
Calling all vegetarians and vegans to the Czech Republic!

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Being a vegetarian, vegan or someone with dietary requirements should never stop you from travelling, trying new cuisines or enjoying your food. I'm a firm believer that this attitude – held by those with dietary requirements and those without – is mostly all in a person's head. You don't have to starve as both the Czech cuisine and the menzas ("cafeterias") at Charles University have something for everyone. Here are my five top tips for how and why:



1 Get the facts straight

Vegans do not consume any animal products; this includes all meat, dairy, sea food, products containing animal extracts such as gelatine, products that are tested on animals and processes that use animals. *Vegetarians* don't consume any meat, but are likely to eat dairy products. Some eat fish and they're otherwise called *pescatarians*. You should try not to confuse the two and don't assume that if someone calls themselves a "vegetarian" they will eat fish or seafood, as most don't. Vegetarians follow similar guidelines to vegans when it comes to the products they buy. *Lactose intolerant* refers to a common difficulty in digesting lactose, a sugar found in milk/dairy and a gluten intolerance is an inability to digest gluten, found in rye, wheat and bread produce. A more sensitive, long-term form of this intolerance is known as *Coeliac Disease*. *Halal* refers to meat prepared according to Islamic food laws and pork products are generally excluded from this diet. *Kosher* refers to Jewish food laws and preparation and the strictness of adherence varies from person to person.

2 Let go of the idea that the Czech cuisine has nothing to offer people with dietary requirements

The Czech cuisine is rich, varied and wholesome. The key is to ask to be creative and to ask questions. More and more people are choosing to be vegetarian, vegan or recognising that they have dietary requirements, therefore more places are catering for them. You'll find that most menus are divided into vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals but beware of the Czech phrase *bezmasá jídla* (dishes without meat) as this doesn't mean the listed dishes are 100% veggie/vegan as they may include bacon or have been cooked in animal fats. Some examples of this would be *knedlíky s vejci* (fried dumplings with eggs) or *omeleta se sýrem a bramborem* (cheese and potato omelette). Unless you visit a specialised eatery in the Czech Republic it is unlikely that there will be a specific vegan or lactose/gluten free menu. Therefore it's recommended to ask what foods are suitable or if the restaurant could slightly change a meal that has taken your fancy. Personally, if I'm stuck I tend to mix up the side dishes or ask to have a side dish as a main when I'm eating out. Remember, all of the Czech desserts are vegetarian and a lot of snack foods are suitable for most dietary requirements. The following dishes, however, are typically Czech and vegetarian (v) - vegan (vv) - gluten free (g), and you'll find them in a lot of food outlets:

Ovocné knedlíky (v) fruit dumplings (*sweet served dumplings filled with different sorts of fruit, e.g. borůvkové knedlíky = blueberry dumplings, jahodové knedlíky = strawberry dumplings, meruňkové knedlíky = apricot dumpling, třešňové knedlíky = cherry dumplings, švestkové knedlíky = plum dumplings; fruit dumplings are served with various toppings – traditional ones are cottage cheese, cinnamon, poppy seeds or fried bread crumbs, all of them combined with sugar and melted butter; non-traditionally but quite commonly fruit dumplings are offered also with whipped cream*);

Bramboračka/ Cibulačka (v; g) thick soup of potatoes and mushrooms / onion soup (*the latter is sometimes served with a cube of melting cheese on the bottom of the plate; please, ask if the soup is made without any flour at all if you are coeliac as there might be a tiny bit added to make the soup thicker*);

Bramborák (v) / Bramborová kaše (v; g) potato pancake / mashed potatoes with diced onion (*if you are vegetarian, ask if the potato pancake or even the mashed potatoes are served without any meat as sometimes there are small pieces of bacon or sausages mixed into the potato dough and very occasionally the mashed potatoes are refined with pieces of meat or bacon*);

Polévka soup (vv if no cream; g if no croutons and no flour added to make the dish thicker) (bramborová polévka = potato soup; česneková polévka = garlic soup; čočková polévka = lentil soup; houbová polévka = mushroom soup; kulajda = dill and sour cream soup, zeleninová polévka = vegetable soup, zelnáčka = sauerkraut, potatoes and cream soup; boršč = beetroot soup, often served with cream); beware that any soup that is called vývar or bujón = bouillon is served with meat or made out of it, unless it is zeleninový vývar which means vegetable bouillon and should be vegetable-based only);

Krokety (v) fried mashed potatoes (formed into small balls; served as side dish);

Dušené fazole (vv; g) stewed beans;

Lilek (vv; g) aubergine;

Celozrný chléb (vv) wholemeal bread;

Chléb/Pečivo (v) bread/rolls;

Hranolky (v) french fries/chips (served as side dish);

Kus-kus (vv) cous cous;

Míchaná vejce (v; g) scrambled eggs;

Chřest/Kapusta (vv; g) asparagus/cabbage;

Knedlíky s vejci (v) dumplings with eggs (pieces of bread dumplings mixed with eggs typically served with sour cucumbers);

Pizza = pizza (v if you select a topping without meat);

Těstoviny/Rýže (vv/v) pasta/rice (served as side dish);

Salát (v/vv; g if without croutons) **salad** (rajčatový salát = tomato salad, šopský salát = Greek style salad – usually no olives are used in the more popular šopský salát unlike in řecký salát = Greek salad which is occasionally on offer as well, but not so favoured by Czechs; zeleninový/míchaný salát = *mixed vegetable salad*);

Sendvič/pitta/panini (v/vv) sandwich/pitta/panini

Smažené žampiony/Smažený sýr (v) fried mushroom/fried cheese

Sojové mléko/Sojový tvaroh or tofu (vv; g) soya milk/tofu

Dort (v) cake

3 Visit the menza

The Charles University *menzas* (“cafeterias”) across the city offer fresh, inexpensive vegetarian/vegan/gluten free dishes from Monday-Friday. Also, I often visit the Faculty of Art's cafeteria where there are several types of cold pasta, cous cous, lentil, bean and vegetable salads, these are all priced on weight. You'll also find an array of cakes, biscuits, rolls and open sandwiches with egg, cheese and/or salad called obložené chlebičky in many of the CU faculty buffets. I often choose an aubergine and cheese baguette or a speedy hot meal like fried cheese, potatoes or soup. What's fantastic is you can check the next day's menu of the menzas beforehand online and order specific dishes ready in advance, so regular visits for anyone with dietary requirements is a must. Visit <http://kamweb.ruk.cuni.cz/webkredit/> to find out more and check out your nearest menza. Don't forget, you can pay using your topped up ISIC or university ID card!

4 Don't let a language barrier limit your eating experience

Not being able to ask someone for help when reading a menu can be frustrating and isolating for people with dietary requirements. You don't want to spend your time abroad avoiding new foods and miscommunication will inevitably put you in uncomfortable situations, so it's important to communicate your needs to whoever is serving you so you can enjoy eating out in the Czech Republic – it only takes a little practice to go a long way. What's more, you'll gain the confidence to embrace the local cuisine elsewhere. Here is the basic vocabulary you will need:

Starters/Main dishes/Side Dishes/Desserts = předkrmy / hlavní chod / přílohy / dezerty

Breakfast/Lunch/Dinner/Drinks (Beverages) = snídaně / oběd / večeře / nápoje

Do you have...? = Máte...?

Food = jídlo

Halal/Kosher/Vegetarian food = halal / košer / vegetariánské jídlo

I'm vegetarian / vegan = Jsem vegetarián (male) / Jsem vegetariánka (female); Jsem vegan / veganka.

I'm allergic to.... *Jsem alergický/á na...* (please, add one of the following or anything else you are allergic to)

Nuts / peanuts / dairy produce / seafood / MSG / eggs = ořechy / arašidy / mléčné výrobky / mořské plody / MSG (*glutaman sodný*) / vejce)

Is that vegetarian / vegan? = Je toto vegetariánské / veganské jídlo?

I'm lactose / wheat / gluten intolerant. = *Mám alergii na produkty obsahující laktózu / pšenici. // Mám alergii na lepek.*

Hello, I would like...and.... = Dobrý den, dal/a bych si....a.....

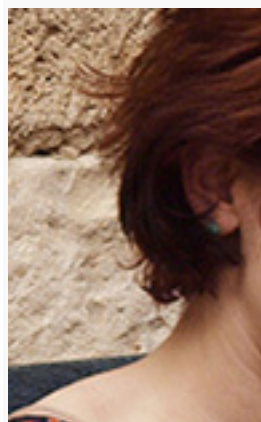
I don't eat... = Nejím... (please, add one of the following or anything else you do not eat)

Poultry / fish / meat / meat stock = drůbež / ryby / maso / masný výrobek (Czech people would use the latter in plural only = masné výrobky)

I'd like it with/without... = Chtěl/a bych to bez....
Vegetables/fruit = zelenina/ovoce
A slice/a piece = kousek...
On the side = zvlášť
What would you recommend? = Co byste (mi) doporučil/a?
What's that? = Co je tohle?
What's in that dish? = Co je (obsažené) v tomto jídle?
I'd suggest the... = Doporučil/a bych
Is this...? = *Je to...? (please, add one of the following)*
Free of animal produce / without meat = *neživočišný/bezmasý produkt*
Free-range/organic = z volného chovu / *bio / organické*
Gluten-free (food) = bezlepkové (jídlo)
Low in sugar = nízkokalorické
Genetically modified = geneticky upraveno
Thank you = Děkuji

5 Get to know Prague

Find out where the markets are (*farmer markets = farmářské trhy* are especially popular, held usually 2-3 times a week on bigger squares immediately aside of the historical city centre), what has the best dairy/meat/gluten free alternatives and remember there are numerous wonderful vegetarian and vegan only outlets in Prague where you can eat in or takeaway. If you have serious allergies or complex dietary requirements, a chat to the menza staff won't hurt! Additionally, Czech students waiting in the queue in the menza can help you with translation if needed. For home cooking, you can find the odd health food shop that will sell an array of specialised goods and meat replacement products such as tofu and soya. Also keep your eyes open for the Halal and Kosher labels especially in takeaways and get your Czech dictionaries out if this applies to you or if you're catering for people who have these dietary requirements. The trick is to be confident, explore and do your research. Happy munching!



Poppy Gerrard-Abbott is an Erasmus student studying BA Humanities at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University and her home university is the University of Essex in England. She chose to write for the iForum to build on her journalism skills and meet other aspiring journalists; to grow closer to the social and creative life of Charles University and to learn more about Czech culture and life in Prague through attending local events and researching Czech issues and current affairs. Poppy saw the iForum as an exciting opportunity to pursue her interests in politics, culture and history whilst meeting other Erasmus students. She thinks it's a very worthwhile and fun experience that has brought some exciting opportunities her way, extended her writing skills and her knowledge of the Czech Republic, and hopes Charles University continues to offer such placements to future students.

Elisabeth Lee

Elisabeth Lee is an Erasmus student studying BA English Literature at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University. After studying for two years at the University of Kent, Elisabeth realised she was immensely passionate about writing. Whether it was writing long arduous essays, shorts stories or to-do lists that would inevitably be lost within her cluttered bag, she loved to write. Therefore she immediately applied for a position at the International iForum hoping that it would develop her skills and enable her to pursue her dreams of one day becoming a fully fledged writer.