

Vegan cuisine is more than just 'rabbit food.'

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The Slice House is one of the restaurants participating in Vegan Restaurant Week.

Leonardtown, MD -- Southern Maryland will be hosting its first-ever Vegan Restaurant Week in St. Mary's County during the week of November 2 - 9.

Participating restaurants will feature a separate vegan menu (or vegan dish) specially created for this week-long community event. Now you might think if you aren't a vegan, there's no reason for you to give it a try. But I spoke with Rebecca Burnett & Alissa Kircher from SOMD Vegan Events and they are anxious to get the message out that vegan cuisine is more than just 'rabbit food.'

"So that non- (or aspiring) vegans, of all ages, have the local opportunity to try and enjoy animal-free food that is delicious and fulfilling. By showcasing creative, unique dishes during a week-long event, we hope all diners will have their interest piqued. For folks that are already interested in plant-based eating but haven't really had the chance to try vegan-specific restaurant dishes or items, this event is the perfect opportunity to try a wide variety of exceptional culinary options. It's also a chance for local chefs to get creative and show off the talent we have here in Southern Maryland restaurants. We ultimately want everyone to enjoy just how tasty and versatile vegan food truly is -- and that it is not just salads and "rabbit food"!

If you aren't familiar with veganism, it's different than being a vegetarian and sometimes people find the guidelines confusing. I asked Alisa to explain.

"Veganism isn't just about food, which is a common misconception. The definition of Vegan is "a philosophy and way of living that seeks to exclude - as far as possible and practical - all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing, or any other purpose; and, by extension, promote the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of humans, animals, and the environment." Vegansim is about embracing all aspects of a compassionate lifestyle, but it's not about perfection, it's simply about making choices that support and contribute to the very least amount of harm possible towards all other living beings. It's about promoting kindness and non-violence for all while preserving an environment that is suffering greatly as a direct result of animal agriculture."

Veganism is growing in popularity, though it's hard to find precise numbers on the number of vegans in the U.S. Most polls put it at around 2 percent of the population though The Economist recently said 25% of adults 25-34 identify as vegan. This growth is making it much easier for vegans to find menu options.

Vegan substitutions for meat, dairy, and even honey are turning up on supermarket shelves and fast food chains like Burger King, Subway, and KFC are adding meat substitutes to their menus.

Rebecca and Alissa are still coordinating details regarding special deals and meals with restaurants participating in the area's first-ever Vegan Restaurant Week.

"We're very excited to learn (and try!) all of the unique culinary creations and will continue to share details, updates and planned menu item photos via our social media pages. We anticipate more restaurants signing up as enthusiasm continues to spread."

Currently the list includes:

- Blue Wind Gourmet
- The Slice House
- Ruddy Duck Brewery & Grill
- The Beanery Cafe and Bakery
- Botanic Deli-Cafe
- Lotus Kitchen
- The Front Porch
- Real Food Studio (truck)
- Elements Eatery & Mixology
- Ruddy Duck Seafood & Alehouse
- Tap House 1637

- Vegan Hut Cafe.

You can get updates about Vegan Restaurant Week by following their Facebook page at this link: <https://www.facebook.com/somdveganrestaurantweek/>

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