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How to Eat Vegan in Turks & Caicos

By [Savita Iyer-Ahrestani](#) | May 29, 2013



Once thought of as a no-go for the vegan traveler, this Caribbean getaway is becoming a veg-friendly beach destination.

The pure white sand and the turquoise blue waters surrounding the Caribbean island of Turks & Caicos are the stuff of legend, and there's nothing to top a stay at one of the many plush hotels that line the shores of Providenciales, the most frequented of the 40-odd islands that make up Turks & Caicos. But even paradise can wear thin when you're hungry, and for vegan travelers to Turks & Caicos, food—or the lack thereof—can often prove to be a real problem.

Harsh Climate

Tropical fruits including papaya, mango, passion fruit, sugar apple and sapodilla do grow on the islands, of course, as do other fruits vegetables such as cucumbers, tomatoes, okra and sweet potatoes. But Turks & Caicos still has to import most of its produce from the mainland, which can be a costly endeavor for many restaurants, and the locals—whose diet is mainly seafood-based—are still not totally at ease with either vegetarianism or veganism. “We are privy to a very small selection of soy-based products, various exotic fruits and vegetables, not to mention sprouts,” says Doug Camozzi, a Providenciales-based entrepreneur and founder of Turks Venture Group, a chain of tourist-based companies. “Due to the geography of the island and the traditional types of cuisine, it has been hard for vegetarians, let alone vegans, to adhere to their diets.” Camozzi, though, is at the forefront of a change.

A few years ago, Camozzi teamed up with Melissa Hartling, a Canadian chef and founder of Food for Thought, a catering company that creates colorful, flavorful, and healthy vegetarian and vegan dishes for local businesses, to launch the Greenbean Cafe, an eco-conscious, health-based eatery that caters to the growing demand for vegan food options on Turks & Caicos. “Being a vegan on the island is definitely a bit of a challenge as a lot of the restaurants aren't very open-minded or creative, but being a vegan doesn't mean you want to eat salads for every meal,” Camozzi says. Which is why Greenbean Cafe places a great emphasis on creativity, innovation, and presentation. In addition to offering gourmet salads made with quinoa and minted couscous, Greenbean works with diners to build their own salads, and offers several sorts of protein sources, including beans, tofu, nuts, and seeds to bulk out the assorted, fresh greens. The Greenbean Cafe also makes its own soups, veggie burgers, and black bean burgers, and most importantly, is open to veganizing any of the dishes on its menu.

Sea Change

Slowly but surely, Providenciales is coming around to the concept of veganism. Not only are more diners requesting vegan options, but locally, too, the cultivation of produce is increasing and becoming more varied, says Steven Murray, general manager of Coco Bistro, one of Providenciales's most upscale eateries. “We are definitely seeing more vegan diners in the Turks & Caicos islands, which means that restaurants have had to improve their familiarization with veganism and in turn their offerings for vegans,” Murray says. Although Coco Bistro's menu doesn't feature any permanent vegan items, the restaurant does offer dishes that can be tailored to suit vegan palates, including a locally grown tomato and basil salad; a locally grown arugula, poached pear and candied walnut salad; a Thai red vegetable curry and delicious homemade sorbets in such flavors as Haitian mango, Dominican pineapple, and coconut.

After snorkeling, diving, exploring the islands by catamaran, or simply lazing on one of Providenciales's many spectacular beaches, vegan diners, too, can now look forward to delicious and satisfying meals to end their day on a perfect note.

A freelance writer currently based in State College, PA, [Savita Iyer-Ahrestani](#)'s work has appeared in numerous print and online publications, including

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