



## VEGAN HEAVEN WITH NO INTENTION, EELKE PLASMEIJER AND RAY ADRIANSYAH FROM BALI IN INTERVIEW

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Eelke Plasmeijer and Ray Adriansyah, Locavore, Bali – interview

### **VEGAN HEAVEN WITH NO INTENTION**

Locavore, noun, meaning: “a person whose diet consists only or principally of locally grown or produced food”. As this Bali restaurant’s name suggests, Locavore is a place that celebrates local food, from the raw Balinese abalone to the Sumbawa Island oyster, and even the plates, silverware and cocktail glasses are made in nearby workshops.

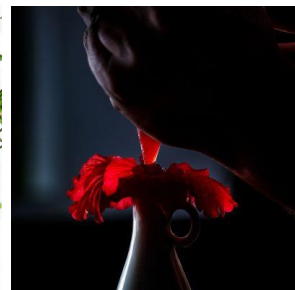
The duo behind Locavore, Netherlands born Eelke Plasmeijer and Ray Adriansyah, born in Jakarta to parents from Sumatra, met in Jakarta 12 years ago and soon moved to Bali. In November 2013, Ray and Eelke opened the Locavore restaurant in Ubud, where the cuisine focuses on the use of Indonesian products. Ray and Elke’s menu, which is largely based on plant ingredients, is a homage to Indonesian farmers, fishermen and artisan farmers. Their concept especially shines in Locavore’s “Herbivore”,

vegetable menu which celebrates Indonesian plant world, has become a vegan heaven that was, as the Chefs say, “decided for them”.

Locavore’s menu lists the origins of all its ingredients, so diners can see the kohlrabi comes from the restaurant’s vegetable garden in Payangan, the pickled seaweed from Lombok and the beef short ribs from Malang, Java. Vegetable sources include “Owen’s garden” – the nearby farm of an Englishman in Plaga, central Bali.

The combination of fresh, local ingredients with the inspired recipes of these chefs has led Locavore to be listed in “Asia’s 50 Best” for four consecutive years and to receive the “Highest Climber” Award in 2017 and “Asia’s Most Sustainable Restaurant” in 2019. In addition to the Locavore Restaurant, they have also opened Locavore To Go (a sandwich bar/cafeteria), The Night Rooster (an artisan cocktail bar), Nusantara (an authentic Indonesian restaurant), LocaLAB (an R&D kitchen) and Local Parts (a butcher’s shop).

I have talked to Elke and Ray during the San Sebastián Gastronomika congress.





**Elke, Ray, what were your first conscious encounters with food?**

RA: My mother worked all day and came home about 5 or 6 and then cooked. On weekends we ate out, not necessarily at expensive restaurants, but also street food, Sumatran food..., just went to explore food all over Jakarta.

EP: Indonesian people are funny. They would drive for an hour, hour and a half just to eat, let's say, fried chicken. But it must be the best fried chicken in town. Or fried rice. They would drive, eat for 10-15 minutes and drive back home. As far as my first experience with food is concerned, my grandfather studied to be a baker, but turned out to be a captain on a river ship. Nevertheless, he always baked his own bread for us and I ate it with a chocolate spread. That's the first thing that comes to my mind when I think about food.

**At which point did you decide that cooking should be your job?**

EP: For me it's a bit funny. When I was really young I wanted to become a garbage man, which was an exciting job for me then, but that failed. Then after that, I always had in my mind to become a cook. So, it was always there.

RA: We did not have cool garbage trucks in Jakarta (laughter), so my influence came from my mother who cooks every day. I always heard interesting stories about chefs, fancy cocktails from her... And chefs with high hats looked cool to me.

## What are the most important things you learned while training?

EP: I have spent two years at the Michelin two-starred restaurant and it was an important experience for me. I realized that that is not what I wanted to do. The chef was great and I consider him my mentor, but it was a very competitive place, cooks were hiding stuff from each other... I learned more on my first job when I was 14-15 years old – a small restaurant in my home village, where I learned how to run a business, how to take care of the staff and how to have fun working together. Of course, I did not realize it back then, but only later.

RA: Same as Elke, on my first job I learned how to work as a team, how to work hard and long hours, be on time and keep your head down. It was three guys in a kitchen for 200 or 300 covers.





### **How similar are your personalities?**

RA: The funny thing is that we are totally different personalities. It would probably be boring if we were similar. Now Elke is more mature than when I met him. He is still impatient, which can be a weakness and a strength, depending of a situation. But, most of the time it's a strength. He always thinks about others more than of himself.

EP: If we didn't like each other we would never stay together for so long. Ray does things that he is good at and I do things I like doing. Ray is for me a consistent factor, somebody always being there. He has good days and bad days, but he is always there to take care of the business. What also works is the fact that we are not ambitious. We have a lot of businesses, but it feels very organic, not at all stressed.

### **Why did you choose Ubud for your restaurant?**

EP: Ubud is less touristic, close to nature and our concept works really well there. It is all about using local ingredients. When we opened Locavore, it was very much about local Indonesian products, but it was not authentic to Indonesia yet. Two to four years in, we switched to using authentic Indonesian produce or ingredients like carrot and a cabbage that have been there for centuries. They come from all over Indonesia. Centre is Bali, but some other things are brought in from Java, Sumatra... Bali is quite small and not all things are available there. On the other side, Indonesia covers an enormous space of very different places.

### **How did you, as guys who are not from Bali, make a menu that is a homage to Indonesian farmers, fishermen and artisan farmers?**

EP: First, I think that to that list should be added Moms and Dads of the people in our kitchen. Because, when we opened, we really had to push boys and girls in the kitchen to tell us what we should cook here. We asked them to tell us what they eat at home, what their grandmothers used in their

kitchens... They thought that this food was not good enough to serve in a restaurant, especially because of the ingredients. It took quite a lot of time to get them on-board, but now they are. They are the ones who inspire our menus. They bring us weird things like sea chestnuts which grow after tides. Very interesting and unique, ingredients that nobody else uses in restaurants. We have a feeling that we have just started as there is so much stuff out there to discover and get our hands on.





**Tell me about some of the dishes that describe your culinary style?**

RA: Our fourth dish on the tasting menu contains rice porridge, wild duck egg yolk, snails, dehydrated frogs' legs, chili flowers... The idea is to use everything that grows and lives in rice fields.

EP: We have a dessert made from everything that bees produce. So, we have ice-cream from bees' wax, crispy coating made with pollen and gel from fermented wild honey. And the type of honey changes with the season. We also have a dessert called "Everything from a palm tree", with heart of the palm, ice cream of palm sugar, palm fruit, gel from a young palm... These are kind of dishes we like. We also like using the whole product where we do not throw anything away.

## **You have two tasting menus of which the vegetable one became quite famous?**

RA: Yes. One is “Locavore”, in which meat and seafood are included and the other one is “Herbivore” vegetable menu. There is no dairy products and no grains, except rice. So, all food is gluten-free and dairy-free. It is not because of allergies, but because these are not local produce. We can offer a lot to vegans without changing anything in the menu. Not on purpose though, but just because these are not authentic Indonesian products. It’s sort of decided for us. You stay away from imported produce and that is what you end up with.

## **Has Bali become too mainstream and commercialized?**

RA: Yes. It’s a popular tourist destination. You know, a lot of foreigners learn about Bali first and then about Indonesia.

EP: It’s very popular. We think, too popular. It’s still more that way in the south than in Ubud. It would be nicer if it stayed a little bit mystical and undiscovered, but those days are over. In a few years we might move the restaurant out of Ubud, into the jungle. That would be the right thing to do. There we could be right in the middle of nature and be able to create our own oasis.

## **Could Indonesian cuisine become the next big thing?**

EP: Oh, we’d like to believe so. It certainly has that potential. It’s a great cuisine. When done properly, I don’t see why people all over the world would not like it. It’s so versatile, much more than Thai, Vietnamese, Myanmar...

RA: You see, I have a big happy smile just because of your question (laughter).

**Thanks, guys! I hope your plan comes true.**

EP: I’m sure it will. We never talk about things, just do them.