

VEGI MIGHT

Melbourne's diverse food scene offers an exciting exploration for vegetarians

By Henna Shah



It was well past sunset on our maiden evening in Melbourne when my husband Yash and I found ourselves perched on high stools at Storyville, a fairytale-inspired cocktail bar that seemed plucked from the pages of our favourite childhood stories. While I picked Alice's Tea Cup, a decadent spiked hot chocolate from Alice in Wonderland, Yash chose the Goblet of Fire from the Harry Potter series, a warm cinnamon-infused drink with a theatrical flair. Immersed in the whimsical setting, we started looking up vegetarian dining options nearby. Determined to explore Melbourne's multicultural food scene, we landed at Taco Bill, a modest Mexican spot where hearty tacos, flavourful enchiladas and comforting churros rounded off our evening.

Embracing the Melburnian morning ritual, we began our day with a gentle stroll through the bustling South Melbourne Market, gliding past stalls brimming with artisanal cheeses, handmade pastas, and vibrant local produce. We stopped at Clement Coffee, a beloved hole-in-the-wall roastery, for freshly brewed flat whites to go. In Melbourne, coffee is no casual affair; the city's deep-rooted passion for a strong, aromatic brew traces back to the gold rush era, when Italian immigrants brought espresso machines and laid the foundations of its thriving café culture. Energised, we made our way to Koy Gozleme, where a crisp, cheese-and-spinach gozleme sizzled on

the grill before reaching our plates. "This is the perfect breakfast I didn't know I was craving," Yash said with a grin.

Later in the week, we joined a leisurely food tour organised by This is Melbourne. Our author-guide, Russell McGilton, wore many creative hats and brought the city's streets and flavours to life through his engaging storytelling. We began at Koko Black, where handcrafted chocolates like yuzu-infused pralines and macadamia-salted caramels set the tone for what lay ahead for us.

Going the extra mile

Our first sit-down stop was MoVida, a Spanish tapas bar offering a vegetarian interpretation of its classics with a blend of seasonal Australian produce and Spanish gastronomy. The croqueta, a golden nugget filled with pumpkin, and the tartaleta, artichoke tarts topped with smoked bocconcini, completely won us over.

The tour's highlight, however, was Lucy Liu, a modern Asian restaurant where each dish was a retelling of cultural adaptation and culinary imagination. As we waited for the showstoppers to arrive, we sipped on Floating Market, a vodka-based cocktail delicately infused with rosemary, pear purée,

Clockwise from left: Locals at South Melbourne Market, Oyster mushroom dumplings at Lucy Liu







Clockwise from left: Mexican fare at Taco Bill, Goblet of Fire at Storyville, Queen Victoria Night Market



apple juice, and lime. Our palates were awakened by betel leaves topped with caramelised tofu, pineapple, and chilli, followed by oyster mushroom and chive dumplings in Sichuan sauce, and crisp eggplant wraps bursting with fresh Vietnamese mint and coriander, that lingered long after the final bite.

Making our way through Hosier Lane's vivid street art, we arrived at San Telmo, an Argentine restaurant rooted in the spirit of shared plates. Our table was overflowing with golden empanadas stuffed with cheese, onion, and corn; zanahorias, chargrilled carrots topped with goat's curd and hazelnut picada; and crackling mozzarella in a rich tomato marinara, served with soft, warm bread. As Russell, Yash, and I passed the plates around, exchanging stories of shared post-colonial identities and a collective fondness for cricket that stitched our worlds a little closer, we wrapped up the tour with a scoop of pistachio gelato at Madame Brussels, a tucked-away spot where we learned that authentic gelato is stored in covered metal containers, not piled high in fluffy swirls.

From laneway kitchens to the Queen Victoria Night Market, Melbourne's food reveals the city's diverse soul. Vegetarian dishes here are thoughtfully curated, far beyond mere meat substitutes, blending local flavors with cultural depth. As a vegetarian often sidelined, Melbourne offered me a delicious kind of redemption.