

# Good Food for Everybody

Halal and vegan dining options have never been easier to find in Tokyo.

by Rosie Ball



A delicious bowl of halal ramen with deep-fried chicken.

Anyone who visits this city will agree: Tokyo is home to some of the best food in the world. Whether visitors are searching for a high-end dining experience, an affordable meal, traditional Japanese cuisine, or something modern, finding the right place to eat has never been easier. In recent years, a diverse range of restaurants and food options has begun popping up across the city to accommodate the growing number of international visitors. This includes an array of exciting halal and non-animal product options aimed at Muslim and vegan customers. No matter what the dietary requirement or preference, absolutely everyone in Tokyo can enjoy delicious food.

Bursting with casual dining options and cafés, the Ebisu neighborhood is heaven for food-lovers looking for a bite to eat. Nestled in a quiet side street is a certified halal ramen restaurant with an extensive and delicious menu. With its warmly lit interiors, this place has the atmosphere of a traditional Japanese ramen shop, while providing a small prayer space for customers to use in privacy. The restaurant is one of the over 100 restaurants and food stores featured in the *Tokyo Muslim Travelers' Guide*, a comprehensive booklet with lots of Muslim specific information, including finding halal food and prayer spaces around the city, issued by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government.

The concept for the halal ramen chain began to grow in 2015, when Shimasue Satoshi realized that millions of Muslim people around the world were unable to eat traditional Japanese pork-based ramen. In 2016 he opened his first halal shop specializing in chicken-based ramen, bringing Japanese-style ramen to a more international audience. "Since pork cannot be used as any ingredient in halal cuisine, the issue is how to produce the tasty flavor," he says. "It is rare to find ramen of a chicken-based soup with deep-fried chicken. This allows us to offer ramen that is fun, delicious, and voluminous." With its rich, creamy broth, the spicy chicken ramen is a favorite among tourists from overseas. As Shimasue points out, "Many customers can eat ramen for the first time." They can also try other popular dishes such as the halal *gyoza*, fried then steamed dumplings, which usually contain minced pork, but here the *gyoza* is made with chicken and tofu. "The theme is to provide ramen that foreign clientele will enjoy," he says. In fact, the food served is so delicious that Japanese regulars enjoy it as well.

There are many other notable restaurants that have uniquely international perspectives in Tokyo. Right at home amongst Aoyama's many cutting-edge fashion boutiques and trendy cafés, a specialty shop was opened in 2011 by Ota Yukari, who wanted to bring people together over dishes of 100 percent vegan food and to celebrate organic, pesticide-free farming, and natural cultivation.

"For the meals I was providing I wanted to concentrate on the vitality and power of plants," says Ota, "where people can eat the same meal at the same table without worrying about differences in religion or constitution, and think 'this is delicious!'" The menu's focus is on its

range of delicious juicy burgers containing zero animal-derived ingredients. It also offers fresh salads, and South Indian style curry, using traditional Japanese fermented seasoning and Asian spices to create thoughtful, tasty dishes. "However, the hidden popular menu items are the vegan sweets," she says. Made entirely without dairy products, eggs, or white sugar, the vegan cheesecake is thick, creamy, and very memorable. According to Ota, people even travel from overseas just to try it.

One of the key concepts at this vegan restaurant is to serve as "a second home when you come to Tokyo." This idea extends beyond the menu and into the restaurant's spacious interior. From the dark herringbone flooring to the cozy suede chairs, eclectic art adorning the walls, and soul music quietly flowing from the speakers, everything about the design says comfort. For the diverse mix of international and Japanese customers, Ota has touched on the universal idea of "the kitchen," a place where anyone will feel welcome, regardless of race, language, or religion.

As the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 draw closer, international visitors to Japan can feel confident about finding delicious food options that cater to their

One of the astonishing and popular vegan desserts.



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needs in Tokyo. The ever-growing selection of diverse restaurants has something to offer everyone, a chance to make wonderful memories through sharing and enjoying food.



Completely free of any animal-based products, this burger will entice everyone.

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