

Vegetarian Hotspots

Contributed by Shelly Ray

Philly's an eatin' town. But what if you don't eat meat? Our resident vegetarian gets her healthy grub on.

Can you ever have too many orders of fries? Most Philly vegetarians would say yes. I'm here to help—I've compiled a list of the five best veggie-friendly spots in Cheesesteak Land. If you're still on the brink of veg but just can't get over the weirdness of tofu, do yourself a favor: read the ingredients on a package of scrapple. Pig hearts, brains and intestines are listed, but what are those other "byproducts" they don't name? Are you ready to make a reservation yet?

5. Vesuvio

736-49 S. Eighth St.
215.922.8380

The food at Vesuvio is top notch, but they're at number five because the menu isn't exclusively vegan. The veggie burgers you enjoy five nights a week get classed up here: it's grilled and topped with pickled long hot peppers, caramelized onions and spicy mayo (they'll hold it if you ask). You can choose smoked gouda, provolone, Monterey jack or soy cheese. The pasta dishes are rich and creative, but most sauces are cream-based, so vegans beware.

4. Su Xing House

1508 Sansom St.
215.564.1419

A direct quote from Su Xing's menu: "Go vege for a healthy lifestyle, an ad on the subway train indicates." I'm sold. This new Chinese spot offers free delivery and BYOB service if you dine in. The menu relies mostly on mushrooms and tofu, which makes it ideal for faux meataphobes. Check out the glutinous rice roll if you're into mortal-sin-delicious stuff: it's tofu sheet filled with glutinous rice, black mushrooms, peanuts and vegetables. Su Xing's winning feature? The lunch specials. The 35 choices each come with a choice of soup, side dish, and rice, and all are priced under seven bucks.

3. Kingdom of Vegetarians

128 N. 11th St.
215.413.2290

Being able to choose chicken, beef, duck or seafood off a menu for the first time in 10 years was weird, but super tasty. Hot and sour soup could sub for the real thing in any of the five billion Chinese takeouts in Philly. (That's a good thing, really.) The portions are huge—a friend and I split the Kung Pao chicken, and there were still leftovers. But the Kingdom truly rocks the competition with the most attentive water boy this side of Broad Street. If your glass has less than five inches of water, I think you get a free dumpling or something.

2. Govinda's

1480 South St.
215.985.9303

Depending on the time of day, you have two options at Govinda's. Before 5 p.m., the ground-floor Gourmet to Go heads in the vegan cheesesteak and hoagie direction. Meatless meatball subs, tuna sandwiches and smoked ham and cheese are among the offerings—all are vegan. After five, go upstairs for their famous buffet. The dishes are mostly curry-based, but the flavors come out more varied than you'd expect. But here's the golden rule: eat dessert first. If you get an overstuffed sandwich or hit the all-you-can-eat, you're not going to have room for vegan lime cheesecake, lemon raspberry tart or tofu pumpkin pie after. Don't take that risk. Heed the rule.

1. Horizons Café

611 S. Seventh St.
215.923.6117

I convinced two committed carnivores to try Horizons with me with the still-unfulfilled promise that I'd eat at Pat's with them. (Haha, suckers!) The word? "Hands down, knock-down, drag-out," the best meal I've ever eaten. Not the best vegan meal. Best. Meal. Ever. Start with the international olive platter, then try the sopa de tortilla, ancho chile glazed-seitan steak atop a stew of pintos, avocados, zucchini and roasted corn. (I think I just short-circuited my keyboard with drool.) On the dessert menu, the hot chocolate cake is deceiving. I had this image of chilly days and mugs with marshmallows on top. But the hot in this cake is actually the coconut chipotle ice cream. It will be the perfect exotic end to the tastiest meal you'll ever have—and nothing furry has to die.