

餐 饮 Food & Drink

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Your monthly guide to wining and dining

Vegging out in Shanghai

By Isabel Janner

A herbivore's survival guide

How many times have you ordered a seemingly genuine vegetarian dish only to find it scattered with bits of ground pork or dried shrimp? Or have you ever worried that some poor chicken gave its life so that you may enjoy a bowl of noodle soup? It's admittedly strange; for a country that claims to eat mostly vegetables it can be surprisingly hard to find a bona fide vegetarian meal in its most modern city. But vegetarianism isn't as foreign a concept here as you might think. Scratch the surface and you'll find a strong undercurrent of Buddhist values in Shanghai's society, and while not everybody strictly adheres to them, nearly everyone respects them. To this end, Shanghai has plenty of options for vegetarians – you just have to look a little harder to find them. Only now you don't, because we've done the legwork for you. So here it is, you lucky people: our guide to vegging out in Shanghai.

Jujube Tree Vegetarian Lifestyle

You know it, you love it. Yet if we failed to mention it you'd think we'd lost the plot. Jujube has three locations – each of which is a safe, if not slightly predictable, option. They look like any other large bright modern Chinese restaurant with the added twist that most of their dishes are in a 'mock meat' form. We recommend the vegetable lettuce wrap (RMB42) and the mock chicken with asparagus and nuts (RMB45).

Veggie verdict: Reliable and dependable, but beware the mock meat sweats

// Daily 11am-9pm. All cards. 1/F, 77 Songshan Lu, by Huaihai Zhong Lu (6384 8000) 嵩山路77号1楼, 近淮海中路

// Daily 11am-9pm. All cards. 258 Fengxian Lu,

by Nanhui Lu (6215 7566) 奉贤路258号, 近南汇路

// Daily 11am-9pm. All cards. 1/F, 848 Huangjin Cheng

Lu, by Shuicheng Nan Lu (6275 1798) 黄金城道848号

1楼, 近水城南路

Anna Maya Garden Cafe

Located on a quiet road in the French Concession, Anna Maya Garden Cafe is different from your run of the mill veggie restaurant. Their aim is to avoid extreme flavors and oversized portions, which might upset the body's natural balance. But don't worry, the food is delicious and you won't go hungry. The antique furniture, exposed wooden beams and gentle chanting music create a relaxed bohemian vibe. The service is not exactly quick, but if you've got the time this is an advantage rather than a hindrance. We recommend the apple curry (RMB50) or, for something lighter, the three mushroom salad (RMB45).

Veggie verdict: Puts the hip into hippie

// Daily 10am-10pm, Cash only, 3 Taojiang Lu, by Baoging Lu (6433 4602) 桃江路3号近宝庆路

Wu Guan Tang Vegetarian Restaurant

With a policy of no MSG, no fried food, no carbonation and no artificial meat, this is the perfect restaurant for the health-conscious vegetarian, or for that matter, the health-conscious in general. There are some classic dishes but mainly the food here is new and unique. So come with an open mind as well as an empty stomach. We especially like the stuffed mushrooms in green tea sauce (RMB32) and the eggplant in plum sauce (RMB18).

Veggie verdict: Where leeks go chic

// Daily 11am-10pm. Cash only. 349 Xinhua Lu, by Dingxi Lu (6281 3695) 新华路349号, 近定西路

Loving Hut – Vegan Life

This candy-colored vegan restaurant is run by the "Supreme Master," Ching Hai. Supreme Master Ching Hai, as it happens, is not some wizened, mountain-dwelling hermit mystic princess. Rather she's a middle-aged American woman who preaches about the dangers of global warming and the importance of veganism. Her young and dedicated followers are also servers in her restaurant, so expect a side of preachiness with your stewed wheat gluten. Unfortunately, the food is not as exceptional as the management, but hey, it's dirt cheap – RMB15 for a passable set meal. Among her disciples, English is nearly non-existent and, despite decent pictures, the menu is completely untranslated. However, their manager Wolfgang is friendly and happy to help (and preach too). As you can imagine, the place has a strange, albeit innocuous, culty vibe to it. Just remember, if they start passing around the purple Kool-Aid, it's time to leave.

Veggie verdict: Superb concept, creepy context

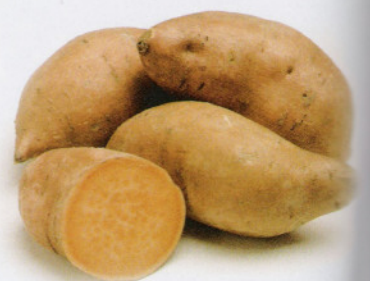
// Daily 11am-9pm. Cash only. 506 Guoding Lu, by Zhenning Lu (150 2181 8032) 固定路506号, 近镇宁路

Jade Buddha Temple Vegetarian Restaurant

Perched atop the Jade Buddha Temple, this restaurant resembles a spacious traditional Chinese dining room and is filled mostly with the requisite large round tables. If you happen to roll with a large crowd of veg-heads, this place is ideal for you. If you're in a small party, expect to share your table with complete strangers. Food-wise, it's a touch greasy for our taste. But they do a pretty tasty vegetable wonton for 15 kuai. If you can't speak Chinese, there's an English menu with lots of pictures, so all you have to do is point and smile.

Veggie verdict: It's how the Buddha got his curves

// Daily 10.30am-8.30pm (rice service) 6.30am-8.30pm (noodle service). Domestic cards only. 999 Jiangning Lu, by Anyuan Lu (6266 5596) 江宁路999号, 近安远路



Godly Vegetarian

Any pasty, gaunt herbivore with enough energy to lift a *Lonely Planet* guide knows about this place. Still, it's worth a mention. Godly (a.k.a. Gongdelin) has been around for years and has maintained a sterling reputation among Shanghai's more compassionate-minded diners. This veggie paradise has a temple-like decor with a small stream running through the entrance, giving it a smart and traditional atmosphere. We love the BBQ duck (RMB10) and, scanning the restaurant, the meatballs appear to be a popular dish (RMB22).

Veggie verdict: The best fake duck since Daffy

// Daily 11am-3pm, 5-9.30pm. Domestic cards.

445 Nanjing Xi Lu, by Chengdu Bei Lu (6327 0218)

南京西路445号,近成都北路



Lucky Zen (Ji Xiang Cao)

Located at the less fashionable end of Madang Lu, Lucky Zen is nothing less than a lucky find. Here, veggies are veggies; it's a delightful change eating tofu that isn't pretending to be a meatball. Even more importantly, the dishes are delicately and uniquely flavored, with outstanding results. The restaurant is airy and open, but with tasteful screens and fabric hangings to give diners privacy. Combined with the numerous bookshelves and subtle incense there is a rustic, smart hippie feel to the place. We recommend the cabbage and tofu hot pot (RMB25), a generously portioned dish with a variety of different styles of tofu, noodles and fresh vegetables.

Veggie verdict: Total nirvana

// Daily 11am-2pm, 5-9pm. Domestic cards.

2/F, 428 Madang Lu, by Hefei Lu (6373 0288)

马当路428号2楼,近合肥路



Shanghai New Age Veggie

Not the most atmospheric veggie restaurant in Shanghai, but given its location in a shopping center this comes as no surprise. Nevertheless the food is good, offering a wide variety of traditional mock meat and tofu dishes. New Age is slightly more expensive than its competitors but it offers generous lunch time deals (RMB88 for two people). There is also an on-site egg-free bakery with wonderfully tempting desserts for dine-in as well as take-away. One other plus: the menu translations are surprisingly clear and the staff is competent in English.

Veggie Verdict: A bit bland for the Super Brand

// Daily 11am-10pm. All cards. 20A/B, 5/F.

Super Brand Mall, 168 Lujiazui Xi Lu (5047 1908)

陆家嘴西路168号正大广场5楼20A/B

// Daily 11am-10pm. All cards. 5/F, 988 Huaihai Zhong

Lu, by Shaanxi Nan Lu (5403 3980)

淮海中路988号5楼,近陕西南路

Chunfeng Songyue Vegetarian Restaurant

Now for a place to avoid. This self-proclaimed "oldest vegetarian restaurant in Shanghai" is a fine example of how some things don't improve with age. Despite the excellent location in the Yu Yuan Gardens bazaar, both herbivores and carnivores alike should give this place a wide berth. The decor is shabby, the tablecloths filthy and the food best described as unhealthy, tasteless glop. Leave this one to the unwitting out-of-towners.

Veggie verdict: More like Eeeeeeww Gardens

// Daily 10.30am-8pm. Domestic cards. 99 Jiuxiao

Chang Lu, by Fangbang Zhong Lu (6355 3630)

旧校场路99号,近方浜中路

