

**The Survival Guide
for
Non-Meat Eaters in Czech Republic**



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EuCAN trip to Zdánice in Czech Republic

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Introduction

I am from Japan where a lot of people LOVE eating meat, so until I came to Britain 9 years ago, I never thought of not eating meat, as I wasn't aware of such a thing as "vegetarian".

The reason I decided to become a "non-meat eater" was because I was young (still a teen) and I wanted to stop bull-fighting, and thought it was controversial if I told people not to kill bulls, while eating nice big beef steak.

More I learnt about farming and vegetarianism; I became a lot more relaxed about the whole thing, and even thought that as long as the animals had a happy life, maybe one day I'll eat meat....

1. More Fat for Vegetarians

While meat-eaters were served with some meat and salad, vegetarians got deep-fried cheese, with fries (Picture 1). Despite all the fat comes with the cheese, it is actually quite tasty. However, it does make you feel sickly, so the trick is to eat half of it and give the rest away to your friend.

Picture 1. Deep-fried cheese and fries.



Anyway, I was expecting to get a deep-fried cheese at one point during this trip – but this was the very first meal I had when I got there. At this point I was quite worried that this was what I had to eat everyday.

This was also a good thing from a volunteering point of view, as I was already very keen to work extra hard to burn all the fat after this meal.

2. Rabbit Fodder for Vegetarians

There's nothing predictable about what you might get served. Since the fattening cheese, I can only remember eating cucumber (Picture 2) and tomato salad. There were huge bowls of cucumber and tomato salad and while meat eaters had something else to eat as well as the salad, vegetarians were just given the salad, and nothing else.

Picture 2. Very tasty cucumber salad



As those bowls were truly huge, we couldn't finish them at lunch— so they appeared again for dinner, and that's what we ate. I was feeling weak, as I was practically eating just water. I soon found out that my fellow non-meat eater, Paul, was eating meat!!!!

Actually, it's a lie. You can get food other than cucumber and tomato salad. One day there was a bowl of shredded carrot too!

3. Goats for Vegetarians

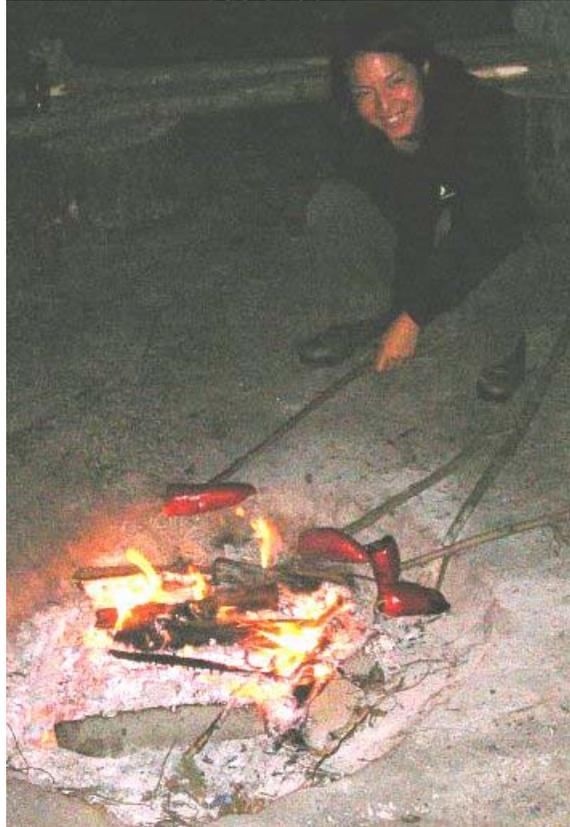
Thank goats, we had an experiment to get some goats to graze on the meadow we were working on. During the night some of us were on “goat duty” which involved camping at the valley, to make sure no one stole the goats.

We were allowed to have fire on site, so I was able to eat “food”. People have been very kind and worried about my recent diet, so they made lovely food for me....Jacket potatoes, roasted peppers (Picture 3) and onions, vegetarian Dahl... and my specialty, roasted chocolate bananas.

So make sure you sign up to camp out every night.

With or without cooking your food, sitting by the fire, camping under the starry sky, listening to the silence (occasionally tree frogs) and waking up in the middle of the valley in the morning.... are just magic.

Picture 3. A happy pepper roaster



4. Bad things happen, but it can only get better

I forgot to take a photo of one meal. So, imagine a plate full of cardboard strips, about 1x3cm rectangular shape, in white sauce made of milk and eggs – That’s how it looked and how it tasted.

It was lovely Zuzanna who organised everything for us, who is also a vegetarian, suggested the hotel chef to cook this fake-meat meal for vegetarians instead of serving just cucumbers, and apparently that was how it should have tasted. I couldn’t face eating it but I felt so bad, that Zuzanna and the chef made this especially for me...so I ate the whole thing. Mixing it with a lot of salt and the cucumber and tomato salad made it more edible.

I was worried that the chef might get the wrong impression that I like the dish so much, and he might use the cardboard for every meal. But that never happened. Instead, I was given this (Picture 4) as a main meal, while meat-eaters were eating meat and vegetables.

Picture 4. Deep-fried crumpets with cream and strawberry jam (* a main meal, not a dessert)



I reckon that the chef heard my comment on cardboard and decided to make me feel better. Very sweet, the chef and the dish.

Vegetarians should be very grateful that we were even given something to eat. I decided not to whinge about food again.

5. Cultural Experience for Vegetarians

We were lucky to have some friendly locals, and also the lovely Hungarian visitor, Janos. One day we were in a pub having a lunch and Janos pointed out that the word “Goulash” is wrong, and it should be “Gulyás”. Then our Czech friend, David, pointed out that Goulash in Czech is better than Gulyás in Hungary.

To protect the peace between the two countries, we decided to have a “tasting match” of David’s Goulash and Janos’ Gulyás, and judge which one is better.

Unfortunately Janos worked too hard in the sun; he had a heat stroke so he withdrew from the match. David went ahead with making the best Czech Goulash anyway.....and this is what happened (Picture 5).

Picture 5. Well, it'd been rude not to eat it!



I did hesitate, but if someone made something for me, I thought I should still eat it, even if it had meat in it.....and it was tasty!

Nine years of not touching meat. I once dreamed about being served a meat dish, and I didn't touch it even in my dream.

The next day, I decided to go back to become a non-meat eater again. The meal was the traditional meal – roast beef and dumplings in creamy cheesy sauce. I was told I should at least try the sauce, as it's really nice. So this is what I got (Picture 6).

Picture 6. Roast beef and dumplings in creamy cheesy sauce, with no roast beef.



So I ate Goulash again, the next night....



After eating the goulash twice, and a small (very small) piece of chicken at the dinner in Mayer's Cellar, I thought I'd go back to become non-meat eater again. So our last lunch in Czech, I ordered salad, topped with sliced almonds and horse radish sauce (Picture 8).

Picture 8. Sliced tomatoes (*main meal, not a starter)



6. Wise words for non-meat eaters

Eat goulash!

If you are a strict vegan, I think you should stay in Britain.

7. A bit more thought provoking section

I'd be happier eating meat in Czech, if I saw livestock on the hills. As far as I could see, there was no single cow grazing outside, and some livestock farms we drove passed were indoor intensive farms.

We spent 2 and half weeks clearing scrubs and trees to open up the lands to encourage butterflies. I question about sustainability. What if this Leonardo Funding ends in the future, what if we didn't go back to the same valley year after year, and what if those people who took the initiatives to take on the project decide to move on... All work that was put into the site will completely be waste of time, unless the local people are

motivated enough to start their own volunteer group...

So why not combine those two together and let livestock graze outside, so that the scrub is kept down, meadow gets cut, butterflies will be happy, local people will be eating better meat, and I'll be able to eat happy-meat goulash without feeling too guilty.

Maybe educating people about organic food and farming is the way to create better-managed butterfly meadow.

Finally...

My two and half weeks in Czech were amazing and intense, and I enjoyed every second of this trip. I met great people and goats, saw great places, had great laugh...felt great everyday...and I would like to thank everyone who was involved in this project to enable me to experience what I have experienced.



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