

McDonald's to open vegetarian restaurants in India

By April Fulton, NPR

McDonald's, home of the iconic Big Mac, is going vegetarian. Well, at least in India, where 20 to 42 percent or more of the population (depending on how you count) eschews meat, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization.

According to AFP, McDonald's will open its first vegetarian-only location next year near the Golden Temple, a pilgrimage site sacred to Sikhs located in the city of Amritsar in northern India. There is no meat allowed in the temple (or smoking or alcohol, for that matter.)

This isn't exactly the first time McDonald's is breaking into the Indian market.

"At the moment, India is still a very small market – we just have 271 restaurants in India, and across the world, we have nearly 33,000," a spokesman for McDonald's in northern India, Rajesh Kumar Maini, told AFP.

But it's a growth opportunity for the chain, the spokesman says.

The reasons for going meatless in India are obvious: Cows are sacred to Hindus, and the country's Muslims don't eat pork. That leaves a lot of chicken and vegetables to be served in McDonald's existing Indian restaurants.

McDonald's in India already has a menu that is 50 percent vegetarian, according to Yahoo News. At 28 rupees, or 50 cents, each, its McAloo Tikki burger— which uses a spicy, fried potato-based patty – is the top seller, accounting for a quarter of total sales. And you won't find a Big Mac in India,

just a Maharaja Mac, which involves chicken patties, notes Business Insider.

The company is also planning to open another vegetarian location near the Vaishno Devi cave shrine in Kashmir, a Hindu pilgrimage site that attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors a year.

So how's the new all-vegetarian version of McDonald's going to play in India? We can only guess, although from China to France, the mega chain has a history of successfully adjusting its brand abroad to suit the locals.