



Enjoy a crunchy apple walnut salad dressed with a subtle hint of basil truffle oil at Svasara Jungle Lodge, Tadoba.

**A**bstaining from all foods derived from animals—be they dairy products, eggs, seafood, meat or even honey—might seem like a culinary nightmare to most people. But inventive chefs and spectacular dishes have transformed vegan cuisine into a gourmet experience that even meat-lovers and non-vegans can relish! From crunchy garden salads to soups and stews and even a veg mutton salan, vegan food has come of age to woo herbivores and health-conscious omnivores alike.

When it comes to crafting a gourmet vegan main that will have diners swooning, chefs know how to get it right. It begins with having a ‘star’ ingredient that is the focus of the dish, followed by a wonderful play of flavours—the fancier the dish, the more complex the flavours. Not to forget texture—a crucial factor that makes for the best kind of surprises. Consider the Bhavnagiri mirch and veg mutton salan—a Hyderabadi-style peanut and coconut curry with grilled chillies and jackfruit. The meaty texture of the unripe jackfruit makes it the central ingredient with the coconut and peanut curry base adding unforgettable texture and flavour. Pair it with a simple sprouted moong pilaf and you’re sure to be reaching out for second helpings.

# Vegans GO Glam

ONCE MISCONSTRUED AS BLAND AND FLAVOURLESS, VEGAN CUISINE IS BEING INCREASINGLY SAMPLED AND SAVOURED.

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could also switch it up by choosing the pineapple and eggplant curry with rice. A sweetly-spiced concoction of pineapple and soft eggplant in a luscious coconut gravy, it is addictively good. Ramen bowls tend to have cult followings and you're sure to join the fold once you have a bite of the exotic mushroom ramen. With four main components—noodles, broth, seasonings and toppings, the ramen bowl with the smoky aroma of mushroom in a divinely flavoured broth makes for the best kind of dining-out choice after endless days of office cafeteria lunches.

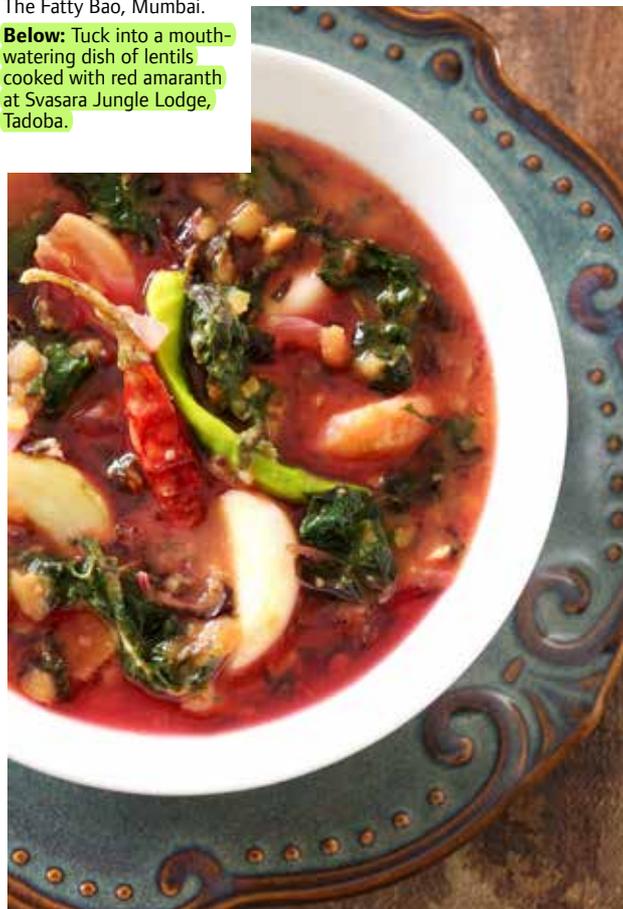
Salads don't get ignored in vegan cuisine either. Fresh, crisp and vibrant, they are chock-full of seasonal produce and could replace your mains in a jiffy. With all the flavours of summer, the green mango papaya salad with shredded unripe mango and papaya tossed in a tangy dressing is a memorable choice for sure. Don't assume for a moment that vegan salad choices are limited without the addition of a creamy dressing. If you

**Above:** An intricately carved lotus stem dish at The Fatty Bao, Mumbai.

**Below:** Tuck into a mouth-watering dish of lentils cooked with red amaranth at Svasara Jungle Lodge, Tadoba.

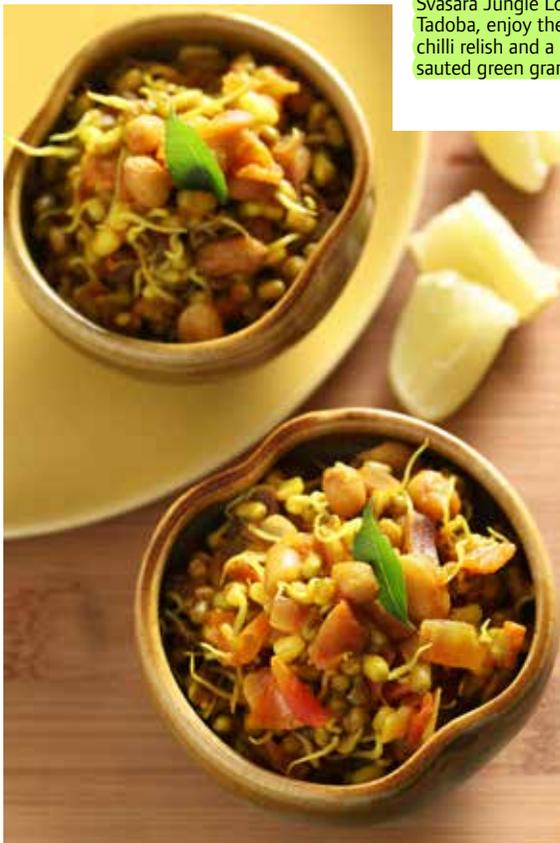
From tender radish pods and local greens to traditional flavouring ingredients, gourmet vegan dishes typically use elements that have classically only been used in home cooking to give diners a transcendental dining experience. Mogre ki subzi combines the distinctive crunch, flavour and aroma of radish pods, a powerhouse of nutrition, with the starchy goodness of potatoes. Served with a fluffy bowl of quinoa with seasonal vegetables, it could easily become a mainstay in your daily menu at home. Unusual vegetable sides can add that dash of oomph to a vegan dish too. A hearty bowl of lentils with red amaranth served alongside rice 'pilaf' with Bengal gram can make for the best kind of comfort food. Add a spoon of amba haldi pickle or green chilli relish and you might even be tempted to take the full vegan plunge.

Hankering to go international with your cuisine choices? The pan-seared tofu with soba noodles makes being a vegan laughably easy. Crisp, flavourful tofu and loads of crunchy vegetables in a tangy spicy sauce with nutty soba noodles make this a dish that is guaranteed to be a perennial favourite. If Thai dishes are your thing, there's always the veganised Thai red curry with lotus root served with fragrant jasmine rice. You





**Clockwise from left:** Enjoy a grilled dhokla chaat at The Bombay Canteen, Mumbai; At Svasara Jungle Lodge, Tadoba, enjoy the green chilli relish and a hearty sauted green gram salad.



have always picked dressings with mayonnaise and the salads with cheese, your taste buds are in for a treat! Dig into the apple, watermelon and walnut salad—coated with basil truffle oil vinaigrette. The exquisite flavour of truffle oil gives this otherwise humble salad an unmissable stamp of indulgence. Making these soup-and-salad choices can prove that meatless options can also be soul food. A bowl of warm pumpkin soup served with a sprinkling of toasted almonds and fresh herbs and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil is sure to woo even the most hard-to-please meat-eater. Soon, you might be the one arguing that you don't need milk and cream to make an appetising bowl of soup.

When it comes to appetisers too, there is a mesmerising variety of vegan options to choose from. Bite into crispy lotus root and chances are you'll forget crispy potatoes ever existed! Indeed, guiltlessly indulge in mouthfuls of this crunchy and flavoursome dish with just the right dose of spice and a dash of sesame seeds. If you prefer your appetisers healthy, there is always the minced vegetable and water chestnut dim sum or a bowl of steamed edamame. Chef Prashanth



**Top:** Indulge your sweet tooth with alu ke musafir at Radisson Blu, Agra.

**Right:** The subtly-spiced rice pilaf with Bengal gram is a hit with guests at Svasara Jungle Lodge, Tadoba.

Puttaswamy, Executive Chef, The Fatty Bao says, "Asian cuisine lends itself very well to vegan dishes. Whether it's stir-fries with a blend of sweet, sour and spicy notes or vegan sushi interpretations with asparagus and mushrooms, gourmet vegan dishes in Asian cuisine are delicious while not compromising on nutrition." If you're pining for a dose of Indian spices in your vegan appetiser, take heart! The grilled dhokla chaat (made without any yoghurt) topped with a lip-smacking date chutney, hara tamatar chutney and nylon sev is a sure-fire hit. It's a perfect blend—street food with a conscience if you will!

For those with a sweet tooth that

they love indulging, the idea of vegan desserts might seem incongruous. Try the strawberry, apricot, almond crumble—blended silken tofu and fresh strawberries come together in this extraordinary dessert with an oats covering that gives it a delightful crunch. Whether it is sticky toffee pudding that you crave, gooey vegan brownies or coconut ice cream, chefs have made partaking in your favourite desserts while simultaneously sticking to your diet an easy task. It's not just western desserts that have vegan options but Indian ones too. Try the most famous kheer from Kerala, ada pradhaman. Made of brown rice, jaggery and coconut milk, flavoured with dry ginger, cardamom and garnished with grated coconut, its caramel and coconut-infused flavours make it truly irresistible. Alternatively, enjoy an interesting twist on the classic pineapple halwa—diced pineapple cooked in almond milk spiced with cinnamon and sweetened with agave.

Thanks to chefs who are focused on ensuring that vegetables and meat-alternatives are just as gratifying as their meaty counterparts, even the most sceptical omnivore won't mind going without meat to indulge in these vegan delights. Stews, salads, soups and mains that look as good as they taste almost make you forget the fact that they're not just great for you but for the

