MARIBEL’S GUIDE TO A VEGETARIAN DIET IN SPAIN

Maintaining a vegetarian diet in Spain - Not always an easy task

The handy and well written Lonely Plant’s World Food-Spain suggests that a visiting vegetarian “must pack a small stash of vitamins and a big sense of humor” when Spain bound, and that Spaniards consider “dead pig a vegetable”.

If one doesn’t eat fish or shellfish, keeping to a strict vegetarian diet while dining out in Spain does represent a distinct challenge, and one’s daily diet may consist primarily of bread, eggs, potatoes and cheese. Many cooked vegetables are seasoned with animal fat, such as green beans (judías verdes), artichokes (alcahofas) and limas (habas) that are most often sautéed with mined ham.

However, strict vegetarian can help themselves by shopping for delicious items sold both in tins and jars in the city’s markets, such as artichoke hearts, cardoons, white asparagus, Piquillo peppers, Marcona almonds, lemon stuffed olives, and by stocking up on the vast array of artisan cheeses to prepare an in-room vegetarian feast.

In Old Madrid if one gets a hunger pang for a real veggie hot and cold buffet, there are 2 outposts of Viva la Vida, an organic market and café. These brightly decorated cafés offer a self-service buffet, one can eat in or take out, and price is according to the weight of what one selects. The two branches are found on Huertas, 57, in the Barrio de las Letras and on pretty Plaza de la Paja at Costanilla de San Andrés, 16. They keep long hours, very handy for starving, dedicated vegetarians (www.vivalavida.vg).

In Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Girona and many other cities, vegetarians should also look out for an outpost of the FrescCo chain, a franchise operation that offers a veggie friendly self-
service, all-you-can-eat buffet of soups, salads, pastas, pizzas for only €7.95, at lunchtime, including drink (price for dinner a few euros more), www.frescco.com.

For vegetarian sandwiches, seek out a branch of Rodilla, the gourmet sandwich chain, where you’ll find delicious sandwiches of cheese and arugula, cheese and quince, cheese and tomatoes and Caprese salads. You’ll find a list of their shops across Spain at www.rodilla.es.

You’ll find a Rodilla in most malls and at Terminal 4 in Barajas airport.

Or for something in higher concept, more stylish, the latest offering of the Mallorca group, Madrid’s most exclusive gourmet delicatessens, is the Club Sandwich Café that serves salads, baguettes, and fresh fruit in a modish setting (www.clubsandwichcafe.com). The goat cheese and vegetable sandwich, their vegetable baguette, onion quiche, blue cheese and nut salad, rice salad, gazpacho and vichysoise will fill up vegetarians in style. The newest location can be found in the chic Salamanca shopping district on Ortega & Gasset, 33.

And finally, pizza and pasta lovers can fare well with the menus of the Ginos pizza chain; a member of the VIPS group, it provides several vegetarian options, including lasagna al funghi and farfalle primavera along with vegetarian pizzas.

The VIPS group also has opened several more fashionable trattorias, such as Lucca (Ortega & Gasset 29) in the Salamanca district along with its other line of sushi eateries, The Wok. Find all of their locations at www.grupovips.com.

To help travelers to negotiate their way through some times vegetarian unfriendly Spanish menus, I’ve prepared the following list:

**Veggie items most often found in traditional Madrid tapas bars:**

- Aceitunas – olives
- Pimientos de Padrón - little green peppers from Galicia - some hot, some not!
- Tortilla española - egg & potato omelet
- Patatas bravas - potato cubes in a spicy sauce
- Champiñones al ajillo or “champis” for short - sautéed mushrooms with garlic
- Ensaladilla rusa - cold salad of boiled potatoes, carrots, eggs, peas, but usually with chunks of *tuna*, held all together with mayo
- Queso Manchego or other artisan cheeses such as Cabals (blue-veined), Torta del Casar (runny cheese from Extremadura), Tortilla (nipple shaped from Galicia), Idiazábal or Ronal (ewe’s milk cheeses from the Basque Country and Navarra).

**On traditional restaurant menus in Madrid:**

- Gazpacho
- Sopa de ajo - garlic soup, but the "castellana" version contains ham. The vegetarian version is served at Posada de la Villa** and Botín
- Tortilla francesa - traditional egg omelet
- Huevos estrellados or huevos rotos - scrambled eggs & potatoes
- Espárragos con mayonesa - thick, white variety or the "trigueros", slender and green served with homemade mayonnaise
- Setas a la segoviana - wild mushrooms, grilled Segovian style. On the menu at Botín
• **Pisto** - Spanish ratatouille
• **Pimientos asados** - roasted red peppers, make sure they're not "piquillos" stuffed with veal, cod or shellfish.
• **Ensalada de lechuga y tomate** - simple lettuce & tomato salad. The "ensalada ilustrada" or "mixta" will come with tuna
• **Paella de verduras** - veggie paella, found at most Madrid restaurants specializing in paella, like La Barraca—there it’s called arroz huertana

Any restaurant can prepare a scrambled egg/fresh vegetable dish, often listed on the menu as a revuelto de temporada, such as…
• **Revuelto de trigueros** – scrambled eggs with asparagus-on the menu at Botín
• **Revuelto de setas/boletus/hongos/perrechicos** - scrambled eggs with wild mushrooms of different varieties
• **Revuelto de ajetes** - scrambled eggs with green onions
• **Posada de la Villa** **in Old Madrid features a number of vegetarian starters than can make for a delicious meal**

Madrid has dozens of regional cuisine bars/restaurants.

**Basque taverns will feature their famous green peppers:**
• **Pimientos de Gernika** - larger than the ones from Galicia but equally delicious
• Some may serve their traditional leek and potato soup with or without cod: **Porruslada**

**Navarran restaurants will always have their renowned lettuce hearts:**
• **Cogollos de Tudela** - ask for them without albacore, ventresca
• And possibly a mixed grill of seasonal vegetables, **Parrilada de verduras de temporada**
• But…The fabled fresh mixed vegetable stew of the Rioja and Navarra, **menestra de verduras**, will have been seasoned with minced ham

**Andalusian cuisine features these veggie friendly regional dishes:**
• **Garbanzos con espinacas** - spinach & chickpea dish
• **Ajo blanco a la Malagueña** - garlic soup with grapes
• **Salmorejo** - thick gazpacho, Córdoba style
Patatas a lo pobre - poor man's fried potatoes
Berenjenas con miel - eggplant with honey
Sopa de almendras - almond soup
Alboronía - dish of eggplant, pepper, tomato, sweet potato or pumpkin, an Andalusian ratatouille
Zarangollo - Murcian dish of zucchini, onions and eggs
Mojete - salad of tomatoes, peppers, black olives, onion and *tuna or *sardines
Pipirrana - fresh tomato and pepper salad with *tuna

Catalán cuisine offers up more dishes for vegetarians
Pa amb tomàquet - toasted bread spread with tomatoes and garlic, drizzled with olive oil
Espinacas con pasas - spinach with raisins
Xató - salad of escarole, tomato, black olives but with *anchovies or *salt cod
Escalivada - an eggplant, pepper and onion salad
Samfaina - catalán version of ratatouille
Trinxat - fabulous comfort food, mashed cabbage and potato pancake, typical of the Pyrenees
Canalons - Catalán cannelloni
Calçots - leek-sized green onions, blackened over an open fire and served with a spicy almond-based sauce, romescu
Amanida de llenties - lentil salad
Espinacas a la catalana - spinach with raisins

Note for Segovia/Avila and virtually all of Old Castile
Pork and lamb reign supreme on the menus of traditional roasting taverns, so this poses a greater challenge to dedicated vegetarians.

Any version of "judiones de la Granja" (aka “judiones del Real Sitio”) or "judiones de El Barco de Avila", a stew of broad white beans, will be seasoned with pork products, such as pig’s ear and/or foot.