

AROUND THE WORLD IN
15 PLATES • TOURING ST.
THOMAS • BEST TRAVEL
CAMERAS • RIVER CRUISES
• THE SHADY SIDE OF
BEACH RESORTS



Essentials

FAVORITE INTERNATIONAL FOOD CITY NEW YORK...40%
San Francisco...21%; Paris...19%; Other...20%



FAVORITE INTERNATIONAL FOOD CITY

The United Nations of Restaurants

You know how most supermarkets have an “international” food aisle? New York City’s Hell’s Kitchen neighborhood is something like that, only with sidewalks. The 20 or so blocks on Manhattan’s far-west side may be the most ethnically diverse stretch of restaurants in the world, representing dozens of cultures. Where else can you find blini, linguine, wienies, and a martini, all within walking distance of one another? **BY MARISA ROBERTSON-TEXTOR**

The UN of Restaurants

continued



1

ARGENTINA

CHIMICHURRI GRILL

609 Ninth Ave., chimichurrigrill.com



One thing is clear at this narrow, white-walled *nuevo* Argentine spot: Buenos Aires-born Chef-owner Carlos Darquea believes there's no place like home. Every cut of grass-fed beef is imported from ranches in South America, and Darquea makes his featherlight chicken, beef, and chard empanadas from his grandmother's recipe (mixed platter \$15). Try them at the marble-topped bar for prime sidewalk people-watching.



2

ETHIOPIA

QUEEN OF SHEBA

650 W. 10th St., shebanyc.com



The secret of Philipos Mengistu's signature *berbere* sauce is so well-guarded, even his kitchen staff doesn't know the formula. Mengistu's mother mixes up each batch of the 20-plus-spice blend back home in Addis Ababa and ships it to his restaurant in New York, which is decked out with African art and woven-straw stools. The seven-dish sampler of lentils, greens, and chickpeas on spongy *injera* bread is a vegetarian's dream (\$12.50).



3

FRANCE

CHEZ NAPOLÉON

365 W. 50th St., cheznapoleon.com



Opened in 1960, this is the sort of classic French establishment that barely exists in Paris anymore: Think silver chafing dishes of calf's brains in black butter and capers (\$23), rabbit in mustard sauce (\$24), and cherries jubilee (\$9), all overseen by 90-year-old proprietor Marguerite Bruno. Yet the decor is the farthest thing from stuffy: Along with mounted swords and battle murals, there's also a framed jigsaw-puzzle homage to the Little Corporal.



3

ITALY

MERCATO

352 W. 39th St., mercatoyc.com



Mismatched wood chairs, open shelving, fluted-tin pendant lamps, and a large, wine-cork-framed mirror make this West Side trattoria feel worlds away from the gritty stretch of Midtown it actually inhabits. Thanks to the efforts of Sardinian executive chef Emanuel Concas, the fava-bean puree with sautéed chicory (\$10) and the homemade gnocchi with braised wild-boar ragout (\$16) will transport you further still.



9

JAPAN

TOTTO RAMEN

366 W. 52nd St., tottoramen.com



Just because the chefs are tattooed, the music is J-pop, and the crowd skews hip, don't assume this just-below-street-level space puts style over substance. Its 20 seats are always packed (with a line out the door) for one very good reason: the flavorful, steaming-hot ramen (\$10.50), cooked with handmade noodles and enlivened with seasoned avocado (\$2), shredded pork (\$2), spicy bamboo shoots (\$1), and other toppings.



10

KOREA

DANJI

346 W. 52nd St., danjinyc.com



With stints at upscale New York institutions Masa and Daniel under his belt, you might expect Chef Hooni Kim to make his solo debut an exercise in over-the-top indulgence—with prices to match. Instead, he created Danji, an understated gem of a restaurant with communal seating and two distinct tapas menus: one boasting traditional Korean items like scallion pancakes (\$10), the other fusion dishes like spicy pork-belly sliders (\$12).



11

MEXICO

TEHUITZINGO MEXICAN DELI

695 10th Ave., 212/397-5956



It would be easy to mistake Tehuitzingo for nothing more than a cheerful, well-stocked Mexican grocery store. But those in the know head straight to the deli's back room for Pueblan dishes such as roast-pork-and-pineapple tacos *al pastor* (\$2.75) and *torta cecina*, a pressed sandwich stacked with salt-cured beef, *queso fresco*, avocado, and jalapeños (\$6), all served with Norteño music and *telenovelas* playing in the background.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY WHITNEY TRESSEL; MAP BY JASON LEE



4

GERMANY

HALLO BERLIN

626 10th Ave., halloberlinrestaurant.com



When Rolf Babel immigrated to the U.S. in 1981 with \$500 in his pocket, he found his salvation in a street cart, selling sausages in Midtown. Today, that “German soul food” has more deluxe digs: his family’s indoor-outdoor beer garden, outfitted with picnic tables, taxidermy, and a cheat sheet likening the menu items to cars. Check out the Mercedes (bratwurst) and Porsche (Berliner currywurst), served with spiced onions and sauerkraut (\$7).



5

GREECE

POSEIDON BAKERY

629 Ninth Ave., 212/757-6173



Maybe it’s the influence of their ever-present ancestors, watching over the room from photos along the wall. The folks behind this fourth-generation bakery have never stopped rolling out their phyllo dough by hand—a laborious process plenty of their competitors have abandoned. It’s takeout only, so go ahead and load up on honey-drenched baklava (\$3) or tangy apricot-cheese strudel (\$3.50) for now and for later.



6

HAITI

LE SOLEIL

877 10th Ave., 212/581-6059



One of just a handful of Haitian restaurants in the city, Le Soleil seems perpetually filled with cabdrivers looking to refuel between shifts and Haitian natives who care much more about the spot-on familiar food than the drive-by, no-frills decor. The menu changes daily, though heaping plates of fried chicken (\$10) or stewed, delicately spiced red snapper (\$17) are consistent favorites. Each entrée comes with plantains, beans, and rice.



7

ISRAEL

AZURI CAFÉ

465 W. 51st St., 212/262-2920



The things people will do for a little taste of home. Israel native Ezra Cohen gave up his successful thrift shop nearby (Barbra Streisand was a regular) back in 1990 to open this five-table hole-in-the-wall cafe, all because he missed his country’s cooking. The gamble paid off: His unusually delicate falafel, which comes on an enormous platter of dips and salads, has repeatedly been voted among the city’s best (\$9.25).



12

MIDDLE EAST

GAZALA PLACE

709 Ninth Ave., gazelaplace.com



There aren’t many restaurants in the U.S. devoted to the cuisine of the Druze people, a religious community scattered across the Middle East. After a meal at the snug-but-cozy, banquette-edged Gazala Place, you’ll wonder why. The tissue-thin pita is made fresh daily on a griddle in the front window, and the spinach-and-cheese *burek* lunch special, served with hummus and a hard-boiled egg, is one of the most wallet-friendly meals in town (\$10).



13

RUSSIA

UNCLE VANYA CAFÉ

315 W. 54th St., unclevanyacafe.net



With its exposed beams, brick walls, and ramshackle collection of antique lamps, this mellow little restaurant has the feel of a friend’s countryside dacha, the kind of homey place where lively conversation and a pot of tea with cookies and homemade jam (\$5), cherry dumplings (16 for \$8.50), and red-caviar-laden blini (\$12.50) are always waiting. In true Russian style, dinner patrons are encouraged to BYOV (corkage fee \$15).



14

SOUTH AFRICA

XAI XAI

369 W. 51st St., xaixaiwinebar.com



The wine comes first at Xai Xai (pronounced “shai shai”)—no surprise, given South Africa’s oenophile status. But the food at this candlelit, 50-seat spot is no afterthought. You’ll find dried, cured meats like biltong and *droewors*, made from beef, lamb, and pork (three for \$18); four types of “bunny chow,” a curried stew served in a bread bowl (from \$10); and *sosaties*, or “skewers,” of spicy Cape Malay *paneer* (\$6) and *peri-peri* prawn (\$7).



15

THAILAND

PURE THAI SHOPHOUSE

766 Ninth Ave., purethaishophouse.com



One of the most recent additions to the Ninth Avenue strip, this skinny, year-old storefront seems lifted from a seaside stretch of Koh Samui, down to the open kitchen in front, tin-siding ceiling, bright metal stools, and colorful Thai movie posters. You can’t go wrong with the house specialty, crab-and-pork dry noodles, a perfectly balanced dish of handmade egg noodles, slabs of roasted pork, and tender lump crabmeat (\$8).

