

Alex Bourke of Vegetarian Guides explores the world's most vegan-friendly city.



LOS ANGELES

LA is big, American-size big, with 200 vegetarian restaurants all over town, half of them vegan. Stay near the ocean in Santa Monica and take the Big Blue Bus for a dollar, or rideshare with Uber or Lyft to the skaters and posers of Muscle Beach, tour celeb hangouts in Hollywood and Beverly Hills, and be a big kid again at Disneyland. Plant-based dining possibilities are, as Californians say, 'like totally awesome', from waffles and pancakes at brunch to cutting-edge raw, via Mexican, Italian, Ethiopian, Indian, all kinds of Oriental, and even Peruvian.

Teens and reluctant veggies love the fun, relaxed experience of **Veggie Grill**, a West Coast chain of vegan restaurants with 16 branches across LA focused on fake meat fast food. Try buffalo wings, cheeseburgers, a smoky bacon tempeh sandwich, 'fish' or 'chickin' tacos, 'crab' cakes and sweet potato fries. There are also healthy dishes like salads or the Bombay Bowl of herb-roasted veggies, grains, steamed kale, cannellini beans and green curry sauce with almonds and hemp seeds.



At **Real Food Daily**, five blocks from Santa Monica pier amusement park, everything is organic and made from scratch in a fusion of macrobiotics with American. Weekender brunch is a must with fat pancakes, tempeh bacon, scrambled tofu, hash browns, tomatoes and onion. The legendary lasagne Napoletana comes with creamy cashew ricotta, spinach and crimini mushrooms. They also serve tacos and burritos, or assemble a Real Food Meal with your choice of plant-based protein, steamed veggies, grains and sauce. Fantastic desserts include chocolate fudge cake.

Crossroads, among the fashion boutiques of the West Hollywood Design District, is the celebs' favourite vegan restaurant, a memorable treat



if you can splurge \$55-\$75 each. Share several exquisite Mediterranean tapas-style dishes, such as authentic tasting artichoke 'oysters' with yellow tomato Béarnaise and kelp caviar, spicy meatball almond ricotta pizza, porcini-crusted eggplant and 'crab' cakes. And where else could you finish with pumpkin tiramisu?

Also recommended...

- Elegant **Shojin**, on the third floor of Little Tokyo shopping centre, serves exquisite sushi, salads, ramen noodles and seitan steaks.
- **Whole Foods Market** superstores have everything for self-caterers, plus prepared foods to-go, salad bars, coffee bars and cafés.
- **Rawvolution** is a chilled out hipster café near the beach, creating astonishing raw versions of mainstream dishes like Mexican pizza or burgers, and raw cacao desserts.



- **Vromage** vegan cheese shop on Sunset Boulevard manufactures an incredible variety of French-style nut cheeses, plus sandwiches and pizza.

NEED TO KNOW

Veggie Grill

www.veggiegrill.com

Real Food Daily

www.realfood.com

Crossroads

www.crossroadskitchen.com

Shojin

www.theshojin.com

Whole Foods Market

www.wholefoodsmarket.com

Rawvolution

www.rawvolution.com

Vromage

www.vromage.com

ABOUT ALEX

Alex Bourke is the publisher of Vegetarian Guides to London, the British Isles and Paris. Visit his website at www.vegetarian.travel for book extracts, links to veggie travel websites for many countries, and a calendar of vegan festivals.