



VEGAN GUIDE TO AIR TRAVEL

So you've booked your tickets for your upcoming vacation, started reading the travel guide every night before tucking yourself into bed and happily consulted Happycow on vegan restaurants at your destination. But the niggling question at the back of your head is still there: but what about the plane? Lots of new vegans (and seasoned vegans, too) blanch at the thought of the typical "chicken or pasta?" question and how on earth a vegan is supposed to answer it, or go about finding decent grub in an airport or on a plane. Relax, we're going to talk about all the basics in this guide, so you're never left starving and angry on a plane again. Because nothing puts a trip off to a bad start like finding out the plane forgot your special meal request, and you find yourself reduced to eating a dinner consisting of Pringles and dark chocolate squares (I should know it happened to me).

In this guide, we'll cover:

- How to order a vegan meal for the plane
- What to expect (and which bits of the meal you should avoid, because they're almost definitely not vegan)
- Airline breakdown: the top 10 most used airlines & which ones serve vegan meals
- Finding vegan food in airports
- Vegan airport guide to the top 10 airports worldwide
- Bonus: What you should bring with you on the plane (+recipe ideas!)

So sit back, relax, buckle up and enjoy.

HOW TO ORDER A VEGAN MEAL

First of all, you need to find out whether a meal is being served on your flight. If you're getting a flight within the continental United States (and newsflash: some airlines treat flights to Costa Rica and Hawaii, however long they are, as flights

where they don't have to serve meals), you probably won't be served a meal. Likewise, on a budget flight in Europe such as Ryanair or Easyjet, you most likely won't be served a meal.

But if you're flying longer haul, you most likely will be served food. Some airlines, like China East or Aegean, serve meals even on flights as short as an hour. Check your reservation or ticket to see if it says food will be served. If it is, you'll need to order a vegan meal at least 72 hours in advance, although I'd recommend booking it earlier, just after you purchase your ticket.

You can usually do this on the airline's website (after you've signed in or input your flight details); if not, just give them a call. If you're booking through a travel agent, make sure they know your dietary preferences and triple check that they ordered a vegan meal for you.

Airlines have codes for special dietary meals, ranging from Kosher to Halal to low-sodium meals. The code for vegan meals, in airline terms, is VGML. Remember those four letters! The airline representative might not know what vegan means, but they will know the code. Confusingly, different airlines seem to refer to VGML in different ways, so some airlines call it vegan and others "vegetarian non-dairy" (to differentiate it from Asian Vegetarian meals, which do contain dairy), while some call it "strict vegetarian".

Other meals (not offered by all airlines):

VJML: Vegetarian Jain Meal

VLML: Vegetarian Lacto-Ovo Meal (so when you're ordered a vegan meal make sure it says VGML, not VLML)

VOML: Vegetarian Oriental Meal

RVML: Vegetarian Raw Meal

Depending on the airline, the Vegetarian Jain meal and/or Vegetarian Oriental Meal may be vegan so it's worth asking when you call. There's a good list of available vegetarian and vegan airline options (and codes) [here](#).

Just bear in mind that with, for example, with the Vegetarian Oriental Meal, in spite of what you may read, some airlines seem to deem it vegan, while I've seen others define it as containing dairy.

You should always follow up after placing your order for a vegan meal, just to confirm, when you check in at the airport and also, if possible, after boarding the plane.



Remember:

1. *Call the airline (or make a request via their website) for a vegan meal, or a meal with the code VGML.*
2. *When checking in at the airport, confirm that you have reserved the vegan meal. Sometimes, it will say on your ticket "special meal request".*
3. *If possible, check with a flight attendant just after boarding.*

WHAT TO EXPECT

Ok, so you've ordered your vegan meal, you've confirmed it when checking in, and generally followed all the right steps like an A+ student (well done, you!). But what should you expect when your meal is actually delivered to your seat?

Usually, special meals are delivered before anyone else's on the plane (yay!), which means that you get to feel special, and also that everyone will be jealous and suddenly interested in your meal. Another big bonus is that your meal is usually hot, because it's just come out of the convection oven, and didn't have to spend any time going up and down the aisles before coming to you.

Most airlines rely on air service catering companies to prepare the meals. These companies make tens of thousands of meals at a facility near the airport, cook the food to partly done and then deliver it to the aircraft. Once it's on board, they cook the food to completion in a convection oven, and then add the condiments as they bring round the trays of food during the flight. Read that again: they add any condiments like sauces, salad dressings, margarine/butter etc. on the plane! What does that mean for you, and vegans everywhere? It means that most of the time (unless you get lucky and are flying with a very clued-up airline), you will be given non-vegan condiments! On the odd occasions when I've actually received vegan margarine, coffee creamer and salad dressings I've been thrilled - that's how rare it is. Nine times out of ten, however, I've been given dairy-containing margarine, or salad dressing with milk in it. I'd recommend against eating the condiments (and be wary of the bread, too, which is also added on board the plane). The bits of food that come in little containers (labeled VGML), like the main and the side salad are the parts of the meal that were prepared by the catering company, and these should be vegan.

What kind of food should you expect? Most likely, something bland and tasteless - but that's not necessarily the airline's fault, or the catering company's. Your [tastebuds' perception](#) and your sense of smell is altered by the altitude of the plane, so you actually [can't taste as well](#) when you're in the air - meaning that the food won't have much flavor to you! Although the fact that it's mass produced food stored for hours and then reheated on the plane probably doesn't help, either.

Typical meals you might expect on the plane? Pasta dishes with vegetables, curry with rice, or vegetables with couscous are some typical ones. Be forewarned that a lot of airlines don't tend to do vegan snacks or breakfasts well. If they're passing out snacks, they likely won't have a vegan option. Similarly, there aren't always vegan breakfast options. When there are, it will likely be something simple like a fruit salad. Also, for dessert with your dinner? Expect a fruit plate. Most airlines have some ways to go in terms of vegan fare on offer. With several airlines [hiring Michelin-starred chefs and building special pressurized kitchens](#) to simulate a flight environment (and therefore develop tastier food in it), it looks like at least airlines are trying to make better food - let's hope that they'll invest in higher quality vegan options, too!



Remember:

Avoid the condiments unless you can tell for sure they're vegan. More than likely, any margarine, salad dressing or coffee creamer they've given you isn't vegan.

AIRLINES: THE TOP 10 AIRLINES & THEIR VEGAN OFFERINGS

These are the top 10 most used airlines (by passengers carried) worldwide, plus their vegan offerings:

American

VGML available.

Note: American *does not offer* special meal options on flights within the US (even flights where they serve meals!)

Delta

VGML available.

Note: Asian Vegetarian meal includes dairy.

General consensus seems to be that Delta does a decent job on vegan meals, better than other airlines.

United

VGML available.

Asian Vegetarian, by United's definition, is vegan: "Asian vegetarian meals contain foods from plant sources and exclude foods derived from animals (e.g., meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, honey, eggs and dairy products and their byproducts)."

They seem pretty clued up on vegan food, [pointing out](#) whey and glycerin aren't vegan.

Southwest

No food available on Southwest flights.

Ryanair

Ryanair doesn't provide meals or special meals on flights, only food for purchase (seemingly none of which is vegan apart from Pringles - which are overpriced anyway, so bring your own!).

China Eastern

Their website doesn't have any information on vegan meal options. When I flew with them 4 years ago, they did have vegan options, but of very variable quality. I had a decent noodle and vegetable dish on one journey, while on another I was given melon, melon and more melon. No joke! It was like something out of a sitcom. They'd taken a normal airline meal tray, which is subdivided into separate sections for entree, salad and dessert and filled the entree section with sliced melon, the salad section with sliced melon and the dessert section with sliced melon.

Lufthansa

VGML available. On the Lufthansa site, it's called "[Vegetarian \(Western\)](#): No meat or fish products, without alcohol, no dairy products and eggs"

China Southern

VGML available.

Plus they have [Vegetarian Oriental Meal \(VOML\)](#), which is vegetarian food prepared Chinese style, without meat, seafood, egg or dairy.

Also offer [Vegetarian Jain Meal \(VJML\)](#), which is vegetarian food prepared Indian style, omitting meat, seafood, egg and dairy and also onion, garlic, ginger, mushroom and root vegetables.

Easyjet

Easyjet doesn't provide meals or special meals on flights, only food for purchase. They do sell [The Food Doctor Couscous & Lentil Wholesome Pot](#), which is suitable for vegans.

Air China

VGML available.

Also has a raw vegetarian meal available, and an [Indian vegetarian meal \(IVML\)](#), which does not have meat, eggs, dairy, sea food or root vegetables.

FINDING VEGAN FOOD IN THE AIRPORT

If you're flying on an airline that doesn't provide food, like Southwest or Ryanair, or if you have a long layover (or even if you just want to bring spare food on your flight, just in case - which I'd recommend!) you might want to grab some vegan food in the airport. Depending on the airport, finding vegan food can be easy or an arduous task. Try looking for places that you know offer a vegan option (for example, if flying out of the UK, Pret a Manger offers a vegan sandwich; in the US, try Subway). Or, look for somewhere where you can 'build your own' option, like a salad bar, a burrito place (check they haven't used lard in the beans, and the tortillas are vegan), or a bagel place (ask for hummus on your bagel). Or look up the airport ahead of time and see if any sites list vegan options in that airport. I've created a guide to the top 10 airports in the world.

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta Airport (ATL)

The busiest airport in the world, Hartsfield-Jackson also has the dubious recognition of having the [most unhealthy food of any airport in the US](#), but don't fear because there are vegan options in every concourse.

Try:

The Atrium in the domestic terminal appears to have extremely limited or no vegan options.

Concourse A: Try Asian Chao or Qdoba for a vegetarian burrito on a whole wheat wrap with brown rice or cilantro lime rice, fajita vegetables and black beans plus guacamole (check their allergen list here

https://www.qdoba.com/downloads/Qdoba_Allergen_Info.pdf)

Concourse B: Fresh to Order (vegan menu here

<http://www.freshtoorder.com/downloads/Vegan-Menu.pdf>)

Concourse C: Fresh Healthy Cafe for a kale wrap or a salad

Concourse D: Try Chipotle or Garbanzo's Mediterranean Grill which offers hummus and falafel

Concourse E: Qdoba (see Concourse A) or One Flew South for garden mint sushi or edamame

Concourse F: El Taco for the [vegan mercado taco](#)

Beijing Capital International Airport (PEK)

Very limited to no vegan options. If you have a longer 6+ hour layover, try vegetarian restaurant [Buddha's Bite in the 798 Art District](#). A cab will take 20 minutes from the airport and cost approximately 25-30 Yuan (allow at least half an hour to flag a cab on the way back to the airport).

Beijing airport now offers 72-hour visa free layovers (you can exit the airport without a visa as long as you show a return ticket), check if you are eligible

London Heathrow Airport (LHR)

While the Heathrow website might have a "special diet" section outlining where there are vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options, it doesn't seem to be all that accurate! Instead, try:

Terminal 1: Pret a Manger, who have a sandwich marked vegan (changes seasonally) or ask for an allergen menu to see which soups are vegan, or Giraffe for the Bahmi Goreng noodles or the hummus and baba ghanoush sharing platter.

Terminal 2: Yo! Sushi for the crunchy tofu salad, the vegetable yakisoba or ask for the nutritional booklet to see other vegan options, M&S for packaged vegan salads, or Leon for the Leon Gobi lunchbox or the hummus & flatbread

Terminal 3: Yo! Sushi (see Terminal 2), Pret a Manger (see Terminal 1), M&S (see Terminal 2) or Strada for a pizza, hold the cheese or Leon (see Terminal 2)

Terminal 4: Pret a Manger (see Terminal 1) or go to Carluccio's (Italian restaurant) and request the vegan menu

Terminal 5: Giraffe (see Terminal 1), Carluccio's (see Terminal 4), M&S (see Terminal 2), Starbucks for a falafel and hummus salad marked vegan, or go to Wagamama's, a Japanese restaurant/noodle bar and ask for the vegan/special diets menu

Dubai International Airport (DXB)

Le Pain Quotidien for an eggplant and spicy hummus sandwich

Cosi for a hummus and salad sandwich

Taste of India Vegetarian restaurant (presumably they can make you vegan dishes as long as you ask them to cook them in vegetable oil and not ghee)

Carluccio's (see London Heathrow - double check pizza bases are vegan)

Los Angeles International Airport (LAX)

In spite of having an all-vegan restaurant on its premises, LAX has fairly limited vegan options on a terminal by terminal basis, because most terminals only have a small handful of restaurants, with some terminal having no vegan options.

Tom Bradley International Terminal: Try 800 Degrees pizza, which offers a vegan pizza with Daiya.

Terminal 1: Very limited options. Try CPK ASAP/California Pizza Kitchen. CPK ASAP has a limited menu so check if they have the California Veggie pizza, no cheese, or the Asparagus & Spinach Spaghettini, hold the cheese. Or ask the vegetarian & vegan menu.

Terminal 2: Try Wolfgang Puck Express - ask about vegan options (according to their website, [all locations can accommodate vegans and special diets](#)) Or try Nate n Al's delicatessen who do a limited range of salad, several of which look like they might be vegan/could be made vegan (enquire about salad dressings and make sure they don't use cheese on the salad).

Terminal 3: No known vegan options, only has 4 restaurants.

Terminal 4: Terminal 4 is the place to be! Terminal 4 holds Real Food Daily, an all-vegan restaurant. Or try Homeboy Cafe for hibiscus flower tacos, stuffed with serano peppers and cilantro.

Terminal 5: Try an Asian or kale salad, or soba noodles with kimchi-marinated vegetables at Lemonade restaurant

Terminal 6: No known vegan options, only has 5 restaurants

Terminal 7: Wolfgang Puck Express (see Terminal 2)

Terminal 8: Limited options. Try Engine Co. No. 28 has salads, some of which look like they might be vegan/could be made vegan (ask) or a vegetarian chilli which could potentially be vegan.

Note: Encounter Restaurant and Malibu AI's are listed on PCRM's list of healthy vegan options in LAX but all have now closed. :(

Tokyo Haneda Airport (HND)

If you have a longer layover, or time on the way to the airport, try [Aburaage](#) vegan restaurant (2 stops from airport, 5 minutes via train)

Note: Haneda is the 6th busiest airport in terms of passenger throughput but mainly serves domestic flights. Most international flights go via Narita. Check out Jai Thai, 5th floor Terminal 1, ask for Pad Thai with tofu instead of meat and make sure to ask for no fish sauce. Or see vegetarian restaurants in the Narita area [here](#)

Chicago O'Hare (ORD)

Terminal 1: Try a fresh salad at Zoot Cafe or Fresh Attractions.

Terminal 2: Cibo Express has a range of vegan options, like the red pepper power wrap. Or grab a salad at Fresh Attractions (see Terminal 1), a chili at Goose Island Beer Company, a lentil and chickpea salad at Argo Tea, or the veggie roll, edamame or seaweed salad at Wicker Park Sushi.

Terminal 3: Try Cibo Express (see Terminal 2), Fresh Attractions (see Terminal 1), Goose Island Beer Company (see Terminal 2) or Argo Tea (see Terminal 2).

Terminal 5: The Goddess and the Grocer's other Chicago locations offer the option of subbing vegan seitan for meat in any sandwich; check if the airport location also offers this. Or, try Wolfgang Puck Cafe or Wolfgang Puck Express - ask about vegan options (according to their website, [all locations can accommodate vegans and special diets](#)). Or check out Tocco, which have salads and pizzas that look like they could be made vegan (ask if the pizza base is vegan, and enquire about the salad dressings, ask to hold the cheese).

Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW)

DFW have very helpfully created a list of all the vegan options in their various restaurants [here](#). See selected options by terminal below.

Terminal A: Try Qdoba for a taco salad/vegetarian burrito on a whole wheat wrap with brown rice or cilantro lime rice, fajita vegetables and black beans plus guacamole (check their allergen list [here](#)), or Subway for a Veggie Delight

Terminal B: Not a lot of options, but try Subway for a Veggie Delight or Au Bon Pain Deli for a Tuscan white bean soup or vegetarian lentil soup (see full list of their vegan options on the DFW vegan list [here](#))

Terminal C: Try Urban Taco's quesadilla with black beans and roasted red pepper

Terminal D: Cantina Laredo's enchiladas de avocado

Terminal E: Not many options here. Try the hearty vegetable soup at Einstein Bros.

Charles de Gaulle Paris (CDG)

Exki: This is the only restaurant in Terminal 2 but [word online](#) has it that they have a few vegan options. Try Exki's quinoa with beans or lentil salads.

Hong Kong International Airport (HKG)

Options seem limited, with Cafe Deco (East Hall, Level 7) the most promising. [Cafe Deco](#) marks all vegetarian items on their menu and some of them seem potentially vegan (e.g. deep fried bean curd with wild mushroom and noodles) or could be made vegan by leaving off cheese (e.g. salad, pizza)

If you have time, [Harvester vegetarian restaurant](#) is reportedly an easy walk from the Airport Express station

For other airports in the US check out the 2013 PCRM on the state of healthy food in airports here: <http://www.pcrm.org/health/reports/2013-airport-food-review>

BONUS: WHAT TO BRING WITH YOU!

Last but not least, no matter what you should always try and bring some snacks (or maybe even a full meal, depending on how long your flight is and whether the airport you're flying from will allow you food through security) on the plane. You don't want to get stuck on a flight where they forgot your meal, or caught out when the vegan options you'd scoped at the airport aren't there, or they've run out of those options at the restaurants, or worst of all get stuck on a train waiting on tarmac for hours because the flight's been delayed (everyone will get cranky in this scenario, so be generous and share your snacks with your seatmates!). Plus, if you bring a few bars or nuts, they won't go off - so you can always snack on them throughout your vacation (bonus snack)!

What should you bring with you? Preferably some non-perishable and filling foods, like meal replacement or energy bars (think Larabars, Lunabars, Clif bars, Nakd bars etc), dried fruits, nuts and seeds. Plus some foods that are easy to transport that won't go off quickly, like a sandwich or wrap, pasta or sushi. You can bring these with you on the plane for dinner! If you want to go the extra mile, bring some vegan chocolate (just for a treat on the plane!) and powdered soymilk or creamer (so you can have coffee on the plane - also a bonus if you're not sure if you'll find soymilk at your destination, because the powdered version means you can still have coffee and even make soymilk for your cereal).

Not sure if you can bring a sandwich on board? Try bringing something you can make easily in hot water (most planes have hot water for tea, so just ask nicely if you can have some for your food), like oatmeal, noodles or instant soup (may not be the healthiest option, but if you're desperate for something on a plane, it's better than nothing!).

Need some ideas? Try making...

- Hummus + spinach + tomato wrap
- Peanut butter & jelly
- Tofu + roasted vegetable sandwich
- Pasta with roasted vegetable tomato sauce
- Sushi with avocado, cucumber and carrot
- Homemade energy bars (try Oh She Glow's recipe [here](#))
- Fruit that's easy to transport (apples, oranges, grapes etc. Don't try bringing peaches with you on a plane, they'll just get crushed!)
- Potato chips/crisps or crackers
- Trail mix of peanuts, cashews, sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds (plus dark chocolate chips if you want)
- Dried apples or dried cranberries



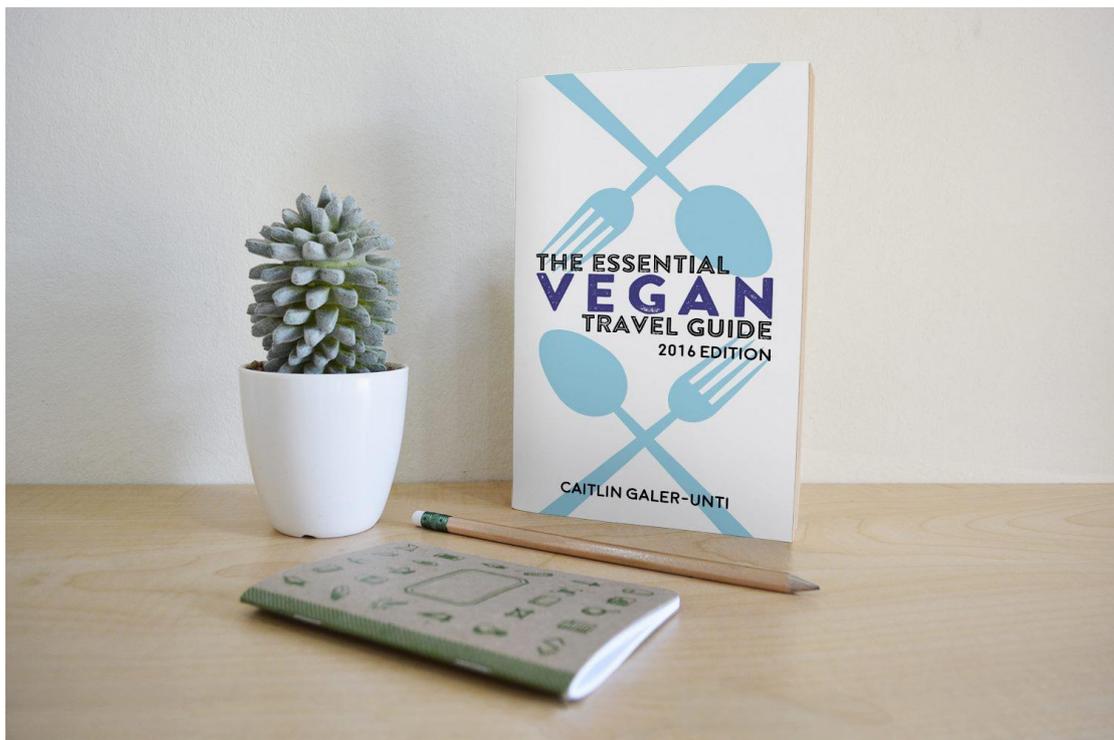
Tip:

Bear in mind that due to liquid limits you will be restricted to bringing only small amounts (less than 100mls/3.4 oz, no more than a small/1 quart ziplock bag's worth) of liquids. So if you're bringing any liquid food items (like soymilk, salad dressing etc.) you will be restricted to this amount. Also, items with a paste-like consistency (peanut butter, hummus etc.) may also be restricted.

Remember, the more prepared you are, the less likely you will have stress on your travels. Just don't pack so much food your bag goes over the weight limit. ;)

Happy (vegan) travels!!

WANT MORE TRAVEL TIPS? CHECK OUT MY BOOK!



If you want more travel tips on how to find vegan food any time of the year, anywhere in the world, check out my book *The Essential Vegan Travel Guide!* Unlike other vegan guidebooks to specific cities or countries, *The Essential Vegan Travel Guide* is a DIY guide showing you the best resources to plan your own trip and find vegan restaurants, choose where to stay, make new friends, research local accidentally vegan cuisine and pack your vegan suitcase. It also

has emergency recipes, like couscous in a coffeemaker, in case you get stuck somewhere without any other options.

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WHO WROTE THIS?

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