

# JAPAN NEGLECTS VEGAN AND VEGETARIAN TRAVELERS



Japanese cuisine is world-renowned, but most of the country's restaurateurs still neglect an increasingly important customer segment: vegan and vegetarian travelers. Experts point out that vegan options are rare in Japan compared to the U.S. and Europe.

Tokyo and other Japanese cities are now trying to attract more international visitors by focusing on a more inclusive culinary offer. The capital's city hall organizes seminars on the subject and offers advice **to help restaurants offer alternatives to their staples, such as pork bone broth or dried fish shavings.**

Tokyo also publishes a small English-language guide to vegetarian and vegan restaurants and has appointed two chefs specializing in these dishes as "tourism ambassadors." Katsumi Kusumoto is one of these volunteer "ambassadors," publishing articles online and sharing his expertise to inspire other restaurateurs. He says he is "saddened" that so many people are excluded from Tokyo's gastronomic scene, "which boasts the largest number of Michelin-starred restaurants worldwide."

## Vegan Menu Seems Challenging

Foreign tourists make up about half of the customers at the restaurant, which has topped the global rankings on the vegan app Happy Cow in recent years.

Many restaurateurs in Japan think it takes a lot of work to prepare vegan food. First, they are unfamiliar with the needs and desires of vegetarian travelers and vegans because this clientele is rare in the country. Some also fear needing a separate kitchen or must comply with strict rules such as those for halal or kosher food.

Others are reluctant to change their usual recipes, often using a fish stock called "dashi" to add flavor, even to vegetable dishes. However, there is delicious dashi made without animal products, experts argue.

## Minority of Vegetarians

Statistics on vegetarians and vegans in Japan are scarce, but small surveys confirm that **a tiny minority of the population follows this type of diet.** However, Buddhist vegetarian cuisine, known as "shojin," has existed in Japan for hundreds of years. It is served in temples, specialized restaurants, and cooking workshops.

Date: 2023-06-12

Article link:

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