

## Boston Area Restaurants

### (Allston-Brighton)

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Bluestone Bistro 1799 Comm Ave., Boston, 254-8309. Gourmet pizza in a small, funky room. Also salads, pastas, and beer on tap. Price range: \$4-\$8.

Chef Chow's House 354 Chestnut Hill Ave. (Cleveland Circle), 566-2275. Not a top-notch Mandarin-Szechuan restaurant, but a big step up for Cleveland Circle. Go for the steamed ravioli, spicy dishes, and General Gau's chicken. Price range: \$4-\$10.

Rangoli 129 Brighton Ave., 562-0200. Something new to this area — South Indian food (generally spicier, more fried, and more vegetarian than the more familiar North Indian dishes). The dishes are so individualistically flavored that it's like Indian cuisine in technicolor. Especially the crunchy-sweet samosa-bhel, the satisfying pav bhaji, masala dosa, and idli-sambhar. You can also fall back on the familiar tandoori dishes, vindaloo, chaat, and such. Price range: \$5-\$10.

San Francisco Noodle House 1029 Comm. Ave., 783-5111, 783-5155. Attracts a chic crowd of would-be Mandarins. Taiwan/Hong Kong-style food can be greasy, but you might like the soups, stuffed bean curd, clams with black-bean sauce, and other non-batter-fried delights. Price range: \$4-\$11.

Uva 1418 Comm. Ave., 566-5670. A happening trattoria with a way-cool wine list. Superb antipasti and desserts. Try the grilled entrees. Or custom-build your own pizza or dish of homemade pasta. No reservations, so you might have to wait outside for a table. Price range: \$8-\$16.

Wing It 1153 Comm Ave., 783-2473. Actually better on chicken wings, which they make in 14 sauces, than on ribs. Big attraction is free delivery. The place would be an excellent collegiate dive if it were a little bigger. Price range: \$6-\$15.

Tasca 1612 Comm. Ave., 730-8002. Our advice is to stick to tapas (bar snacks) in what looks more like a sit-down dining room than the kind of loud tapas bar Spaniards call a tasca. Good Spanish wine list, so have a fino and some fried calamares, and enjoy. Price range: \$10-\$16.

North East Brewing Co. 1314 Comm Ave, 566-6699. At last, a brewpub with both solid ales — even the light ones are clean-tasting — and delectable food. Especially the Nor'Easter Pale Ale and the crabcakes, the roast chicken, the greens salad, and the tall-foodiest, most postmodern chocolate ecstasy that ever was. Dark, so wear what you like. Price range: \$11-\$17.

Roggie's Brew and Grille 356 Chestnut Hill Ave. (Cleveland Circle), 566-1880. An inexpensive, superfilling bar and grill with 20 beers on tap and a crowd that's hipper than you'd expect for Cleveland Circle. Fajitas, steak tips, and the like come in monstrous portions; diners more discerning than hungry should look to the raw bar and the very nice Greek-style grilled seafood. Price range: \$6-\$14.

Julia's 386 Market St. (Brighton Center), 782-5060. Contemporary American food in a casual, public atmosphere. Price range: \$8-\$13.

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### (Back Bay)

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29 Newbury 29 Newbury St., Boston, 536-0290. New American cuisine served in the kind of low-key but elegant atmosphere you'd expect on lower Newbury Street. Works by local artists grace the walls; an outdoor Cafe in the warm weather makes for ideal people-watching. Price range: \$12-\$22.

Baja Mexican Cantina 111 Dartmouth St., Boston, 262-7575. Serves California Mexican food rather than "authentic" Mexican, but does so with spirit and skill. Most authentic Mexican restaurants, after all, don't have Baja's wonderful "ultimate chocolate cake," or its scallop quesadilla, or a heavenly roasted garlic memela (close your eyes — it's pizza). Price range: \$6-\$12.

Biba 272 Boylston St., Boston, 426-7878. The restaurant all Boston keeps talking about, with a vivid combination of bold decor and bolder food flavors. Ultra-trendy — fried food, strange foodstuffs, and familiar foods done as never before. Tremendous fun. Price range: \$16-\$24.

Blue Wave 142 Berkeley St., Boston, 424-6711. Thoroughly postmodern Millies and their pals are flocking to this bustling Cafe and grill. Good and moderately priced; stick to entrees and desserts. Go for grilled stuff and Mexican flavors on the former, multi-chocolate options on the latter. Great salads. Price range: \$7-\$15.

Bombay Cafe 175 Mass Ave., Boston, 247-0555. A storefront with a good, standard menu, somewhat richer in seafood and fried foods than many, and with enough non-spicy dishes to satisfy parents from Iowa. Anything made with chicken tikka will be good, as will shrimp samosas, stuffed nan, mint paratha, and tandoori shrimp. Price range: \$7-\$16.

Cactus Club 939 Boylston St, Boston, 236-0200. Southwestern cuisine: enchiladas, fajitas, and other traditional dishes. Lively bar scene. Price range: \$9-\$12.

California Pizza Kitchen 800 Boylston St., Boston, 247-0888. The food news is that Peking-duck pizza is here, and it's good. The trend report is that tiramisu is turning into cheesecake. The feature story is that two prosecutors figured out how to make a chain restaurant with nice service and good food. Second location at 16-18 Eliot St., Cambridge (Harvard Sq.), 492-0006. Price range: \$6-\$10.

The Capital Grille 359 Newbury St., Boston, 262-8900. New upscale steakhouse combines the distractions of its predecessors, but does offer aged steaks almost as good as Morton's, in a tonier atmosphere. Overpriced wines and underpriced desserts. Stick to the protein (great swordfish, too) and salads, maybe the potatoes. Price range: \$13-\$25.

Cottonwood Cafe 222 Berkeley St., Boston, 247-2225. Likeable, stylish, inauthentic, popular Santa Fe bar with nouvelle NuMex food. Younger, livelier tone than the similar Porter Square branch. Good salads and desserts, fun fusions like "cowboy pot stickers," Puebla duckling, Norma's Zuni roll. For traditional tastes, the chili and the black-bean torta are nice. Price range: \$8-\$18 (lunch, \$6-\$10).

Armani Cafe 214 Newbury St., Boston, 437-0909. Elegant room, if you ignore the standing joke of waiters in rumpled Nehru jackets. Pretty good northern Italian food — especially the authentic risottos and the long list of desserts. You will, of course, want to dress up. Price range: \$10-\$29 (lunch, \$7-\$15).

Gyuhama 827 Boylston St., Boston, 437-0188. Busy and authentically Japanese, this restaurant and bar is popular both for its sushi, which is top-notch, and its late-night hours. Price range: \$5-\$14.

Hsin Hsin Chinese Noodle Restaurant 25 Mass Ave., Boston, 536-9852. A great little restaurant with a short menu full of clean, sharp flavors. Emphasizing soups and noodles, the menu draws

from all regions, with a slight tendency toward the hot-and-spicy seasonings of the Southwest. Try the vast and delectable scallion pancake, and the house-special pan-fried noodles. Price range: \$3-\$7.

India Samraat 51a Mass Ave., Boston, 247-0718. Small, sparsely decorated, and running to small entrees, but the chef has a firm hand on the standard curries and the condiment tray. Homemade cheese sparks the vegetarian list; lamb jalfrozie and chicken tikka masala for richly flavored sauces. Great tea. Price range: \$6-\$8.

Kashmir 279 Newbury St., Boston, 536-1695. At last, an Indian restaurant as beautifully decorated and designed as the fancy Thai restaurants. Plenty of wham in the food, too, from the shrimp samosas and humble vegetarian curries up to the tandoori rack of lamb, presented with the chops impaled on swords. As the name suggests, the strengths are tandoori (don't miss the nan) and creamy sauces with real cilantro. Price range: \$9-\$17 (lunch, \$4-\$6).

Library Grill (at the Hampshire Hotel), 84 Beacon St., Boston, 227-9600. Seafood is the specialty, but the menu is still quite varied. There is also live entertainment and a great view of the Public Garden. Price range: \$15-\$25.

Miyako 279a Newbury St., Boston, 236-0222. The strengths are service, sushi-by-the-piece, and a long list of unusual appetizers and small plates. Vegetarians have the most novel choices, but the familiar dishes are there, including a smoked-salmon cocktail served to look like sashimi. Minimalist blue-gray space rewards dressing up. Price range: \$11-\$23.

Morton's 1 Exeter Plaza (Boylston at Exeter), Boston, 266-5858. A modern reconstruction of a Chicago steakhouse. Surely one of the last upscale restaurants in Boston where one can smoke a cigar without objections (even from us: the ventilation is excellent). Withal, a custom-aged porterhouse steak of unimaginable flavor and tenderness. Price range: \$13-\$23.

The Other Side Cosmic Cafe 407 Newbury St. Ext., Boston, 536-9477. New Bohemian Cafe with film-noir booths overlooking the alley, a beatnik living room up on the balcony. Cheap west-coast sandwiches (on terrific breads) and fresh juices, including "a dose of wheatgrass juice." Homemade pie. Seattle soundtrack. Price range: \$4-\$7.

Parish Cafe 361 Boylston Street, Boston, 247-4777. At last, a bar with sandwiches named after celebrities, where the celebrities can actually cook. Chefs, in fact. Boston's celebrity chefs designed some nifty sandwiches and salads, and a young staff makes them with top-shelf ingredients. And serves them with some interesting American wines and world beers. A conversation-maker for people interested in food. Price range: \$5-\$9.

Pignoli 79 Park Plaza, Boston, 338-7500. Second restaurant by Lydia Shire, of Biba, less expensive and more focused on Italian foods. The main strategy seems to be unusual morsels. The bread basket and pesto is glorious, and there are many excellent moments, especially in the starch departments. Initially a younger, hipper crowd than the nationally famous Biba. Price range: \$17-\$25.

The Rattlesnake Bar 384 Boylston St., Boston, 859-8555. Pan-American food with a Caribbean accent. Dress fancy/casual and eat better than usual. Price range: \$6-\$14.

Small Planet Bar and Grill 565 Boylston St., Boston, 536-8993, 536-4477. More of a bar appealing to twentysomethings with good pizza, fried appetizers, and desserts like the power-chocolate "maniac brownie." Stick with the quesadilla, fried conch, vegetable risotto, and blueberry-apple crumble. Fun postmodern decor works in pictures of Third World food production. Price range: \$7-\$16 (lunch, \$6-\$9).

Sonsie 327 Newbury St., Boston, 351-2500. Wear your Newbury Street clothes, whatever those might be, to a fun, see-and-be-seen restaurant. Appetizers are often among the best things on the eclectic menu. Excellent bartenders who know how to mix a good drink. Superior Sunday brunch and weekday, early-morning breakfast crowd. Price range: \$10-\$18.

Spasso 160 Comm Ave., Boston, 536-8656. Italian eats, featuring an enormous menu that's good for sharing. A good place to drop in with pals and split a designer pizza and a few entrees. Price range: \$7-\$13.

Stephanie's 190 Newbury St., Boston, 236-0990. Bistro-style dining, very romantic. While you're there, check out the gourmet retail food shop. Price range: \$14-\$26.

Thai Basil 132 Newbury St., Boston, 424-8424. Underground but elegant effort to sell a consistent Thai menu in the Back Bay. Excellent porpia tod (spring rolls), and quality across the board, from the bland Thai crepe and tamarind duck to the pretty-darn-hot "choo chee fisherman." Price range: \$6-\$13 (lunch, \$5-\$7).

Aujourd'hui 200 Boylston Street (Four Seasons Hotel), 451-1392. Prix fixe tasting menus \$52 (vegetarian) and \$70. Elegant food in an elegant setting with impeccable elegant service — and a view rivaled only by that of the Ritz. Many consider this to be Boston's most romantic dining room, although the food may strike some as a little staid. Price range: \$29-\$40.

Back Bay Brewing Company 755 Boylston St., Boston, 424-8300. Quick off the blocks with its beer, this brewery-restaurant has culinary ambition, too. The bar menu is a standout, with nice sandwiches and a pretty serious cheeseburger (I mean, shiitake mushrooms?). The pricier entrees offer remarkable presentation. Don't miss the chocolate-mousse mug for dessert. Price range: \$7-\$23.

Chanterelle 226 Newbury St., 262-8988. Ambiance is the story at this cuddly Upper Newbury date spot. Outstanding service and properly executed, if conventional, French fare make this more a place for an anniversary than for a culinary adventure. Price range: \$14-\$19.

Tapeo 266 Newbury St., 267-4799. Evocative Spanish decor in this crowded and loud tapas bar/dining room. Tapas and a terrific list of Spanish wines and sherries are the key, although you shouldn't miss the onion soup, zarzuela (seafood soup), or the orange-flavored flan. Price range: \$3-\$18.

Cafe Louis 234 Berkeley Street, Boston, 266-4680. Tiny, precise, extravagant, this Cafe in the rear of the eponymous men's store offers perfectly sculpted, attentively cooked dishes for the Newbury Street crowd that can afford it. Look for the venison with truffled polenta, the daily pasta specials, and the celestial Sauternes sorbet. Price range: \$19-\$33.

Angelo's Ristorante 575 Boylston Street (Copley Square), Boston, 536-4045. Vaulting right to the top of the Italian pile in the Back Bay, the smallish and very dressy Angelo's skips the old cliches of red-sauce pasta and light Northern Italian cooking for a clean, muscular style that embraces both grilled meats and rich sauces. Try portobello mushrooms on arugula, lobster bisque, and any of the grilled entrees. Price range: \$12-\$25.

575 94 Mass Ave. (at Newbury), 247-9922. You know you're dealing with ultrahipness when a restaurant is named after a number that isn't even the street address. 575 (say "Five-Seven-Five") is supposed to be named after the syllabic pattern of a haiku, and has great sushi, along with some pretty good Italian food. It's loud and spacey in a way that says "bar" more than "restaurant." Dress, you know, carefully but not exactly up. Price range: -

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## (Beacon Hill)

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Antonio's 288 Cambridge St., Boston, 367-3310. Northern and Southern Italian menu, with a rotating list of specials. Price range: \$6-\$10.

Black Goose 21 Beacon St., Boston, 720-4500. Your basic bar scene with better-than-basic bar food in a spectacular location. Next to the State House in the renovated lobby of the former Bellevue Hotel — Beaux Arts meets Postmodern. Boisterous inside; the terrace outside is quieter. A lunch or after-work spot with inexpensive finger food to split; good shrimp and artichoke pizza, Caribbean chicken and seafood stew, tiramisu. Price range: \$6-\$14.

The Hungry I 71 Charles St., Boston, 227-3524. A cozy, plush restaurant tucked downstairs on Charles Street. Price range: -

Istanbul Cafe 37 Bowdoin St., Boston, 227-3434. Tip-top Turkish food in a pleasantly Bohemian semi-basement on the back side of Beacon Hill. Fine appetizers like the fried sigara boreks, a really tasty vegetarian stuffed eggplant, terrific lamb kebab, and better, spicier adana kebab, swell Turkish coffee. Price range: \$4-\$10.

Siam Cafe 197 Cambridge St. (Charles River Plaza), Boston, 227-1431. At last, a Thai restaurant for the area of Mass General Hospital and the backside of Beacon Hill. Particularly strong on satay and the seafood entrees. Price range: \$6-\$12.

Lemon Grass Grille 156 Cambridge St., Boston, 720-4656. The mild cooking and rangy menu at this primarily Thai spot make it a decent starter restaurant for would-be Thai eaters. Problem is, most of us have already started. Some amusing touches: the lightly spicy pineapple chicken comes in a real half-pineapple. A sushi bar has been added since our original review. Price range: \$7-\$14.

Lala Rokh 97 Mount Vernon St., Boston, 720-5511. Exotic, authentic, romantic, and beautiful, Lala Rokh fulfills, surpasses, and deconstructs our fantasies of ancient Persia all at once.

Absolutely don't miss the eggplant appetizer and pilaf entrees. Many unique garnishes and subtle flavors do justice to a rare and classic cuisine. Price range: \$12-\$16.

Artu 89 Charles Street, 227-9023. A stylish, low-key trattoria and roastery with two locations. The Charles Street storefront is the place if you're in the mood for a terrific lamb sandwich, or if one of the nightly specials looks good. The original North End branch is a better spot for a full Italian dinner (longer menu; prices a dollar lower). At both, the food is affordable and consistently flavorful. Price range: \$7-\$14.

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## (Charlestown)

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Barrett's 2 Constitution Plaza, Charlestown, Boston, 242-9600. American cuisine with a strong emphasis on seafood. Price range: \$9-\$21.

Olives 10 City Square, Boston, 242-1999. Fairly expensive, and expect a long wait unless you're a celebrity. But worth every cent and minute. The pan-Mediterranean cuisine here is served with a shot of pure genius, making it one of Boston's best (and most sophisticated) eateries. The dishes — from the classic Olives tart to the "falling chocolate cake" — are so inspired it's hard to believe they're not classics. Price range: \$15-\$29.

The Warren Tavern 2 Pleasant St., Boston, 241-8142. A pub-style restaurant serving seafood, pasta dishes, and daily specials. Price range: \$7-\$14 (lunch, \$5-\$7).

Figs 67 Main Street, Charlestown (242-2229) and 42 Charles Street, Beacon Hill (742-3447). From the people who brought you Olives, an extraordinary pizza parlor. Outstanding thin-crust pizzas lavishly topped with fresh ingredients. Try the bianco (topped with fresh arugula and tomatoes). The risotto with corn and crab is sheer bliss. And the tiramisu may be the best in town. Price range: \$10-\$16.

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## (Chinatown)

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Asian Garden Seafood Restaurant 46 Beach St. (basement), Boston, 695-1646, 695-1651. Live tanks in the basement entrance promise superb Hong Kong-style seafood. The kitchen delivers with fresh eel, whole roe scallops, lobster, crab, and fish in brilliant treatments. Authentic hot pots, Chinese broccoli in oyster sauce, and a comforting dessert of hot tapioca in coconut milk. Friendly place, too, and a cut cheaper. Price range: \$3-\$17.

Ba Dat Restaurant 28 Harrison Ave., Boston, 426-8838. Very nice pho in numerous variations in a quiet storefront. Price range: \$4-\$7.

Buddha's Delight 5 Beach St., Boston, 451-2395. Chinese and Vietnamese Buddhist-temple cuisine, strictly vegan (except for condensed milk in some drinks) imitations of your favorite shrimp, pork, and egg dishes. I've seen better visual work in this tradition, but it didn't taste as good as the best here: spring rolls, summer rolls, nam vang noodle soup, hot-and-sour soup, moo shi, Lake Tung-ting "shrimp," and anything spicy or with lemongrass. Good coffee. Weird desserts. Price range: \$4-\$10.

China Pearl 9 Tyler St., Boston, 426-4338. Actually the perfect three-generational night out, as this revived dinosaur of Chinatown scores with fried goodies for the kids, authentic Hong Kong and Cantonese-style seafood for the parents, and spirited Chinese-American classics for the grandparent generation. Superb soups for all. Lunch and late-night dim sum. Price range: \$6-\$16.

East Ocean City 25-29 Beach St., Boston, 542-2504, 542-4223. Handsomely decorated Cantonese-Hong Kong restaurant that actually nets a fish from the dining-room tank for your steamed fish. You can taste the difference. Good house special soup, clams in black-bean sauce, king tou spares, and chow foon as well. Late hours, full liquor license. Dress up a little. Price range: \$4-\$15.

Grand Chau Chow 41-45 Beach St., Boston, 292-5166. A fancier supplement to the popular Chau Chow Seafood Restaurant across the street, with good versions of every imaginable Chinese dish, but concentrating on Cantonese-style seafood and specialties of the Chau Chow people from Swatow and Southeast Asia. Notice the Swatowese dumpling soup, vinegar dips, grey sole with fried fins and bones, sauteed pea tendrils, and a surprising General Gau's chicken. Price range: \$4-\$22.

Imperial Seafood Restaurant 70 Beach St., Boston, 426-8543. The downstairs of the famous dim sum restaurant, full of big round tables for large groups on medium-celebratory occasions. The best of an overly inclusive menu are the ambitious Cantonese classics: steamed fish; lobster Chinese style; Imperial egg roll; roast duck; clams in black-bean sauce. Lavishly redecorated with live fish and lobster tanks, without losing the rococo, kitschy sense of the thing. Price range: \$6-\$27.

Lei Jing 20 Hudson Street, Boston, 292-6238. Everything from won ton soup to a three-course Peking duck, but the emphasis is on South Chinese banquet dishes in a more formal and

expensive dining room. Recommended: the beef teriyaki, steamed minced shrimp balls, clams with black bean sauce, and taking a chance on dessert. Price range: \$8-\$35.

New Shanghai Restaurant 21 Hudson St., Boston, 338-6688. Chinatown's venerable Szechuan palace refurbished and refocused on Shanghai cold appetizers and soy-based stews. Five-spice beef and duck, crispy eel (outstanding, no joke), crispy scallops with black-pepper sauce, steamed prawns with garlic, whole fish with braised bean curd — a consistently fine meal handsomely served. You could dress up for this. Price range: \$8-\$17.

People's Cafeteria 21-23 Edinboro St., Boston, 482-7328. Not a real cafeteria, but fewer frills and lower prices than most of the current wave in Chinatown. You could make this your personal chow foon palace, but I'd also feast on lobster in ginger and scallion, clams in black-bean sauce, and salt-and-pepper squid. Price range: \$4-\$11.

Peking Cuisine 10 Tyler St., Boston, 542-5857. Formerly known as China Grove, this family-style restaurant continues in the Mandarin and Szechuan tradition of its predecessor. Serves both standard Chinese fare as well as more adventuresome dishes like scallops with black-pepper sauce and sauteed eel with yellow leeks. Price range: \$3-\$9.

Pho Bang 7 Beach St., Boston, 422-0501. Small, clean pho shop with some of the best beef broth in the galaxy, made up into enormous noodle soups with various mix-ins. At these prices, start with all of them. Price range: \$4-\$7.

Pho Bolsa Restaurant 1 Stuart St., Boston, 695-1843. A good attempt to market Vietnamese soup with a user-friendly menu describing the usual 18 variations of pho with encouraging English prose. The soup is very close to what you can get with a little more courage elsewhere, once you've had a few experiences at Pho Bolsa. Stir-fries less reliable. Price range: \$4-\$6.

Pho Pasteur 8 Kneeland St., Boston, 451-0247. Superb specialist in noodle soups, beef or chicken based, with a variety of mix-ins. Also a line of drinks and desserts, and some, like "avocado juice" (actually a luscious milkshake), that are both. Small, homey, clean. Price range: \$3-\$5.

Pearl Dynasty 25 Tyler St., 422-0664. When this opened in 1996 as Banana Leaf, it was Boston's only full-tilt Malaysian restaurant. Malay food is the mother cuisine of Indonesian and Thai food, and there are heavy Southern Chinese influences from two centuries of migrants. It adds up to an amazing asam stingray with a vivid curry, numerous other seafood novelties, and also plenty of accessible soup and noodle dishes. Price range: \$3-\$16.

Blue Diner 150 Kneeland Street (South Station), 338-4639. Not quite a diner, not even very blue, this is still the best place to go for a serious meal at 3 a.m. The all-night hours, the barbecue menu, and the cool bar in back called the Art Zone draw everyone from cops to clubbers. Price range: \$7-\$15.

Original Boston Diner 178 Kneeland St. (South Station), 350-0028. In the funky little 1920s diner building at the corner of South and Kneeland Streets, this 24-7 diner serves solid, handmade versions of what you'd expect: burgers, fries, cheese omelets, and plenty of coffee. No beer or wine. Cash only. Price range: \$3-\$5.

Grand China 690 Washington Street, 482-8898. Huge, somewhat impersonal, but very handy dining rooms serving dim sum (teahouse snacks and dumplings) every day through lunch, and shifting over to fine Cantonese dining (with a few Mandarin-Szechuan dishes) at night. Soups are great, and so are clams with black-bean sauce, vegetables with fresh squid or real crab sauce, and a comfort-food version of beef with broccoli. Price range: \$6-\$14.

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(Copley/Prudential)

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Dixie Kitchen 182 Mass Ave., Boston, 536-3068. Genuine Cajun flavor and tone, even if not every recipe is strictly authentic, with the good-timey languor of the Big Easy. Mustn't miss the gumbo ya-ya, jambalaya, fried crawfish, and the fine, fine list of pies. Some less specifically New Orleans items are only average. Price range: \$8-\$10.

Kaya Korean-Japanese Restaurant 581 Boylston St., Boston, 236-5858, 437-1882. Hearty Korean dishes with a Japanese sense of variety and refinement; Japanese food almost as good. A respite from nearby Copley Place. Don't miss the popular tempura udon at lunch, superb galbi (marinated short ribs), or the fiery stir-fried squid. Second location at 1924 Mass. Ave., Cambridge (Porter Sq.), 497-5656. Price range: \$9-\$20 (lunch, \$5-\$10).

Moka 130 Dartmouth St., Boston, 424-7768. Cal-Ital (and thus somewhat conventional) version of the '90s Cafe with terrific coffee, homemade vegetarian soups, neat focaccia sandwiches (order anything with cranberry pesto), little pizzas, and such. Perfect transition from the South End to Copley Place, or back. Price range: \$4-\$6.

The Original Sports Saloon 47 Huntington Ave. (Copley Sq. Hotel), Boston, 536-9000. The Memphis smoked barbecue is the star of this menu. This sports bar also boasts a superior collection of sports memorabilia. Price range: \$7-\$10.

Tables of Content Cafe 220 Huntington Ave. (Symphony area), Boston, 262-2122. A pleasant bistro turning out exceptionally polished, somewhat healthful versions of familiar dishes like turmeric-fired calamari, mushrooms in phyllo pockets, baked monkfish, stir-fried hoisin chicken, and such. Informal, but excellent. Price range: \$11-\$17.

Turner Fisheries 10 Huntington Ave., Boston, 424-7425. Traditional seafood favorites, as well as more exotic offerings. Fresh fish prepared to order; also a raw bar. Price range: \$17-\$25.

Ambrosia on Huntington 116 Huntington Ave., Boston, 247-2400. In a dramatic and sophisticated setting, dishes strongly influenced by provincial French cuisine are sparked into the sublime by Asian seasonings. An emphasis on native New England game and seafood, as well as wonderfully imaginative desserts. Lively bar scene as the evening progresses. Price range: \$5-\$26.

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(Dorchester/Mattapan)

Galvin's Harp and Bard 1099 Dorchester Ave., Dorchester, Boston, 265-2893. Irish bar with quality meat and potatoes, fried fish, homemade soups, and fine grapenut custard at prices that you can fit in a draught Bass or Harp. Over the TV, a ticker prints the odds on sporting events. Price range: \$5-\$11.

Pit Stop Barbecue 888a Morton St., Dorchester-Mattapan, Boston, 436-0485. A tiny building and two-table restaurant built around an exposed brick oven. Basically a take-out, and what you want are the exquisite pork ribs, slowly defatted and perfectly balanced between smoky and spicy. The rest is hit or miss. Late hours Thursday through Sunday. Price range: \$2-\$6.

M&M Ribs 195 Adams Street, Dorchester, 825-9667. Maurice and Marion Hill bring their popular outdoor stand indoors, with take-away prices, in the former basement jail of the former District 11 police station. Slow-grilled Carolina-style barbecue produces succulent beef ribs,



tangy chopped pork, and a variety of side dishes. With gospel tapes in the background, these are the coziest jail cells in Boston. Price range: \$7-\$9.

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(Downtown/Waterfront)

Bay Tower Room 60 State St., Boston, 723-1666. Fine American cuisine with a spectacular view of the downtown skyline. Save this one for dressing up. (Open evenings only.) Price range: \$14-\$35.

Cafe Suisse Lafayette Hotel, 1 Lafayette Pl., Boston, 422-5577. Serves one of the best modern-cuisine meals in Boston. Creativity of the Marquis de Lafayette dining room has gone into even the most familiar sandwiches; pretty place; great service — special bet for lunch. Price range: \$10-\$14.

Galleria Italiana 177 Tremont Street, Boston, 423-2092. Menu changes daily. A trattoria you'd be delighted to find in Italy, with hearty country food and a welcoming informal style. Price range: \$12-\$18.

Grill 23 and Bar 161 Berkeley St., Boston, 542-2255. Heaven for cigar-lovers and carnivores, but fans of general good-food-beyond-steak will find happiness here, too. A handsome, impressive room, with a sense of Old World luxury. Price range: \$18-\$25.

Il Panino's Bistro 295 Franklin Street, Boston, 338-1000. A bustling, very moderately-priced alternative to the fancy dining room upstairs, and seems to be particularly popular with women. Must be the food: simple and low in fat, yet based on superflavorful ingredients. Don't miss anything with arugula, fresh basil, or the other great Italian flavorings. Price range: \$8-\$16.

Max's Deli Cafe 151 Milk St., Boston, 330-9790. A trendy, downtown Cafe with a New York deli struggling to get out. Kenya AA coffee with surprisingly good chicken soup and decent pastrami sandwiches, once you turn down the focaccia, Swiss-cheese, and Dijon-mustard options. Price range: \$4-\$6.

Michael's Waterfront 85 Atlantic Ave., Boston, 367-6425. One of the best wine lists in the city to accompany seafood and beef entrees. Price range: \$15-\$24.

Rowes Wharf Restaurant 70 Rowes Wharf (at the Boston Harbor Hotel), Boston, 439-7000. Contemporary New England cuisine served in classic elegance; views of Boston Harbor. Price range: \$18-\$29.

Seasons North and Blackstone Sts. (in the Bostonian Hotel), Boston, 523-4119. Two-, three-, and four-course dinners for Luxurious setting, New American style, and a nationally renowned New American menu. Expect the best seasonal produce, innovative combinations. Price range: \$28-\$39.

West Street Grill 15 West Street (off Tremont St., near Downtown Crossing), Boston, 423-0300. The bar scene here attracts such a large and lively crowd it's hard to remember that this is a fine restaurant in its own right, too. Roughly New American with many innovative touches. Price range: \$11-\$19.

The Barking Crab 88 Sleeper Street (Northern Ave. Bridge), 426-CRAB. A hearty clam shack — actually a lobster tent gone year-round with a crab name. Warm informality blends simple seafood entrees and the odd yuppie treat into things like the "crab burger." The fun is eating like this with a full view of the downtown skyscrapers. Hearty desserts and local microbrews as well. Familiar, yet new. Price range: \$9-\$21.

Les Zygomates 129 South St., Boston, 542-5108. The only bistro in Boston that will remind anyone of France, this has a wine-bar angle (the list of 40-odd wines changes weekly), an artsy angle (galleries across the street), and a shamelessly Gallic angle (sweetbread vol-au-vent, venison in wine reduction sauce). Not to mention the black-and-white tile floor, and what's probably the only real zinc bar in New England. Price range: \$12-\$19.

Fajitas & 'Ritas 25 West St., Boston, 426-1222. Lively, casual Tex-Mex restaurant and margarita bar. Decor is provided mostly by the customers, who are encouraged to decorate the walls with graffiti. Price range: \$6-\$10.

Oskar's 107 South Street (Leather District), Boston, 542-6756. A stylish, loungelike new restaurant serving lunch, dinner, cocktails, and late supper. Price range: \$12-\$23.

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#### (East Boston)

Santarpio's 111 Chelsea St., Boston, 567-9871. One of the classic Boston pizzas, thin crust toasted to a marvelous crisp. And a font of wood-fired, East Boston "barbecue" items — skewers of lamb or sausage served simply with peasant bread and a hot cherry tomato. And that's all there is in a neighborhood bar with a core of boxing fans. Don't knock Boom-Boom Mancini or Vinnie Paz' in here. Price range: \$3-\$8.

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#### (The Fenway)

Bangkok City Restaurant 167 Mass Ave., Boston, 266-8884. The fourth Thai restaurant within blocks of Symphony Hall, but the nearest to Berklee, with a fine list of vegetarian items including fooled-me spring rolls and crunchy mee grob noodles. Elegant, uncrowded, and the food is beautifully presented. Omnivores go for shrimp mermaid, garlic fish, and beef jungle. Price range: \$7-\$14 (lunch, \$5-\$6).

Sorento's Italian Gourmet 86 Peterborough St., Boston, 424-7070. A (somewhat yuppie) neighborhood pizza parlor with food better than most "northern Italian" Cafes. The secret: a short list of top ingredients worked into al dente pastas, delectable calzones and pizzas, and a couple of creamy sauces. Price range: \$6-\$10.

Mucho Gusto 1124 Boylston Street, Boston, 236-1020. Great old Cuban music, kitschy collectibles off the sets of I Love Lucy, and superb hospitality make this fun. Healthful-ized Cuban food makes for pretty great dining, especially on the Cuban sandwich, black-bean soup, Cuban coffee, and anything deep-fried (which is a lot of anythings). Price range: \$8-\$14 (lunch, \$5-\$9).

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#### (Jamaica Plain)

Black Crow Caffè 2 Perkins St. (Hyde Sq.), Boston, 983-9231. A continental Cafe with owners and some decor from the West Indies. Great soups, salads, cappuccino — and desserts to die for. Price range: \$12-\$17.

El Embajador 3371 Washington St., Boston, 524-6812. Ask the waitress what they actually have in stock, or call in advance to arrange seafood stews or paellas. Walk in for stews, soups, mondongo, fried plantains, and creamy desserts with excellent espresso. Mostly Latin clientele, with some gringo workmen from the area at breakfast and lunch. Price range: \$6-\$14.

El Oriental 416 Centre St. (Hyde Sq.), Boston, 524-6464. The orient in question is Eastern Cuba, inspiring amazing soups, Cubano sandwiches, and red-beans-and-rice to rank with any. Fierce chocolate batido, too. A neat little luncheonette to help us forget the loss of the Espanola across the street. Price range: \$5-\$8.

Five Seasons 669a Centre St., Boston, 524-9016. Health food with flair. The menu is oriented completely toward the health-conscious. Price range: -

International Restaurant 3160 Washington St., Boston, 522-7410. Fabulous food, huge portions, cheap, too — just get used to thinking of Dominican cooking as the Italian food of the Caribbean. Savory, distinctive stews and sauces and soups. Matchless rice and beans and fried plantain “side dishes.” Price range: \$5-\$12.

Tacos el Charro 349 Centre St., Boston, 522-2578. Authentic Mexican food. Spicy shrimp, tripe soup, and soulful burritos and tacos. Price range: \$2-\$12.

JP Seafood Cafe 730 Centre St., Jamaica Plain, 983-5177. A neighborhood sushi bar and Korean-Japanese restaurant that’s part of an established fish store, so you know everything will be terrific. And it is, especially dumplings, scallion pancakes, stir-fries loaded with vegetables, teriyaki and tempura, and an excellent bibimbop. And did I mention top-quality sushi? Price range: \$8-\$23.

Jake’s Boss BBQ 3492 Washington Street, Jamaica Plain, 983-3701. Veteran pitmaster Kenton Jacobs brings Texas smoked barbecue back to the inner city, in a handy location next to Doyle’s. Beef brisket and chopped (pork) barbecue best show off the smoker, and don’t miss the smoke-enriched collards and cowboy beans. Price range: \$6-\$15.

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(Kenmore/BU)

Caffe Lampara 916 Comm Ave. (near BU Bridge), Boston, 566-0300. Top-shelf Italian flavors at distinctly moderate prices. Make sure you get something that has the fried polenta on it. Also great lentil soup, fine salads, a class antipasto, well-sauced pastas, and a knockout hazelnut-chocolate dessert: zuccotto. Big, a little loud, lots of fun. Price range: \$6-\$14.

Choe’s Cafe 957 Comm Ave., Boston, 783-8702. Down the block from the Paradise nightclub, a little paradise of sushi and savory Korean dishes. Don’t miss the seafood scallion pancake, udong, bulgoki, Korean-style spicy squid, and “salmon-skin fried rice.” Sushi aside, the Japanese food is less great than the Korean food. Price range: \$6-\$23 (lunch,\$5-\$8).

Cornwall’s Restaurant and Oyster Bar 510 Comm Ave., Boston, 262-3749. English-theme pub with excellent beers and ales (draft stouts!) and quietly homemade food. First-class raw bar. A proper grilled Reuben sandwich. Lean pastrami. Real fried potatoes. Small, personal-type space, so beware of Red Sox fans. Price range: \$4-\$7.

Audubon Circle 838 Beacon Street (Audubon Circle), 421-1910. The second baby from the team behind Cambridge’s Miracle of Science is a sleek, no-nonsense wood-paneled room that produces some of the best grilled food you can get in a bar: moist chicken slices tossed over a salad, an amusing box of Chinese potstickers, seared rare tuna steak, a generous cheeseburger with the best home fries for miles around. Price range: \$4-\$12.

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(North End)

Alloro 351 Hanover St., Boston, 523-9268. Simple, inspired dishes, in a tiny storefront restaurant. No frills — just intensely personal service and truly outstanding food. Cash only. Menu changes daily. Price range: \$12-\$25.

Il Nido 257 North St., Boston, 742-4272. Not cheap, not pretty, not innovative, but Il Nido wins our hearts with a modern Italian menu executed reliably, and some extras: reservations, brick-oven pizza, and a variety of desserts that is positively un-Italian. Price range: \$9-\$20.

Il Panino 11 Parmenter St., Boston, 720-1336. Traditional Italian seafood and pasta specialties. A local favorite and well worth the parking hassles. Price range: \$7-\$12.

Mama Maria 3 North Sq., Boston, 523-0077. Multi-leveled, candlelit spot with pink tablecloths and fresh flowers on the tables. Seasonal menu, with an emphasis on the innovative. Price range: \$18-\$24.

Massimino's 207 Endicott St., Boston, 523-5959. Comfort food served in a cozy storefront away from the bustling part of the neighborhood. Think veal shanks. Think hearty portions of pasta. Think filling. Price range: \$5-\$9.

Oasis Cafe 176 Endicott St., Boston, 523-9274. Your date hates Italian food. You act mysterious, park at the North End All Right Garage, and march your date past four or five Italian restaurants to.....ah, this little American Art Deco Cafe with classic jazz and good homemade soups, great fritters, meatloaf, ribs, and great desserts. Sweet service and cheap, too. Hey, didn't the original personal ad mention "sense of humor"? Price range: \$6-\$11.

Restaurant Pomodoro 319 Hanover St., Boston, 367-4348. A few-frills storefront showcase for rising chef Richard Hansen, an assembler of savory, almost overwhelming platters, and a whiz at roasting, frying, and saucing. The action is in the daily specials, but watch for the red meat, risotto with lamb sausage, anything with fritters, and the roast-vegetable salad. They take reservations but use the nearby caffes when tables aren't ready. No desserts, so it's back to the caffes. No problem. Price range: \$9-\$20.

Sage 69 Prince St., Boston, 248-8814. A treasure trove of fine food in a small, spare room with a touch of understated elegance. Along with the herb after which the restaurant is named, Chef Tony Susi is partial to the best local ingredients and novel combinations: pan-seared sea bass, New England shellfish stew in lemongrass broth, oven-roasted sausage with braised cabbage and soft polenta. Price range: \$15-\$21.

Terramia 98 Salem Street, Boston, 523-3112. A tiny spot with beamed ceiling, terra-cotta floor, and stucco walls. Comforting but creative Italian cuisine — inventive but not wild. Impeccable seafood, especially the swordfish dishes, which are like air. Price range: \$9-\$24.

Artu 6 Prince Street (North End), 742-4336. Stylish, inexpensive trattoria and roastery. See listing under Beacon Hill. Price range: \$7-\$14.

Road Trip 54 Canal St. (North Station), Boston, 720-2889. A large bar, a late crowd, and a menu that features dishes from six regions of America. Price range: \$10-\$20.

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(Roslindale)

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(South End)

Addis Red Sea 544 Tremont Street, Boston, 426-8727. Perhaps Boston's most exotic dining experience, and certainly one of its most rewarding. Spicy Ethiopian stews arrive on huge sourdough pancakes as patrons sit on stools around woven tables. Be sure to start with a warm dip and the cottage cheese with red-pepper powder. Eating without silverware turns out to be easier than you think. Price range: \$6-\$9.

Anchovies 433 Columbus Ave., Boston, 266-5088. Pizzas, calzones, and fresh pasta dishes in a lively, neighborhood setting. Price range: \$5-\$10.

Azita Ristorante 560 Tremont St., Boston, 338-8070. Pretty-in-pink yet moderately priced addition to the list of South End comfort-food places with Italian names. Veal shanks, beef steak with Italian bacon, grilled Cornish game hen, quail with pancetta, lots of pastas, reasonable prices. Price range: \$8-\$17.

Botolph's on Tremont 569 Tremont St., Boston, 424-8577. A '90s grazeteria. Entrees are held down to pastas and grilled pizzas so appetizers can go wild and crazy. Addictive focaccia bread, fine fried calamari, sweet-potato fries. Dress for a white room with black chairs and red cushions. Price range: \$6-\$13.

Claremont Cafe 535 Columbus Ave., Boston, 247-9001. A fresh Cafe that suits the South End, with informal service and a touch of bohemia in the decor. The food is serious enough to suit anyone, with fine soups, unusual salads, deliciously garnished entrees, and knockout desserts. Price range: \$10-\$14 (lunch, \$5-\$6).

The Delux Cafe & Lounge 100 Chandler St., Boston, 338-5258. The perfect, five-star, not-a-false-note postmodern Cafe-bar for people in their 20s. Deceptively simple great food and openhearted, sincere cool make this a great visit for anyone else. Wall art and music superbly evoke the '50s-'90s connection. Price range: \$5-\$9.

Geoffrey's Cafe-Bar 578 Tremont St., Boston, 266-1122. A lovely, Parisian re-take on the former space of Hamersley's Bistro, with reliable bistro food at most un-Parisian prices. A younger South End bohemian crowd has noticed, and they can eat remarkably well if they stick to the spicy grilled shrimp, pastas, Brazilian steak sandwich, beef bourguignon, and large desserts. Price range: \$7-\$15.

Grillfish 162 Columbus Ave., Boston, 357-1620. Not hard to guess what you want to order. Grilled fish of many species are excellent, with very complementary sauces. Fried calamari are neither grilled nor fish, but they are great, too. Loud bar/dating bar atmosphere, but the informality and friendly staff make everyone comfortable. Price range: \$11-\$20.

Hamersley's Bistro 553 Tremont St., Boston, 423-2700. Casual French-inspired food with a distinctly American and decidedly upscale accent: guests wear ties while the chefs wear baseball caps. Famed for duck confit, wild mushroom and garlic sandwich, and roast chicken with garlic, lemon, and parsley — an olfactory and culinary triumph. One of Boston's best. Price range: \$18-\$27.

Icarus 3 Appleton St., Boston, 426-1790. A longtime favorite that's held its own. American ingredients with flair in a romantic, festive environment. Try the polenta with wild mushrooms, grilled shrimp with mango-jalapeno sorbet, and venison with juniper, black pepper, and cranberries. Great comfort food, elegantly prepared. Price range: \$18-\$28.

Mass Cafe 605 Mass Ave., Boston, 262-7704. Eritrean and American food, but clearly run by immigrants on their own terms, thus lacks the touristy feeling along with some of the amenities. Not every dish on the menu will be there, but what there is, is choice. Price range: \$6-\$8.

On the Park 1 Union Park, Boston, 426-0862. A cut-rate (like halvesies) version of the stylish restaurants a few blocks away. You can eat pretty well with careful attention to the blackboard specials and quasi-French country dishes like confit of duck leg, terrine of vegetables, and vegetarian cassoulet. Price range: \$9-\$13.

Thai Village 592 Tremont St., Boston, 536-6548. Small, high-quality Thai room contests South End's restaurant row with plenty of spice and some innovative dishes like fried sweet-potato sticks, a mussel pancake, and an excellent seafood salad. Solid standards (coconut chicken soup, hot-and-sour soup, pad Thai), though the curries are a lot alike. Price range: \$6-\$13 (lunch, \$5-\$6).

Zipangu 439 Tremont St., Boston, 695-9227. Stunning, focused Japanese-French fusion cuisine in a stylish bistro. Don't miss any of the French or fusion seafood dishes, which take unusual advantage of the sushi-fresh fish and shellfish already in the kitchen for purposes of a considerable sushi menu. Swell French-style desserts. Price range: \$15-\$20.

Metropolis Cafe 584 Tremont St., Boston, 247-2931. Wow. In a space that was once an ice-cream parlor, a jewel of a bistro serves consistently on-target dishes that take their inspiration from both the French and Italian traditions. When this place is three times as big and twice as expensive, you can say you ate here when. Try the elegant salmon pave, the astonishingly rich risotto specials, and any of the desserts. Price range: \$12-\$18.

Bob the Chef's 604 Columbus Ave., Boston, 536-6204. The same mild-mannered soul food in a newly (and handsomely) bistroized space makes this a mellow place for an evening out, often with live jazz. Especially recommended: the glorified chicken, catfish fingers, crab cakes, and sweet-potato pie. Price range: \$6-\$14.

Tremont 647 647 Tremont St., 266-4600. A well-dressed crowd enjoys beautifully grilled food, clever but not overbearing, in this long and cozy bistro. A duck confit sits atop a sauce of red wine and white raisins; tater tots are infused with truffle oil; the steamed Chilean sea bass comes wrapped in a huge banana leaf. The chef earned his stripes at Cambridge's East Coast Grill, but the feel is pure South End. Price range: \$14-\$19.

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#### (Central Square)

Anago Bistro 798 Main St., Cambridge, 876-8444. A very fine small restaurant, comfortable if not overly distinctive. Transcendental grilled mushrooms, wood-grilled pizza, vegetable garnishes like baked beets or al dente fava beans, venison, chocolate marquise. Price range: \$15-\$20.

The Fishery 718-730 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 868-8800. Clean, competent fish house trying to bridge the family and fancy markets. Solid menu of broiled or fried choices. More fashionable dishes are dicier, but try the crabcakes, calamari tossed with roasted garlic, mussels with lemongrass, and the hazelnut cappuccino torte. Price range: \$9-\$20.

Green Street Grill 280 Green St., Cambridge, 876-1655. (Mondays \$8.95 for limited menu with live music starting after 10 p.m.). Hot Caribbean tastes in a gritty Soho-style bar. Not for the faint of heart or timid of palate. Shellfish lovers: don't miss the seafood pepper pot. Price range: \$14-\$17

Indian Globe 474 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 868-1866. Cheap even by Indian-restaurant standards, with good tandoori, a number of vegetarian curries, a variety of breads, fine fried appetizers, excellent chutneys and pickles. Price range: \$6-\$9.

Izzy's Sub Shop 169 Harvard St., Cambridge, 661-3910. Cheap, plentiful, and clean dinners in a somewhat bland Puerto Rican style, which therefore favors the soups. A big case of fried savories for the nostalgic and a really large and fun selection of imported soft drinks at honest prices. Some dishes and drinks from Jamaica and the Dominican Republic as well. Price range: \$3-\$6.

Koreana 154-158 Prospect St., Cambridge, 576-8661. Savory Korean barbecues, spicy Korean stir-fries, and top-flight sushi make this the most impressive Japanese-Korean restaurant yet. Warm and informal. Have kabli or a sushi assortment, and save some of the marinated raw skate wing for me. Price range: \$8-\$20 (lunch, \$7-\$9).

La Groceria 853 Main St. (off Mass Ave., between Kendall and Central), Cambridge, 497-4214. A local favorite serving classic Italian fare in a large, upbeat setting. Price range: \$9-\$18.

Mary Chung Restaurant 464 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 864-1991. An amazing revival of the last really good '70s-'80s Mandarin-Szechuan restaurant of Central Square, complete with the same superior Peking raviolis, suan le chow show, chicken velvet, and dun dun noodles, and the same techno-nerd customers crowding in to get them. Price range: \$4-\$10 (lunch, \$4-\$5).

Middle East Cafe 472 and 480 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 354-8238. One of the more explicitly Arabic restaurants in the area, with a distinctly Lebanese menu. Strong on the kibbees; excellent beer selection. Price range: \$5-\$9.

Mimi's Oriental Grill 950 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 354-1665. A very good Szechuan restaurant with romantic atmosphere (cool jazz, abstract paintings) and handsome presentations.

Concentrate on the spicy stuff, like Formosa squid with vegetables, and tangerine scallops with cashews. Pacific Rim selections widen the menu but don't measure up to the originals. Western desserts and coffee, though, are welcome additions. Price range: \$7-\$19.

Pu Pu Hot Pot 907 Main St., Cambridge, 491-6636. Despite the name and modest size, a very fine Mandarin-Szechuan restaurant with a Taiwanese emphasis on deep frying and good lists of vegetarian specialties and Shanghai cold appetizers. Don't miss the big noodle soups, vegetable tempura, orange-flavor chicken, strange-flavor shrimp, or the "Pu Pu scallion doughnuts," which take scallion pancakes to a whole new dimension. Price range: \$4-\$12.

Small Planet Bar and Grill 795 Main Street, Cambridge, 441-9020. Second branch of the Boylston Street world-beat restaurant. "Peasant cuisines," live music, 16 beers on tap. Price range: n/a

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(East Cambridge)

The Helmand 143 First St., Cambridge, 492-4646. Greater Boston's first Afghan restaurant, and also one of the finest South Asian restaurants we have had. Serves dishes with a seamless style in a beautiful setting with fine service. Vegetarians and meat-eaters will both be giddy with delight. Price range: \$8-\$12.

Salamander First and Athenaeum Sts. (Carter Ink Bldg.), Cambridge, 225-2121. "Nouvelle barbecue bistro" is the best summary of this upscale Cafe-restaurant featuring many kinds of fire and spice. Warm salads and desserts excel. Lunch a food-court-like gourmet bargain. Informal dress-up and postmodern posh. A searching, angular mind in a peasant's hungry body. Price range: \$16-\$25 (lunch, \$4-\$5).

Atasca 279A Broadway, Cambridge, 354-4355. A warm, friendly restaurant with big butcher-block tables which makes a great case for the underappreciated food of Portugal. Order a couple

bottles of vinho verde and enjoy the chopped-octopus salad, charcoal-grilled game hen, and ameijoas na cataplana — clams in a traditional copper steamer. Price range: \$10-\$18.  
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(Harvard Square)

Bombay Club 57 JFK St. (Galleria Mall), Cambridge, 661-8100. Inching above Boston standards, Bombay Club offers a familiar menu in unfamiliarly airy, contemporary surroundings. The divine is in the little things, like the buttering of mint chutney in the cheese pakoras, the distinctive spicing in the vegetarian curries, the texture and charcoal flavor of the reshmi kebab. Good breads. Price range: \$8-\$13 (buffet lunch, \$5.95).

Cafe Celador 5 Craigie Circ., Cambridge, 661-4073. A cozy, exquisitely pretty neighborhood restaurant serving Mediterranean-inspired food. Price range: \$13-\$16.

Cafe of India 52a Brattle St., Cambridge, 661-0683. A conventional Indian restaurant menu reaches Harvard Square, bearing some notable vegetarian dishes: especially a stunning okra specialty, bhindi masala kadahi. Fine fried appetizers and stuffed breads. Desserts for hardcore escapists only. Price range: \$7-\$12.

Delhi Darbar 24 Holyoke St., Cambridge, 492-8993. Well-rounded Indian restaurant with a touch of luxury, solid tandoori items, and some novelties, like the cold appetizers, methi chicken (with fenugreek leaves), and gingery okra. Above-average Indian desserts and masala tea. Price range: \$8-\$14 (lunch, \$6).

Grendel's Restaurant & Bar 89 Winthrop St., Cambridge, 491-1160, 491-1050. Some terrific food from this age-old Harvard Square institution, including a wonderful "vegetarian gardenburger" and a 38-item salad bar. The '70s look and feel is alive and well here. So are some terrific desserts. Price range: \$6-\$10.

Harvest 44 Brattle St., Cambridge, 492-1115. The dining room is like a professor's house — Danish Modern meets Country Living. The laid-back Cafe is the best place to eat here. Good Caesar salad, grilled sardines, swordfish brochette with tomato olive sauce. The simple dishes are often the strongest. Price range: Cafe: \$8-\$16. Dining room: \$16-\$23.

Henrietta's Table One Bennett St., Cambridge, 661-5005. Freshness is the theme here, with a farmstand built right into the decor. Chefs visible in an open kitchen prepare down-home, cozy, country fare, as well as simple but inspired continental cuisine and fresh-baked desserts. Stop by for the generous Sunday brunch. Price range: \$6-\$15.

House of Blues 96 Winthrop St., Cambridge, 491-2583. Excellent service and great menu mainstays in an environment filled with great music and a remarkable collection of folk art. Live music every night at 10 p.m. Price range: \$5-\$10.

John Harvard's Brew House 33 Dunster St., Cambridge, 868-3585. Try all the ales (brewed right here) on the Bard's Sampler, then split a romantic pint of the winner, likely the toasty Irish Export Stout. Food is actually very good, from the homemade chowders through apple-smoked chicken, smoked scallops on pasta, side dishes of corn pudding and potato pie, and an outstanding maple pecan pie. Price range: \$6-\$11.

Rialto 1 Bennett St. (Charles Hotel), Cambridge, 661-5050. Despite the Mediterranean name and format, it is the traditional French food that impresses, especially the manchego flan, roasted pork loin, and desserts like fresh figs on puff pastry with Champagne sabayon. Hotel guests give the room an upscale and older crowd, but a less formal tone than you might expect lets everyone enjoy. Price range: \$16-\$24.



Rio 18 Eliot St., Cambridge, 876-7018. Formerly called Soleil, this is an inexpensive and wholesome dining spot with “peasant foods from sunny lands.” Student foods from too many ethnic cuisines would be more accurate. But you can dine well on chowders and salads, suprisingly good Indian dishes, tortilla pie, and a very decent fruit salad. Price range: \$5-\$15. Ta Sheng Restaurant 16-18 Eliot St. (2nd floor), Cambridge, 497-8288, 497-4488. Generally good versions of Mandarin-Szechuan dishes, in Taiwan-style readings. But with less grease and crispier frying than that has often implied. Also a very pretty place, with notable Peking duck, Peking ravioli, diet sliced jumbo shrimp and vegetables, and crispy sesame beef. Price range: \$5-\$13.

Chez Henri One Shepard Street, Cambridge, 354-8980. A classic French bistro with a Cuban flair: loud, casual, warm, and nourishing. Try the steamed mussels in creamy saffron broth, blanquette de veau on egg noodles, steak frite with sofrito and fries, trout a la Meuniere, lemon hazelnut tartlette. Cuban bar food is available until midnight, Mondays through Saturdays. Price range: \$13-\$18.

Casablanca 40 Brattle St., Cambridge, 876-0999. New chef Ana Sortun has brought the most Mediterranean and least studenty food yet to this much-upscaled post Brattle Theatre hangout. Bogart and Bergman wannabes can find the smoking section and practice their accents while grazing on excellent North African breads and spreads, fine entrees of roasted cod and grilled lamb, and serious desserts. Great murals of the film. Price range: \$10-\$18.

Brew Moon Restaurant and Microbrewery 50 Church Street, Cambridge, 499-BREW. Third branch of popular downtown restaurant/bar. (See listing under Theater District.) Price range: -n/a Santa Barbara Cafe 1 Arrow Street (Harvard Square), Cambridge, 497-5109. Serves healthy food with a nutritional breakdown provided on the menu. Pastas, sandwiches, rice dishes, salads, and low-fat desserts. Price range: \$3-\$6.

Cambridge Common 1667 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, 547-1228. A bar-restaurant right at the gates of Harvard Law School, but with diner-style Mom food and no attitude. Microbrews on tap, the best sweet-potato fries around, and all the mac-and-cheese, meat loaf, and garlic mashed potatoes you can handle. Plus a soup of the day, a grilled fish of the day, a fruit crisp of the day, and — yes! — a bread pudding of the day. Price range: \$4-\$13.

Sandrine’s Bistro 8 Holyoke Street, Cambridge, 497-5300. Pretty serious and beautifully composed food, especially for something called a bistro, but the dedication to the food of Alsace ensures that soups and entrees will have hearty, bistro-like flavors. And then there’s the signature pizza-like flammekueche, loaded with onions and smoked bacon. Fabulously composed desserts. Price range: \$14-\$25.

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(Inman Square)

Akbar India Restaurant 1248-50 Cambridge St., Cambridge, 497-6548. The usual Indian menu, plus some valuably different South Indian small plates, such as masala dosai. Try the pastry-wrapped samosas, the oddly spiced aloo bada and dahi vada, the mint-coriander chutney, garlic nan, and any of the tandoori dishes. Price range: \$7-\$15 (lunch, \$5-\$7).

Cafe China 1245 Cambridge St., Cambridge, 868-4300. A small, elegant restaurant characterized by contemporary Chinese cuisine, decor, and ambiance. Jazz background music, extensive beer and wine list, and homemade fortune cookies dipped in dark chocolate. Price range: \$8-\$12.

East Coast Grill 1271 Cambridge St., Cambridge, 491-6568. Enlarged and leaning now toward premium fresh seafood, but still the greatest place with the least pretense for barbecue, grilled meat, soulful side dishes, and super-spicy hot dishes, clearly labeled. Price range: \$8-\$20.

Magnolias 1193 Cambridge St., Cambridge, 576-1971. The Cajun food is still the best. Try outstanding Cajun popcorn shrimp, paneed veal with tasso, and blackened prime rib. Wider Southern menu takes in fried green tomatoes, super Key lime pie. Bluefish pate and informal tone are strictly from Cambridge. Price range: \$10-\$18.

S&S Deli 1334 Cambridge St., Cambridge, 354-0620. You can get a bit of everything here — traditional deli food to innovative entrees to desserts. Great burgers and omelets; popular for weekend brunch. Price range: \$6-\$9.

Cafe Soho 11 Springfield Street, Cambridge. 354-7040. A friendly bistro with weird magenta lighting and a vaguely New York theme. Portions range from generous to enormous, and the eclectic Americana of the cooking can be a great value. It's hard to miss with the basics, like the smoked-salmon appetizer or the \$9 "bistro turkey dinner." Price range: \$8-\$14.

Midwest Grill 1124 Cambridge St., Cambridge, 354-7536. The Brazilian contribution to barbecue is "churrasco rodizio," which translates to a lot of meat for \$14.95. Roasting spits are brought to your table: pork, beef, chicken, lamb, and more, in endless rotation. Other Brazilian specials are good, too, and the vibe is unfailingly friendly. Price range: \$8-\$15.

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(Kendall Square/MiT)

The Blue Room One Kendall Sq., Cambridge, 494-9034. Remarkably low in pretense, yet the cutting-edge grill is relentlessly innovative. Don't miss the salads, anything off the wood-fired rotisserie, bartolillos for dessert. Cambridge crowd dresses comfortably and shares tastes, with chopsticks provided. Price range: \$13-\$18.

Daddy O's Bohemian Cafe 134 Hampshire St., Cambridge, 354-8371. Beatnik decor but a contemporary menu of hardwood-grilled things and comfort food like macaroni and cheese, updated with a little smoked cheese. I also felt good about the latkes, mussel fritters, fish fry, black-bean soup, and the cheap, tasty desserts. Cheap list of wines and ciders, too. Wear your beret. Price range: \$8-\$12 (lunch, \$4-\$6).

Manhattan Sammy's 1 Kendall Sq., Cambridge, 252-0044. Remarkably haimische flavors in a Tech Square deli, including real steamed pastrami, as well as handsome salads and yuppie sodas. Loud enough for the kishke to taste right, quiet enough to discuss network software or read *Mating by Norman Rush*. Price range: \$4-\$10.

Miracle of Science 321 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 868-2866. A loud bar with no sign outside, full of alternative rock and two-tone music, not too many MIT jokes. But great grilled skewers, each with tortillas and its own lively, creative condiment on the side. Also fabulous burgers with real roast potatoes. Young, cool-looking crowd. Price range: \$3-\$8.

Rhythm & Spice 315 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 497-0977. A lively, hip tribute to the English-speaking Caribbean with a reggae/soca beat, a beachy tone, warm staff, and excellent food. Try the gundy, festivals, escovitched fish, the coffee, and staying late for the dancing. Price range: \$9-\$13.

Ristorante Florentina 143 Main St., Cambridge, 577-8300. Not cheap, but cheaper than the upscale North Italian places it resembles. The food is more like what Italian restaurants used to

serve, with good pizzetta, Caesar salad, saltimbocca, and red sauces. Out of the way, quiet. Price range: \$9-\$15.

Thai's 1 Kendall Sq. (Building 300), Cambridge, 577-8668. Lovely, elegant, uncrowded place with tuxedoed servers — and you can still get delectable Thai (and some Vietnamese) food. Great fried appetizers and unusual grilled flavor in the Vietnamese shrimp-asparagus roll and grilled meats with lemongrass. Also, credibly hot jumbo shrimp chee and a generous pad Thai. Price range: \$6-\$15.

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(North Cambridge)

Hana Sushi 2372 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 868-2121. A handsome little storefront with excellent sushi and teriyaki, also a good hand with noodles. The great talent of Japanese restaurants for inducing mindfulness of essential flavors attracts both neighborhood couples and Japanese groups from the suburbs. Price range: \$8-\$13 (lunch, \$6-\$8).

Ristorante Marino 2465 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 868-5454. At its best, a big loud room full of hearty peasant flavors, sourdough rolls, grilled meats and vegetables, well-handled pasta. Top-flight desserts. Reservations for parties of eight or more. Price range: \$9-\$18.

Frank's Steak House 2310 Mass Ave, Cambridge, 661-0666. The oldest steak house in Massachusetts, as far as anyone knows, is in the midst of a transformation from a blond-wood '70s eatery back to the dark red-meat emporium it was when Tip O'Neill hung out here. You can certainly order chicken, but be warned: the motto is "Home of the Boneless Sirloin Sizzling Platter." Price range: \$6-\$14.

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(Porter Square)

Christopher's 1920 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 876-9180. Serves Southwestern and Tex-Mex food, as well as sandwiches, burgers, and salads. A popular neighborhood hangout and a pleasant place to linger over a beer or coffee and dessert. Price range: \$8-\$13.

Porterhouse Cafe 2046 Mass Ave., Cambridge, 354-9793. Texas heaven. Food is heavily smoked, Texas style, so start with the pulled chicken and various beef components. Hot barbecue sauces. Great fries. Meatphobes can eat the grilled fish. Price range: \$6-\$12.

Finnegans Wake 2067 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, 576-2240. A big, busy space with traditional Irish food like bubble and squeak, Guinness beef stew, and shepherd's pie. Live music weekend nights, plus a downstairs pub called the Snug. Price range: \$6-\$14.

Fraser's on the Avenue 1680 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, 441-5566. Is it a bar or is it a restaurant? Either. Both. The walls are full of goofy local art in this affordable yuppie hangout (that's Cambridge yuppie, natch) between Harvard and Porter Squares. Some outstanding light dishes: cod-and-garlic pate, salmon pizza, mushroom risotto. Keep an eye out for interesting pasta specials. Price range: \$7-\$13.

Forest Cafe 1682 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, 661-1634. Mexican-food fans tired of jack-cheese enchiladas and grilled-chicken nacho plates owe it to themselves to check out this dive bar/Mexican joint. (The restaurant half used to be called Mexican Cuisine.) This is real regional cooking, not cheap but great for a change of pace. Good bets are the ejotes — truly remarkable green beans — as well as the Enchiladas Trotsky and any fish dish made with the pumpkin-seed-and-peanut mole. Price range: \$10-\$14.

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(Brookline)

Cafe Shiraz 1030 Comm Ave., Boston, 566-8888. A large and pretty place, with a rotation of exotic Persian dishes in a generic Middle East and American kosher (meat) menu. Don't miss the soups, pilafs, kebabs, shishlik, and baklava. Open Saturday nights, but closed Friday nights and Saturday lunches. Price range: \$10-\$17.

Bombay Bistro 1353 Beacon St. (Coolidge Corner), Brookline, 734-2879. A new, modern look in Indian restaurants makes this one suddenly popular amid the Szechuan fans of Brookline. Well-executed dishes off the familiar Punjabi menu, with some new ones to this market: chicken or seafood xacuti with tamarind-coconut curry, a sour herbal chicken soup, a Peshawari nan with coconut and raisins. You can even dress up a little. Price range: \$7-\$13.

Elephant Walk 900 Beacon St. (Audubon Circle), Brookline, 247-1500. Just a great restaurant, doing everything well. The Cambodian food, like somlah machou, banana-flower salad, and amok de fruits de mer, is a whole level up from any other Southeast Asian restaurant in the area. The French food is no longer just for cowards — it's first-class nouvelle cuisine, with gloriously beautiful and delicious desserts. Price range: \$10-\$19.

Indian Cafe 1665 Beacon St., Brookline (Washington Sq.), Brookline, 277-1752. Lunch and weekend buffet cheaper. Not wildly innovative Indian restaurant, but a good hand with the spices, both generous and varied from dish to dish. Good soups and fried appetizers, really tasty vindaloo, and channa masala that makes those chickpeas sing. Modern and trim little dining room. Price range: \$6-\$13.

Kiyoshi Sushi House 398 Harvard St. (Coolidge Corner), Brookline, 232-5800, 739-8679. Authentic addition to the several small sushi palaces along Harvard Street and Harvard Avenue. Unusual sushi include marinated vegetables, but one should not miss the many grilled specials, unusual seafood dishes, noodle soups. Soundtrack of '50s jazz. Price range: \$8-\$17.

Niko's Restaurant 187 Harvard St. (Coolidge Corner), Brookline, 277-2999. A rare find: actual Greek food at Greek prices and plenty of it. Dips like ultra-garlicky skordalia and subtle taramasalata. Cheap, huge spinach pies, gyro sandwiches. Full-flavored meatballs, stuffed grape leaves, roast lamb, and real mashed potatoes. Very decent fried chicken for the kids. Small but sincere. Price range: \$3-\$10.

Providence 1223 Beacon St. (Coolidge Corner), Brookline, 232-0300. More elegant than casual, a postmodern dining room with intellectual substance. Chef Paul O'Connell has nouvelle-American training and northern-Italian experience, but hearty, northern-European flavors keep sneaking in. Price range: \$13-\$22.

Rubin's Kosher Restaurant 500 Harvard St. (Coolidge Corner), Brookline, 566-8761. The only Boston Kosher restaurant that vies with the better Manhattan delis in the all-important pastrami category. Warm, non-exclusionary atmosphere. The only problem is, 30 days later you're hungry again. Price range: \$4-\$8.

Shalom Hunan 92 Harvard St. (Brookline Village), Brookline, 731-9778. Glatt kosher attempts at the classic dishes of pork-loving China, succeeding perfectly with the steamed sea bass, and pretty well with pan-fried dumplings, mu shu veal, and General Tso's chicken. Nice service and chocolate cake for dessert offset a somewhat sweet-and-bland palate. Price range: \$7-\$20.

Vinny Testa's 1700 Beacon St. (between Washington Sq. and Cleveland Circle), Brookline, 277-3400. Like-forget-it portions of very competent if uninspired red-sauce Italian food. A couple of

clever touches, such as serving a roast head of garlic instead of that wimpy olive oil with your bread basket, and making roasted vegetables a frequent side dish. Price range: \$8-\$20.

Yokohama 238 Washington Street, Brookline Village, Brookline, 734-6465. Small jewelbox of a Japanese restaurant, with some good Korean dishes as well. Wide selection of appetizers and sushi, generous entrees of tempura, noodle soups, and teriyaki. Don't miss the "stone pot bibimbap" or the combo tempura. Price range: \$9-\$15 (lunch, \$7-\$9).

Zuxuz Cafe 250 Harvard St. (Coolidge Corner), Brookline, 738-7979. Fun combination of postmodern decor, some comfort food, some fancy American-nouvelle, a lot of seafood and vegetables, maybe too much informality and noise. Don't miss Aunt Regina's crab cakes, fried calamari, sweet-potato pancakes, and the fabulous desserts. Price range: \$7-\$16.

Bangkok Basil 1374 Beacon Street (Coolidge Corner), 739-1236. A pleasant Thai restaurant with some unusual Indonesian dishes as well, catering to immigrants and foreign students, as well as eager Brookline Anglos. Don't miss Ayam Goreng and Mahtahba for appetizers, chili salmon for a main dish, or nasi goreng if you are by yourself and want to try a couple of the Indonesian treats on one platter. Price range: \$8-\$13.

Felucca 1032 Beacon Street, Brookline, 264-7100. Mediterranean bistro with emphasis on highly flavored small plates from the southern shores of the Med. Rather on the plan of 8 Holyoke except less pretentious, less expensive, and more consistent. Especially at dessert, where we tasted six straight winners, which may be the record. All three soups were killers, too. A restaurant to snap you out of the winter blahs, the summer blahs, any blahs that afflict you. Price range: \$12-\$20 (lunch, \$8).

Matt Murphy's 14 Harvard St. (Brookline Village), 232-0188. Real Irish pub with good food. Actually rather Irish good food at that. Very bizarre, but everyone else is too busy enjoying to make much of the situation. Insanely large portions, too. Don't miss anything with the french fries and homemade ketchup, the various savory pies, soups, salads — really, anything. Price range: \$6-\$12.

Pacifico 204 Washington St. (Brookline Village), 738-4810. There's nothing subtle about this experiment in fusion — pan-Asian with a heavy Italian accent. It's extravagant and energetic, although a menu that ranges from sushi to pasta is inevitably going to distress the purists. The pad Thai, mussels, and novel sushi rolls should keep everyone else happy. Price range: \$11-\$20.

India House 239 Harvard Street, 739-9300. A handsome room bringing the wonderful institution of the Indian buffet lunch to Coolidge Corner. The dinner menu is rather nondescript so far, considering that the same owners have an Indian grocery across the street stocked with exotic edibles. Price range: \$6-\$12.

Cafe St. Petersburg 236 Washington St. (Brookline Village), 277-7100. At last a serious, elegant Russian restaurant, featuring cool, neoclassical renditions of flavorful Russian dishes. Nothing sloppy about the borscht here, nor the blini, the pozharski cutlet, or chicken tabaka. A lot of neat vegetarian surprises, like beet pancakes, vegetarian stuffed cabbage with raisins, and a great venigret beet-potato salad. Waiters wear tuxedos even at lunch. Price range: \$9-\$14 (Lunch: \$4-\$8).

Fajitas & 'Ritas 48 Boylston St. (Rte. 9), Brookline, 566-1222. Lively, casual Tex-Mex restaurant and margarita bar. Price range: \$6-\$10.

Ginza 1002 Beacon Street, Brookline, 566-9688. Arguably the best sushi bar in Boston, certainly one of the most avant-garde, yet well-grounded in tradition, as evidenced by the more than 20 brands of sake, the wide range of cooked appetizers, and the solid tempura and teriyaki.

Somewhat random service won't bother those who come in expecting to share tastes. Price range: \$10-\$24.

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(Newton)

Appetito 761 Beacon St. (Newton Centre), Newton, 244-9881. Wildly popular, no-reservation Cafe-bar with good Italian food and an interesting undertone of what used to be called "Continental." People dress informally, but eat nicely arranged salads and antipasti, al dente pasta, grilled specialties with real whipped potatoes, tortes, and tarts. Price range: \$10-\$19.

Sol Azteca 75 Union St. (Newton Centre), Newton, 964-0920. The area's best Mexican restaurant, admittedly not a very competitive honor, opens a beautifully decorated branch in Newton Centre. No dilution in such classics as the grilled shrimp in cilantro sauce, puerro en adobo, and evident improvement in standard Mexican items like chicken enchiladas. Mexican coffee with cloves and a homemade cheesecake. Price range: \$10-\$15.

Johnny's Luncheonette 30 Langley Rd. (Newton Centre), Newton, 527-3223. Too many concepts — '50s diner, postmodern revival, Jewish deli, kid-friendly — but the good food makes a certain sense of it. I especially recommend the Jewish-identified stuff like matzoh-ball soup. Reuben sandwiches, stuffed cabbage, and kosher-style hot dogs. Only trendoid thing is the wall art; otherwise good attitude, tasteful even. Price range: \$5-\$12.

Moon Woman Cafe 108 Oak St. (Newton Upper Falls), Newton, 630-9569. A little place with a big menu, Mediterranean (and some Parisian) dishes with flavor, texture, and real heart. Don't miss the potato-leek soup, seafood crostini with brandade, eggplant ravioli with sage-smoked mushrooms, or the seasonal pies. Hard to find, but a find. Price range: \$12-\$16.

Norumbega Park Restaurant 287 Auburn St., Newton, 558-7654. A very useful suburban roadhouse that reaches beyond reliability with truly impressive salads, broiled vegetables, a real-wood grill, and a fallen chocolate cake. An open stairwell links rooms of an old house into a large dining space, so you can dress to be seen and heard. Price range: \$10-\$18.

Papa Razzi 199 Boylston St. (Chestnut Hill Mall, Chestnut Hill), Newton, 527-6600. A modestly-priced restaurant serving particularly good salads, al dente pastas, and pizzas. Also look for veal dishes and Tuscan sausage. Price range: \$8-\$20 (lunch, \$5-\$11).

Sabra 45 Union St. (Newton Centre), Newton, 964-9275. A typical Israeli/Middle East restaurant with an outstanding luncheon buffet (\$6.50). Invest heavily in the rice-and-lentil dardara, eggplant moussaka, tomato-laced wheat pilaf, tabouleh, spicy hummus, and such. On the meat side of the menu, a cute trick of spicing the shwarma like pastrami, with coriander seed and mustard. Price range: \$5-\$12.

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(Somerville)

Borgo Sushi and Seafood 235 Holland St., Somerville, 776-8857. Sushi and tempura at reasonable prices. Free delivery. Price range: \$6-\$18.

Chef Lee's Gourmet Chinese 296-298 Beacon St., Somerville, 876-7666. Chef John Lee, formerly of Cafe China, brings back the high-powered, distinctively flavored Szechuan food of yore. Hot and authentic yu hsiang dishes, kangsho shrimp, and Ta Chien chicken. Even the rice has extra aroma. For a fried appetizer, try the shrimp-stuffed eggplants. Price range: \$5-\$13 (lunch, \$4-\$5).

Dali 415 Washington St., Somerville, 661-3254. A rare outpost for Spanish-from-Spain cooking. Tapas capture the tone and savor of the original, from slices of potato omelet and meatballs in sauce to garlicky potato salad and exquisite tripe with chickpeas. Starting at \$3 a pop, you can afford to experiment. Price range: \$5-\$16.

Elephant Walk 70 Union Sq., Somerville, 623-9939. Greater Boston's first Cambodian-French restaurant, and a very nice one, with fresh, exciting food and some of the romance of pre-1975 Phnom Penh. Love of garlic makes the Provencal-Cambodian alliance. I urge upon you the soups, spring rolls, and Cambodian salads. (There's an extensive wine list, too.) Reserve early, and no scalping the sidewalk-Cafe tables! Price range: \$8-\$14.

Johnny D's Uptown Restaurant 17 Holland St. (Davis Square), Somerville, 776-2004. Where else can you eat inventive, healthy food while sipping draft microbrews and listening to Luther "Guitar Jr." Johnson? Try the conch fritters with sweet-potato fries, maverick grits, vegetarian dishes, anything Southern. Price range: \$7-\$18.

Mt. Vernon's 14 Broadway, Somerville, 666-3830. Daily lunch and dinner specials served in a casual atmosphere minutes from downtown Boston. Price range: \$6-\$20.

Union Square Bistro 16 Bow Street, (Union Square) Somerville, 628-3344. True bistro spirit, and hearty filling food. Outstanding bread platter, fine appetizers, good dinners, weak desserts is the profile, so graze away. Don't miss any form of crab cakes or portobello mushrooms. Price range: \$12-\$17 (lunch, \$6-\$10).

Redbones 55 Chester St., Davis Square, Somerville, 628-2200. Big food for big guys. Loud and bright and legendary for barbecued, grilled and smoked things, hoofed or otherwise. The Arkansas ribs are phenomenal; so are the Buffalo shrimp. Try the corn pudding to start. The wait is long but worth it. Cash and checks only. Price range: \$6-\$13.

Tallulah's Tap & Grill 65 Holland St. (Davis Square), Somerville, 628-0880. A big, informal space serving what looks like New American cuisine with the occasional Caribbean accent.

Check out the "shark bites" — cubes of mako shark wrapped in a tortilla — and the pumpkin ravioli. The 60 beers on tap will see you through any difficult moments. Price range: \$6-\$14.

Eat 253 Washington Street, Somerville, 776-2889. More homey than haute, this Union Square hole in the wall is at its best with modern takes on American faves like pork chops, catfish, and pear crisp. A pleasant, parlorlike room fills up with neighbors who like the friendly vibe and the owner, Charlie, who circulates around the tables checking in on everyone's dinner. Price range: \$9-\$16.

East Asia 868 Broadway (Powderhouse Sq.), 666-8282. A tiny, out-of-the-way place with great, great Asian food. The menu is North Chinese and Thai, but the keynote is loving treatment of basic ingredients in dishes like chili eggplant, royal tofu, and spicy squid. Price range: \$6-\$9.

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(Theater District)

Brew Moon Restaurant and Microbrewery 115 Stuart St. (Transportation Bldg.), Boston, 523-6467. A brewpub, but initially the food was so much better and more interesting than at other brewpubs that we are going to call it a bistro. Pretty good wine list, too, and small plates to go with either beverage. Serious desserts. Of the ales, the darkest and strongest are the best. Price range: \$6-\$13.

David's 123 Stuart St. (Transportation Bldg.), Boston, 367-8405. An experimental menu with a Mediterranean spin. Try the upscale Greek dishes like spanikopita and lamb shish kebab; the

grilled squid is also very special. Weird, dark, stagy decor, though few will rush through this experience to get to theater. Price range: \$8-\$21.

Legal Sea Foods 35 Columbus Ave. (Park Plaza), Boston, 426-4444. Locally famous and deservedly so. The Legal chain (other restaurant locations are at 5 Cambridge Center, in Kendall Square, at 800 Boylston Street, in the Prudential, at the Chestnut Hill Mall, in Chesnut Hill, and at 100 Huntington Ave. (Copley Place), in Boston,) restaurants are large, loud, good for crowds, and perfect for impressing seafood-loving visitors from out of town. Price range: \$12-\$19.

Mercury Bar 116 Boylston St., Boston, 482-7799. A long bar, an open room, a standing, young, well-dressed crowd that looks like a crowd amid the dark Victorian wood and postmodern gilding. Small plates with powerful, world-beat flavors. Being young and well-off hasn't been this cool in a long time, especially with the duck-breast prosciutto, grilled sardines, roast chicken with Moroccan spices, pear tart, or warm chocolate cake. Price range: \$16-\$19.

The Noodle Bar 8 Park Plaza, 723-6800. Who imagined a restaurant dedicated to noodles would be as interesting as this? That it's a good value is less of a surprise. There's an Asian emphasis here, with great wontons and Thai noodles, but also nicely done lamb with ravioli and an out-of-left-field noodle sundae. Price range: \$7-\$12.

The Red Herring 13 Columbus Ave. (Park Sq.), 423-1581. Small, unprettily postmodern Cafe with the sensationally flavored food of the renowned Salamander. Desserts have traveled especially well, and the tea is treated seriously, so consider a shopping stop just for that — if not for the small plates, strictly vegetarian soups, and Continental aperitifs. Price range: \$5-\$12.

Legal C Bar 27 Columbus Avenue (Park Square), Boston, 426-5566. Legal Sea Foods' puritanical devotion to quality is applied here to a relaxed Caribbean menu. The results are a little stiff but awfully good, even when it's just tropical side dishes done right, alongside standard Legal wood-grilled scallops or fried calamari. And when it gets to acra (codfish cakes) or Bermuda fish chowder, or rum drinks, or the pastry turnovers — well, you go outside and you're surprised not to see palm trees. Price range: \$11-\$20.

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#### (Watertown)

Kareem's 600 Mt. Auburn St. (Cambridge line), Watertown, 926-1867. Cheap and delectable. Also authentically homemade, with real lemon juice in every dish, and plenty of red pepper and garlic. No atmosphere, but outstanding platters of falafel, kibbeh, hummus, marinated kebabs, and a powerful sauteed chicken. Several vegetarian dinners. Closed weekend nights. Price range: \$5-\$7.

Le Bocage 72 Bigelow Ave., Watertown, 923-1210. Big-hotel French menu (but shorter) in a quiet Watertown storefront. Miles from the cutting edge, but a competent kitchen. Try appetizers like the curried fruit salad or the sausage of smoked chicken and apple. An easy mix of posh informality. Price range: \$28-\$38 (four courses).

Stellina 47 Main St. (Watertown Sq.), Watertown, 924-9475. Trendy northern Italian food with counter-trendy pleasant service and reservations. Try anything grilled, anything stuffed, and your favorite pastas. Appetizers and desserts are a notch above entrees, so consider a graze. Informal despite popularity; a loyal crowd with an academic tinge. Price range: \$13-\$15.

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#### (Out of Town)



Aigo Bistro 84 Thoreau St., Concord, (508) 371-1333. Great flavors of the Mediterranean from Tunisia to the Basque country, but centered on Provence (whence the garlicky name), rounded off with Parisian technique. Better focused and mellower than the fine urban Cafes I'd compare it to. Menu changes frequently, but see if they don't have the great brandade, the brilliant seafood entrees, anything from North Africa, and the honey-lavender-thyme flan that amazed me. A well-dressed, middle-aged suburban crowd dines incredibly well. Price range: \$15-\$18.

Al Forno 577 South Main St., Providence, RI, (401) 273-9760. Big portions and hearty food are the rule at this famed haven for Northern Italian cuisine. Pasta dishes are made to order; the grilled pizza is a traditional favorite. Well worth the trip. Price range: \$13-\$23.

Blue Point Oyster Bar 99 North Main St., Providence, RI, (401) 272-6145. Funky, and fun, the Blue Point also boasts one of the most extensive and interesting wine lists in New England. And, of course, great oysters. NOTE: the Blue Point Oyster Bar has now closed with the intention to relocate. Call the listed number for more information. Price range: \$13-\$25.

Chillingsworth 2449 Main St. (Rt. 6A), Brewster, Cape Cod, (508) 896-3640. Open June, September, and October only. An elaborate menu that gracefully and casually mixes classic French cuisine, native foodstuffs, the latest Cal-Ital flavors, and satisfies at every level. The weird thing is that everyone tastes around and decides that one's own dish is the best on the table. Just a great country restaurant. Price range: \$40-\$52 (prix fixe).

El Sarape 5 Commercial St., Braintree (Weymouth Landing), 843-8005. A modest suburban storefront full of real Mexican flavors. The format and many dishes imitate Sol Azteca, but often improve on the model, as with the black-bean soup, carnitas, and guacamole appetizers, and the fabulous churros for dessert. Not as pretty as the best Boston Mexican restaurants, but often tastier food and cheap enough to justify a run from Providence. Price range: \$8-\$12.

Ipanema Restaurant and Churrascaria 106 Southville Rd. (corner of Rt. 85), Southborough, (508) 460-6144. Fifty minutes from Boston, but close enough to the Brazilian community of Framingham for top-notch mandioca frita, pastels, a superb muqueca of shrimp and halibut, and an uncrowded churrasco (Brazilian barbecue). Big American-style roadhouse — comfortable if unexotic. Live music and feijoada on weekend nights. Price range: \$8-\$16.

Mediterraneo Bistro 323 Turnpike St., Canton, 821-8881. Finally, a source for garlic and cumin south of Route 128. Excellent regional dishes from Spain, Southern France, Italy, Greece, and Northern Africa, many innovatively prepared. Don't let the exterior scare you off. Price range: \$15-\$22.

Tuscan Grill 361 Moody St., Waltham, 891-5486. Actually focused on the wonderful food of Tuscany, actually featuring outstanding grilled squid, shrimp, steak, and duckling, this is the North Italian boutique restaurant that delivers more than it claims. Food good enough for tuxedos in a room informal enough for sweaters. Don't miss the gnocchi or the cacciucco (fish stew) in your rush for the grilled dishes. Terrific wines, too. Price range: \$12-\$16.

Katahdin 106 High St., Portland, ME, (207) 774-1740. A terrific New American bistro in Portland, which is emerging as the hippest of the reviving New England cities. Don't miss the crab and scallop dishes, the comfort food, or any of the several chocolate desserts. Price range: \$9-\$15.

Flora 190 Mass. Ave., Arlington, 641-1664. The foodie scene arrives in Arlington Center in airy, peach-toned form. Located in a renovated bank, the first solo project of journeyman chef Bob Sargent is strong on grillwork and full of catchy touches, like the arugula-fennel-calamari salad, or the intensely garlicked escarole under the leg of lamb. Price range: \$11-\$18.

Bison County 275 Moody Street, Waltham, 642-9720. A nice, Western-style restaurant and bar with a selection of microbrewery beers. Try the grilled buffalo, beef, or turkey tips, or the fiery grilled shrimp and sweet-potato fries. Price range: \$6-\$24.

Kong Luh 9 Medford Street (Arlington Center), Arlington, 643-2456. Kong Luh opens up new regions of China, as the chef is a Mongol from Manchuria, though also influenced by the subtleties of Beijing cuisine. The result is a small restaurant of large interest, especially the Mongol Rolls, Parou, "sour and spicy vegetable" (actually a pickle), and any of the soups. Price range: \$5-\$13.

Prose 352a Mass Ave, Arlington, 648-2800. Behind the curious name lurks a cheery, if bare-bones, corner restaurant entirely dedicated to the creative flights of its chef and owner, Debbie Shore. The menu rarely repeats itself from night to night, and regular visitors are treated to a series of rewarding experiments with more ingredients than we have space to list. Search out the soft wild-mushroom polenta and any dish that includes grilled fish. Price range: \$14-\$17.

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