

GREEN CUISINE IN THE BIG MANGO

Leading a vegetarian lifestyle is a challenge under the best of circumstances, but in Thailand it can pose extra barriers. Not everyone may understand your request for 'ahaan mangsavira' (vegetarian food) or 'mai sai nuea' (no meat), and even if they do, don't be surprised to be asked after ordering, "Can you eat chicken?"

So, what is a hapless herbivorous individual to do to avoid going hungry? Choices in Bangkok are disappointingly limited in terms of strictly vegetarian restaurants, made all the more poignant now that this writer's favorite veggie restaurant (Tamarind Café) has sadly closed its doors.

Then there's another sticky issue. Like regular human beings, vegetarians don't like to dine alone. Admittedly, the limits of friendship get tested when dining out and we proceed to interrogate the waiter about every single ingredient. Restaurant owners take note: kindly add a discreet 'V' or tiny symbol to the menu item to indicate its suitability for plant-eaters. After nearly six years of trial and error in The Big Mango, this staunch, semi-vegan has created her own list of vegetarian safe havens and their appeal to her flesh-eating friends.



GOVINDA

One of the last bastions of vegetarianism in Sukhumvit. Despite the Hare Krishna-ish name, Govinda is an Italian restaurant with a generous selection of pizzas and pastas on the menu. Ingredients include meat substitutes.

Herbivorous appeal: ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

Less ideal for vegans because most dishes contain dairy.

Carnivorous appeal: ▲ ▲ ▲

Your date might not be too happy to discover they're consuming mock meat when they thought they were getting pepperoni. Not that you have to tell them!

How to find it: Sukhumvit 22, Tel +66 (0)2 663 4970

ANOTAI

Run by a graduate of the Cordon Bleu Academy in England who shares her passion for the vegetarian lifestyle at this restaurant. Artfully prepared Thai and international culinary delights; homemade bakery goods (freshly baked every morning), and a large selection of herbal teas make this place a must-try. Vegetables are grown on their own organic farm in Ratchaburi.

Herbivorous appeal: ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

Carnivorous appeal: ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲

If there's any restaurant that can tempt meat-eaters into going veggie more often, it's this one.

How to find it:

Next to Rama 9 Hospital, Tel: +66 (0)2 641 5366/70



"I'M A LEVEL 5 VEGAN... I DON'T EAT ANYTHING THAT CASTS A SHADOW"

– Character on *The Simpsons*

ARAB DISTRICT

The bustling sois around BTS Nana station are home to what some say is the best Arabic food outside of the Middle East. Vegan and vegetarian options abound like *falafel*, *hummus* and *baba ghanoush*, plus many eateries also offer Indian fare. Lebanese restaurant Beirut in Sukhumvit Soi 2 is definitely worth a visit.

Herbivorous appeal: ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

Carnivorous appeal: ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲

No complaints from the carnivore when his vegetarian friend is forced to enjoy their lentil soup under the smoke of grilled shish kebabs and lamb.

How to find it:

Between Sukhumvit Sois 3 and 5; Beirut: Ploenchit Center, Sukhumvit Soi 2, Tel: +66 (0)2 656 7377

TAMARIND EXPRESS AND SANDWICHES

We miss Tamarind Café but at least we can still enjoy a few of our favorites whenever we go to MBK, like the *Wild Mushroom Steak* and *Vegetable Lasagna*. Dishes are very reasonably priced with added bonuses such as the salad bar and sandwich shop.

Herbivorous appeal: ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

Carnivorous appeal: ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲

Since we're at a food court, it's easy for the more rapaciously inclined to sneak over to the Chinese stall with duck, pork and other meats galore.

How to find it: Fifth Food Avenue, MBK Shopping Center

RASAYANA RETREAT

Delicious fresh and imaginative 'raw' cuisine. Every item on the menu – whether it's the *Zesty Fettuccine & Red Sauce*, the *Carrot Cream Soup* or the *Key Lime Pie* – has been created using raw food only, and needless to say, all ingredients are organic.

Herbivorous appeal: ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

Heaven on earth for health fanatics.

Carnivorous appeal: ▲ ▲

Unacceptable for first dates unless they're the president of the local macrobiotic club.

How to find it: 57 Soi Prom-mitr, Sukhumvit Soi 39, Tel +66 (0)2 662 4803-5, www.rasayanaretreat.com

MAY KAIDEE

May Kaidee operates three popular restaurants, all in the Banglamphu area. On the menu are Isaan-style Thai vegetarian dishes using red rice and organically grown vegetables. May also offers vegetarian cooking courses at the Samsen Road branch.

Herbivorous appeal: ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

The only quibble is that it's a bit out of the way if you live in Sukhumvit or Sathorn.

Carnivorous appeal: ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲

How to find it: 59 Rachadamnoen Road, 111 Rachadamnoen Road and 33 Samsen Road Soi 1, Banglamphu, Tel +66 (0)2 281 7699, +66 (0)89 137 3173,

CREPES & CO

Arguably the best and most popular brunch spot in town. Besides American-style breakfast food (eggs, pancakes or French toast), there's an extensive menu ranging from crepes, salads and brunch sets to Mediterranean and Moroccan specialties. Wonderful ambiance – the restaurant is located in an old traditional Thai wooden house surrounded by a lush tropical garden – you can also enjoy your meal at one of the tables on the terrace outside.

Herbivorous appeal: ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣ ♣

You can build your own salad or crepe

Carnivorous appeal: ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲ ▲

You can build your own crepe AND they have Nutella.

How to find it:

Sukhumvit Soi 12, tel +66 (0)2 653 3990-1, www.crepes.co.th

WORTH A CLICK



For even more vegetarian dining options in Bangkok plus a useful list of places to buy health food and organic products, be sure to check out Happy Cow's online vegetarian guide:

www.happycow.net/asia/thailand/bangkok