

# VEGAN

## *in a Non-Vegan World*

HERE'S WHERE VEGANS CAN DINE  
WITH CARNIVOROUS FRIENDS

BY RONA GINDIN

The vegetable souvlaki wrap with grilled vegetables and hummus is one of two no-special-order-required vegan menu options at Taverna Opa.

Veggie tacos at Cocina 214 have layers of flavor from vinaigrette, salsa verde and a slew of fresh vegetables. Their guacamole (right) is also vegan.



“Where can we go to dinner with another couple?” a friend asked, desperate. “My husband is vegan, is tired of veggie burgers and doesn’t like to make a fuss with special orders.”

And so the search began. Our regular go-to places around town rarely move left of vegetarian, meaning most meat-free dishes are made with fish, shellfish, eggs and/or cheese.

To find some “regular” restaurants with a truly animal-free dinner entrée, we combed through the *2013 Zagat Orlando City Guide*; visited the websites of every non-hotel, non-theme-park table-service restaurant listed and scoured the menu for vegan dinner entrées. Then we called to confirm that the chefs stir in no dabs of butter. In fact, we took a few restaurants off the list once we learned their online menu descriptions didn’t mention dairy items in, say, risotto or a pasta sauce.

Here are the rules we set:

- The restaurant has to be a table-service establishment that does not specialize in vegan or vegetarian meals, and is not primarily a coffeehouse or bar.
- The vegan dinner entrée can’t be a veggie burger.

- No salads. That’s not dinner.
  - No special orders necessary other than “skip the dollop of sour cream” or somesuch.
- Here’s what we found:

## ADRIATICO TRATTORIA ITALIANA

A low-key longtimer on College Park’s Edgewater Drive, Adriatico is an old-fashioned Italian restaurant. It’s quiet, the dishes are the familiar ones of our childhoods, and owners Rosetta and Marco Cudazzo know their repeat guests well.

While customers without dietary restrictions sup on veal alla Marsala and spaghetti with spicy shrimp “fra diavolo,” vegans order the cappellini alla checca (\$15.50). It’s angel hair pasta tossed with cherry tomatoes, garlic, basil and extra-virgin olive oil. “We didn’t think of vegans when we added it to the menu,” Rosetta says. “People were asking for cappellini.” The dish is popular because “it’s very flavorful with very simple but good ingredients, not too heavy,” she says.

While non-vegans can add chicken or shrimp to their cappellini, vegans can request the spaghetti fra diavoli without the shellfish. [adriatico-trattoria.com](http://adriatico-trattoria.com)

## COCINA 214

Tex-Mex fare is known for not only meat but lard mixed into refried beans, but Cocina 214 in Winter Park takes a fresher approach—so fresh that even vegans can eat without worry. Among the beef enchiladas and “Tim’s Flaming Rooster” chicken sandwiches is the Veggie Taco entrée (\$13), which not only is vegan but has a V for vegan next to its name. The entrée is three tacos filled with sautéed vegetables, black beans, slaw, jalapeños and a citrus vinaigrette, plus a tomatillo-based salsa verde.

“We had no vegan entrées when we opened, but our comment cards ask, ‘What can we do to improve your experience,’ and people requested a vegan option,” says co-owner and manager Lambrine Macejewski. “The tacos are one of our best sellers, and they’re not only ordered by vegans.” The Cocina 214 menu also has icons for vegetarian and gluten-free dishes.

[cocina214.com](http://cocina214.com)

## TAVERNA OPA

Diners at Taverna Opa might be too busy dancing the Zorba to notice how varied

# VEGAN

## Variety

Here are more places that offer vegan entrées.

### AARSHIRWAD RESTAURANT

**Cuisine:** Indian

**Neighborhood:** International Drive  
Entire "Vegetarian" menu section.

**Examples:** cauliflower florets in a ginger-garlic soy-based sauce; potatoes cooked with cumin, mint, onion and tomato.

[aashirwadrestaurant.com](http://aashirwadrestaurant.com)

### BOSPHOROUS

**Cuisine:** Turkish

**Neighborhoods:** Winter Park, Dr. Phillips

**Examples:** Vegetable Sauté—green beans, eggplant, zucchini, potatoes, carrots and garlic in tomato sauce, plus rice. Also: Okra Sauté.

[bosphorousrestaurant.com](http://bosphorousrestaurant.com)

### CAFÉ MURANO

**Cuisine:** Italian

**Neighborhood:** Altamonte Springs, MetroWest

**Examples:** Cappellini Marinara—Italian peeled tomato sauce with garlic oil, herbs and spices.

### PASHA

**Cuisine:** Moroccan

**Neighborhood:** Millenia

**Examples:** Vegetable S'CSOU—Steamed couscous topped with mixed vegetables. Also: vegetable kebab.

[pashaorlando.com](http://pashaorlando.com)

### SAFFRON

**Cuisine:** Indian

**Neighborhood:** Dr. Phillips  
Has a vegetarian menu.

**Example:** Saffron Vegetable Jal-fraizi—stir-fried vegetables in a tangy tomato-curry sauce.

[saffronorlando.com](http://saffronorlando.com)

### SEASONS 52

**Cuisine:** American

**Neighborhood:** Altamonte Springs, Dr. Phillips

Has a vegan menu that's posted online and available by asking the server. Entrées include cedar plank-roasted tofu with vegetables and roasted crushed tomatoes, and black bean tacos with roasted peppers and mole poblano.

[seasons52.com](http://seasons52.com)

### SEA THAI

**Cuisine:** Thai

**Neighborhood:** Colonial Town

Many dishes can be made vegan.

**Example:** Panang Curry with tofu—Thai herbs and spices, basil, snow peas, mushrooms, bell peppers and kaffir lime leaves simmered in coconut milk.

[searlando.com](http://searlando.com)

For a simple yet tasty vegan meal you can make at home, try these crepes from holistic health coach, Chelsie DiPaolo.

### CHICKPEA CREPES

*Serves 5 to 6*

1½ cups plain, unsweetened almond milk

½ cup water

¾ cup all-purpose gluten-free flour (such as Bob's Red Mill) or regular all-purpose flour

⅓ cup chickpea flour

2 teaspoons coconut oil, grapeseed oil or olive oil

½ teaspoon salt

Nonstick vegetable oil spray, for cooking

Roasted vegetables, for serving (sweet potatoes, Brussels sprouts, tomatoes, carrots, cauliflower, or tomatoes)

Garlicky Dill Tahini Dressing, for serving (recipe below)

**1** Combine in a blender and process until smooth. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour, and up to 8 hours.

**2** Heat a nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. The skillet is ready when a few drops of water flicked onto the pan sizzle immediately.

**3** Spray pan with nonstick vegetable oil spray and ladle about ¼ cup batter into pan. As batter starts to sizzle, tilt pan in a circular motion to spread batter to the edges of the pan.

**4** Cook until crepe looks dry and the edges appear firm. Gently run a spatula along edges and underneath the crepe to loosen. Peek underneath; if it's golden with a few light brown spots, flip it. Cook about 30 to 45 second on second side.

**5** Repeat with remaining batter. Serve with roasted vegetables and Garlicky Dill Tahini Dressing.

### GARLICKY DILL TAHINI DRESSING

¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons water

¼ cup tahini (sesame seed paste)

3 garlic cloves, finely chopped

4 to 5 tablespoons chopped fresh dill

3 tablespoons chopped parsley

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Combine all ingredients in a food processor and process until smooth.





Rocco's Italian Grille & Bar has three vegan entrées on its menu, including the veggie-filled Pappardella alla Toscana.

the menu is, but this Greek restaurant on International Drive has two solid vegan entrées. One is Stuffed Peppers (\$15), which are green and red bell peppers filled with herb-infused rice. “There’s also lemon and olive oil, and it all marinates so the rice absorbs the flavors before it’s stuffed into the peppers,” says chef-owner Katerina Coumbaros. “Then we roast them for a couple of hours so there’s loads of flavor. It’s a very traditional dish from the island of Crete, where we’re from.”

In addition, a vegetable souvlaki platter is entirely animal-free. “It has zucchini, mushrooms, peppers and asparagus,” Coumbaros says. “We roast them, then serve them on pita bread with lettuce, tomato and tzatziki or hummus, like Greek street food.” Tzatziki contains dairy, she notes, so vegans must opt for the hummus. Why does such a meat-heavy menu have two vegan options? “These are traditional items,” she says. “In Greece we tend to eat more vegetables.” [opaorlando.com](http://opaorlando.com)

## MI TOMATINA

Mi Tomatina is a snappy little Spanish restaurant on Winter Park’s Hannibal Square, putting out authentic and creative tapas plus a variety of paellas. It’s not shocking that several of the small plates are vegan, since they are little snacks, after all. But a paella? As we think of the rice-based casserole as a chicken-and-seafood meal, the variety with wild mushrooms and fresh vegetables (\$39, meant for two to three people) came as a surprise. “People know little about the foods of Spain,” says Patricia Carvajal, who owns the restaurant with Stuart Kirban. “A lot of the food is vegetarian and even vegan.”

Mi Tomatina guests share a bunch of tapas instead of ordering entrées, so we’ll mention some vegan ones here: mushroom croquettes, garbanzo stew and lentil soup. These and other vegetarian (but not necessarily vegan) items are designated with two green leaves on the menu. “We want to

cater to everyone with special food needs and meet those needs with flavor,” says Carvajal. [mitomatina.com](http://mitomatina.com)

## ROCCO’S ITALIAN GRILLE & BAR

“No special orders” are part of the requirements, but we’re waiving that for “No Parmigiano shavings, please.” With those words, Winter Park’s romantic Italian restaurant Rocco’s goes from having one vegan entrée to three.

Its spaghetti with olives, red pepper flakes, garlic and oil (\$14.95) is a natural. But, cheese-free, the choices get more interesting. Pappardella alla Toscana (\$16.95) is pasta tossed with artichoke hearts, mushrooms, sun-dried tomatoes and arugula. “It’s made with a vegetable broth, which we make ourselves,” says owner Rocco Potami. “We put broth plus oil into the mix, which gives it a velvety texture.” A third option is Fettuccine al Pomodoro (\$14.25), tossed in a tomato sauce. [roccositaliangrille.com](http://roccositaliangrille.com)