

The Veg Culinary Voyage

A food lover's paradise, Singapore, in the last decade, has seen a rise in restaurants serving vegetarian fare. With vegetarianism increasingly becoming a lifestyle choice, stand-alone restaurants serving a range of such cuisines are mushrooming all over the Lion City. LIVING goes vegetarian in gastronomic Singapore.

An oft asked recommendation by people visiting Singapore is for vegetarian cuisine. Over a decade ago, eateries serving vegetarian fare in this foodies' paradise could be counted on one hand, with a finger or two to spare. However, with vegetarianism increasingly becoming a lifestyle choice, there is an escalated demand for stand-alone restaurants serving a range of such cuisines. Beyond the obviously ubiquitous Indian, there's also Italian, Mediterranean, Western, Peranakan, Chinese, Japanese, and new age organic, holistic, healthy alternatives.

The restaurants we've featured here have won numerous culinary accolades, but it is word-of-mouth publicity that has resulted in their continued popularity and regular repeat clientele. LIVING presents an alphabetical listing of pure vegetarian restaurants in the Lion City.

Original Sin

Original Sin continues to reign as the first Mediterranean vegetarian restaurant in Singapore, located in the expat-friendly Holland Village. Here, you can dine al fresco or in the cosy, candlelit interior with its earthy tones in mustard and coffee tints.

Proprietor and Culinary Director Marisa Bertocchi is one of the prime reasons for guests' repeated visits. The lady obviously loves her vegetables and plays on multiple flavours and textures in each dish. Must-haves here are the *Magic Mushroom* comprising oven-baked portobello stuffed with ricotta cheese, spinach, pesto and pine nuts, topped



■ The *Bosco Misto* at Original Sin comprising spinach, feta and tofu made into patties



with tomato basil sauce and mozzarella.

Other dishes high on the list are the *Bosco Misto* comprising spinach, feta and tofu made into patties coated with crushed almonds and sesame seeds. The low-calorie *Principessa Salad* is a combination of vegetables drizzled with balsamic vinaigrette.

Middle Eastern specialities are represented via the mezza plate with servings of *koreish*, *hummus*, baba ganoush, *tzatziki* and *salafel* accompanied with pita bread. If you want something more substantial, order the *Moussaka* (baked layers of char-grilled eggplant, potato, tomato and lentils, infused with Middle Eastern spices).

Whilst here, you should also try the Indianised masala pizza with eggplant and yogurt. And make sure to save space for desserts – the marble cheesecake and tiramisu get a thumbs up!

■ At Original Sin, located in the expat-friendly Holland Village, you can dine al fresco or in the cosy, candlelit interior with its earthy tones in mustard and coffee tints

■ The Original Sin *Haloumi*

Address: Block 43, Jalan Merah Saga.
Tel: +65-6475 5605

Food #03

Located adjacent to an art gallery-cum-museum in Little India, this vegetarian restaurant (named after one of the owner's art projects) is a blend of bohemia and style. In the narrow, elongated space, raw bricked walls are broken by windows with curlicue metal grilles and the tables are accompanied by sleek steel chairs. It is a venue you would associate with the young arty crowd.

The creative Western-style menu is changed every few weeks. The

preference for meals start with the inviting red beetroot soup or in total contrast the sunshine yellow roasted pumpkin and yellow peppers soup, accompanied by fresh, home-made focaccia or wholemeal bread.

Pizza lovers will relish the *Mix Grilled Pizza* with its healthy wholemeal crust heaped with spinach, peppers, feta and egg. Likewise, the *Dugu Burger*, a zesty tempeh patty topped with organic oyster mushrooms and grilled vegetables, is interesting.

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■ Clients walk into Cafe Salvation for the *Mexican Enchiladas Remo* with tortillas stuffed with stir fried vegetables and topped with tomato sauce and white cheese sauce

Shojin Ryori, the Zen temple cuisine served at Enso Kitchen, is inspired by the Zen Buddhist philosophy and uses fresh seasonal ingredients – vegetables or food from plant sources – to capture the natural flow of energy.

bubbling banana pancake with spiced orange jus. For those with a sweet-tooth, the choice between the *Chocolate Brownie* and *Ginkgo Nuts with Fresh Strawberries* is equally rewarding.

Address: 109 Rowell Road.
Tel: +65-6396 7980

Cafe Salvation

The candy striped walls and diaphanous salmon-pink curtains certainly jazz up this place. Breaking the perception that Little India eateries serve only Indian cuisine, the vibrant Cafe Salvation (part of The Raj Group of Restaurants) aims at satiating the vegetarian lover's every craving from pastas, pizzas, burgers and sandwiches to Mexican wraps and eggless Western desserts. Accompanying the meal are refreshing drinks, mocktails and a variety of Italian coffees.

Clients walk into Cafe Salvation as much for the *Mexican Enchiladas Remo* (with tortillas stuffed with stir-fried vegetables and topped with tomato sauce and white cheese sauce), as for the *Kidney Bean Quesadilla*, *Paneer Pizza* and *Italian Penne Arrabiata*. The restaurant also serves a grilled desi sandwich with potatoes, tomatoes and green coriander chutney, popularly found at every street corner in Mumbai, and the spicy



scrambled paneer with toast.

Eggless desserts and cakes are as loved as the pancakes with maple syrup and the visually attractive strawberry parfait.

Jain cuisine without onion and garlic is also available for the asking.

Address: 75 Syed Alwi Road.
Tel: +65-6298 1412

Enso Kitchen

Located in a conservation, pre-war shophouse in Chinatown, the 20-seater Japanese eatery scores high on exclusivity. It operates quite differently from the other restaurants. For one, it has no fixed menu, and, secondly, Enso Kitchen opens only once a week – for lunch on Sundays. Obviously, the tables here are booked well in advance.

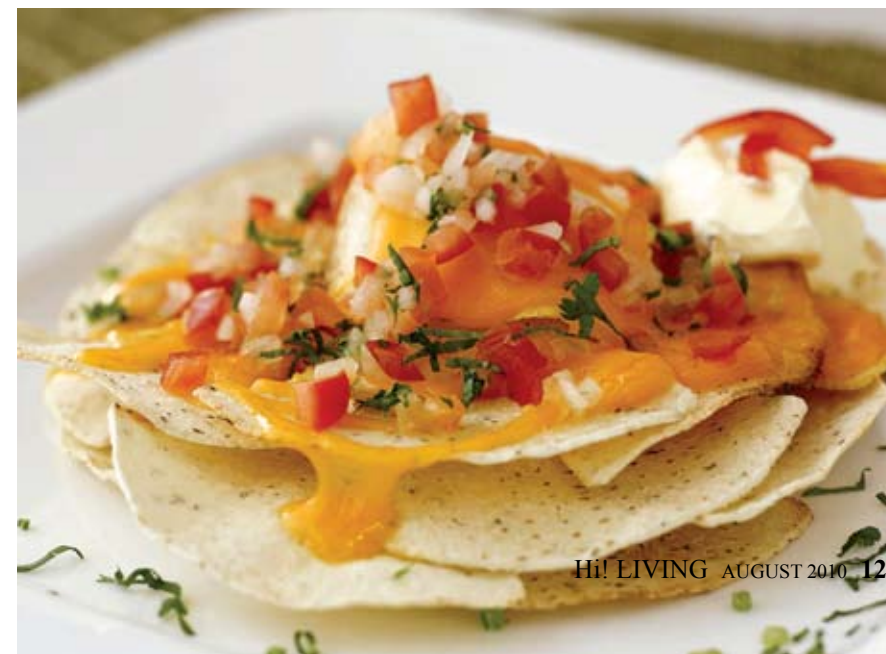
Shojin Ryori (the Zen temple cuisine

served here) is inspired by the Zen Buddhist philosophy and uses fresh seasonal ingredients – vegetables or food from plant sources – to capture the natural flow of energy. This means the ingredients of a Shojin meal change according to the seasons, with Enso Kitchen changing theirs every month.

The Sunday lunch begins with a starter followed by the main course of six items presented on a tray setting, dessert and a free-flow of Japanese tea. Presentation, colours and flavours make for a multisensory experience.

An average Shojin Ryori meal would have what is considered to be the king of this cuisine – *goma dofu* (sesame tofu). Essentially, there are only two main ingredients: *kuzu* (wild Japanese arrowroot) and sesame that bind together to form a tofu-like texture. In the Shojin method of cooking, ingredients are minimised to enable the diner to taste the natural flavours. The cooking requires much detailed attention and effort.

So if on a Sunday the mood strikes for a zen-like experience, Enso Kitchen



■ The candy striped walls and diaphanous salmon-pink curtains certainly jazz up Cafe Salvation

■ The *Nifty Nachos* at Cafe Salvation – a restaurant that aims at satiating the vegetarian lover's every craving



is your destination!

Address: 14 Ann Siang Road.
Tel: +65-8133 1182

LingZhi Vegetarian Restaurant

LingZhi from the TungLok Group is the undisputed pioneer of haute vegetarian Chinese cuisine. Having been in the business for over 10 years, the spacious flagship outlet remains on Orchard Road with another branch opened on Novena Square.

The dishes at LingZhi are devoid of the mock meats/seafood and gluten products which are increasingly passing for ‘vegetarianism’. Mushroom lovers will find a gamut of choice here, as the chef expertly combines an assortment of these (some with woody overtones), with fruit and vegetables.

Top of the list has to be the *Vegetarian Mushroom Hot Pot*, combining over 10 varieties of mushrooms (shiitake, abalone, golden, black fungus, velvet, lingzhi, straw, button, white fungus and oyster) in either a clear, *laksa* or tom yam broth (available only at the Velocity @ Novena Square outlet).

The signature dishes include the *Sautéed Monkey Head Mushrooms with Dried Chilli* and the *Crispy Wild Mushrooms with Aeroponic Vegetables Salad* and *Sautéed Honshimeji Mushrooms*. Other delectable creations are the asparagus and capsicum served in a potato basket and the sautéed broccoflower and fungus with the chef’s special blended sauce.

Address: 541 Orchard Road #05-01 Liat Tower. Tel: +65-6734 3788 and 238 Thomson Road, #03-09/10 Velocity @ Novena Square.
Tel: +65-6538 2992

■ Enso Kitchen, the 20-seater Japanese eatery scores high on exclusivity. It opens only once a week – for lunch on Sundays

■ The main course at Enso Kitchen comprises six items presented on a tray setting

Whole Earth, on Peck Seah Street in the Central Business District, is the only vegetarian Peranakan and Thai food restaurant in Singapore was opened by its pioneering ‘green team’ in 2003 as the result of a calling to serve healthy and enjoyable plant-based food.

Deli-Vege

This new age fusion vegetarian restaurant, serving creative Japanese, Chinese and Western dishes, is suitable for diners looking for interesting cuisine in a cosy, light-hearted ambiance.

At Deli-Vege, the owner stresses that “healthy and tasty vege food is our first priority.” For those yearning for chicken or fish, the restaurant has vegetarian mock options made from soya protein and flavourings. The three most popular dishes are *Claypot Rice* (which comes with shreds of ‘chicken’ with mushrooms and carrots), *Fish’ and Chips* (where the mock fish is wrapped in seaweed and coated with tempura powder and fried) and the famed Japanese *Yakitori* (made from several bite-sized pieces of ‘chicken’ on a bamboo skewer, barbecued over charcoal and served with Deli-Vege’s special sauces).

The *Laksa*, reputedly one of the best vegetarian versions in Singapore, brings in many regular clients. This coconut-based spicy noodle soup has its origins in the Peranakan culture, a merger of Chinese and Malay elements, found primarily in Singapore and Malaysia. **Address:** 200 South Bridge Road. Tel: +65-6223 9868



Bombay Cafe

The interiors are funky. Shades of fuchsia dramatised with black used to their tasteful advantage. Bollywood dominates the décor with a collage, posters and plasma screen showing clippings from Hindi movies jazzing up the walls.

The Bombay Cafe experience is nostalgic, especially for those yearning for Mumbai street food and snacks. The range is extensive – from authentic *pav bhaji*, *bhel puri*, *vada pav* and *ragda patties* to an impressive list of *chaats* including *gol gappas* and varied *pakor*s. The tandoori-

■ Sautéed honshimeji mushrooms, asparagus and capsicum served in potato basket at LingZhi

■ The ‘Fish’ and Chips at Deli-Vege where the mock fish is wrapped in seaweed and coated with tempura powder and fried



style *bharwan aloo* and crispy paneer and pepper-filled *kurkure* mushrooms are delicious. And all of these can be downed with either the Punjabi-style cooling *shikanji* or a thick mango lassi.

Main meals with a strong Indian twist include Chinese or Chindian (as they are trying to popularise it here), Mexican, Western, and of course Indian. The Mexican *dosa* and tandoori pizza are flavoursome, while the Bombay Cafe sizzler and an unusual chat sizzler exude a delectable aroma while being served.

Naturally, the Indian-Chinese all-time favourites: *gobi* Manchurian, crispy vegetable, black pepper mushrooms and American chop suey are all available here. And you can round up the meal with the must-eat, gooey-grainy sizzling brownie.

Another smaller outlet, Bombay Cafe Xpress (at the Suntec City Mall) promises all of the above along with lunch and dinner buffets. Ideal for office goers in a hurry.

Address: 334 Tanjong Katong Road.
Tel: +65-6345 0070

Whole Earth

Walking along Peck Seah Street in the Central Business District, the side façade of the white building facing an open plot demands attention. Besides the logo and restaurant's name in green, it's the black silhouettes of people strolling, some with a dog on a leash that makes Whole Earth come alive.

Indoors again it is predominantly white which perhaps makes for an ideal setting for the colourful cuisine.

The only vegetarian Peranakan and Thai food restaurant in Singapore was

■ **Bollywood dominates the décor at Bombay Cafe** with a collage, posters and plasma screen showing clippings from Hindi movies jazzing up the walls

■ **Broccoli with braised monkeyhead mushroom at Whole Earth**



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opened by its pioneering 'green team' in 2003 as the result of a calling to serve healthy and enjoyable plant-based food.

Peranakans, the descendents of Straits Chinese (early immigrants from Mainland China), inter-married Malays and imbibed their customs, culture, clothes, jewellery and food.

The undisputed favourite, *Asam Pedas* (literally, sour spicy in Malay) is made of crispy slices of bean curd with a flavourful sauce. The *Oatmeal Tofu* is all about textures – crispy on the outside and silken within, and can work as a substitute for rice or noodles. Made of shiitake mushrooms, the *Nyonya Curry* takes eight long hours to cook on a slow fire. The *Yam Treasure Ring* is not only visually interesting, but is a treasure trove of vegetables, nuts and mushrooms.

Besides this, the Thai dishes include the signature *Olive Rice* which can complement any dish on the menu, *Thai Battered Oyster Mushroom* and *Thai Sweet and Sour Delight* where textured soy merges with the natural sweetness of pineapple chunks.

The restaurant's name, we were told on an earlier visit, was because "...we serve wholesome food from Mother Earth."
Address: 76 Peck Seah Street.
Tel: +65-6323 3308

Lotus Vegetarian Restaurant

It is said that a well-known Indian industrialist from Tamil Nadu liked the food at Lotus Vegetarian Restaurant so much that he flew the chefs down to Chennai to cater for his party.

Decorated in a contemporary Oriental style, the rosewood furniture at the

restaurant is offset by soft peachy-pink carpeting and wallpaper.

The chef has successfully managed to capture the essence of cooking non-vegetarian dishes without using any real meat. The weekend buffet (Friday to Sunday) has a mind-boggling selection of almost 100 dishes to choose from. Other days of the week, it is the steamboat buffet that proves popular. The a la carte all-vegetarian menu (despite the names) includes the *Shark's Fin Soup*, *Spicy Pan-Fried Fish*, *Butter Prawns* (fritter-style), *Hot Plate Pepper Chicken*, with barbequed buns accompanying these dishes.

Address: 201 Balestier Road.
Tel: +65-6254 0090/0091

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