

New dishes, new places in New York's worldly cuisine

By Diane Bair
and Pamela Wright
GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

NEW YORK — Gazing at the pig's blood chip on the plate at Aska, one might think: I'm supposed to eat this thing? It looks so . . . scab-like! But of course you eat it; after all, Aska (www.askanyc.com) is one of the hottest tables in New York, so how bad could it be?

Tucked behind a gallery space in the hipster haven of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, this Scandinavian restaurant is one of Bon Appetit magazine's top 10 new restaurants of 2013. So even if you hide out in the restroom during the blood course, you'll probably discover something else you love — cured duck heart, or locally foraged greens, perhaps — on chef Fredrik Berselius's tasting menu.

If you're tired of the same-old same-old stuff on a plate (can we please declare the slider to be over?), the city is a great place to cleanse — and challenge — the palate. With more than 20,000 eateries, representing a United Nations' worth of countries, New York offers diners the opportunity to table-hop around the world.

On a recent three-day weekend, we sampled dishes from Sweden, Peru, Indonesia, Ecuador, Nepal, northeast Thailand, India, and China, no passport required. A course here, a course there, a few local beverages (even a Durian milkshake) and you've got a culinary journey around the world — and a cool way to explore intriguing melting pot neighborhoods like Jackson Heights, Queens. Eight plates or 80, it's a fun way to sightsee.

PIO PIO

Last year, Peruvian cuisine was all the rage in New York, underscored when the ultra-trendy Spotted Pig put crispy pig's ear salad on the menu. And it's still a popular dining option, as evidenced by the full

tables at Pio Pio in Murray Hill. On the recommendation of our waiter, we ordered the seviche limeno, consisting of fresh corvina (white fish) marinated in lime juice, with red onions, cilantro, hot pepper, and chunks of sweet potato and white Andean corn. If you really, really love lime, this is the dish for you. Just be sure someone in your party orders the Pollo ala Brasa, a Peruvian specialty. It's a whole chicken marinated in soy sauce, red peppers, and spices to smoky, salty wonderfulness. And it's just \$12. (Did we mention Pio Pio is a bargain?) 210 East 34th St., and other locations in the city, 212-481-0034, www.piopio.com

BALI NUSA INDAH

Ninth Avenue is chockablock with ethnic eateries, including this little place that bills itself as "the only Indonesian restaurant in Manhattan." Ingredients like lemongrass, kafir lime, galangal, coconut oil, chili, and turmeric lend a complex flavor to even a simple curry. We tried the Rendang Padang (\$14.95), beef chunks simmered to tenderness in coconut and chili sauce, and happily scooped up every last bit of sauce with a spoon after the meat was gone. No vegetables are involved, so you'll want to order, say, Sayur Asam (vegetable tamarind soup, \$6.25) to round out your meal. And don't order a ho-hum drink when you can try an Indonesian beverage like Es Cendol (jackfruit with coconut milk and palm sugar, thickened with rice flour) or, if you're bold, Juice Durian, a milk shake made with the very smelly (when you cut into it) but very sweet durian fruit. 651 Ninth Ave., 212-974-1875, www.balinusaindah.net

BARZOLA

On the day we came here the place was buzzing in anticipation of a pay-per-view boxing match on TV. Located in



PHOTOS BY DIANE BAIR FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Tangra Masala (above) in Queens serves chicken "lollipop" with Chinese herbs and Indian spices. An Ecuadorian Llapingacho platter at Barzola (right, below).



Queens, Barzola is authentic Ecuadorian, from the pop music on the sound system to the menu, which includes tipico (traditional) foods like goat stew and tripe. We opted for a traditional dish, the Llapingacho platter, a yellow potato patty under a blanket of cheese and egg, served with sausage, fried pork chunks, and sauteed plantain. A lot of food for \$11, so we didn't mind springing for an order of pescado curtido (\$11) to share, one of the best seviches we've ever had. And we had to try the fruit drink called Quaker, made with passionfruit and lulo, a citrus fruit. "You really feel like you're in another country here," our companion said as she piled more seviche onto her plate. 92-12 37th Ave., Jackson Heights, 718-205-6900

HAWA FOOD

You don't go to Hawa Food (a.k.a. Hawa's Hut) for the atmosphere. At this Queens hole-in-the-wall, we were seated at a table wedged between a roti

counter and a refrigerator (one of only two tables in the place). But we had a great view of the two Nepali ladies rolling out dough and shaping momo, the Nepalese dumplings that everybody orders. For \$7 (cash only) you get a plate of momo stuffed with beef, chicken, or vegetables, rolled super-thin and steamed. You dip them in one of three sauces, all very spicy. 37-38 72d St., Jackson Heights, 718-457-7766

SOMTUM DER

Unless you've traveled to Thailand, you probably haven't tried Isan Thai (also spelled Isaan) from the northeastern region of the country. There are a few Isan Thai places in New York, but the hot spot of the moment is Somtum Der, a new

Hungry? Pick a country for dinner

For a quick trip down under way of Chelsea Market (Chelsea), visit the Tuck Shop (www.tuckshopnyc.com) for a handmade Australian meat pie (with antibiotic-free meat). Of the many Asian-fusion restaurants, there are some standouts, like Laut in Union Square (www.lautnyc.com), where Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand meet on a plate (try the Malaysian curries); and Tangra Masala (www.tangrafusionnyc.com), an Indo-Chinese hybrid in Sunnyside, Queens, where you can get a wonderful fish dish with spicy garlic sauce, and chicken dry rubbed with Chinese herbs and Indian spices. And we can't leave out Tanoreen (www.tanoreen.com), a Brooklyn favorite for Middle Eastern (Lebanese- and Syrian-influenced) cuisine. You won't go wrong with the baby eggplant stuffed with ground lamb in lemon-garlic sauce. For dessert, pass on the fancy cupcake shops and head directly to Uncle Boon's (www.uncleboons.com), a Thai rotisserie in Nolita, where the one and only dessert is a coconut ice cream sundae topped with candied peanuts and toasted coconut. This, alone, is reason to go to New York.

DIANE BAIR AND
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restaurant in the East Village. Don't judge by the graffiti-marred exterior; inside is a bright, welcoming space, with lots of pale wood, wicker, and a mirrored wall. Thai waiters, wearing rakish Panama hats (a nod to the trendy 'hood) will recommend good combinations

of small plates to share. This isn't wimpy Americanized fare, so expect assertive flavors and plenty of heat. Don't miss Tum Thai (\$10), the spicy papaya salad that's a staple. We especially liked the Larb Ped, a minced duck salad with vegetables and green chilis (\$11) and Sa Poak Kai Tod Der (fried chicken thighs). If you're adventurous, there's Nam Sod (marinated raw pork sausages), and a soup made of pork cartilage. Their pad Thai with crabmeat and crab paste (\$15) is far more zingy than any pad Thai we've ever tried. We loved it all, and didn't have room for the dessert our waiter recommended: black jelly with fresh milk. 85 Avenue A, 212-260-8570, www.somtunder.com

ODA HOUSE

This authentic Georgian restaurant in the East Village has become a go-to spot thanks largely to one dish: adjaruli khachapuri. Basically, this is cheesy bread, Georgian-style: a football-size crunchy loaf with a crater scooped out of the middle, filled with a bubbling blend of feta and mozzarella cheese (subbing for a brined Georgian cheese). As if that weren't enough gooey deliciousness, they drop in a raw egg at the last minute, creating a thick, salty dip. You break off chunks of the bread, dip it in the goo, and are instantly transported to cheese-drenched heaven. Although chef Maia Acquaviva, a former plastic surgeon in Georgia (the Eurasian republic bordering the Black Sea), creates other tasty dishes with herbs and spices, minced lamb, pinto beans, mushrooms, and so on, it is this one that put Oda House on the map. Menu items about \$7-\$30. 76 Avenue B, 212-353-3838, www.odahouse.com

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Fuel up at lunch for a fresh walk

► MUSEUMS
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tures and photographs to drawings and paintings. And MOMA just opened "Magritte: The Mystery of the Ordinary, 1926-1938" (through Jan. 12), showcasing the visionary artist's breakthrough Surrealist years. Don't miss MOMA's gift shops, which are troves of reproductions and innovatively designed gadgets, clothes, and jewelry.

From there it's just a few blocks to the **Museum of Art and Design** on Columbus Circle. My favorite lunch spot is halfway between, Radiance Tea House and Books on 55th Street between 6th and 7th avenues. Bright and airy, the dining area is rimmed with shelves of Japanese teapots and books to peruse while waiting for your meal to arrive. (My favorite is the Teriyaki Glazed Salmon Rice Box, which is exquisitely prepared and artfully presented.) I always take advantage of the extensive tea menu, trying something new each time. Tea can be purchased as well.

The Museum of Art and Design, one of my favorite "go to" spots in Midtown, is packed with exhibits that explore the intersection of art, craft, and design in eye-catching, provocative displays. I head first to the studio and art jewelry gallery. The current exhibition, "Fashion Jewelry: The Collection of Barbara Berger" (through Jan. 20), features highlights from the famed collector's 4,000 pieces, ranging from Art Deco jewelry to haute couture necklaces and brooches by notable designers. In addition, contemporary and historical pieces from the museum's extensive permanent collection range from elegantly wearable to outlandishly innovative and conceptual. Gallery walls are inset with dozens of drawers that visitors can pull out one by one, like combing through a treasure chest. Another major exhibition that just opened is



RUTH FREMSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES (ABOVE), HULYA KOLABAS (BELOW)



A close look at "American Modern" at MOMA, and the staircase at Neue Galerie.

frogs while noting the sobering impact environmental changes are making on these amphibians.

You'll need a break for lunch and the popular Shake Shack across the street is burger heaven. But if the weather's nice, try a picnic in Central Park. For take-out provisions, the city abounds in small delis and grocery stores. But if you'd like something adventurous, a trip to Zabar's (a.k.a. the "food museum") at Broadway and 80th Street can net a veritable feast. Walking across the park on 81st Street takes you east past Belvedere Castle and Belvedere Lake, as well as near the Delacorte Theater and the Obelisk, for a wealth of lovely picnic spots before exiting the park at 79th Street. It's a leisurely stroll up Fifth Avenue to the **Guggenheim Museum** at 89th Street.

After the vast terrain of the American Museum of Natural History, the Guggenheim feels especially manageable because you can see at an upward glance what you're getting into. The spiral ramp of the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed building is ideal for a slow ramble with diversions into the side galleries. Current exhibitions include the recently opened "Robert Motherwell: Early Collages" (through Jan. 5) and "Kandinsky in Paris, 1934-1944"

(through April 23), which showcases the last years of the influential artist's life. (Note: Currently, the museum ramps are closed and views of the rotunda obscured in preparation for the upcoming "Christopher Wool" exhibit opening Oct. 25.)

DAY THREE

An artist friend recommended I check out the **Neue Galerie**. Specializing in German Expressionist painting and decorative arts, the museum is housed in a 100-year-old Upper East Side townhouse with original and restored interiors, and it's adorned not only with paintings, drawings, sketches, and sculpture, but a wealth of glassware, pottery, and furniture. (I recommend getting the audio tour for context.) It's a Klimt lover's dream — reproductions don't do justice to the rich texture and gold leaf of the artist's distinctive works. An exhibit on Kandinsky just opened (through Feb. 10). Located on Fifth Avenue at 86th Street, Neue Galerie is also famous for its two classic Viennese cafes. Café Sabarsky, modeled on a fin-de-siècle kaffeehaus, is perfect for lunch. Decorated with period objects, it boasts an enticing menu of German-Austrian specialties — leave room for one of the lavish desserts and specialty coffees.

From there, it's four blocks to the **Metropolitan Museum of Art** (Fifth Avenue at 82d Street), where one could spend hours in any one gallery. If I have time, I do just that, and the newly opened "The Nelson A. Rockefeller Vision: In Pursuit of the Best in the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas" (through October 2014) is especially intriguing. It showcases the late vice president's extraordinary collection of non-Western art. But you can also just meander through gallery after gallery of some of the world's most extraordinary artistic creations. And if you want a little guidance, the Met offers a "highlights" audio tour of some of its most distinctive holdings that takes you on a spin "through time and across cultures." That's on the list for my next visit.

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If you go . . .

Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53d St., New York
212-708-9400, www.moma.org
Adults \$25, 65 and older \$18, students \$14, under age 16 free.

Museum of Art and Design
2 Columbus Circle
212-299-7777, www.madmuseum.org
Adults \$16, seniors \$14, students \$12.

American Museum of Natural History
Central Park West at 79th St.
212-769-5100, www.amnh.org
Timed tickets \$16-\$27, includes general admission.

Guggenheim Museum
1071 Fifth Ave. at 89th Street
212-423-3500, www.guggenheim.org
Adults \$22, students and 65 and older \$18, 12 and under free.

Neue Galerie
1048 Fifth Ave. at 86th Street
212-994-9493, www.neuegalerie.org
Adults \$20, students and 65 and older \$10, under 12 not admitted.

Metropolitan Museum of Art
1000 Fifth Ave. at 82d Street
212-535-7710, www.metmuseum.org
Adults \$25, 65 and older \$17, students \$12, under 12 (accompanied by an adult) free.

Where to eat lunch
Radiance Tea House and Books
158 West 55th St.
212-217-0442, www.radiancetea.com
Entrees \$9-\$32.

Zabar's
2245 Broadway at 80th
212-787-2000, www.zabars.com
From a \$.95 bagel up.

Shake Shack
366 Columbus Ave. at 77th
646-747-8770, www.shakeshack.com
Burgers and hot dogs \$3-\$8.80.

Café Sabarsky
Neue Galerie, 1048 Fifth Ave. at 86th
212-288-0665, www.neuegalerie.org
Sausages and savories \$5-\$30.



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