



Vegetarian buffet restaurants offer tasty fare

Xu Wenwen and Huang Gejiang

It is not easy to run a vegetarian restaurant where the number of vegans is small — like Hangzhou, where in the past decade several attempts have been made, only to see

the eateries go down silently.

China has a stereotype for vegetarian foods: They are basically vegetables and tofu. Another misconception is that only vegans go to vegetarian restaurants.

Vegetarian restaurant chefs use various culinary methods, making vegetables light or even tasting like

meat. Chinese people once invented “fake meat” that, though made from tofu and mushrooms, looked like and tasted like meat. That was to satisfy people holding Buddhist beliefs yet not used to eating vegetables only.

Today “fake meat” dishes remains important on most Chinese vegetarian restaurant menus.

Perhaps a buffet is a good idea, as both vegans and meat eaters can be lured to have a try of various vegetarian foods, with an open attitude. Last year some new vegetarian buffet restaurants sprouted up in Hangzhou, providing affordable and healthy vegetarian foods. Today Shanghai Daily introduces the three.



Vegetarian Flourishing Restaurant 素缤纷自助餐厅

It's hard to taste all 100-plus foods here at one meal. From fried dishes and soups to cakes and desserts, delicacies here get rid of the stereotype that vegetarian foods are simple.

The restaurant run by a Taiwanese team enriches its buffet with 25 kinds of home-made desserts that include macaroon, tiramisu, mocha cake, and tea jelly made from Taiwan Oolong tea, as well as a Taiwanese-style black fungus juice. “We serve vegans and also non-vegans who like healthy lifestyle,” the manager, Pan Renqing, says.

Some sauteed dishes and noodles taste like meat dishes. While Taiwanese cooks here do not deliberately make tofu or

vegetables look like meat, the taste is able to meet demands of vegans or non-vegans.

The toppings of the dan-dan noodles, for instance, include mushroom, bamboo and fungus.

Each is fried separately to make sure each ingredient's flavor is fully released.

The restaurant also serves hotpot, with light soup containing vegetables and Chinese herbs. The restaurant does not use garlic or scallion, and foods with milk and egg are labeled. Its recommended dishes include tea jelly, souffle, almond tea.

Address: 5/F, Zhongdu Department Store, 87-1 Qingchun Rd
Tel: (0571) 8778-0268

Miao Ti Hu 妙醍醐

Lying on the food street Dadou Road and also right at the square of Xiangji Temple, Miao Ti Hu vegetarian restaurant features an antique-look in accordance with the decor of the temple.

The location contributes to its large supply of customers, some of whom are visitors to the temple.

It charges only 20 yuan per person while providing 20 kinds of foods and beverages. For an additional 5 yuan, one can enjoy hotpot.

As a Buddhist vegetarian

restaurant, it also plays videos of Buddhist speeches in the hall, and makes “pure vegetarian foods” without egg, milk, garlic or scallion.

The operation is like a college canteen. One takes chopsticks and plates after dropping payment into a box (people can also take change from the box), then picks the food and drink. After the meal, one should take all plates and cups to a cleaning lady.

Address: 108 Dadou Rd
Tel: (0571) 8829-9969



Su Man Xiang 素满香

It's the cheapest buffet in town — 19 yuan (US\$3) per person. The meal offers more than 20 different kinds of fresh vegetarian food, beverage and fruits.

Su Man Xiang is run by a Buddhist couple who provide “pure vegetarian foods” with no garlic, scallion or egg. There is no cashier, as customers pay on their own under an honor system.

“For those who have no money and are at hunger, we will let them in for free,” says Hu Xi-aoyun, who owns the restaurant with her husband.

It is located in a residential community and draws lots of senior residents living nearby.

A peaceful, generous environment is a big attraction here. The TV shows videos about



traditional Chinese merits, and the restaurant sends out free books, CDs, and DVDs to promote traditional Chinese culture.

“I benefited from Buddhism culture and vegetarian cuisine, and I want to spread it to more people,” says Hu.

All the food is homemade. The recommended are turnip cake, dumplings, and sweet-sour potatoes. Turnip cake is tender but not oily; dumplings are made with vegetables; and sweet-sour potatoes taste very similar to pork.

Besides daily business, Su Man Xiang holds many volunteer events, such as sending food to local seniors. Impressed by their charitable act, many volunteers will come to the restaurant to help or give away their vegetables and fruits.

It's highly recommend that people arrive early. Otherwise they are quite likely to wait a while for a table.

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