

# VEGAN VIRTUES

PLANT-BASED FOOD CREATIONS

HAVE GOT EVERYONE TALKING

WORDS SARAH GAMBONI



**T**here's no denying it: we love to talk about food. Though it might surprise you to learn exactly what we've been talking about. OpenTable, a US online reservation company, reveals Australians are particularly verbose when it comes to veganism. In fact, online chatter about vegan food rose

35 per cent last year, making it the top culinary discussion topic. Superfoods came in a distant second, while Paleo fell off the radar.

It's not just vegan chatter that's on the rise – plant-based offerings are on the up, too. Vegans are no longer pushed aside with a bland plate of tempeh or tofu. Instead, today's vegan creations appeal to everyone.

In the US, Silicon Valley's Impossible Foods has engineered an all-veggie burger that looks and tastes like real beef, right down to the medium-rare, juice-dribbling patty. You can sink your teeth into this plant-based beauty at David Chang's Momofuku Nishi in New York, but closer to home a host of eateries are kicking their own vegan goals.

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Vegan eggs from Melbourne's Matcha Mylkbar BELOW: Vegan nachos at Mandala Organic Arts Cafe on the Gold Coast.

### Kitchen trickery

Take a peek at the menu of Smith & Daughters in Melbourne's Fitzroy and you'll see a raft of Spanish and Mexican favourites, such as garlic prawns, potatoes with chorizo, or tuna croquetas. Look a little closer and you'll discover that Shannon Martinez and Mo Wyse's hip eatery is a meat-free zone.

"There are still people who believe veganism is a trend, that all vegan food tastes the same, boring, bland and, above all, that vegan food is uncreative, not filling and lacks flavour. We don't," says Mo in the introduction to their cookbook, *Smith & Daughters*. Reworking her grandmother's traditional recipes, Shannon draws on TVP (textured vegetable protein), nut cheese, beans and soy to create flavour-packed renditions of meaty dishes.

South of the river, Matcha Mylkbar in St Kilda has filled the egg-shaped void created by a plant-based diet with their Vegan Eggs, made with coconut, turmeric and sweet potato. They're slightly sweeter than your standard hen's egg, but the texture is spot-on.

### Comforting creations

You'd think a Philly cheesesteak of beef and melted cheese would be off the table for veganistas, but the clever crew at Sparrow's Philly Cheesesteaks in Melbourne have come up with a beauty, crammed with spiced, pulled jackfruit and a creamy chipotle dressing.

In Sydney, comfort food favourites get a plant-based makeover at Sadhana in Enmore and Bondi, where you can tuck into a breakfast burger with vegan eggs and coconut "bacon", or lasagne layered with shiitake and walnut bolognese and a cashew béchamel.

Gigi Pizzeria in nearby Newtown took cheese and meat off its menu in 2015, making its wood-fired Neapolitan pizzas completely vegan, while in the same suburb Bliss & Chips dishes out fin-free versions of fish-shop classics, made with soy protein or konjac (an Asian root vegetable).

On the Gold Coast, the cosy old couches at Mandala Organic Arts Cafe beckon for vegan



### Try it here

**SMITH & DAUGHTERS**  
175 Brunswick Street,  
Fitzroy, Melbourne, VIC  
[smithanddaughters.com](http://smithanddaughters.com)

**SOUL BURGER**  
The Spot, 49 Perouse  
Road, Randwick, and  
111 Glebe Point Road,  
Glebe, Sydney, NSW  
[soulburger.com.au](http://soulburger.com.au)

**THE RAW KITCHEN**  
181A High Street,  
Fremantle, WA  
[therawkitchen.com.au](http://therawkitchen.com.au)

eggs Benedict with smoky coconut bacon, or nachos with Mexican beans and melted cashew cheese.

### High praise

PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals) recently rated Soul Burger in Glebe and Newtown as the best vegan burgers in Australia. The tongue-in-cheek menu includes the 'Straya Mate with pineapple and beetroot, an American Badass with pickles and cheese, and Hanson's Halal with beef strips and garlic sauce, all without a hint of animal protein.

In Western Australia, The Raw Kitchen scored the sustainability initiative title at the Fremantle Business Awards, thanks to its eco-minded approach. Its gluten-free, vegan creations such as "live" pad Thai with zucchini noodles or sticky date pudding with raw ice cream will leave you feeling happy *and* virtuous. ✈



PHOTOGRAPHY FRAZER ALEXANDER, MATCHA MYLKBAR