusa** - *cold salad of boiled potatoes, carrots, eggs, peas, but usually with chunks of *tuna*, held all together with mayo*
- **Queso Manchego**-the omnipresent cheese from La Mancha.

Other regional artisan cheeses such as **Cabrales** (*blue-veined*) from Asturias, **Torta del Casar** (*runny cheese*) from Extremadura, **Tetilla** (*nipple shaped*) from Galicia, **Mahón** (*cow's milk*) from Menorca, **Idiazábal** or **Roncal** (*ewe's milk cheeses*) from the Basque Country and Navarra, if not on a bar menu, can be purchased at the cheese stand of most any market

On traditional restaurant menus in Madrid

- **Gazpacho**
- **Sopa de ajo** - *garlic soup, but the "castellana" version contains ham. The vegetarian version is served at Posada de la Villa** and Botín*
- **Tortilla francesa** - *traditional egg omelet*
- **Huevos estrellados or huevos rotos** - *scrambled eggs & potatoes*
- **Espárragos con mayonesa** - *thick, white variety or the "trigueros", slender and green served with homemade mayonnaise*
- **Setas a la segoviana** - *wild mushrooms, grilled Segovian style. On the menu at Botín*
- **Pisto** - *Spanish ratatouille*
- **Pimientos asados** - *roasted red peppers, make sure they're not "piquillos" stuffed with veal, cod or shellfish.*
- **Ensalada de lechuga y tomate** - *simple lettuce & tomato salad. The "ensalada ilustrada" or "mixta" will come with tuna*
- **Paella de verduras** - *veggie paella, found at most Madrid restaurants specializing in paella, like La Barraca-there it's called arroz huertana*

Any restaurant can prepare a scrambled egg/fresh vegetable dish, often listed on the menu as a *revuelto de temporada*, such as...

- **Revuelto de trigueros** – *scrambled eggs with asparagus-on the menu at Botín*
- **Revuelto de setas/boletus/hongos/perrechicos** - *scrambled eggs with wild mushrooms of different varieties*
- **Revuelto de ajetes** - *scrambled eggs with green onions*
- **Posada de la Villa** ** in Old Madrid features a number of vegetarian starters than can make for a delicious meal.



Grilled vegetables at El Barrigón de Bertín, Lastres



A plate of espárragos de Navarra in olive oil

Madrid has dozens of regional cuisine bars/restaurants.

Basque taverns will feature their famous green peppers

- **Pimientos de Gernika** - *larger than the ones from Galicia but equally delicious*
- Some may serve their traditional leek and potato soup with or without cod: **Porruslada**

Navarran restaurants will always have their renowned lettuce hearts

- **Cogollos de Tudela** –lettuce hearts- *ask for them without albacore, ventresca*
- And possibly a mixed grill of seasonal vegetables, **Parrilada de verduras de temporada**
- But...The fabled fresh mixed vegetable stew of the Rioja and Navarra, **menestra de verduras**, will have been seasoned with minced ham
- Delicious canned white asparagus, **espárragos**, from the town of Lodosa

Andalusian cuisine features these veggie friendly regional dishes

- **Garbanzos con espinacas** - *spinach & chickpea dish*
- **Ajo blanco a la Malagueña** - *garlic soup with grapes*
- **Salmorejo** - *thick gazpacho, Córdoba style*
- **Patatas a lo pobre** - *poor man's fried potatoes*

- **Berenjenas con miel** - eggplant with honey
- **Sopa de almendras** - almond soup
- **Alboronía** - dish of eggplant, pepper, tomato, sweet potato or pumpkin, an Andalusian ratatouille
- **Zarangollo** - Murcian dish of zucchini, onions and eggs
- **Mojete** - salad of tomatoes, peppers, black olives, onion and *tuna or *sardines
- **Pipirrana** - fresh tomato and pepper salad with *tuna

Catalán cuisine offers up more dishes for vegetarians

- **Pa amb tomàquet** - toasted bread spread with tomatoes and garlic, drizzled with olive oil
- **Espinacas con pasas** - spinach with raisins
- **Xató** - salad of escarole, tomato, black olives but with *anchovies or *salt cod
- **Escalivada** - an eggplant, pepper and onion salad
- **Samfaina** - catalán version of ratatouille, a mix of onions, eggplant and peppers
- **Trinxat** - fabulous comfort food, mashed cabbage and potato pancake, typical of the Pyrenees-*but it's often prepared with bits of bacon
- **Canalons** - Catalán cannelloni
- **Calçots** - leek-sized green onions, blackened over an open fire and served with a spicy almond-based sauce, romesco
- **Amanida de lleties** - lentil salad
- **Espinacas a la catalana** - spinach with raisins

NOTE FOR SEGOVIA/AVILA AND VIRTUALLY ALL OF OLD CASTILE

Pork and lamb reign supreme on the menus of traditional roasting taverns, so this poses a greater challenge to dedicated vegetarians.

Any version of "judiones de la Granja" (aka "judiones del Real Sitio") or "judiones de El Barco de Avila", a stew of broad white beans, will be seasoned with pork products, such as pig's ear and/or foot.



A selection of beans at the market in Santander, Cantabria