

# Vegetarian Options Everyone Can Enjoy

[ *Michael Martin* ]

Most people venture to the big city for finer food choices, but Yamanashi hides a few culinary secrets of its own. Luckily for those who have adopted plant-based diets, vegan restaurants can be counted among them! Let's get one thing straight from the start, though: You don't have to be an herbivore to enjoy wining and dining at these local hotspots.



Let's start at the heart of Kofu. Fluunt is about as downtown as you can get, being located down the street from Okajima and foreigner-favorite bar, The Vault. Fluunt is a great option for those who are a bit apprehensive about the authenticity of a meal with no meat. It specializes in vegan hamburgers that, many claim, rival the real deal—or at least, the Japanese interpretation of the real deal. Sides include fried chicken, without the chicken of course. The flavors are great but connoisseurs will know that the real trick to a solid vegetable patty or soy nugget is the texture. Fluunt doesn't disappoint: The nuggets are uncannily similar to matsuri street stall *kara'age* (deep fried meat nuggets), and the burgers just beg for you to sink your teeth into them. Are they going to convince a farm boy raised on fresh milk and red meat that it's time to ditch the diet and go vegan? Probably not, but it will certainly satisfy anyone looking to mix things up for a meal.

It's not just the food that has the run of the place at Fluunt, but the drinks as well. The extensive menu includes soft drinks such as cordials as well as wine, beer, and sake on the alcohol side of things. There's coffee as well, a necessity for me. If you aren't looking for caffeine to keep you up all night, though, they also offer a caffeine-free coffee alternative that has a deep and earthy taste not unlike a chicory blend.



Fluunt is party- and enkai-ready, and although it won't fit a staggering amount of bodies, they offer a few dishes that can only be ordered ahead of time. Have a special someone, who happens to be squeamish around animal products, with a birthday coming up? Fluunt is a safe bet for a great time and quality service. Salads and rice bowls are available for guests who would prefer something a little more akin to a traditional diet.

Fluunt is great for dinner but also offers a set-of-the-day, such as pasta, as well as their burgers on the lunch menu. If you're downtown during lunchtime it's a great place to grab a bite on your break!

Before we move on, let's talk about one more thing that Fluunt does absolutely right: the cheese. It's completely dairy-free, as are all of Fluunt's products. What's the secret? *Sake kasu* – the dregs left over from the sake-manufacturing process. In true Japanese fashion, even these scraps are collected and sold in stores. Some clever soul out there found a way to make a quality cheese substitute from them and Fluunt has perfected the art.

Just two train stops down the line from Kofu Station is Veggie Ya near Isawa Onsen Station. A short drive or reasonable walk from the station brings you to this part bakery, part restaurant owned by the same family as Fluunt. The bakery section includes pastries, raw cheesecakes, tarts, muffins, and more. If you're luckily enough to snag one of the very limited seats, you can also order a set meal. Options include such mains as *tempe katsu*, *kurumafu*, and teriyaki scallions. *Tempe* is a traditional Indonesian food made from fermented soy beans, but it bears little to no resemblance to *natto* so worry not if the sound of it resurrects memories of stringiness and horrid odors. *Kurumafu* is wheat gluten, or the result of washing all the starches out of wheat until only the protein remains. It's used as a soy alternative. The menu is constantly changing, so keep an eye on the Facebook page (べじ屋) for the latest offerings.



When we visited, we tried the *tempe katsu* and the *kurumafu*. *Katsu* has never been a favorite of mine, but I was more than pleasantly surprised by Veggie Ya's take on the classic. It was hearty and filling. More to my liking, though, was the *kurumafu*. It had a teriyaki sauce that was delightfully sweet and the gluten's texture gave a satisfying resistance as I chowed down on it, like biting into a firm piece of meat. For dessert we tried the raw blueberry cheesecake. From the moment I saw it I was in love: The plate was garnished with strawberries, apple slices, and a the dish. As much as a treat it was for the eyes, it was even more so for my taste buds. Rich, creamy, and sweet with berries, it was a great way to cap off the meal. On the way out I also grabbed a six-nut tart for the road. It was, needless to say, an excellent choice.

If you like making your own food the shop is worth a visit for

yet another reason: Fresh spices and chickpeas are offered for sale, so you can try your own hand at being iron chef for a day.

The store clearly focuses on the bakery aspect and offers dining as a bonus. The menu is limited to a full-size set, a smaller set, an Indian curry, and four a la carte sides. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, though: It lets the owners focus on what they can get fresh. Veggie Ya – and for that matter,



Fluunt as well – procures many of their ingredients from local growers.

Veggie Ya is best saved for a leisurely day. There was only one worker when we visited, and it was a bit of a wait for the food to come out. You wouldn't want to do the cuisine an injustice by rushing it to meet other appointments. Take your time to enjoy the care and attention given in

preparing each sweet morsel and muffin.

If I had to describe the difference between Fluunt and Veggie Ya, I would say that Fluunt offers a take on vegan that will satisfy partakers of all kinds of diets. Veggie Ya, on the other hand, focuses on bringing out the unique qualities of each ingredient in a more traditional manner. It's an easy recommendation for seasoned vegans who have long lost the desire for tricking their tongues into thinking they're eating meat. It does, however, try to satisfy that niche as well – just not with as many choices as Fluunt offers.

It's not just vegan-dedicated eateries that cater to vegetarians and the like these days. There is a constantly wider and wider selection for those with restricted diets – from soy patties at Mos Burger to Indian curry at places like Taj Mahal and Milan. Even for those with dietary constraints, whatever you're in the mood for, Yamanashi has something wonderful to offer you.



Michael is the Prefectural Advisor for the Yamanashi High School Board of Education and is a 5th Year JET Program Participant. As a relatively recent pescatarian, he's excited to write for The Grapevine for the first time about alternative food options in Yamanashi. In his free time, he enjoys studying, going on road trips around Japan, enjoying the outdoors, playing trumpet with the Kofu City Wind Orchestra, and hiding under the kotatsu while playing video games. He especially loves relaxing on the beaches of Kyushu and witnessing breath-taking vistas atop the Minami Alps!