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With demand rising, companies offer vegan vacations

Priya M Menon, TNN Mar 24, 2013, 04.22AM IST

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CHENNAI: Monica Pandian and her friends are busy planning a trip to Auroville. But the gang of eight from Chennai has to pick their eat-outs with care as all of them are vegan. That naturally rules out cheesy pastas, steaks and even ice creams.

"There are a lot of vegan eateries in Auroville, and that's why we decided to go there," says Pandian, a third year college student.

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Holidays can turn out to be stressful for vegans, who shun animal products. With the vegan movement gaining momentum across the country, organizations are coming up with vacations to cater to the community.

"The idea struck me when I went on a holiday and got fed up trying to find my kind of food," says Nandini Gulati, health coach with The Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature (Sharan). This NGO, which works to promote an ecologically sustainable, compassionate lifestyle, recently launched vegan wellness weekends in association with Mystic Asia.

The first vegan weekend, priced at 16,000, will be held from April 12 to 14 at Kasauli. Participants will get to go on nature walks, meditate and enjoy vegan cooking classes.

"We will be serving vegan Thai and Italian cuisine, fresh salads and nut-based milks and desserts," says Gulati, who turned vegan two years ago to get healthier. "Depending on the response, we plan to conduct these every other month all over the country," she says.

The Indian Vegan Society in Karnataka also offers vegan vacations. "We have a vegan centre that acts as a home for tourists. We have a cottage that people can book for vacations," says Shankar Narayan, who founded the society in 2004 to bring together like-minded people. "It is situated in a three-acre hillside plot near Udupi."

The society also helps vegans identify suitable places to stay and organize sightseeing trips. "We don't charge anything for our services. People can donate what they want," says Shankar.

The society also conducts a festival every year to celebrate the vegan spirit. "It attracts vegans from across the world. Last year, 200 people attended," says Narayan, who will be conducting it this year from September 27 to 29.

India is a popular vegan destination and clubs here play hosts to tourists. "About 18 American and British tourists will visit Chennai at the end of the year, and we will throw a vegan potluck for them," says Niranjana Amarnath, founder of Chennai Vegan Drinks. "We plan to introduce them to south Indian fare."

Many vegans prefer to marry their own kind as veganism is a lifestyle choice, with people opting for an ethical way of life that excludes the use of animal products, be it a silk saree or a leather wallet.

"There is no way I could have married someone who ate meat," says Anand Narayanan. Though he is based in Washington DC, his wife is from Chennai. "She is a vegetarian and I told her that I am a vegan and she respects my choice," he says.

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