

Route vegetables

Vegan food has been undergoing a transformation. Ben Olsen reports on the new wave of plant-based restaurants, and how **Virgin Trains** has brought the trend to Britain's railways



Like a vegan: Virgin Trains is leading the charge in championing everyone's food choices

After decades on the fringes of the culinary mainstream, veganism is the now the coolest kid on campus. As a growing awareness of health, environment and animal-welfare issues drive more of us to eat less meat, or ditch it altogether, so the plant-based alternatives are improving.

But while great vegan food outlets, or eateries offering vegan options, are becoming ever more common across the UK, it can still be surprisingly hard to find good-quality, imaginative vegan fare when you're on the move.

Virgin Trains is changing all that. For those travelling between major cities in the north and south, it has introduced an inspiring range of vegan dishes to its onboard menu. These include a breakfast pot complete with mushrooms, hash browns, spinach and baked beans – while other options throughout the day include a vegan chilli pot, a Japanese-inspired katsu curry and Bombay potatoes with raita.

Clearly, you don't have to be committed to a plant-based diet to be tempted by these options – they fit perfectly into the menu on offer. But if you *are* vegan, and bored with bringing along your

own veggie box whenever you travel, this is a seismic shift, and happily reflective of the culinary scene as a whole.

Since British animal-rights activist Donald Watson coined the term "vegan" in 1944, the concept has mushroomed from a militant minority to an estimated 3.5 million in the UK today. Standalone festivals, markets and an army of influencers have swelled this hungry audience, whose appetites have been sated by sophisticated restaurant menus, and catered for by supermarket offerings that now extend to cruelty-free clothing, cosmetics, beers and wines.

In culinary terms, dishes have evolved significantly from the clichéd staples of lentils and pulses. Reflecting an industry-wide focus on seasonality and provenance, vegan haute cuisine based on locally sourced produce has become increasingly common. But a major shift is also happening at the other end of the spectrum. The rise and rise of vegan fast food – encompassing burgers, hotdogs, pizzas and fried "chicken" – has broadened the definition of vegan from virtuous to varied, and putting hangover-grade comfort food within reach for the first time.

Virgin Trains, as you might expect, is leading the charge among our transport companies when it comes to championing everyone's food choices. By providing high-quality options for all different dietary needs, it's helping to ensure your journey is as satisfying as the destination.

As for the rest of the country, we've picked out six of the UK's finest vegan restaurants – from classic to contemporary; fast food to slow – that are playing a part in redefining veganism as we know it.

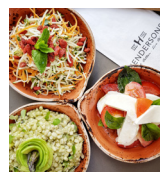
1 EDINBURGH

Hendersons

Dating back to 1962, Hendersons is an Edinburgh institution, and the addition of a vegan restaurant down the road is a further feather in its cap. The vegan haggis with mash and red-wine gravy has a cult following north of the border.

Ten minutes' walk from Edinburgh Waverley station

hendersonsofedinburgh.co.uk



2

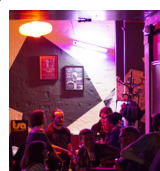
GLASGOW

Flying Duck

In a city not short of vegan restaurants, this charismatic bar and diner stands out. In a dimly lit basement that hosts live music and alternative cabaret, the Flying Duck offers a vegan take on US classics from Philly cheesesteak to loaded fries.

Eight minutes' walk from Glasgow Central station

theflyingduck.org



3

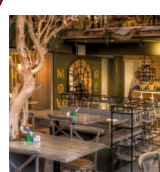
LIVERPOOL

Mowgli

Boasting two sites in the city, Indian street-food specialist Mowgli has built a loyal following. The vegan menu includes a vivid selection of small plates such as bhel puri and roti wraps, as well as a tiffin box with a selection of fragrant vegan curries.

Seven minutes' walk (Bold St branch) from Liverpool Lime St station

mowglstreetfood.com



4

MANCHESTER

V Rev Vegan Diner

The focus is on fast food at this lively diner that offers plant-based versions of burgers, wings, loaded fries and pesto-spiked mac and "cheeze" among a roster of dishes with wise-guy titles ("Who ordered the Notorious D.O.G?")

Fifteen minutes' walk from Manchester Piccadilly station

vrevmcr.co.uk



5

BIRMINGHAM

Warehouse Café

Getting a table here can be tough, but its plant-based British comfort food, served up in a beautiful

brick-clad space, is worth the effort. Inspired by seasonal ingredients, dishes range from salads to vegan burgers and a standout Sunday roast.

Eleven minutes' walk from Birmingham New St station

thewarehousecafe.com



6

LONDON

The Spread Eagle

The capital's first vegan pub opened earlier this year and hosts Meriel Armitage's plant-based take on Mexican cuisine. Seitan, jackfruit and charred corn feature on a menu that includes some of London's best "chicken" wings.

Twenty-five minutes by Tube/Overground from Euston station

thespreadeaglelondon.co.uk



VIRGIN TRAINS

Connecting the dots across the country, think of Virgin Trains as a rolling restaurant with a range of delicious food choices to suit all appetites. Whether you're after nibbles or something more substantial, its West Coast services now offer an onboard vegan menu all day long. From tasty breakfast pots for early travellers to flavour-packed dishes such as sweet-potato pakora, katsu curry and Bombay potatoes, Virgin Trains has something for everyone. Get up to speed with all the options at virgintrains.co.uk.

No minutes' walk from any station!

