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Anyone Can Be Vegan – Even Cash-Strapped Students

‘I figured that with my small kitchenette, equipped with microwave, kettle and toaster, I could somehow make it work.’ - Zoe Thompson

Food blogging and Instagram have helped to raise awareness of the benefits of a vegan diet – and many students are embracing this new way of eating.

Zoe is a student studying English literature at the University of Bristol.

The ubiquity of kale chips, quinoa and juice fasts recently has led many to consider veganism as just another diet trend. But more and more

people, including students, are recognising the real health and ethical benefits of a plant-based diet.

Being a first-year student, I was apprehensive about whether I'd be able to sustain a vegan diet in catered accommodation. As I walk to collect my dinner, it can be somewhat off-putting to be met by kitchen staff who announce, rather loudly, that “the vegan is here” in need of her “special meal” of tinned mushrooms and a fruit cocktail.

However, I am comforted by the fact that 18 per cent of this year's intake of university students were apparently contemplating going vegan, according to a recent poll of nearly 2,200 respondents.

Veganism on a student budget

While I could see the advantages to being self-catered, I wanted the social experience of the dining hall. Like others with “special” diets, I didn't want to feel limited because I eat differently from the traditional British fare.

I figured that with my small kitchenette, equipped with microwave, kettle and toaster, I could somehow make it work.

And so, within just six weeks at university, I have learned how to manoeuvre around an uncomfortable dining situation and, most importantly, how to prepare a nutritionally rounded dinner with minimal resources.

Following a vegan diet can be extremely cheap for students. For example, one thing I depend on is the sweet potato. Not needing an oven or a hob, the humble root vegetable is microwaveable in under five minutes. **A jacket sweet potato can easily be stuffed with hummus or ready-made falafel, beans and steamed vegetables, making a really tasty (and notably quick) lunch.**

Uncle Ben's ready-rice, pre-cooked lentils, vegetable soups and porridge have also been my go-to for creating meals. Broth (miso or vegetable), curry bases (coconut milk, curry powder and tinned tomatoes) and "free-from" pesto can add some sparkle to tinned beans or tofu.

I have also invested in a **miniature slow cooker**. Using little electricity, it isn't classified as a fire hazard and can be stored in my bedroom. This has really helped with making big batches of veggie chilli that I leave in the fridge for the week.

But nowadays anyone can prepare vegan food. Supermarket "free-from" aisles are gradually becoming more varied and there is an increased awareness about food preparation in our food blogging and Instagram culture.

Like me, **Claudia Rooke**, a second-year student at Bristol, opted for veganism during her first term at university and relies on **macro bowls** (with brown rice, vegetables, sprouted beans and soy sauce), porridge and soy yoghurt as staple meals and snacks.

"Choosing to eat this way has been an amazing experience for me," says Rooke. "I wasn't particularly interested in cooking to begin with, but I have found that being vegan makes you more creative with food, and over the past two years I have tried cooking with many new ingredients."

Students: could you turn flexitarian?

Natasha Matsuert, a student studying animal behaviour and welfare science at the University of Bristol, has been vegan for five months. Overall, she has found most people to be accepting of her lifestyle and finds her self-catered accommodation makes it easy.

“At the moment I’m having a lot of green smoothies, fruit, hummus and salad,” says Matsuert. “I try to get a bit of protein into every meal, like beans and lentils, and carbs for breakfast. Fruit and vegetables are fairly cheap and I try to do a weekly shop and plan my meals so nothing goes to waste. Bristol is also amazing for vegans, there are options basically everywhere you go.”

Crucially, being a vegan at university has made me understand the social stigma around it. I’ve learned how to be confident in my actions, answer questions and respond to people’s criticisms. I’ve accepted that some people will remain unconvinced by veganism and now I know that, ultimately, that is okay.

“My friends were supportive of my choice to go vegan, although most of them eat meat,” says Rooke. “Being at university is the best environment in which to go vegan, as you have the space to make your own choices and it’s really easy to meet like-minded people. I’m now president of my university’s vegan and vegetarian society and so far it’s been a really positive experience.”

Now, I can confidently say that veganism is a fundamental part of who I am. I’m proud to be sensitive to animal rights and that I have garnered enough independence, creativity and self-acceptance to live this way and let others know and learn about it.

Hopefully, my case serves as a testament to the fact that anyone, anywhere can be vegan if they truly have the passion for it.

Source: The Guardian

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