

A VEGETARIAN'S GUIDE TO PRAGUE

FOOD & DRINK Charukesi Ramadurai scouts out the best places for herbivores in the Czech capital



When you're a staunch vegetarian (not even eggs, thank you) and you want to feast on the world's very many attractions, immersing yourself in cultures that have a different concept of vegetarianism can be daunting. For example, many East Asian countries consider fish sauce and shrimp paste as vegetarian; several parts of South America treat beef in the same way; and in Prague, if you are not eating at a specialist vegetarian restaurant, you may want to watch out for the ham pieces that can find their way into many dishes.

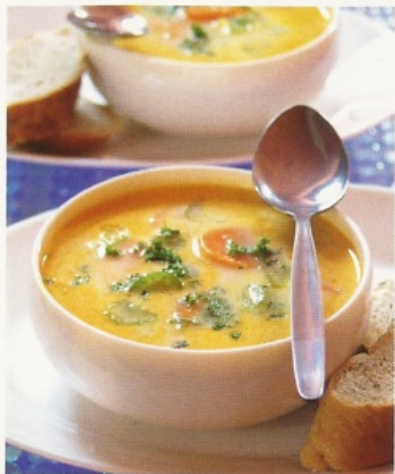
Fortunately, through years of travel and practice I've realised that no matter where you go, even hardcore carnivores eat some of the same things you do—vegetables, grains, cereal and if you are not vegan, dairy products. Any restaurant kitchen will stock these basic ingredients, so don't be afraid to ask for a vegetarian dish to be made specially.

Order a familiar dish without the meat—like a burger with a mushroom patty—in a restaurant without veggie options

Also, a little planning goes a long way to make your holiday more relaxed and fun, without having to constantly forage for vegetarian food and sniff suspiciously at what's put in front of you.

You'll find many websites that provide information on vegetarian meal options in Prague. VegDining (www.veg dining.com) lists restaurants that serve vegetarian food, while Happy Cow (www.happy cow.net) →

Clockwise from top: Prague's Old Town Square; a café in Prague's historic House of the Two Suns building; red lentil soup at Lehka Hlava restaurant



PHOTOGRAPHS: PIETRO CANALI/SIME/4CORNERS; BARRY LEWIS/CORBIS; LUKAS KLIMENT



From left: Eating al fresco near Hradcany Castle, Prague; the interiors of Lehka Hlava restaurant

curates not just vegetarian and vegan restaurants, but also health food stores you can source a meal from. Also look at local tour companies like Prague Walker (www.praguewalker.com), whose guides will show you not just the sights of the city, but also vegetarian restaurants you can keep returning to for a good meal.

However, there may be times when you find yourself in a restaurant that doesn't offer many veggie options. In such cases, order a familiar dish without the meat—a burger with a soya bean or mushroom patty can be a safe option. Sometimes talking directly to the chef helps, too.

If you're still not confident your vegetable soup will arrive without chicken stock in it, order a salad and starters. I have often had success with this when there have been no vegetarian dishes for the main course, or they have been too bland for our fiery Indian palate (really, how much bulgar wheat or polenta can one eat?).

It's also good to learn phrases like: 'Je to vegetarián?' ('Is it vegetarian?') or 'Jsem vegetárian' ('I am a vegetarian'). And if all this fails, a simple and forceful 'no meat or fish' instruction delivered in English, accompanied by a vehement shake of the head will always do the job. 🙏

5 CZECH VEGETARIAN SPECIALITIES TO TRY



GOULASH

This classic Eastern European dish is a thick stew of meat and vegetables. Specialist vegetarian restaurants in Prague offer meatless versions.

ROHLIK

A Czech speciality, rohlik is a mini baguette or crescent-shaped bread. Make your own sandwich by stuffing it with cheese and vegetables, or simply dunk it in your tea or coffee and eat it as a snack.

KOLACHE

A fruit-filled pastry that you can grab and eat on the go.

SMAŽENÝ SÝR

A famous Prague dish, it's fried cheese served with salad, fries and mayonnaise.



TRDELNIK

This melt-in-your-mouth Slovakian baked dessert is a hollow cylinder of dough coated with sugar, cinnamon, walnuts, almonds and sometimes, chocolate.

The best vegetarian restaurants in Prague

COUNTRY LIFE

These organic vegetarian **health food stores** serve pre-packaged sandwiches, burgers and salads. They also have a few seats for those who want to eat in-store. The Melantrichova branch, close to the Old Town Square, offers a **vegetarian goulash**. (www.countrylife.cz)

LEHKA HLAVA

The name translates to 'Clear Head' in English and is one of Prague's most popular vegetarian restaurants. Located right next to Charles Bridge, it is known for its **special brunch and lunch packages**. The menu has tapas, soups, salads, pasta and daily specials. (www.lehkahlava.cz)

MAITREA

A sister concern of the Lehka Hlava, this restaurant is closer to the Old Town Square and serves a mix of **Mexican, Italian and Czech** food. (www.restaurace-maitrea.cz)

GOVINDA'S

This restaurant is the Prague branch of the worldwide chain run by the

International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) and serves healthy and reasonably-priced **Indian and international cuisine**. The building also houses an organic bakery and cultural centre. (www.govindarestaurace.cz)

GOPAL

Strict Jains will love this Indian restaurant in the Nerudova area. Dishes on their menu are prepared **without eggs, garlic or onions**, and its outdoor seating is perfect for lunch on a summer afternoon. (www.gopal.cz)

LOVING HUT

This chain of vegan restaurants serves a mix of **Vietnamese, Thai and Western** cuisines. Most outlets have English-speaking staff, so you can ensure that you get exactly what you ordered. (www.lovinghut.cz)

RADOST FX

A restaurant, café and lounge located at the entrance of a nightclub, their menu features vegetarian **pizzas, pastas, burgers and salads**. (<http://radostfx.cz>)