



## Food and Health

### Vegan and Chic



But talking about babies, the Sehgals have three children; two daughters (Neena and Romilla) and a son (Paul). The first came along 14 months after they were married and was named Neena. They had to find a name that would please both mothers, confides Barbara, "A lot of thought went into all these little things. We used to be very concerned about every small aspect in the earlier days. We wanted both our mothers to be comfy with the names of their grandchildren. Neena was perfect, neutral. Each thought the name belonged to their land. So that was fine."

I travel a fair amount and people often ask me how I manage, being a vegan and all that. Well, quite honestly, it's not as daunting as it may seem. There are vegan eateries in almost all the big cities of the world and if not, most vegetarian restaurants have a list of vegan items on their menus. It's



often easier abroad than in India! Although vegetarianism is easily understood in India, veganism is not. Many chefs in our country do not even know the meaning of the word 'vegan' nor anything about its implications on health, the environment and animals. Luckily this is changing.

#### Vegan travelling in India

In most five star hotels in the Indian metros if you ask for soya milk with your tea and coffee, you are likely to get it. Many dishes on the menu are already vegan or can be easily veganised. Our traditional food, roti, subzi, dal and chawal were traditionally largely vegan. But today much of it is topped with butter, cream or cheese in restaurants. To get a vegan meal may require a little more work in the form of explaining to the chef what your needs are. Once that's done, more often than not the meal can become special, and you can end up being the envy of others at the table!



I have often organised conferences, workshops and other large events in hotels and explained to the chefs about my requirements. The chefs usually welcome the challenge. For them it was working with something new, it required creativity and ingenuity. I was always highly pleased with the results. More and more people are asking for this choice – some for health reasons, others for

ethical reasons. Once explained, most chefs understand the necessity of learning to cater to this need.

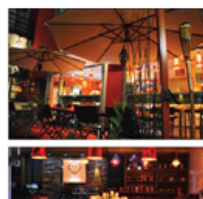
There is a catering service called Carnival Cakes in Bangalore. Their motto is to cater to their customer's needs. If you ask for something, they will deliver. How did they do this? One of their chefs was working with a European airline's catering facility and he clearly understood how to meet the requirements of any need. They make amazing vegan cakes and pastries of all kinds which can be ordered and will be delivered anywhere in Bangalore. Mumbai has some strictly vegan catering services. Rithika Ramesh's Green Stove is an all vegan service. Marisa Paolillo's Angel Foods is another such venture. Vegan Mumbaiers are now waiting for the metro's first vegan restaurant.

Veganism is catching on in India in a big way, and it is a pity that our restaurants are not keeping pace. I am always being asked if I know any vegan restaurants in India, and I generally have to answer in the negative. There are more and more vegan friendly restaurants but not many pure vegan restaurants. At the end of Oct 2010, there will be an entirely vegan IVU-India South West Asia Vegetarian Congress at Hotel E Inn, Bangalore. The venue was selected because it's one of the few large, high quality vegetarian hotels. At the moment there are hardly any notable hundred percent vegan restaurants, guest houses or hotels in India. But if there was one in any of the Indian metros, just because of the pure novelty, it would be full.



#### Speciality Vegan restaurants around the world

At the moment since vegans are still a minority, vegan restaurants, and guesthouses are a speciality. I was in Sardinia, a Southern Italian island, renowned for its clear beaches, blue waters and the meat. The tourist season is short and almost the whole island closes down in winter, which means for six months of the year all the guesthouses and hotels shut down; all but one. A vegetarian quest house (agriturismo) called Ca' La



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Somara is open all year-round and the owners complain that they never get a holiday since they always have guests. It's special, and all the vegetarians

or vegans who want to visit Sardinia, stay here.

I was in Germany and had just finished my work in the beautiful mountainous area of Allgäu. I was looking for a nice place to relax for the last two days before flying home. Naturally I searched for a vegan guest house in the area. I came across Gästehaus Rita, I stayed there. It was a small place nestling in the mountains. The owner Torsten Stix who is also a healer and his wife themselves cooked 100% organic vegan meals. The breakfast spread was vast and because it was so good, I was tempted to try everything. I went hiking in the mountains after that with just an apple for lunch because the breakfast was so substantial! Dinner was a three-course meal, excellent as well. Most people probably don't know about this little guesthouse, which was recommended to me by other vegans. The fresh mountain air and the wonderful food was perfect to take away years of age and stress.

In Paris I met a group of vegans at Saveurs Veget Halles which served French style vegan food. In the past I had discovered a wonderful falafel chain in Paris that is vegetarian, Maoz. They have branches in other cities in Europe as well. I found London a haven for vegans. Not only are there plenty of vegan and vegan friendly restaurants, they are also easy to get to and offer a huge variety of fare. Italy too is not lagging. Milan, Florence, Rome, all have their share of good vegan restaurants. Milan in fact, has several restaurants, Florence even has a bakery that's all vegan.



I was in Budapest giving a 4-day seminar. Since the hotel where the seminar was being held was not equipped to serve vegan meals, the organisers had found a catering service that would deliver vegan meals to the hotel every day at lunch. In the evenings we went to a few vegan restaurants and I was pleasantly surprised to find the city had its own share of vegan restaurants. We had no need to repeat any in the five days I was there! Each served a delicious array of vegan dishes, and each was different from the rest.

Not all vegan restaurants are healthy though. Some merely serve tasty food. But one thing is sure - most vegan restaurants are competing with other local eateries. And not everyone who eats in a vegan restaurant is vegan. By default the food has to be superlative or they will lose business. The best part is that you can usually eat well and yet you will be able to get up and get back to work if you have to. It's lighter eating. Vegans can eat without worrying about getting something they had not bargained for.

As Carol Adams the author of the classic, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* recently wrote on her Facebook page: "It's Bruce's and my 32nd anniversary. At the reception, one dish was walnut balls in a white sauce. Several people said, 'so you gave in & agreed to meatballs for your guests!' I just smiled & thought, 'how foolish you are; you don't even know when you aren't eating meat!'" I used that basic insight in *Living Among Meat Eaters*: People are perfectly happy eating vegan food if they don't know that is what they are doing.

So where are the best vegan restaurants in the world? I would say some of the best are in London, New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Washington DC areas.

Perhaps because these are the places where vegan restaurants are concentrated. But they are all over the world, in places you would never even imagine. In case you are travelling and would like to sample vegan restaurants, be sure to check out <http://www.happycow.net> to find a list of restaurants that are vegetarian or vegan. You may be surprised with what you find. If you are travelling in India, see [vegan-india.blogspot.com](http://vegan-india.blogspot.com) for vegan friendly restaurants all over India and other helpful information. If you are travelling by air and would like a vegan meal, let the airline know. The code is usually VGML or strict vegetarian but if you fly an Indian or US based airline the chances are higher that they will make mistakes. However, you can decide what you prefer at that point – to eat whatever they give you or carry a few eats with you for the flight or simply give your stomach a rest while flying!

