

3 OF THE BEST

DARK CHOCOLATE BARS

With National Chocolate Week in mind, we had the arduous task of getting stuck in to rate the following!

Amelia Rope Dark Hazelnut and Seasalt

This handmade bar contains 69% cocoa solids, no butterfat and the combination of nuts and seasalt is scrumptious in a sophisticated way! Although pricey, these bars would make a lovely gift for a host who appreciates the finer things in life (£5.60 for 100g).
www.ameliarope.com



Seed & Bean Organic Coconut and Raspberry Extra Dark Chocolate

Our testers agreed the combination of dark chocolate with a strong taste of raspberries and more subtle coconut was a winner. This handmade vegan-friendly chocolate has won a number of awards for taste (£2.45 for 85g).
www.seedandbean.co.uk



Green & Black's Organic Dark Chocolate with Ginger

The warmth of the crystallised ginger against good quality chocolate stands out, while testers felt this represented good value for money for a special bar (£2.09 for 100g).
www.greenandblacks.com



Please note: Not all dark chocolate bars are suitable for vegans. Always check labels if you're unclear.

Apple bobbing



Cawston Press has recently gone fizzy and added a Sparkling Apple drink and a Sparkling Apple Ginger Beer to their range of apple juices. The latter contains lemon juice and a hint of chilli for extra 'bite' making it a great party alternative to alcohol for drivers. Both are available from most major supermarkets priced at £2.79 for 750ml.

VEGGIE VENTS

In the first of a new monthly column, food writer and vegetarian Kelly Rose Bradford talks about the irksome comments most veggies have suffered at the hands of the veggiephobes!



Having been vegetarian since I was 14 – so more than half my life – I didn't really expect to be hurtling towards middle-age *still* having to explain to people what I can and cannot eat, or justifying my chosen diet. Or indeed picking bits of chicken out of 'vegetarian' salads, or saying until I am blue in the face, 'No, vegetarians do *not* eat fish.'

But as I approach 40, with a nine-year-old veggie son in my wake, I find that being meat- and fish-free can be as tricky now as it was when I was a trailblazing 14-year-old defender of animal rights and eater of dehydrated Beanfeast packet food.

Over the years I've been accused of putting my own health at risk because of my 'lack of iron' (my pregnancy was full of 'advice' from everyone from shop assistants to midwives on how I should be eating 'nice juicy steaks for the baby's sake'). And now of course, I am told regularly that my strapping veggie-from-birth son will be anaemic, have brittle bones, and an undeveloped brain through lack of fish oil...

On a seemingly weekly basis I get accused of hypocrisy for wearing leather shoes, and – until people meet me – am generally perceived as some hippy-dippy tree hugger who will eventually cave in over (predictably) a bacon sandwich ('You must really miss the smell of bacon' is obviously the first entry in the 'What to Say to Veggies to Really Annoy Them' handbook).

So while the supermarkets have without a doubt upped their game in terms of product range and availability in the intervening 20-something years since I stopped eating dead animal, the attitude towards vegetarianism from the public at large generally still seems to be in something of a time warp. A weaved-from-lentils time warp, where Harold Bishop is the poster boy and vegetarians roam the streets in Jesus sandals and purple tie-dye kaftans, eating only textured vegetable protein and nut cutlets, and ruining people's dinner parties with their outrageous demands and wan complexions.

No holds barred

So this column is dedicated to veggie venting. Each month I will bring you my latest dietary diatribe, and trust me, in a world where I am routinely served fish, where Parmesan cheese adorns my veggie pasta with gay abandon, and where an entire plate of peas once constituted a vegetarian meal, I am never short of meat-free (or not-so-meat-free) moans!

I'll name and shame (and give a right to reply, naturally) those who don't tick all my veggie boxes, and will leave no salad leaf unturned in my attempts to get vegetarianism out of that mocking-zone of 'special dietary requirements' – (a yawnsome place where people think it is amusing to claim 'vegetables have feelings too') and put it up there where it belongs – as a sensible, healthy-eating fuelled, normal way of life.

But it's not all about me, me, me – I'd love to know what gets up your nose as a veggie, what outrageous 'vegetarian' meals you have been served (though I challenge anyone to beat my plate of peas), and what ridiculous comments you've had to endure in the name of meat-free living.

NEXT MONTH I'll share with you my experiences of being a veggie when travelling – and trust me, it ain't pretty – from airline meal chaos to veggie dishes with hidden ham 'to give it some flavour'. Home or away, this veggie has seen it, heard it, and had it all – and is not afraid to spill the beans!

'You must really miss the smell of bacon' is obviously the first entry in the 'What to Say to Veggies to Really Annoy Them' handbook