

# Summer Vegcation

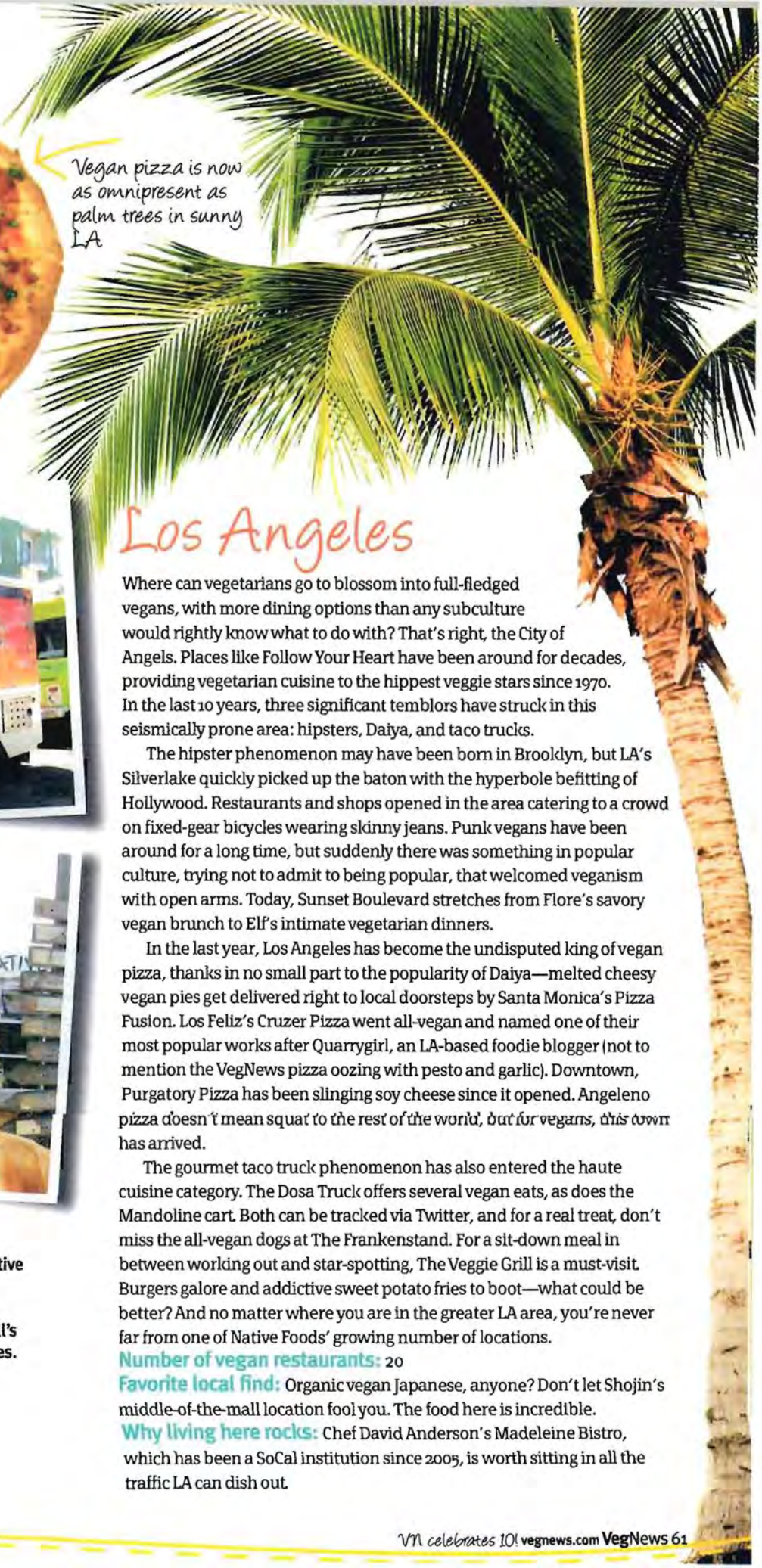
From sunny Los Angeles to sizzling Atlanta, these 10 cities offer incredible dining and passionate denizens. *By Matt Flanzer*

## Whether it's food or community

that pulls you toward a cruelty-free lifestyle, these 10 cities offer everything an urban herbivore could desire. Restaurants, events, and bustling veg communities make these metropolises must-visit havens. If your sizzling summer plans are led by heart and stomach, why not stop in for some delightful dining at each of these incredible hot spots? From world-renowned restaurants to locals-only gems, individual activists to meet-up groups that are spreading like wildfire, veganism has officially taken root across the country.



Vegan pizza is now as omnipresent as palm trees in sunny LA



## Los Angeles

Where can vegetarians go to blossom into full-fledged vegans, with more dining options than any subculture would rightly know what to do with? That's right, the City of Angels. Places like Follow Your Heart have been around for decades, providing vegetarian cuisine to the hippest veggie stars since 1970. In the last 10 years, three significant temblors have struck in this seismically prone area: hipsters, Daiya, and taco trucks.

The hipster phenomenon may have been born in Brooklyn, but LA's Silverlake quickly picked up the baton with the hyperbole befitting of Hollywood. Restaurants and shops opened in the area catering to a crowd on fixed-gear bicycles wearing skinny jeans. Punk vegans have been around for a long time, but suddenly there was something in popular culture, trying not to admit to being popular, that welcomed veganism with open arms. Today, Sunset Boulevard stretches from Flore's savory vegan brunch to Elf's intimate vegetarian dinners.

In the last year, Los Angeles has become the undisputed king of vegan pizza, thanks in no small part to the popularity of Daiya—melted cheesy vegan pies get delivered right to local doorsteps by Santa Monica's Pizza Fusion. Los Feliz's Cruiser Pizza went all-vegan and named one of their most popular works after Quarrygirl, an LA-based foodie blogger (not to mention the VegNews pizza oozing with pesto and garlic). Downtown, Purgatory Pizza has been slinging soy cheese since it opened. Angeleno pizza doesn't mean squat to the rest of the world, but for vegans, this town has arrived.

The gourmet taco truck phenomenon has also entered the haute cuisine category. The Dosa Truck offers several vegan eats, as does the Mandoline cart. Both can be tracked via Twitter, and for a real treat, don't miss the all-vegan dogs at The Frankenstand. For a sit-down meal in between working out and star-spotting, The Veggie Grill is a must-visit. Burgers galore and addictive sweet potato fries to boot—what could be better? And no matter where you are in the greater LA area, you're never far from one of Native Foods' growing number of locations.

**Number of vegan restaurants:** 20

**Favorite local find:** Organic vegan Japanese, anyone? Don't let Shojin's middle-of-the-mall location fool you. The food here is incredible.

**Why living here rocks:** Chef David Anderson's Madeleine Bistro, which has been a SoCal institution since 2005, is worth sitting in all the traffic LA can dish out.



From top: LA's Dosa Truck, Native Foods' Costa Mesa location, and Veggie Grill's Sweetheart Fries.



← The multi-layer glory of a MaggieMudd's sundae.



## San Francisco

San Francisco might only boast 49 square miles of space, but it packs plenty into its many distinct neighborhoods. In the Mission District alone, a vegan can walk mere blocks for incredible vegan sandwiches made to order at Ike's Place; vegan beers, brats, and bike culture at Gestalt Haus; huge bowls of vegan nabeyaki and other authentic Japanese dishes at Cha-Ya; rofu scrambles and shawarma at casual staple

Herbivore; the world's greatest vegan burritos at Papalote; and to-die-for vegan sundaes at nearby Bernal Height's MaggieMudd. And that's just one small (albeit popular) district of the City by the Bay.

Earlier this year, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed a resolution encouraging restaurants, stores, and schools to celebrate Vegetarian Day by offering vegetarian options on that day to improve general civic health. The plan may be a mere recommendation, but it represents an awareness that puts San Francisco firmly in the very veg-friendly

camp. Superstar restaurant Millennium has brought veg cuisine upscale for 15 years. San Francisco's bi-monthly vegan bake sale brings in thousands of dollars for animal-rescue charities, popular blog Vegansaurus sweeps local online awards, and SF Vegan Drinks features raffles, veggie hot dogs, and custom drink specials. While it's clear that Journey's Steve Perry co-wrote "Lights" while thinking of San Francisco, there's no telling whether or not he did so knowing that a mere 22 years later, VegNews magazine would begin here. Feel free to leave your heart in San Francisco. It'll be in good company.

**Number of vegan restaurants:** 15  
**Favorite local find:** Thousands of miles from New Orleans, Rodger's Coffee & Tea, which also happens to be in the Mission, doles out fresh, vegan beignets and the best coffee in town.

**Why living here rocks:** Not only are there great vegan restaurants, a local chapter of Vegan Drinks, and veg-friendly businesses (like Twitter) in San Francisco proper, just a 10-minute jaunt across the bay opens up the incredible dining experience that is the East Bay.

## Atlanta

Hot 'Lanta has long been the energetic cultural center of the South. It's the largest city in the region, home to internationally recognized brands Coca-Cola and CNN, and like the other great urban centers on this list, has become increasingly vegan-friendly.

Local favorite Veggieland has been serving global cuisine since the 1990s. The vegan mock meats and Chinese standards at Harmony Vegetarian have filled bellies for almost as long; and although you can find Soul Vegetarian restaurants in 14 cities internationally, none feel quite as down-home as its two locations in metro Atlanta. There's something just perfectly Southern about mouthwatering country-fried veggie steak served with collard greens, a side of vegan macaroni and cheese, and housemade vegan ice cream.

Leigh and Ken Saluzzi run Cosmo's Vegan Shoppe in nearby Marietta, the only 100-percent vegan online store and storefront in the Southeast. They point out a host of veg community outlets: "Second Opinion Radio is a local radio show that is animal-rights-themed; Georgia Animal Rights and Protection do a good bit of the local protests and demonstrations."

Atlanta also has two 100-percent vegan bakeries opening soon. Dough Bakery will set up shop in Inman Park, while across town Dulce Vegan plans to beat them to the punch, opening in Grant Park by August. Double the sweets? That's what we call southern hospitality.

**Number of vegan restaurants:** 5

**Favorite local find:** King of Pops popsicle cart at the corner of North Avenue and North Highland makes and sells gourmet popsicles. Many of the flavors are vegan, including hibiscus, grapefruit mint, and pineapple ginger.

**Why living here rocks:** "Atlanta is a great city for food, music, and a wide variety of events like art shows, craft fairs, and the like. There's always something 'fun to do!' say 'ne Saluzzis."



← Down-home fried potatoes at Veggieland? Yes, please!



# Austin

Deep in the heart of Texas sits a thriving oasis known as Austin. Daniela Nuñez has lived there her whole life. A self-described socially networked vegan and animal-rights activist, she has witnessed the increasing number of veg options and blossoming activism in her hometown. "Austin deserves to be called veg-friendly," she says.

"About five years ago, there were fewer vegan-friendly restaurants you could depend on," Nuñez reports. "Now we're seeing more choices for where to eat and where to connect with other vegans. We have a couple of all-vegan restaurants and food trucks, and it seems like I hear about new vegan options every day."

Like many cities, Austin hosts a rapidly expanding and popular Vegan Drinks meet-up. Recent outreach connected with several hundred people in conjunction with SXSW—Austin's premier music and film festival that is quickly becoming the most prominent of its kind in the country.

This capital city is more than a college town,



but it's decidedly youth-centric. Surrounded on all sides by ranches and cowboy country, Austin breeds tough-skinned vegans whose hearts are full of compassion, like Nuñez, who concludes with this parting dictum: "Bacon-loving hipsters can kiss my vegan ass!"  
**Number of vegan restaurants:** 7  
**Favorite local find:** Counter Culture is an all-vegan and raw-foods trailer run by chef Sue Davis, who has veganized American favorites from Philly cheesesteaks to tuna

Whole Foods' ready-to-go vegan options.



salad sandwiches. With raw desserts and an incredible Sunday brunch, what's not to love?  
**Why living here rocks:** Home to the first-ever Whole Foods Market, which opened in 1980, you can find a healthy vegan culture here, smack in the middle of Texas. Vegans Rock Austin, a group formed in 2003, bolsters the cruelty-free community with bake sales, meet-ups, and parties.

# Boston

With its concentration of colleges and a tradition of liberal thought, it seems surprising that it has taken so long for the vegetarian and vegan impact to reach Boston, but like pilgrims to nearby Plymouth, the ship has come in. Sure, it's always been there, lurking in compassionate shadows—the Boston Vegetarian Society was founded in 1986, Wheeler's Black Label Vegan Ice Cream began in 1987, and Grasshopper has been serving up Vietnamese vegan cuisine and hosting third Sunday buffets for as long as anyone can remember—but this year, animal-friendly New Englanders can really claim their city as their own.

Eric Prescott, who moved to Boston two-and-a-half years ago, notes the increase and diversification of veg restaurants, including Peace o' Pie, a gourmet vegan pizzeria he co-founded last fall. Prescott is also the president of the Boston Vegan Association, which offers "vegan community, activist education, and [an] outlet for animal-rights advocacy work."

For the best bubble tea of your life, don't miss My Thai Vegan Café, just across from Boston Common. Perhaps it's a bit too much to claim to make tofu from the legumes of Beantown, but it's nice to see that local patriots can have soymilk at their tea party.

**Number of vegan restaurants:** 8

**Favorite local find:** The Spike's Junkyard Dogs chain offers veggie dogs and burgers to go with its famously gigantic assortment of condiments.

**Why living here rocks:** The annual Boston Vegetarian Food Festival, now in its 15<sup>th</sup> year, is the longest-running, all-veg food festival in the country.



Strolling by the Charles River is tastier with a slice of vegan pie and bubble tea.



# Washington, DC

In so many ways, our nation's capital leads by example, and increasingly so for the animals. Five-year resident and self-described "lawyer, writer, and citizen lobbyist" Amber McDonald went vegan only after her move to DC. After blogging for DC Vegan, she gave up her carnivorous ways and now uses the website as a resource of all things cruelty-free. Recently, she drafted a resolution for Councilmember Yvette Alexander to bring Meat-Free Mondays to DC.

Since 2001, Sticky Fingers Bakery has sweetened the palates of Republicans and Democrats alike with delicious desserts free of animal ingredients. From there, it's a quick cruise downhill to Dupont Circle where just this spring, Café Green opened, becoming the "first full-service, sit-down organic vegan dining experience in the nation's capital." Already it's become McDonald's favorite. Perhaps the café will become a great place to take a new date whom you met at DC Vegan Drinks, held monthly at veg-friendly Bread & Brew. McDonald might be able to help you out there, too. She says, "I've received permission from SuperVegan to launch their 'Date This Vegan' feature at DC Vegan. I'm really looking forward to bringing together people for some veggie love in the District."

An increasingly veg-friendly DC is an exciting thing. Politicians on both sides of the aisle should take a look into their own backyard and note the growth of this compassionate, educated, and active meat-free constituency.

**Number of vegan restaurants:** 4

**Favorite local find:** Sticky Fingers' General Manager Ben Adams loves the vegan tapas options at Jaleo so much that his rehearsal dinner was held there. And the gazpacho is particularly life-changing.

**Why living here rocks:** "DC is where laws are made and minds are changed. There's never a dull moment," says McDonald.



Jaleo's stunning dining room and a Sticky Fingers sweet.

# Chicago

Two hardworking ball teams and the President of the US call this city home, making Chicago a town full of civic pride that plays Second City to none. It's also the birthplace of fast-food chain McDonald's and the setting for Upton Sinclair's famous novel, *The Jungle*, a polemic tome exposing the meat-packing industry. One could argue that the cards were stacked against vegetarians from the beginning, which makes the veg-friendliness of Chi-town all the more remarkable.

In a sense, the city's history has given today's meat-free residents strength. "We've been through a lot," comments Leanne Malley Hilgart, Windy City native and owner of Vaute Couture, a vegan fashion label. "We're just

happy to have found each other." Chicago has exploded onto the vegan scene with nationally renowned businesses such as Vaute Couture, Upton's Naturals seitan, and Chicago Soydairy. The last of that list, founded by Ryan Howard and Daniel Ziegler, quickly rose to prominence with its triple-threat offerings of vegan ice cream, marshmallows, and cheese. Chocolate Temptation milkshakes are reason enough to brave the winter winds here.

Since 1983, The Chicago Diner has served mouthwatering vegetarian cuisine on the North Side. Hilgart recalls the "most delicious summer of [her] life" working there. She also sings the praises of Karyn's on Green as the new vegan "it" spot: "I dreamt of a dressy, gorgeous vegan restaurant in Chicago—and there it was!" Sweet Cakes Bakery keeps Chicagoans supplied with vegan root beer cupcakes, and iCream's customizable menu keeps the vegan ice cream coming. With popular meet-ups such as Vegan Chicago, events like Chicago VeganMania, a thriving veg music scene, and animal-free eateries, Midwestern vegans are crooning as Sinatra once sang—Chicago is my kind of town.

**Number of vegan restaurants:** 10

**Favorite local find:** Delicious Café's homemade vegan cheese used in its grilled sandwiches is a bucket-list-worthy experience.

**Why living here rocks:** Even the mainstream events have vegan angles. Lollapalooza, one of the most well-known music festivals of all time, routinely includes a Chicago Soydairy booth.



The Chicago Soydairy team and their delicious Dandies.





# Philadelphia

Chef Richard Landau co-founded Horizons, Philadelphia's epicurean pinnacle of vegan cookery, bringing delicious, ethical haute cuisine to the heart of his lifelong home. "Since we opened up downtown," he says, "other restaurants have caught on. They see we are packed all the time and [now] you can get a decent veg offering in a lot of mainstream restaurants."

Philadelphia, a city of artery-clogging cheesesteak fame, has opened its arms (and stomachs) to vegetarianism in recent years. With restaurants such as Horizons at the high end, many others are filling bellies in a more casual way. Among the most popular are Govinda's Gourmet to Go (which serves faux chicken cheesesteak), Kingdom of Vegetarians (dim sum), and Singapore (kosher Chinese).

In 2008, the Philadelphia Phillies won the World Series, the same year that PETA named Citizen's Bank Park (the Phillies home field) the most vegetarian-friendly ballpark in the country.

Highlights include crab-free cakes, as well as vegan hot dogs, veggie burgers, and cruelty-free cheesesteaks.

The Humane League works on the advocacy front bringing veganism and compassionate living to the greater Philadelphia region. Since 2005, the group has done outreach, campaigned for policy changes, and rescued and placed hundreds of displaced, endangered animals. With veg chef and writer Rachel Klein, it also produced a series of vegan cooking shows, which air locally. A city steeped in American history, from the Liberty Bell to Rocky Balboa, Philly is writing a new chapter that is very veg-friendly.

**Number of vegan restaurants:** 7

**Favorite local find:** The vegan pizza offered up at Gianna's Grille should be a national treasure.

**Why living here rocks:** "I think the city as a whole has really embraced the concept of veg dining—so I take my hat off to Philadelphia in general," Chef Landau praises, adding, "The dining choices are really diverse. New Jersey is just over the river and grows some of the country's best produce."

What's not to love in this city of brotherly vegan cheesesteaks?



# Seattle

The world knows Seattle as an epicenter of great coffee. For those who subscribe to the belief that under a wet, grey sky, nothing goes better with a good cup of java than an equally great doughnut, check out Mighty-O. Since opening in 2000, Mighty-O has created artisan, organic doughnuts, free of any animal ingredients. For the plant-based epicurean palate, look no further than Capitol Hill where Plum Bistro recently opened its doors. The savory and spicy Cajun Mac 'N Yease bears little resemblance to its blue-box step-cousin, and has received glowing reviews.

Today, Seattle offers a growing number of veg-friendly businesses, from vegan tattoos at Damask Tattoo to the completely vegan store Sidecar for Pigs Peace. Pizza Pi offers up cruelty-free slices of heaven six days a week, and one would be hard pressed to find a tastier, more satisfying brunch than at Café Flora. Of course, no survey of Seattle herbivorous restaurants would be complete without mentioning Wayward Café and its incredibly delectable biscuits and gravy.

Vegans and vegetarians of a certain generation—who surfed concert crowds to Seattle's sound—will be happy to know that Pearl Jam front man Eddie Vedder is vegetarian, as is former Nirvana bassist Krist Novoselic. Still others recall the infamous WTO protests of 1999. A year later, anniversary protests from around the city concluded in a vegan barbecue in Westlake Plaza. A *Seattle Times* article from 1991 detailed the different types of vegetarianism, making reference to Seattle being "one of the vegetarian meccas of the United States." Nearly two decades later, the city continues to press ahead, as bold as a dark Indonesian roast, into a meat-free future. Clearly, Seattle has something very vegan in its caffeinated blood.

**Number of vegan restaurants:** 13

**Favorite local find:** Hillside Quickie Vegan Sandwich Shop is just as satisfying as the name would have you believe.

**Why living here rocks:** Now that the truly omnipresent Starbucks in Seattle offers vegan frappuccinos, rainy days are slightly brighter. Sip one while strolling through the peaceful Japanese Garden if you can catch a break from the showers.



Fresh dining and blended coffees brighten the Pacific Northwest.



From top: Lula's Sweet Apothecary, a delicious dosa, Veggie Prom queen Marisa Miller-Wolfsun and king David Benzaquen.



# New York

Start spreading the news—New York reigns supreme. By the numbers, the city boasts 42 vegan restaurants, 71 vegetarian, and 41 veg-friendly, tallying up a veg-friendliness score of 215. Compare that to next-best Los Angeles' 123, San Francisco's 81, and Seattle's 67. Overseas, London comes closest with 202, but New York is in no danger of losing its tofu tiara.

Home of the original Vegan Drinks phenomenon of cruelty-free snacks and libations, this monthly social gathering's Facebook page has more than 1,300 fans. The April event this year raised more than \$1,100 for Darwin Animal Doctors, an organization actively building the Galapagos' first comprehensive veterinary clinic. The NYC Animal Rights meet-up group has more than 800 members. In a city of millions, this may not seem like much, but the New York scene is huge, active, and tearing forward at an accelerating pace aptly clocked against the eponymous New York minute.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) was founded in New York City in 1866, and is the first humane society to be established in North America and one of the largest in the world. The Fund for Animals has also called the city home since 1967. The UN sits just above the East River, and recently its *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, winner of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, urged a reduction in meat consumption to curb global warming.

Details of the ever-changing veg scene are chronicled daily on veg blog SuperVegan. Try to keep up: From Vegan's Delight in the Bronx down to Strictly Vegetarian in Brooklyn, New York is a city for foodies. Indeed, this is where *it is at*—whether it's dining on seitan piccata on the Upper East Side at Candle 79 or simply grabbing a tofu turnover from the Body and Soul cart at Brooklyn's Grand Army Plaza Greenmarket. MooShoes will shod your deserving feet in leather-free footwear, and if that isn't enough, vegans can undergo a sugar-induced religious experience at Lula's Sweet Apothecary, a beloved vegan confectionary. Feeling especially prideful? The NYC Veggie Pride Parade has garnered national attention to the cruelty-free cause, and this year was preceded by the city's first Veggie Prom. Simply put: We heart NY.

**Number of vegan restaurants:** 42

**Favorite local find:** The Vegan Panini at 'Snice might seem like just another tofu-and-pesto panini, but it's much more like heaven in a pressed sandwich.

**Why living here rocks:** Did we mention that there are 42 *vegan* restaurants? And no trip to the Big Apple would be complete without a slice of Vegan Treats cake at Atlas Café. **VN**

**Matt Flanzer** is a writer for print and screen in Los Angeles. He can be found riding his bike around Venice or online at [matt.flanzer.com](http://matt.flanzer.com)

**Bonus!** You didn't think we'd write about veg-friendly cities and leave out Portland, Ore., did you? Never! Don't miss our must-read Portland travel feature on [vegnews.com](http://vegnews.com).

