

Girlwich.com Guide to Dining and Drinking Spots for Yarn-Saturated Travelers

Dining codes:

\$ (cheap; one person can eat for less than \$20, inclusive); \$\$ (moderate (\$20-\$30 per person);

\$\$\$ (less moderate but not Rockefeller; about \$30-\$40 per person, inclusive)

K: kid-friendly

V: vegetarian/vegan-friendly

C: cash-only (does not accept credit cards)

B: has booze

Italian:

Frutti di Mare (212-979-2034) and Cucina di Pesche (212-260-6800), 2 restaurants under same ownership with very similar menus, on the same block, FdiM is on the corner of 4th St. and 2nd Ave., CdiP is on 4th St., a few doors west of 2nd Ave. \$, K, V, B. Not my very favorite Italian spots in the city, but they're nice, have decent food, are very affordable, and relatively easy to get a table. Enough space for large groups. Pleasant setting.

Supper, (212-477-0823) 156 E. 2nd St., between Aves. A and B. Authentic Italian food (in the sense that it feels and tastes much like Italy), more expensive, can be very difficult to get a table, especially on a weekend. But I mention it because it is lovely, and if you're dining before 7pm, you can usually get in. \$\$-\$\$\$\$, semi-V, C, B. Does *not* take reservations for fewer than 10 people. Freaking gorgeous setting, but be prepared – you may end up sharing a table with strangers. Don't worry; that's fun here.

John's, 302 E. 12th St. between 2nd Ave. and 1st Ave. (closer to 2nd.) (212-475-9531), Cozy, family-style Italian. Lots of cheese-heavy and meat dishes. Very hearty, not as good for vegans, ok for larger groups, but make a reservation, as it's smallish. \$\$, K, C, V but not vegan, B.

Indian:

There are about a hundred Indian restaurants on 6th St. between 2nd and 1st Aves., but I do not recommend most of them. Here are two nearby that I do recommend, and one in a different neighborhood, too.

Madras Café, 79 2nd Ave., just above 5th St. (212-254-8002), possibly the best Indian food in Manhattan (for the best in New York, go to the Jackson Diner in Jackson Heights, Queens). Affordable, informal, delicious, and vegan-friendly. \$, V, K, B.

Baluchi's, several locations, E. Village on 1st Ave., a block or two north of 6th St. (east side of street), W. Village on 6th Ave. near West 4th St. subway (10th St., I think), East Midtown on 53rd between 2nd and 3rd Aves. Good, reliable, if unadventurous Indian. Better for meat-eaters and dairy eaters than for vegans (cooked with ghee). \$\$-\$\$, V, K, B.

Vatan, 409 3rd Ave., between 28th and 29th Sts. (212-689-5666), vegetarians' paradise, but less so for vegans (a few dishes cooked with milk, though you could just not eat them). Fixed-price South Indian feast (3 courses, about \$22, plus drinks) in imaginative surroundings (mural, huts, take-your-shoes-off booths). Call well ahead of time to reserve on weekends; they can

accommodate large groups. It's a total experience, and everyone I've ever taken here has loved it. \$\$, V, K, B.

Dosa (or more formally, Hampton Chutney Co.), 68 Prince St., between Lafayette and Broadway (and uptown, at 464 Amsterdam Ave.) (212-226-9996), a darling spic-and-span hole-in-the-wall. As its nickname suggests, serves the most gigantic and delicious dosas you've ever had in your life. Also has other Indian specialties and American-style sandwiches. Informal, vegan-friendly, best for lunch, not large enough for big groups or passels of children. Run by Siddha Yoga devotees. Try the orange blossom lemonade. \$, V, may be C.

French bistros/café

Le Gamin, several locations: 5th St. between Aves. A and B, Hudson and Christopher St. in W. Village, 9th Ave. and 23rd in Chelsea, Houston at Sullivan in Soho. My favorite is the 5th St. one. Smallish, sweet little places that always smell like butter and chocolate. Good for breakfast, lunch, dinner, or dessert. Or champagne (lovely mimosas & Kir Royales). Excellent crepes, salads, sandwiches. Affordable and not terribly crowded at night, at least on 5th St. \$, V (less so for vegans), K, B. I think they take credit cards, but don't hold me to it.

Café Orlin, 41 St. Marks Pl. (aka 8th St.) between 2nd Ave. and 1st Ave, closer to 1st. (212-777-1477), French-Moroccan, menu has nice variety of dishes and prices. A great default option, pleasant surroundings, and affordable. \$-\$\$, V (including vegan), K, B.

Casimir, (212-358-9683), 103 Ave. B between 7th and 6th Sts., French-Moroccan. Lovely romantic atmosphere (nice for girl groups too), good food, good booze. Yada yada. \$\$-\$\$\$ B, not sure about credit card policy.

Flea Market, (212-358-9280) 131 Ave. A, between St. Marks Pl. and 9th St. My very favorite place to have brunch. Lovely food, not too expensive (at least for brunch), and the prettiest boy waiters – but only in springtime, for some reason. The girls are cuties, too, incidentally. \$-\$\$, B.

L'Express, (212-254-5858) on Park Ave. So. at corner of 20th St. Big noisy French bistro, food is good but not superb, a little overpriced, *but* it's open 24 hours. Good wine list. \$\$-\$\$\$ K, B.

Eastern European

Veselka, (212-228-9682), 144 2nd Ave., at 9th St., a New York institution, with good reason. Homey diner atmosphere, casual and suitable for kids. Haven't dined there personally but friends swear by the borscht. I think it's \$-\$\$, V, K, not sure about B.

Palacinka, (212-625-0362) 28 Grand St., between Thompson and 6th Ave. This cute little Russian-French café has nice crepes and sandwiches (including the trendy pressed sandwich) and has the added bonus of being an affordable little restaurant in a part of town where they aren't thick on the ground. Order wine or champagne over the sub-par mojitos here. (For mojitos, go to Cafecito or Esperanto, listed under Cuban) \$-\$\$, B, may be C.

Deli

Katz's, (212-254-2246), 205 E. Houston, corner of Ludlow. Possibly the world's most famous deli (the place where they filmed "that scene" from When Harry Met Sally). Damned good, too.

Can be unbearably crowded, but take your chances if you need a pastrami fix. \$, K. If you have kids, make sure you bring at least one other adult, so one of you can score a table while the other orders at the counter.

Vegan

Angelica Kitchen, (212-228-2909) 300 E. 12th St., just east of 2nd Ave. All vegan, all the time (such a relief when you're used to looking for one item on the menu you can order). Homey, pretty surroundings, affordable, no booze (I think). \$, V, K (but it's small). Reserve if you're a large party.

Caravan of Dreams, (212-254-1613) 405 E. 6th St. just east of 1st Ave. I have to tell you, I haven't eaten here personally, but I include it because I have heard good things about it, and because vegan restaurants aren't thick on the ground (though they're thicker in NYC than most places). Has a wide array of raw foods, too, if you're into that. \$\$, V, B, not sure about C or K.

Sushi

Cube 63, (212-228-6751) 63 Clinton St., between Stanton and Rivington (also an outpost on Court St in Brooklyn). This tiny, miniscule dot of a restaurant has my favorite sushi in all NYC. Creative, unusual rolls. Don't bother trying to get in after 7pm on a weekend night. You'll only be frustrated by the line out the door. Sit at the sushi bar for best relief from the noise that builds up. \$\$\$, BYOB (wine shop one block uptown). They have vegetarian sushi, but really, don't bother if you're not going to lap up a bunch of fish.

Japonica (212-243-7752), on University Pl., between 12th and 13th Sts., Long-established, popular joint with gargantuan sushi in a more traditional style than Cube. Gets busy on weekends, but that's ok. They can handle it. \$\$\$ or more, B, C+AmEx. Reservations recommended (weekend).

Moroccan

Café Mogador, (212-677-2226) 101 St. Marks Pl. (aka. 8th St.), between 1st Ave. and Ave. A. Oh Mogador, how I dream of your Moroccan tea. Lovely little (but not tiny) place with nice variety of things – tagines and couscous and hummus, oh my. If it's too busy, head west a block to its sister restaurant Café Orlin (see French section). \$-\$\$, V, semi-K, B.

Thai

Holy Basil, (212-460-5557) 149 2nd Ave., between 9th and 10th Sts., upstairs above the gaudy Telephone Bar (look for the awning). Pretty setting, relatively inexpensive, food varies but is usually very good. \$\$, B, semi-K, semi-V (typical of Thai).

Cuban

Cafecito, (212-253-9966) 185 Ave. C, between 11th and 12th Sts. Authentic Cuban food and oh the drinks. Here you'll find the elusive perfect Mojito, and some seriously good sangria. Difficult for vegetarians (there are one or two things), and typically crowded as hell on weekends, but not if you go early. Leave the kids at home; you'll want to drink too much. \$\$-\$\$\$, B, C.

Esperanto, (212-505-6559), 145 Ave. C, (just a couple of blocks south of Cafecito), Somewhat wider menu than Cafecito (more fish), larger space, Mojitos not quite as good but still good. This place gets very rockin' on weekends, and sometimes has music, too. I always have a hard time

deciding between the two. Same rules of crowding apply (come early, or be prepared to bail and head over to Casimir). \$\$-\$\$\$\$, B, C+AmEx, K if you're really early.

American/other

Home Restaurant, (212-243-9579), 20 Cornelia St., between Bleecker and 6th Ave. Tiny, but enlarged by a back garden. Creative American food, and it's very good, and you will want to make a reservation. Best for small parties unless you're being seated at the big tables in the garden. Drink one of their all-New York state wines. \$\$\$, B. A bit pricey but usually worth it.

Bubby's Pie Company/Bubby's Brooklyn, (212-219-0666, in Tribeca, Manhattan; 718-222-0666 in DUMBO, Brooklyn), 120 Hudson St. (corner of N. Moore) in Manhattan; 1 Main St. in Brooklyn. One of the best places to bring kids or a large group. Food is sort of basic American home-cookin', well-executed, with large portions. Setting is casual and comfortable, non-pretentious despite being in snooty Tribeca. It is therefore popular, so call if you are many or don't want a wait. It's been a while since I was there, but I think: \$\$, B, K. Not sure about V. Fair warning: you'll want to eat some pie.

British

Tea and Sympathy, (212-807-8329) 108 Greenwich Ave., tricky to get to, since Greenwich runs diagonally between 8th and 7th. Aves. – 14th St. station on the A,C,E is the best subway stop – look sharp for Greenwich on your left and turn onto it and you'll be there (left side of street, kitty-corner to a Benny's Burritos). Oh, I am giving away all my secrets with this one, but I want you to have a wonderful time in NYC. This teeny-weeny teashop is authentically British, as are its waitresses. Cream tea, full-blown high tea, and bangers and mash, to begin with, but it doesn't end there. Stop me I'm swooning. Don't under any circumstances come here and *not* order some form of actual tea. Cautions: It is tiny, you will probably have to wait, you can only wait outside (there's a bench), and you may be moved to a different table at some point to accommodate the changing flow of patrons. But it is still one of my favorite places, and if you are a tea fan, you will understand why. Oh, and it has the dubious distinction of having the very smallest bathroom in all NYC. Try it and tell me I'm wrong. I dare you. \$-\$\$, V, K but only if it's a baby (no room to move around), you'll want tea, not B.

Soul/Cajun

Old Devil Moon, (212-475-4357) 511 E. 12th St., between Aves. A and B. One of my favorite joints. Small, down-to-earth, and festive. Food is barbecue, Southern, with Cajun overtones. Surprisingly, there are a few decent vegetarian options. Favorite things: catfish tacos, collard greens. \$-\$\$, V, K, B.

One or two specific needs:

Cupcakes! Buttercup Bake Shop, on 2nd Ave. between 51st and 52nd Sts. (west side of st). Or Magnolia Bakery at 401 Bleecker (at 11th). Similar cakes. Worth the calories - Trust me.

Bagels. There's a lot of debate over whose are the best, but I can guarantee you won't be disappointed with Ess-A-Bagels (on 1st Ave. at 21st St. or 3rd Ave. between 50th and 51st). Just don't expect the guys at the counter to be friendly – one guy at the uptown location is famous for his surly personality. But it doesn't affect the taste of the bagels. And their tofu cream cheese is indistinguishable from the original.

Drinking establishments

Some of these also serve food to varying degrees (most at least have snack options), but drinks are their primary attractions. With a couple of exceptions, I am not including phone numbers, because who calls a bar? Also, many of the above restaurants are also good places for drinks, and I have noted a few that have good drinks/wines. I am leaving out about a million-billion places; these are just some of my favorites.

St. Dymphna's, 118 St. Marks Place between 1st Ave. and Ave. A, on the south side of the street. Look for the little yellow doorway. Absolutely the best Guinness outside of Ireland. 'Nuff said. Oh, okay, it's also fairly cozy and has a back garden (which is usually filled with smokers). Other beer and cider also good. But drink the damned Guinness, willya?

Angel's Share, on 9th St., just a few doors east of 3rd Ave. It is upstairs, hidden away in an ordinary sushi restaurant – look for the neon sign and awning, and turn left at the top of the stairs. It's like a very posh, quiet, luxurious speakeasy. Have one of the special cocktails, please. My favorite is the Lady in Satin. Sashimi snack also good. (212-777-5415 – I am giving you the phone number in case you can't figure out where it is, because I want you to be able to find it, should you need it.) Hint: Angel's Share is at its most brilliant in the afternoon, when it is empty.

Beauty Bar, 231 E. 14th, north side of the street, between 3rd and 2nd Aves. It's kinda cheesy and kinda fabulous. A former beauty salon, with some of the old fixtures still in it, now serving strong drinks to hipsters. Go and have a something and tonic for me (I haven't been there in a while). Small, so it can get crowded; go elsewhere if you are many.

Grape and Grain, 620 E. 6th St., between Aves. B and C. A darling little spot, dark and secluded, with a sweetheart of a barman. Devoted to wine and its sparkly cousins. Order it by the quart (about a glass and a half), my friends. Nice little edibles, too. Like all of my petite finds, it can get packed, but give it a try if you are nearby.

The Bourgeois Pig, 122 E. 7th St., between 1st Ave. and Ave. A, 212-475-2246 (I give you the phone number because if you have your heart set on it, you can call and reserve). It is tiny tiny tiny, and has champagne cocktails and chocolate or cheese fondue. Drink the violet and champagne cocktail or the one with honey (or whatever strikes your fancy). Did I mention it is tiny? There is another one at 124 Macdougall St. in the W. Village. It is also open during the day for café-type things, and may be less crowded then.

Rodeo Bar, 375 3rd Ave., at 27th St. Sawdust on the floor, peanuts in the shell on the table, all manner of cool music on the stage, a giant buffalo head on the wall, and beer in your belly. Get it? Good. Now go there. Also, there is a restaurant part that has barbecue. Heh. Also, it is bigger than many of my haunts, and is a fine place to bring a dozen of your closest friends to drink and be rowdy.

Vintage Wine Bar, used to just be tastings in the Vintage New York wine shop, but now they've opened a wine bar/restaurant. I haven't been to the new space, but loved the original concept, and I bet they've improved on it. It's all New York wine (and it's good), at 482 Broome St. (entrance at 60 Wooster). Give it a try.