



LONGEVITY HOTSPOT, OKINAWA, CELEBRATES VEGANNUALLY

Diets based on fresh vegetables and fruits play a big part in the archipelagos 'blue zone' status



Left to right: Jimami Tofu, locals and Okinawan vegetables and fruits

24 January 2023. In the longevity hotspot of Okinawa, a designated 'blue zone' for life expectancy and boasting one of the longest-living populations in the world, it seems more appropriate to celebrate Vegannually rather than Veganuary, as there is no denying that following a vegan diet, prevalent in Okinawan culture, comes with a wealth of benefits. Indeed, Okinawa's food culture is believed to be a key factor in its status as one of five longevity hotspots in the world with the bountiful fresh produce its natural environment produces such as fresh vegetables and tropical fruits playing a big role.

As the UK celebrates Veganuary, Visit Okinawa highlights below a selection of restaurants loved by locals for their vegan offering for those planning a visit in 2023 and beyond:

An organic vegan oasis in the heart of the capital

Run under the motto 'seeds are magic' [Ukishima Garden](#) is a vegan restaurant in the heart of the capital, Naha. Using locally and organically cultivated produce, its menus have a special emphasis on what was often referred to as the sacred five grains - millet, wheat, brown rice, white rice and beans - to express the flavours of the sea and earth of Okinawa. Open for lunch, the set menu starts from ¥1,680 per person (approx. £11) for a main and a drink with dishes including 'Shima Tofu VegeTaco Rice', made with organic rice grown in Iriomote Island, and 'Island Vegetable Keema Curry' with Amaranthus from Hateruma Island (Okinawa's southernmost island), barley and flavoured with organic spices.

A hidden café in the mountains

[Yama Chaya Rakusui](#) is a secluded café on a mountain in the town of Tamaki in the southern part of Okinawa Island, which is approx. 30 minutes by car from the airport. Getting to this charming eatery comes with a challenge as travellers will need to walk up approx. 100 steps. However, the effort is well worth it, with uninterrupted ocean views and tasty food! The family-run restaurant offers a range of specialities made with

locally grown vegetables such as purple sweet potato tempura and soba noodles, as well as pizzas made with home-grown wheat and cooked in brick ovens. The design and décor of this café are to be noted with dynasty-period paintings showcasing the Okinawan lifestyle adorning the walls, offering guests the opportunity to enjoy delicious food while admiring fine cultural paintings. For travellers wanting to stay in the area, the family also runs three small villas in the same plot of land - [Sachibaru Villa](#) - overlooking the ocean! Stays at the villas start from ¥38,000 per night (approx. £239) based on two adults sharing and including breakfast.

All-you-can-eat vegetable goodness

For travellers wanting to combine a shopping spree with a delicious meat-free meal, Chatan in central Okinawa Main Island is the place to go. The vibrant area is known for its distinctive colourful buildings and lively leisure outlets, including the oceanfront [Depot Island](#) and [American Village](#), brimming with stores and eateries. But away from the buzz and boasting panoramic views of the area is [Vegeful Lunch Café](#), a small independently owned café offering an all-you-can-eat meat-free lunch buffet, as well as a set dinner menu. The lunch buffet starts from ¥1,200 per person (approx. £8) and dinner from ¥2,500 per person (approx. £16). Additionally, the owner is a licensed nutritionist specialising in meat-free nutrition and offers workshops from ¥3,000 per person (approx. £20) for those wanting to learn how to make Vegeful's original spices, dressings and pickles.

A compulsory stop for those with a sweet tooth

Those looking for a vegan sweet treat should head to Yomitan Village, popular for exuding all that makes Okinawa famous: blue skies, white sandy beaches with clear waters, iconic food and rich Ryukyu culture. It is in Yomitan that travellers will find [Bakery Suien](#), a charming vegan bakery famous for its sweet treats and slowly baked brick oven bread all made with vegetables produced in Okinawa, and with a selection of lunch options available. The interior and décor of this bakery would make visitors feel like they are in the home of a friendly local so much so that they will even get to meet the owners' pet donkey whose hobby is to greet customers from the back garden! Once the indulging is done, the 15th-century UNESCO-listed [Zakimi-jo Castle](#) is a short ten minute walk from the bakery, perfect to walk off the tasty treats and explore the local culture and history.

For further information about Okinawa, please visit: <https://visitokinawajapan.com/>

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About Okinawa:

Japan's southernmost prefecture, Okinawa, comprises 160 subtropical islands boasting a year-round warm climate comparable to Hawaii, Miami and Cancun. Just 3 hours by air from Tokyo and blessed with incredible natural beauty, from lush forests to crystal blue waters with abundant coral and golden sands, Okinawa is perfect for beach lovers and sport enthusiasts alike whilst still appealing to culture seekers thanks to its unique history and heritage.

Using the bountiful fresh produce its natural environment produces, Okinawa's culinary culture is also unique and is believed to be a key factor in Okinawa's status as one of five longevity hotspots in the world.

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