

Asian Restaurants – Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese (and Similar)

Eating Kosher When the Menu Isn't Made for You

Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese, and similar Southeast/East Asian cuisines can be difficult for kosher dining—but not impossible. With the right questions and a vegetarian-only approach, many meals can be eaten fully kosher, even without supervision. This guide helps you navigate the pitfalls and order with confidence.

Basic Strategy: Only Eat Vegetarian (and Ask)

- These cuisines use a lot of meat, shellfish, broths, and fish-based condiments.
- The easiest and often only way to eat kosher is to ask clearly for vegetarian only:

“No meat, no chicken, no seafood, no oyster sauce, no chicken broth—just vegetables or tofu, please.”

- Almost all restaurants will accommodate honestly if you're clear. You can trust this.
 - You're eating from the vegetarian side of the menu only.
-

What to Ask About or Avoid

- **Oyster Sauce** – Often used in vegetable stir-fries. Ask to omit it.

- **Fish Sauce** –

Usually made from anchovies (a kosher fish) and salt.

✅ **Halachically permitted** if you confirm it's made only from kosher species like anchovies.

⚠️ If uncertain or mixed with shellfish, ask or avoid.

- **Chicken or Pork Broth** – Ask specifically for vegetarian broth. Very common in soups and noodle dishes.
- **Shrimp Paste** – Found in some Thai curry pastes. Ask if used.
- **Shared Fryer Oil** – If food is deep-fried in oil used for meat or seafood, it may absorb flavor. Avoid fried items unless the oil is vegetarian-only.
- **“Vegetarian” that isn’t** – Many vegetarian-labeled dishes still include fish sauce or broths—**always ask**.

✅ **Dishes You Can Usually Eat (If Verified Vegetarian)**

- **Stir-Fried Vegetables** – Ask for no oyster or fish sauce.
- **Tofu with Vegetables** – Confirm sauce and broth are vegetarian.
- **Vegetable Fried Rice or Lo Mein** – Ask for no egg, fish, or animal-based sauces.
- **Steamed Vegetable Dumplings** – Confirm filling is only vegetables and not flavored with meat stock.

- **Vegetable Spring Rolls / Fresh Rolls** – Often fine if made without fish sauce or meat.
 - **Thai Basil Tofu / Cashew Vegetable Stir-Fry** – Fine with vegetarian sauce.
 - **Thai Coconut-Based Curries** – Permitted if you verify the curry paste contains no shrimp paste and the broth is vegetarian.
 - **Vietnamese Pho with Vegetable Broth** – Ask about the base—it’s usually chicken unless requested.
 - **Pad Thai** – Ask for tofu and confirm no fish sauce or oyster sauce unless the fish sauce is 100% anchovy-based.
-

Avoid

- All meat, duck, pork, seafood, shrimp, squid, crab, eel, etc.
 - Anything with oyster sauce or chicken broth unless removed.
 - All soups unless you’ve confirmed the broth is vegetarian.
 - “Vegetarian” dishes that use curry paste with shrimp or unknown sauces.
 - Egg Foo Young or anything in brown sauce without checking.
-

Drinks

- **Water, soda, tea, juices** – All fine.
- **Thai Iced Tea or Coffee** – Fine; made with tea/coffee, sweetener, and condensed milk.
- **Beer, sake, rice wine, whiskey** – All fine. No hechsher needed.
- **Table wine or plum wine** – May not be kosher unless labeled.

Note: Even if wine or wine-based sauces are in a cooked dish in small amounts, they are typically batel (nullified) and not a halachic problem unless they're a main ingredient.

Halachic Notes

- **Bishul Akum** – Not a concern for vegetables or tofu that are not “fit for a king’s table,” or when the food is part of a commercial kitchen.
- **Fish Sauce** – Anchovy-based sauce is kosher if not mixed with non-kosher ingredients.
- **Pas Palter** – Rarely relevant here.
- **Mar’it Ayin** – There is no concern with being seen eating kosher food in an Asian restaurant.
- **Toleh B’nemanim** – You can ask the staff and rely on their answers. Most are honest, especially in allergy-sensitive cultures.

吃好喝好 chī hǎo hē hǎo