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Sept / Oct 2019

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12 DELICIOUS VEGAN FOODS FROM MALTA + Where to Find Them

By Wendy Werneth

Malta doesn't often get touted as a vegan-friendly destination. In fact, vegan visitors are sometimes dismayed to find out how few vegetarian or vegan restaurants Malta has to offer.

It's true that the Malta vegan movement is still in its infancy, and meat and seafood features heavily on most menus at Maltese restaurants. But don't despair. There are a number of traditional Maltese dishes that are completely free of animal products!

The truth is, there's plenty of vegan food in Malta to enjoy. In addition to the ubiquitous pizza and pasta dishes, there are also a number of traditional Maltese dishes that happen to be vegan.

And there are several more that can easily be veganized by leaving off one or two ingredients.

Mezze platters are popular as a first course in Maltese restaurants. These are often vegetarian and can be veganized by swapping out a couple of items on the platter.

It's a great way to try many different dishes all at once, and they are perfect to share with dining companions.

You may notice that several photos of the dishes below are of small, ramekin-sized portions. Now you know why; they were part of a traditional Maltese platter!

Here are 14 traditional dishes from Maltese cuisine that are already completely vegan or can easily be veganized. Plus, I also give you my top recommendation on where to try each dish in Malta.

1. FTIRA

There are two types of ftira: the first is a type of bread that is used to make sandwiches (see *Hobż biż-żejt* below), and the second is similar to a pizza, but with a Maltese touch. Right now, I'm talking about the second kind.

This ftira looks a lot like pizza, so how is it different? Well, potatoes are often a main topping on ftira, whereas cheese is often left off. The dough is also different from Italian pizza dough and has a crispy texture.

Ftira is famous as a specialty of Gozo, which is a separate, smaller island next to Malta but is still part of Malta the country. The ftira in Gozo is one of the best things I ate while in Malta. Don't miss it!

Where to Eat It: Mekren's Bakery on Gozo. If you can't make it to Gozo, try Nenu the Artisan Baker in Valletta instead. Their Ta' Karmnu l-Bidija ftira is vegan, but a bit plain. A better option is to order the Karmni s-Sultana ftira without the anchovies.



2. SOPPA TAL-ARMLA (WIDOW'S SOUP)

This is a hearty, tasty soup made with potatoes, carrots, garlic, peas and cauliflower, among other ingredients. It normally comes with egg and gbejniet (Maltese cheese), but these are totally optional.

The name "widow's soup" refers to the simplicity of the dish, which is made with ingredients even a poor widow could afford.



Where to Eat It: Nenu the Artisan Baker in Valletta. Ask them to leave off the gbejniet and egg.

3. BIGILLA

Bigilla is a dip made from broad beans (fava beans) and is often served as a starter, either on its own with crusty bread and olive oil, or as part of a larger mezze platter. Technically, the beans used are not exactly broad beans, but a very similar bean that has a darker and harder skin and is known as ful ta' Ġirba in Maltese.

While bigilla is usually enjoyed as a spread on bread, it can also be a tasty accompaniment to many dishes.

Where to Eat It: Nenu the Artisan Baker



4. KUNSERVA

Kunservea may look like a simple tomato sauce, but it is much more than that. To create the thick paste, sweet sun-dried tomatoes are simmered for hours with other ingredients. Each cook has their own secret recipe, but rosemary is often included.



It's a type of preserve, so it will last for months. Typically, kunservea is spread on freshly baked Maltese bread, called Hobż tal-Malti.

Where to Eat It: Nenu the Artisan Baker, where it's served as a starter with bigilla and bread.

5. HELWA TAT-TORK

This is a rather dense, block-style version of halwa, the tahini-based confection that is popular throughout the Middle East and beyond. The Maltese name for this dessert can be translated as "Turk's sweet", and it is quite similar to the halwa you'll find in Turkey.

In addition to tahini (sesame seed paste), the Maltese version often contains almonds or pistachios. It was probably originally introduced by the Arabs, but it has since become a Maltese specialty.

Where to Eat It: I found the halwa pictured here at the Valletta airport, just as I was leaving Malta. You can probably find it in souvenir shops, but be aware that some brands contain gelatin.



6. KUSKSU BIL-FUL

The main ingredients in this soup are fava beans and Israeli couscous, which is similar to normal couscous but much larger. Vegetables such as peas, potatoes and carrots are also sometimes added.

It's a warming, comforting soup that is most often eaten in the winter, though you can enjoy it at any time of year. Maltese cheese and eggs are sometimes added, but these are totally optional.

Where to Eat It: Diar Il-Bniet in Dingli. Just ask them to leave off the gbejniet (Maltese cheese).



7. HOBŻ BIŻ-ŻEJT

This is essentially a sandwich, either open-faced or closed, that is made with the crusty, sourdough bread that is eaten throughout Malta. The name of the dish literally means "bread with oil", but there's generally more to it than that.

In addition to extra virgin olive oil, the thick slices of Hobż tal-Malti (Maltese bread) are spread with kunservea or bigilla and then topped with capers, olives, garlic, parsley and black pepper. Some people add tuna or



anchovies, but this is completely optional.

Hobż biż-żejt is very versatile and is a popular snack or light meal, especially in the summer.

Where to Eat It: the small kiosks near the seafront in Valletta.

8. KAPUNATA MALTJA

Sicilian caponata is one of my favorite dishes, so I was excited to discover that Malta has its own version of this cooked vegetable dish. This shouldn't come as a surprise, since Italy, and nearby Sicily in particular, has had a strong influence on Maltese cuisine.

I'll be honest, the Maltese kapunata that I tried as part of a mezze platter at Diar Il-Bniet was a bit of a letdown. It tasted much more bitter than the balsamic-vinegar-sweetened version I was used to. But I've since looked up several recipes for kapunata maltja, and they all seem pretty similar to the Sicilian version. Most contain eggplant, tomatoes, bell peppers and typically Mediterranean flavors like capers, olives and garlic. All of which I love, so I'm not sure what happened. I'd definitely be willing to give it another try, though.

Where to Eat It: as part of the mezze platter at Diar Il-Bniet or at Nenu The Artisan Baker.



9. FUL BIT-TEWM

The name of this dish means “broad beans with garlic”, and that’s exactly what it is. The beans are cooked with lots of fresh garlic until they are soft and tender.

Whereas in bigilla the beans are mashed into a dip, in this dish they are left whole and sprinkled with parsley. They are still typically served with bread, though, either hot or cold.

Another variation is Fazola bit-Tewm, which is a similar dish made with white beans instead of broad beans.

Where to Eat It: as part of the mezze platter at Diar Il-Bniet.



10. GALLETTI BISCUITS

These puffy little crackers are sometimes known as “ship biscuits”, because they were eaten by sailors while at sea. Traditionally, they would be baked at home, but nowadays most people in Malta just buy the store-bought ones, which are sold everywhere.



Tal-Furnar is a popular brand that offers a variety of flavors. The more traditional varieties, like these with sea salt and black pepper, are vegan friendly. If branching out to more exotic flavors, check the ingredients first.

You’ll often find galletti served alongside Maltese bread as part of a mezze platter. They’re perfect for scooping up all those lovely dips and spreads.

Where to Eat It: any supermarket or convenience store will sell them

11. PASTIZZI TAL-PIZELLI

Pastizzi are an incredibly popular street food snack in Malta. This flaky, savory pastry comes stuffed with a variety of fillings, but one of the most popular is mushy peas. Sounds gross, but I promise it’s delicious.

Pastizzi tal-Pizelli (pastizzi filled with mushy peas) is one of those foods that should always be vegan, but you need to watch out for a few hidden animal products that sometimes sneak their way in.

Butter or lard in the pastry crust, egg wash on top, corned beef mixed into the peas ... you get the idea.

The one pictured here is from the Crystal Palace in Rabat, which is generally considered to make the best pastizzi in all of Malta. The staff assured me there was no egg, dairy, meat or lard in their pea pastizzi, so you should be good.



But if you want to be doubly safe, you can buy frozen pastizzi from one of the confirmed vegan sources listed below and bake them yourself.

Where to Eat It: The pea pastizzi at the Crystal Palace are vegan as far as I can tell, but there is lots of conflicting information about vegan pastizzi in vegan Maltese circles. Two vendors

that definitely do sell vegan ones are LivWell Health Shop in Naxxar and Pastizzi Gourmet in Siggiewi. Theirs are frozen, though, so you’ll need to bake them yourself.

12. QASSATAT TAL PIZELLI

Qassatat is a traditional Maltese pastry that comes with a variety of fillings. Including ... you guessed it ... mushy peas! They are similar to pastizzi, except that they are made with shortcrust pastry rather than the flakier phyllo dough.

The shape is also different; it reminds me of the “money bags” dumplings that are popular in parts of China. Along with pastizzi, this is another very popular street food in Malta.



Where to Eat It: the same pastizzerias that sell pastizzi will often sell qassatat too. Mekren’s Bakery on Gozo has qassatat that are vegan apart from the egg wash. The staff are very friendly, so if you contact them in advance on Facebook they may put one aside for you without the egg wash.



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Wendy is a vegan foodie with a passion for travel at thenomadicvegan.com. Her aim is to uncover the best vegan-friendly restaurants the world has to offer, enabling others to be vegan anywhere they go.

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