



DA BÖD

Quiz question: Where is the most northerly vegetarian restaurant in the UK?

Quiz answer: Hillshead.

Hillshead is in the north of the main island in the Shetlands and shares a line of latitude with Greenland. Life is hard on Shetland: very few trees grow there and most things green have to be imported, the main produce is oil, fish and sheep: so it's

not the most promising vegetarian territory.

Hillshead is the ultimate one horse town. There's a shop (which is also the Post Office and petrol station) a few houses, a church and a disused hotel. And a vegetarian restaurant called Da Böd.

Da Böd is dialect for trading place – they used to trade fish catches here – it stands on a beautiful, remote bay. Beginning as a seal and otter sanctuary, the owners found themselves needing money to support their work. So they opened a restaurant. In truth, 'restaurant' sounds a bit posh for a room with four tables and a peat fire... but restaurant or not, it's a unique eating experience. The menu is on a chalk board and typically comprises five main courses. This could include a wholesome soup and items like hummus, pitta bread and salad. More filling options might be red onion tart, but they're always experimenting. Then there's

the cakes and puddings which change all day as fresh ones are made. Tea comes in a proper pot with a tea cosy and although there's no alcohol for sale, it's fine to bring a bottle. The food is simple, fresh and delicious: vegan alternatives are available and there's an emphasis on organic food. Sharing a table is commonplace but you'll be among like-minded folk, probably from a mix of nations, and the sheer charm is seductive.

But the most remarkable thing is the price list... it doesn't exist! You're asked to leave a donation which you think covers the cost of your meal in a closed box as you leave. Credit cards should be left at home.

After eating, you're welcome to visit the adjacent sanctuary where injured seals and otters are nursed back to health. The conservation project attracts volunteers from all over the world. We were served by waitresses

from Norway and China who were welcoming and efficient.

Despite the diminutive size, there's a play space where children can learn about conservation. The spotless toilets remind you that you're eating somewhere where people care about standards. Success has enabled them to add a bed and breakfast option. Go if you ever have the chance. You'll never forget the smell of the peat fires or the sheer, straightforward honesty of the place. And you'll experience one of the most beautiful and wild corners of our fabulous islands as well as simply delicious food.

Da Böd is open Wed-Sun, from 11.00 until late.
Tel: 01806 503348

*Keith Plant
Stoke on Trent*



ITALY WORKCAMP

I would like to tell you about a small co-operative near Mompeo, in north east Lazio, Italy, called Cooperativa Fiume Farfa, which may be of interest to young vegetarians and visitors to Italy. I joined a work camp for two weeks in November but stayed a little longer, picking olives, clearing the olive orchards of weeds and clearing trekking paths. The cooperative consists of two parts: a vegetarian B&B

(agrotourismo) called Le Mole sul Farfa and the farm of 24 hectares producing olive oil and honey based on traditional and organic methods. The Italian organiser is vegetarian and provides free vegetarian food for the work camp volunteers. Volunteers live in a stone house and cook for themselves. A long term EVS (European Volunteer Service) volunteer organises the cooking with our help. The small house contains a washing machine, dishwasher, fridge, gas stove and small shower room but with up to 10 volunteers you live very closely together!

Sadly, I was the only vegetarian there, but the others accepted the vegetarian food without complaint. I hope they may reflect on this after the work camp. I was also the only British person there, although English is the common language spoken.

But it is more than just a farm. The cooperative

members are involved with the local schools in educating about traditional organic farming methods and the relationship with the environment. Some of the previous work camps have been involved in Roman and medieval archaeological excavations on the farm.

So if you want to enjoy vegetarian food on a work camp, lovely scenery and a memorable experience I can recommend it. But you have to be prepared to work hard. November is the olive picking month. To get information you would need to look at the UNA Exchange or Concordia volunteer agency websites. You pay a booking fee and your own travel costs. Although most volunteers are under 30 do not be put off if you're older – I am 60. Provided you are fit, you will have more than enough stamina to do the work.

For those travelling through the region it would be best done by car (but you can catch infrequent buses

and walk). Within the farm, some of which is a protected nature area, you can get a guide (the farmer!) to show you the ruins of the medieval watermill for oil and flour, the Roman cellars where oil was stored and to guide you along the trekking trails in the river gorge. He speaks good English and you will find him knowledgeable and very enthusiastic. For those wanting to get away from the tourist sites this is an ideal place to spend a few days and discover an unknown part of Italy.

Le Mole sul Farfa, Strada delle Mole, 02040 Mompeo, Lazio, Italia. Tel/fax +390765469037 (If you search for Le Mole sul Farfa on Google you will come up with several local Italian tourist sites and it is listed there in agritourismo/accomodations/B&B)

*John Woodward
Glen Parva, Leicester*



ORGANIC TUSCANY

I decided that, this year, I would like to go on a week's cookery holiday somewhere in Italy. Searching through the web, I found dozens of options. Eventually Organic Tuscany caught my eye. One of the main reasons was that they run two completely vegetarian courses a year, so I booked myself in.

The course is run by Shilpa and her husband Riccardo from their house about halfway between Florence and Siena. They encourage an ethical lifestyle, and offer advice on travelling to the

course by train and, before the course, Shilpa put five of us in touch with each other so we could arrange to share a hire car once we were there.

There were seven of us in total on the course, which meant that the kitchen wasn't too crowded during the lessons. There were four cookery lessons during the week that covered pasta making, salads, desserts and various anti-pasti and side dishes, all of which used organic and fresh ingredients, many of which were sourced from local suppliers.

One of Shilpa's friends, Chiara, who runs Sesamo in Barcelona, took the first lesson alongside Shilpa and we made tagliatelle and two sauces, the first a tomato and basil, the second a courgette and goat's cheese. We also did a really tasty orange and fennel salad and a tiramisu. We then sat outside and ate the food we had made, accompanied by organic wine, good conversation and fireflies.

For lunch the next day we made a selection of crostini with different toppings – roasted pepper and goats cheese, melanzana and mint, and tomato with olive oil and basil. We also made cannellini beans with tomato sauce, panzanella salad, chard and peccorino flan and panna cotta. The next day, we made a fabulous tomato and bread soup (papa al pomodoro) and a couple of sformati which are a sort of soufflé like flan. For dessert we made a custard tart. Once again it was all very tasty and the weather was lovely, so we were able to eat on the terrace. Friday saw us making risotto, cheesecake, a lovely rice salad and a Tuscan dessert made with chestnut flour, raisins, pine nuts and rosemary.

We also had the chance to visit several organic farms and wineries and had some time for sightseeing in Florence, Siena and San Gimignano. The course felt that it was a one off being run especially for us and you

never had the feeling that you were just one of many courses that were being run over the course of the summer. The atmosphere was really personal, Shilpa and Riccardo made you feel incredibly welcome, almost like old friends.

The accommodation was in apartments attached to local farmhouses and was pretty basic, but it was fairly comfortable and clean. If you check out the cost of Organic Tuscany compared to other cookery courses you'll see it's considerably cheaper so don't go expecting four star hotels. Since I went, they have started to run more vegetarian courses. I'd recommend it to anyone who wants a fun 'foody' week in Tuscany.

Organic Tuscany
Località Pino, 50052 Certaldo
(FI), Italy
Tel +39 347 328 9333
www.organicuscany.org/

Gary Nicklin
Via email



TOMLINS

France is not the easiest place in the world to find decent vegetarian and vegan catering. But it's a lovely place to visit when liberated from concerns about the food. My mother (non-vegetarian), daughter (vegetarian) and I (vegan), spent a great summer holiday at Tomlins and were sustained by the wonderful food and hospitality provided by David and Lorraine Tomlinson. They have a couple of self-catering apartments/gites but they

also run an exclusively vegetarian guesthouse with attractive bedrooms and a good sized garden where one can eat out when the weather is fine.

Tomlins is located in Charente-Maritime in a tiny village called Chambon, about 35 minutes from La Rochelle and 10 minutes from Surgeres. Although the area is rather flat and dominated by maize and sunflower based agriculture, Tomlins is a very pleasant base from which to explore Charente-Maritime. There are lots of interesting places to visit within 45 minutes' drive.

The three-course meals at Tomlins are wonderful; I ran out of superlatives to describe the vegan delights I was served every night. My mother was so enthralled that she invited my brother and his non-vegetarian family to join us. 'Vegetarian ambassadors' is a term that seems to suit the Tomlinsons and the food they served my family was a delight.

The menu changes daily and the Tomlinsons are very willing to cater for special diets. Lorraine keeps a record of what every guest has eaten when they stay, so you won't get the same meal twice even if you have eaten at Tomlins before! That's what I call exceptional customer service.

To provide a taste of the food on offer, I will describe a meal on an evening when I had invited my non-vegetarian brother and sister-in-law to join us. The starter was a savoury tomato pudding with a basil vinaigrette. As ever at Tomlins, this dish looked good as well as tasted superb. A subtle combination of basil with fresh tomatoes, along with the vinaigrette and sponge casing, gave me surprises with every mouthful. For the next course, there was a wild mushroom ragout with sweet potato rosti, oven baked leeks and wilted spinach. This was presented attractively in a stack with the rosti placed on

top. This dish contrasted well with the starter and was full of surprising and pleasing taste experiences. This does not mean that it lacked subtlety. On the contrary, the rosti was good for a delicate palate and the spinach lurked as a foil to the strong taste of the mushrooms.

To complete the meal, David created a vegan crème caramel for me and a crème brûlée for the other guests. We all enjoyed our respective desserts and I was so impressed with the smoothness of mine.

Nothing seems to be too much trouble for the Tomlinsons. They treat their guests like friends... and many end up being just that. My visit was not the first and I hope it won't be the last.

Tomlins
tel: 00 33 (0)5 46 35 65 42
info@tomlinsinfrance.com
www.tomlinsinfrance.com

Robert Baylis
Via email