

Indonesia can expand its gastrodiplomacy via plant-based meals in Europe

March 4 2024, by Meilinda Sari Yayusman, Ahmad Nuril Huda, Gregorius Andika Ariwibowo and Prima Nurahmi Mulyasari



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[Gastrodiplomacy](#) as the practice of a country's diplomacy by promoting its cuisine, is now gaining popularity in several countries across the

globe, including [South Korea and Thailand](#).

South Korea, for example, has introduced its so-called "[Kimchi Diplomacy](#)" in the world for the past years as part of the country's soft power in promoting culinary culture. Thailand, meanwhile, has been [spreading the influence of Thai food](#) and expanding Thai restaurants around the globe, attracting the global communities to [eat authentic Thai cuisine](#).

Indonesia, [with diverse food and beverages as well as indigenous spices](#), has also started to resort to this strategy to promote the country in the global forum.

Our unpublished observation based on fieldwork in May 2023 and [literature reviews since mid-2021](#) resulted in a recommendation for the Indonesian government to take advantage of its diverse menu for its gastrodiploamacy agenda.

We recommend Indonesia emphasize plant-based dishes for its gastrodiploamacy strategy in Europe, given [the region's rising trend of plant-based food consumption](#).

Why plant-based food

A growing number of people are increasingly considering plant-based food as a dietary alternative to maintain their health following [global concerns](#) on the negative impacts of processed foods on health, society and the environment.

Indonesia has a lot of ingredients and spices to create plant-based menus that have [met global healthy standards](#).

Among them are tempeh, a traditional Indonesian food made from

fermented soybeans. The fermentation [increases its nutritional quality](#). Tempeh has been known [in the Netherlands](#) and already has consumers [in Europe](#). However, it is not widespread yet in the whole continent.

[Gado-gado](#), the famous Indonesian salad with its authentic peanut butter dressing, has also seen an [emerging popularity in the global market](#). From our fieldwork, we have learned that almost all Indonesian restaurants worldwide, such as in The Hague and Amsterdam, the Netherlands, usually have gado-gado on their menus.

Other plant-based cuisines that have potential to gain popularity abroad are [asinan](#) (fruit salad preserved with vinegar) and [gudeg](#) (jackfruit stewed in coconut milk).

However, our observation shows that Indonesian vegan menus have yet to be widely known in Europe and other continents. Indonesia should promote them in the global market.

Why Europe

Plant-based food trend has been currently growing [in many industrialized countries](#), especially [in Europe](#).

In Europe, the value of plant-based food sales [increased by 49%](#) between 2018 and 2020. This includes [an expansion](#) in the market for plant-based substitutes for meat and dairy.

In the Netherlands, for example, sales rose by 50% during the same period. Germany and Poland have also witnessed a notable surge in the sales of plant-based food products, with an increase of 97% and 62%, respectively.

With the change in people's food consumption habits, Europe can be a

significant, promising market for Indonesia to expand the promotion of its plant-based food products.

Taking advantage of current presence

The fact that Indonesia's culinary presence in Europe is already evident, particularly in the Netherlands, should benefit Indonesia.

[Based on our finding](#), no less than 392 Indonesian restaurants are operating in West and South Europe, majority of which (295) is in the Netherlands. They have become popular since [the 1970s](#).

For hundreds of years, the Netherlands [colonized](#) parts of what is now Indonesia. The [colonial history](#) between the two nations has created a sense of romanticism, including what and how they ate in the past.

Many Indonesian citizens living in European countries own Indonesian cuisine restaurants, and recently, they have started to develop plant-based menus in their kitchens.

The Netherlands offers a promising hub for introducing Indonesian foods and establishing Indonesian restaurants in other parts of Europe.

As part of our observation, we visited some Indonesian restaurants in the Netherlands that are developing plant-based menus in their kitchens for [vegans](#) and [vegetarians](#), in response to the [rising popularity of plant-based food in European society](#).

Among them were [De Vegetarische Toko](#), [Toko Kalimantan](#), [Bali Brunch 82](#) and [Praboemoelih](#). They serve gado-gado, variants of tempeh and tofu and tumis buncis (vegetable stir-fry).

De Vegetarische Toko, for example, has creatively transformed some

authentic Indonesian foods into vegan and vegetarian-friendly versions. They replace the meats in menus like rendang (slow-cooked beef stew in coconut milk and spices) and semur (beef stew) with tempeh, tofu, beans and peanuts.

With these creative innovations, these restaurants may have an excellent opportunity to extend and promote Indonesian plant-based meals more widely to other parts of Europe, thus supporting Indonesia's gastrodiplomacy.

More support needed

Indonesia has acknowledged its gastrodiplomacy potential through several programs.

In 2021, Indonesia launched ["Indonesia Spice Up the World"](#). It becomes the country's first-ever concrete initiative to promote Indonesian cuisine and attract investment opportunities in local spices and herbs.

The initiative aims to [increase Indonesian spice exports to US\\$2 billion, launch approximately 4,000 Indonesian restaurants abroad by 2024 and make Indonesia a culinary destination in the future.](#)

To support this kind of initiative, the Indonesian government should regularly and intensively communicate with all stakeholders involved in the Indonesian culinary industry. The partnership should aim to support Indonesian diaspora entrepreneurs looking to start businesses in the food sector abroad.

One example is offering soft loans to these food entrepreneurs. Bank BNI, Indonesia's [fourth-largest bank](#), has begun offering this kind of loan.

It is time for Indonesia to strengthen its international existence through gastrodiploamacy by taking advantage of the rising consumption of plant-based meals among global communities. Tempeh, gado-gado, asinan and gudeg can become a powerful weapon of Indonesia's soft diplomacy on the global stage.

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