

### ***Was it difficult to be vegan in Central America?***

Not at all. Many vegans think that it's difficult to maintain their values while traveling, but really it's not. The usual comment I heard about my trip to Guatemala and Honduras was "It must have been hard to find vegan food." Actually, it was generally easier than going to an average non-vegetarian restaurant in Toronto. Here's why: The culture in Latin America (and in many other places in the world) is friendly and easy-going. That means that when you're ordering food and asking for either a vegan dish or for a regular dish to be prepared vegan, you're met with patience and understanding.

Typically, when speaking with servers, chefs, cooks, and street vendors, I would begin with (in my limited Spanish): "I'm vegan. Do you know what 'vegan' means?" That would usually result in a politely confused look on their faces, so I'd continue: "Well, it's similar to vegetarian. A vegetarian doesn't eat meat. A vegan doesn't eat meat, but also doesn't eat other animal products such as..." At this point I'd explain what I do and don't eat, and the confused look would turn into a thoughtful look. (As a result, they would learn a bit about "veganos" too.) Once we would decide on what I was eating, I would ask a few questions about how it's prepared, just to be sure.

### ***Keep a home-made glossary with you.***

When travelling in countries where you might have trouble getting by with English, a little preparation beforehand can make things easy for you when you're there. Before my trip, I made a glossary of useful words and phrases, and I would refer to this glossary when ordering food. It included vegan and non-vegan food items, phrases about food preparation, and names of some local vegan dishes or dishes that can easily be made vegan. One thing to watch out for – as with regular non-veg restaurants in Toronto – are hidden animal products such as rice cooked in meat broth, vegetables sautéed in lard or butter, or fruit smoothies made with milk.

### ***Were restaurants vegan-friendly?***

Yup. In Guatemala and Honduras, restaurants are generally inexpensive and reasonably vegan-friendly. By checking online before your trip, you can find out about the vegetarian restaurants and other vegan-friendly restaurants. However, I got some great vegan meals in regular non-veg restaurants that are not particularly known for being vegan-friendly. In one of those restaurants, Chef Eduardo had prepared me such a delicious vegan meal (the best gallo pinto that

I ate on my trip) that I went back a few times and asked him to prepare whatever he wanted to create. He later asked me to email him some vegan recipes from Canada so that he could learn more vegan cooking! While strolling around, it's also common to find street vendors offering some tasty quick meals and snacks which can be easily made vegan.

### ***Here are some of the more memorable meals and snacks I ate:***

- "gallo pinto": a rice and bean dish with cilantro and some finely chopped vegetables
- guacamole
- burritos stuffed with mixed vegetables, covered with tomato sauce
- sandwich with fresh avocado, lettuce, and tomato, roasted zucchini and eggplant, caramelized onions, pesto sauce, balsamic vinegar, olive oil, and herbs – on whole-grain bread
- tostadas (a flat, thin, crispy piece of corn bread) topped with refried beans, guacamole, dressed cabbage, and salsa
- breakfasts (included) at the hostel in Antigua (called El Hostal): a small bowl of refried beans, tortilla bread, fried plantains, a fruit salad, and a choice of coffee, juice, tea, or herbal tea. For \$1, I would also have a shot of wheatgrass juice.
- fruit licuados (smoothies)
- spaghetti with vegetables and a tomato sauce that was so good it would make an Italian chef cry
- tofu stir fry
- mushroom burrito
- falafels and hummus
- pakoras (in an Indian restaurant)

### ***How can a vegan can prepare before leaving for a trip?***

I suggest that vegans do two things before leaving for a trip:

1. **Check online for vegan-friendly restaurants.** Note that each website will list different restaurants, so you might want to check all of these to compile your own list of places to eat.
  - [www.happycow.net](http://www.happycow.net)
  - [www.vegguide.org](http://www.vegguide.org)
  - [www.veg dining.com](http://www.veg dining.com)
  - [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)
  - Even my guidebook (Rough Guide for Guatemala) mentioned several vegetarian-friendly restaurants in the various towns and cities I visited.

2. **Prepare a glossary** of words and phrases that you can easily refer to when ordering food. A few phrases will help, but to be comfortable you'll need to prepare something like what I've shown here.

**a) My intro:**

- I'm vegan. Do you know what 'vegan' means? = Yo soy vegano. Sabes que significa "vegano"?
- It's similar to vegetarian. = Es similar a vegetariano.
- A vegetarian doesn't eat meat. = Un vegetariano no come carne.
- A vegan doesn't eat meat, but also doesn't eat other animal products, such as...  
= Un vegano no come carne, pero también no come otros productos que provengan de animales, como...

**b) Vegan Foods:**

- rice = arroz
- wheat = trigo
- beans = frijoles
  - chick peas = garbanzos
  - soya = soja
    - tofu = queso de soja (N.B. "queso" means "cheese")
    - soymilk = leche de soja (N.B. "leche" means "milk")
- vegetables = vegetales
  - greens = verduras
  - corn = maíz
  - squash = calabaza.
    - Güisquil is a common variety of squash.
  - potato = papa
    - fries = papas fritas
  - cabbage = repollo
  - tomato = tomate
  - carrot = zanahoria
  - sweet peppers = pimientos dulces
- fruits = frutas
  - avocado = aguacate
- nuts = nuez
- mushrooms = hongos
- bread = pan
  - flour = harina
  - flat corn bread = tortillas
- vegetable oil = aceite vegetal
- vegetable shortening = manteca vegetal (N.B. "manteca" means "lard".)

### **c) Non-Vegan Foods:**

- animal products = productos que provengan de animals
- meat = carne
  - cow/beef = vaca / carne de vacuno
  - pork = cerdo
  - chicken = pollo
  - lamb = cordero
  - sausage = salchicha or chorizo
- sea food = mariscos
  - fish = pescado
  - mussels = mejillón
  - clam = almeja
  - shrimp = camarón
  - “ceviche” is a seafood dish made in Latin America
- dairy = productos lácteos
  - milk = leche (cow milk = leche de vaca)
  - cheese = queso
  - yogurt = yogur
  - butter = mantequilla
  - cream = crema or nata
  - ice cream = helado
- eggs = huevos
  - mayonnaise = mayonesa
- lard = manteca (de cerdo)
- beef/chicken/fish broth = caldo de carne/pollo/pescado

### **d) Local vegan (or easy to make vegan) dishes and foods:**

- rice and beans = arroz y frijoles (or gallo pinto)
- guacamole
- refried beans = frijoles refritos
- bread / flat corn bread / flat crispy corn bread = pan / tortilla / tostada
- fruit smoothie = licuado de fruta
- burrito
- sandwich = sándwich
- pasta
- rice soup = sopa de arroz
- El Salvadorian tortilla usually stuffed with meat, cheese, or refried beans:  
pupusa with refried beans (and without meat or cheese) = pupusa con frijoles refritos (y sin carne o queso)

### **e) Other useful words and phrases:**

- vegetarian = vegetariano/vegetariana
- vegan = vegano/vegana
- good/bad = bueno/malo

- sauce = salsa
- spicy = picante
- with / without = con / sin
- prepared with... = preparado con...
- prepared without ... = preparado sin...
- Can you prepare it... Puedes prepararlo...
- made from/with ... = hecho de/con...
- I eat... / I don't eat... = Yo como... / Yo no como...

**f) Things to watch for and important to verify with servers:**

- Sauces prepared with cream
- Dishes topped with cheese
- Sandwiches topped with cheese or mayonnaise
- Rice cooked in meat broth
- Vegetables sautéed in butter or lard

<b>Guacamole</b>
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In Guatemala, guacamole is commonly prepared as a side dish and used as an ingredient in other dishes. Avocados – the main ingredient – grow everywhere there. People even grow them as ornamental trees. When I got back to Canada, I dug up a recipe my sister gave me years ago so I could have some guacamole at home. It pretty much tastes the same as what I found in Guatemala:

Guacamole, modified from my sister's recipe:

**Ingredients:**

- 3 ripe avocados
- 2 medium tomatoes – diced finely
- 1 small shallot – chopped finely (or 1 – 2 tablespoons of dry chives)
- juice of 1 lime
- 2 tablespoons fresh cilantro chopped finely
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley chopped finely
- ½ clove of garlic
- pinch of salt

**Directions:**

Mix everything into a bowl. Mash with a potato masher, leaving some chunks.