

The real

MEAL DEAL

by Eugene Costello

Images by
John McGoldrick

In a city boasting 79 Michelin stars, Tripadvisor's 2017 list of its top London restaurants might just surprise you. Forget about going to Gordon's place, and never mind a meal Heston's... here's where you should *really* eat in the city

London's thriving restaurant scene has come a long way in the past few decades. In the 1970s, the height of sophistication could be summed up by a visit to a trattoria or bistro, some red-and-white checked tablecloths and a candle shoved into a hard straw-encased Chianti bottle. If you were feeling brave, you'd order daring foreign dishes such as spaghetti bolognese, boeuf bourguignon or cheese fondue. If you were playing it safe, you'd go

for melon or prawn cocktail, followed by a steak so well done you could have worn it as a shoe.

Wartime rationing had left a decades-long, dank odour over British food – so even this one-armed, casual embrace of European cuisine was something to be welcomed. In post-war Britain, the influential British food writer Elizabeth David was determined to replace the smell of over-boiled cabbage with the vibrancy of the Med diet, and her 1950 bestseller *A Book of*

Mediterranean Food has never gone out of print since. As a result, David is widely credited with changing British attitudes to food forever.

Fast-forward to 2017, and the UK scene couldn't be more different. When it comes to fine dining, London is now one of the world's great gastronomic destinations, with a total of 79 Michelin stars. The only city in Europe with more is Paris.

It's probably those statistics that make the annual TripAdvisor list of London's

top ten restaurants, so surprising. You won't find too many celebrity chefs here, and only one spot for a place granted star-status by the Michelin Guide (the Ledbury in the Notting Hill area has two). Instead, the order of the day is good food, honestly served and reasonably priced, with most being neighbourhood stalwarts in the suburbs as opposed to being slap-bang in the expensive districts of Mayfair, Knightsbridge or Soho. We picked out three that you should visit and savour...

Liman



Liman is found at one end of the bustling Chapel Market Street in Islington. The area hasn't really changed much in 30 years, and you can buy anything here from clothes to household cleaners,

cheeses to mobile phones.

It's unashamedly noisy – this is a market trader's street, after all – so when you reach the far end and arrive at Liman, a modest but attractively-fronted bistro dwarfed by its brutalist concrete police station neighbour, it feels like an oasis of calm.

Liman Mediterranean Kitchen – to give it its full title – is simple but homely. Inside, it's all exposed brickwork and sailing paraphernalia (liman means port in Turkish).

The restaurant narrows at the far end to make space for the food prepping area and an enormous charcoal grill. It's fun just watching the team at work, and it also means that all food is prepared and cooked right in front of you.

Testament to its popularity, we arrived at 6pm on a Friday, and by just 7pm the place was full and turning away walk-ins. Booking ahead is strongly advised.



THE REVIEW

The food really is spectacular – great Middle Eastern-inspired dishes cooked to perfection on a sizzling grill under your nose, with super-fresh meze prepared beside it. The starters are a meal on their own, with standouts including cacik, a cucumber yoghurt dip with plenty of fresh mint and dill and a subtle kick from crushed garlic (US\$4.75), patlican soslu, translated as “aubergine napolitana”, a rich and smoky assembly of aubergine and tomato with some fire from pepper, garlic and onion (US\$4.75), and the perennial favourite hummus, served with optional cubes of lamb (US\$5.15), all of which come with plenty of flatbread to dip.

For a hot starter, you should try the excellent falafel with a hint of coriander, served freshly fried with a layer of tahini on top (US\$6.75), the perfectly formed borek of salty feta cheese (US\$5.90) and – the standout dish – a duo of mucver, creamy courgette fritters with potato, egg, carrot

and feta cheese, pan fried in flour batter and with a taste of mint and parsley (US\$7.20).

If you can handle a main, there are two that really star. The pizola (lamb chops), a generous trio of meat the size of a small hand, each is cooked just as you like it on the charcoal grill. It's well seasoned and served with salad Middle Eastern-style with lots of fresh mint that offers a nice counterpoint to the smoky meatiness (US\$15.65). Secondly, you'll find a great Iskender-style dish of lamb beyti, grilled minced lamb served wrap-style, pressed into diamond wedges of flatbread (lavash) and on a plate of yoghurt and tomato sauce (US\$15.30).

**60 PENTON STREET,
ISLINGTON, LONDON N1 9PZ;
+44 (0)20 3583 6442;
LIMAN.CO.UK; 11AM TO 11PM
SEVEN DAYS A WEEK**

THE STORY

The brainchild of Kurdish husband-and-wife team Niyazi and Berivan Tezik, Liman opened in June last year and specialises in Turkish and Middle Eastern dishes. Niyazi has worked at the prestigious Sofra in Mayfair, an upmarket Turkish restaurant, as well as at the Royal Albert Hall. Meanwhile, wife Berivan charms the

clientele front of house, but she's also a pastry chef in her own right.

“My brother pushed us to do this,” explains Niyazi. He has a restaurant in Turkey near Ankara, and he lent us the money we needed to get started (he's a very good man, interjects Bervian with a smile). But it was difficult at first to understand the UK

market, to learn what people want and expect.”

Location was crucial. They looked hard for the right place to set up shop. It needed to be somewhere they could afford the rent at, but still be in a location where business would be steady. It's open all day, every day. It's hard work. But after such a great response in only ten months, the

struggle appears to have been more than worth it.

“We're far busier than we ever expected,” explains Bervian with a smile. “We have TripAdvisor to thank for this, and we're so happy to be number one. It's such a great success story for us – but now we are stressed again... this time about keeping our place at the top.”

You won't find too many Michelin stars on the list. The order of the day is good food, honestly served and reasonably priced, with most being neighbourhood stalwarts as opposed to big name establishments

The Golden Chippy



Greenwich is one of the most historic areas of London, and famously home to the Royal Observatory, the beautifully restored Cutty Sark – the world's sole surviving tea clipper – and any number of handsome

Georgian properties and buildings from around the early 18th century.

You'll find The Golden Chippy down the High Road away from the most genteel part of Greenwich and towards the distinctly more urban Deptford. It's a classic London chippy, on a street corner but with a covered terrace with patio heaters for those who want to eat their food on-site. We visited at 4pm on a weekday and there was a constant stream of customers. By 7pm, a steady trickle had become an unstoppable flow.

THE STORY

The man in charge at The Golden Chippy is Chris Kanizi, 57, a Turkish Cypriot who came to London in 1977 to study medicine. He gave it up in 1979 when, "Mrs Thatcher put the fees for studying medicine up from US\$1,830 to US\$5,500, so I became an expert in operating on fish instead of humans," he says with a hearty chuckle that shakes his bear-like frame. "These hands have been cooking for 40 years," he says, with no little pride.

In 2016, TripAdvisor had The Golden Chippy at number one, and the business exploded from

there. "It's crazy," laughs Kanizi. "Last year we had one group of 67 people who came here from Holland. We had to do it in three sittings and put tables in the road for them – they're back again in April, only with 70 people this time.

We've had people from the US, New Zealand, Paris... you name it. Last Sunday, we had a group of 31 from Oman who came here to be fed. They Google: best fish and chips in London, and up we come."

There are two reasons for his success. One is the quality, "Our fish comes from a supplier we've used for years. They don't



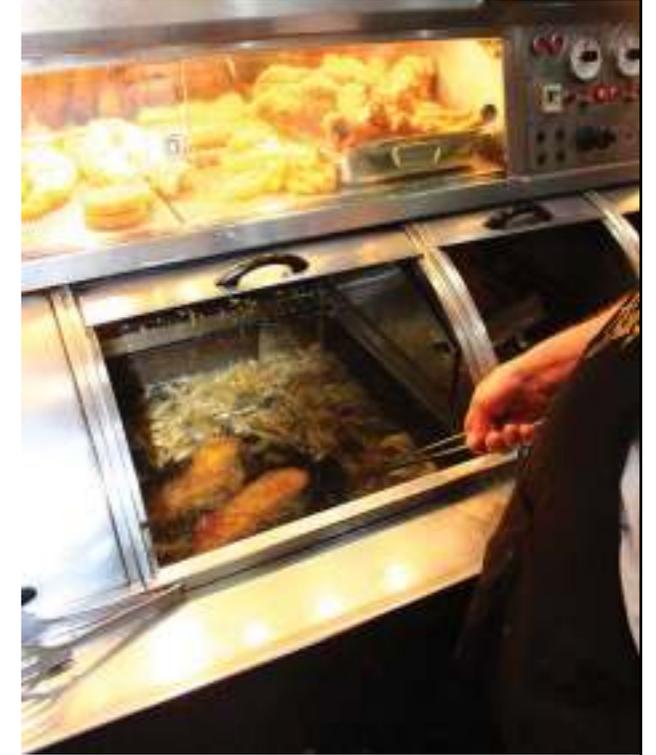
buy from [London fish market] Billingsgate – they have deals with individual skippers of fishing boats and will buy up the whole catch. Last week, we had cod from Hull and haddock from Scotland...

it changes according to what's fresh and what's good."

The second reason? "That's the magic ingredient," laughs Kanizi. "Lots of TLC... and a little bit of beer."

But while beer is an essential ingredient in the batter for many, this place caters for all dietary requirements. If you're Muslim, he has a version of his batter without the booze, and he's stopped frying in groundnut oil because of the growing awareness of people

with nut allergies; these days, he only uses fresh rapeseed oil. Incredibly, he's even perfected a batter for those on gluten-free diets such as coeliac sufferers, "I make a lovely batter using rice flour; not wheat – it works out very well, with a good texture."



THE REVIEW

There's often a touch of snobbery when it comes to fish and chips in the UK. Northerners maintain that you can only get a decent serving in their half of the country, while those from down south are fiercely proud of what they can do with a fryer:

At The Golden Chippy you'll see burgers, pies, and fried chicken all on the menu, but this place is all about the fish and chips and, geography aside, the result is outstanding. Expect a handsome piece of cod served fresh from the fryer; golden, crisp batter that's light and tasty, with fresh flakes of white meat inside that slides off the fork. The chips are perfect – cut

chunky and drowned in salt and vinegar (albeit on request). Add some tartar sauce – essentially mayonnaise sharpened with mustard or vinegar, lemon juice, capers and chopped gherkins. After that, you're left with one of the finest examples of the art you could ever wish to try, all for a very reasonable US\$8.95.

**62 GREENWICH
HIGH ROAD, LONDON SE10 8LF;
+44 (0)20 8692 4333;
THEGOLDENCHIPPY.COM;
11AM TO 11PM MONDAY TO
SATURDAY, NOON TO 11PM
SUNDAY**



Emirates airline operates 133 flights per week from Dubai to the UK – six services a day to Heathrow, three daily to London Gatwick and Manchester, three per day to Birmingham and Glasgow and a daily service to Newcastle.

The Clink

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he Clink is a charity that assists offenders coming to the end of their sentence by training them to work as kitchen and front-of-house staff in a real restaurant contained within HMP Brixton.

Set behind the newly gentrified area of Brixton Hill, the prison was built in 1820 and is arranged in a half-octagonal plan, with the octagonal governor's house at the centre.

This is not your typical restaurant and so, for security reasons, you'll need to book in advance and bring proof of identity – no walk-ins here. On the day of your reservation, you're kept in a hut at the main gates until your dining group is present and correct. With a whirr and a hum, the enormous gate slides open and you're ushered into a small tunnel with a locked gate at the other end, while the main gate is locked into place behind you. A guard with a sniffer dog walks up and down the line of would-be diners, sniffing inquisitively amongst the crowd before the inner gate finally pulls back to allow you into the walled compound of the prison.

Once there, you'll find the restaurant inside the governor's house. It's a tastefully designed bistro-style space with contemporary touches such as stacked-slate-style walls, muted ochres and browns, and lampshades that change colour from turquoise to purple to blue to green. There's a bar and cocktail waiters – although all servings are, naturally, non-alcoholic. The plastic cutlery is a further, gentle reminder that you're eating in a fully working prison.



THE STORY

The Clink Charity started in 2009, when Alberto Crisci, then catering manager at HMP High Down in Surrey, hit on the idea of training offenders nearing the end of their sentences so they

would have a trade upon release. It gives people a real chance for a fresh start, and many restaurants in the UK have signed up to support The Clink's "graduates". HMP Brixton signed up to

the programme, and opened its doors to the public in February 2014. The charity now runs four restaurants in four prisons, the others found in Cardiff, High Down, and Styal.

With a whir and a hum, the enormous gate slides open and you're ushered inside, while a sniffer dog moves inquisitively among would-be diners. This isn't your average restaurant



THE REVIEW

The menu here wouldn't look out of place in a modern European fine dining restaurant. That means the price point is a little higher than most, but it's fair and reasonable for the level of cooking and the quality of the produce.

While starters such as savoury baked cheesecake, cranberry relish and thyme shortbread (US\$8.50), and tea smoked duck and winter salad (US\$7.60) both catch the eye. The highlight of the five dishes is a classic British option of potted brown shrimps with paprika croutons, chicory salad and lemon dressing (US\$8.50).

Choosing a main course is a struggle, with six dishes that would satisfy even the pickiest of food blogger. Standouts include the duo of venison, seared loin and cottage pie, cavolo nero light pan juice, (US\$19.20), and the poached loin of cod with curried cockle broth and Jerusalem artichoke,

(US\$18.25). However the braised ox cheek with leek and potato gratin and seasonal vegetables (US\$17.70) is sensational. A huge hunk of meat that has been slow-cooked to the point it flakes off your fork; combined with the leek and potato gratin and heritage vegetable, it feels like the ultimate in comfort food.

For dessert, go classic with Cox apple and comice pear tarte tatin, clotted cream, or decadent, with chocolate mousse, walnut praline and marshmallow ice cream (US\$7.90).

HMP BRIXTON; JEBB AVENUE, LONDON SW2 5XK; +44 (0)20 8678 9007; THECLINKCHARITY.ORG; BREAKFAST, 8.15AM TO 10.30AM, LUNCH 12 TO 3PM, AFTERNOON TEA 2PM TO 4PM MONDAY TO FRIDAY