

# CANUCK PEAS

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# THE VEGAN NOMAD

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Travel. To say I'm addicted is putting it lightly. A month without packing up my suitcase or gritting my teeth through airport security and I'm in restless depressive funk. The further the destination the better. I love exploring the unexplored and getting as local of an experience as I can. When my lease of four years was about to expire, I made the plunge into my latest major adventure. Instead of renewing it or moving, I hopped on a plane to Copenhagen and roamed the continent for

months. With my interest in living out of a suitcase and immersing myself in every place I visit, I would be remiss to report that being vegan has always been easy in my experience. I have been met with a few raised eyebrows and accusations of eating like a rabbit, but I've persevered. My experiences have led me to develop a philosophy and some guiding principles to satisfy both the adventurer and vegan in me.





# RESEARCH

The amount of nerdy Pinterest boards and notes I've compiled before stepping foot off the plane is silly. Amongst them are a smattering of shops, art galleries, and historical sites, but the bulk of them are food related. They are amassed from personal recommendations, articles and social media deep dives. I've scoured the internet looking for menus, scrolled through comment feeds searching "vegan" and called ahead anywhere that has piqued my interest, but doesn't look to veg-friendly on the surface. This has led me to eat classically prepared stuffed mirliton (chayote) in New Orleans, perfect macrobiotic food in Tokyo and the most vibrant Caribbean lunch in Martinique. Not one was at a vegan establishment.

As much as I love Happy Cow and the amount of times it's saved me when I haven't done my research, I often find the restaurants I've been lead to filled with tourists and lacking local flavor. I love the challenge of discovering something new. The lists are loose guides. I don't need to visit all of them and I always follow my senses. Some of my favorite experiences have come from the jewel box restaurant I've stumbled upon on my way to the subway in Tokyo or the eclectic dive I've passed by the roadside in California, not on any list.

## *discover indigenous food culture*

Oftentimes there will be a few dishes that are inherently vegan. The cucina povera tradition in Puglia uses animal products sparingly for economic reasons. With Rastafarianism in the Caribbean comes Ital which is not only vegetarian at its core, but additive free. Even countries known for being notoriously unvegan will have something to sample the local flavor, mulled wine in Denmark, tofu in Tokyo or corn tortillas and guacamole in Mexico. Take it all in when you can.

## *know what to look for & learn a few local words*

Take note of the cuisine of the place you're traveling to. Is it dairy heavy? Uses a lot of chicken stock? Know those words. English is rampant these days, but just knowing to ask if "les haricots verts son fait avec du bierre" is helpful.



## DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK

If you are going to take one thing away let it be this. If you can communicate in the local language do! When I've asked a server if a vegetable dish could be made without dairy or called ahead to ask if they can accommodate vegans, I have almost never been told no. The only times that has happened has been in major North American cities. Many places are all too happy to adapt a dish. One of my greatest successes was in Mexico City, a place with a rich food culture and devotion to hospitality. In my non-non-existent Spanish in one night I was able to partake in a Mexican omakase and feasted on a smoked vegan caesar salad, certainly not on the menu.

## COOK

I'm an Airbnb traveler instead of a hotel traveler: it means more space, more local and my favorite feature, the kitchen. My first destination upon landing is to head to the local market or grocery store. Everything is new. The aisles teem with foreign mustards, hot sauces and vegetables. I make sure to have a few local cookbooks downloaded and recipes in mind. I've had vegan al fresco Italian dinners, French bistro-inspired evenings and Japanese washoku feasts. There has been nothing more satisfying than veganizing the regional food. Beet tartar all the way.

## TRAVEL WITH FOOD

If I'm going away for longer than 3 days and I know there will be cooking involved, I pack for it. In a tote, I have a kit that includes: aminos, nutritional yeast, togarashi, apple cider vinegar packets, Maldon salt and a few spices. This has allowed me to work miracles with a mini fridge and a microwave. They can add emergency flavor to anything: bland take away, lack luster room service, or seasoning the crunchy cucumber fresh from the market. If I know there won't be cooking involved, I channel my inner squirrel and pack nuts, seeds and bars. Vegan protein or dense green vegetable are my typical deficits when I travel.

The amount of times spirulina, pumpkin seeds and dates have saved my life...well I've lost count.

## GRAB A DRINK

Even if you don't drink, pull up a bar stool. Get an espresso, try the local soda or mineral water. I promise no one will look at you weirdly. It is low commitment in both time and money. Rest your legs, hydrate and maybe even grab a snack. There is no better way to get to know San Sebastián than by standing at a pintxo bar drinking a glass of txakoli, or Barcelona than by having tapas and Vermut or Vichy Catalan.

## DON'T PANIC

In my interest in immersing myself in a culture through food, I have encountered a miscommunication or two. I've been served omelets, turnip greens with a smattering of pulled pork and lovely butternut squash soup garnished with chorizo. I did not scream, cry or use an accusatory tone. I kept my cool. In those very rare times I have gone ahead and ordered something else if it was a true mix-up or turned to my trusty purse snack to tide me over until I could find something else. In a decade in traveling as a vegan I can count maybe ten instances where I've been served something questionable. The risk has been worth it.

To thrive as a traveler you have to be willing to let your guard down, be open and flexible. What I would've missed if I had only eaten at the California style vegan restaurants of the world. Off the top of my head...a vegan tailored tasting menu in Copenhagen, interacting with the octogenarian owners of a taberna in Lisbon and a an impromptu natural wine block party that overflowed into the street of the 11ième in Paris. Those experiences are what connected me to the people and are why I eagerly keep getting on airplanes to throw myself halfway across the world. To see how others live. There isn't a better way to feed a human connection than over a plate of food. Δ

