

FIVE OF THE BEST: veggie-friendly restaurants in Nairobi

Healthy eating has never tasted this good...

A foodie revolution is taking place throughout Nairobi. Restaurants are popping up every month offering customers fresh and innovative items of food and drink. But what's on offer for the vegetarian population out there? We've compiled a list of Nairobi's most delicious veggie-friendly restaurants. Happy reading – and try not to drool...

By Harriet Constable



◀ MARULA MERCANTILE
Sesame fried feta with fennel and pomegranate



VEGGIE HEAVEN ▾
Tin Roof Cafe's famous spicy veggie melt



CHOWPATY

The number one choice for veggie food in Nairobi, Chowpaty offers Indian and Chinese fusion dishes. The company has branches in Westlands, Shimmer Plaza, Highridge and Diamond Plaza, the heart of Nairobi's Indian community.

Our preferred location is Diamond Plaza, where diners can choose to sit either in the restaurant or opposite in the lively food court. From Chowpaty's menu, try dahi puri (crispy balls filled with beans, spices and Bombay mix served with cool yoghurt); mushroom tikka masala; gobi manchurian (an Indian and Chinese fusion dish made with cauliflower); and malai kofta (a classic creamy north Indian dish with paneer and vegetable dumplings). Alcohol is not available, but the food court has a great choice of juices.

MARULA MERCANTILE

New kid on the block Marula Mercantile has been open only since May, but is already asserting itself as a 'go to' destination for vegetarian food in Nairobi. It's located on the Marula Studios site in Karen, with a selection of shops available to peruse after you've eaten. Head down on a weekend to enjoy a lazy lunch of sweet potato fritters with a tamarind dip, feta with dill and toasted sesame seeds, grilled halloumi salad with a tangy cumin dressing and expertly cooked French fries. Top these off with a cocktail (you'll have a tough time choosing – the drinks menu is excellent) but we can recommend the Bloody Mary made with freshly crushed tomatoes. This is a rustic yet modern place, featuring a spacious bar with tall metal stools, a chalk-board coffee menu and chunky wooden tables set on decking overlooking the grassy studio gardens. Those with a sweet tooth will want to try Marula's selection of doughnuts, easily the best in Nairobi.

TIN ROOF CAFÉ

Another Karen establishment that has won the hearts of vegetarians in Kenya is the Tin Roof Café at The Souk. The restaurant prides itself on its eclectic mix of salads (eight varieties served every day), influenced by British-Israeli chef Yotam Ottolenghi. Options include watermelon, olive, onion and feta; green bean, sugar snap pea and sesame seed; and roasted beetroot and squash with a herb marinade. In response to popular demand, the Café recently introduced more vegetarian items to the menu, including a spicy vegetable melt made with seasonal roast vegetables in a piri piri marinade, topped with melted cheese.

This is a charming place with a homely feel. There are floral cushions scattered over garden chairs and the whitewashed walls are decorated with pictures. There are a few seats available inside, and a handful of tables adorned with wild fresh flowers throughout the shaded veranda and garden.

SMART VILLAGE

The Kilimani establishment Smart Village has been attracting non meat eaters for years by its combination of buzzy atmosphere, protein-packed vegetarian options and eccentric decor. Try the vegetarian platter with an extra order of shiro, a creamy dish made from pureed chickpeas, and a side order of brown injerra, a spongy, stretchy flatbread made from teff flour that comes rolled up like a flannel. The food is beautifully presented on a huge round metal tray, with scoops of different vegetarian dishes arranged on one large rolled-out injerra. It's meant to be eaten with your hands, so use the injerra to scoop away until you can eat no more. Be sure to let the waiters know if you can't handle your spice – they like to pack in the chillies.

PIZZA 360

The artisan pizza restaurant 360 Degrees offers some of the best vegetarian pizza in Nairobi, cooked in a giant stone oven. The menu features fresh local ingredients and pizzas are available with either a 'rosso' (red) or 'bianca' (white) sauce base. It's worth trying the DOP Margarita, made with San Marzano tomatoes and soft fresh mozzarella, or the eggplant parmigianino, topped with eggplant, home-made ricotta, fresh basil and bread crumbs.

The restaurant is located at ABC Plaza, just off Waiyaki Way. Grab a seat at the kitchen bar and watch the chefs at work, or sit out on the patio with a flickering candle adorning the table. You'll want to leave space for dessert, as this restaurant also serves the creamiest, most flavoursome homemade ice cream in town. Best flavour? Salted caramel.

It's meant to be eaten with your hands, so use the injerra to scoop away until you can eat no more