

London's best

Cheap eats

2011

Our appetite for excellent well-priced dining has never been greater: let the **Time Out Food & Drink** team help you get your fill. Photography **Rob Greig** and **Ed Marshall**



North



Oasis

A perfect taste of Poland

Hearty and filling Polish food is the order of the day in this cheery caff, and it's served in indecently large portions at very low prices.

The classics are here – bigos, barszcz, beef stroganoff, pancakes – but the menu lists many other Eastern European choices.

Bigos is an immense helping of sauerkraut hiding chunks of chicken and wonderfully smoky bacon nuggets, with juniper berries adding piquancy. It costs £3.80, and virtually nothing costs more than £8. There are naleśniki-filled pancakes for pudding, if you can possibly fit them in. Polish chatter comes via the satellite TV and a loyal bunch of expats.

236 Neasden Lane, NW10 0AA (8450 5178). Neasden tube. Meal for two with drinks and service: around £30. BYO: no corkage charge.

Ariana II

Afghan

One thing to bear in mind when eating at this Afghan restaurant in Kilburn is to look beyond the familiar meat grills. Instead, order the Afghan specials: dumplings such as aushak, delicate ravioli that are filled with leeks, then topped with spicy meat sauce and a drizzle of yogurt. Mantu is another style of dumpling dish that's superficially similar to aushak. Kabuli palow (pilau) is a heap of long-grained brown basmati rice concealing a bone of lamb shank, a luxe version of the rice dish peppered with raisins, almonds and pistachios, and carefully spiced. The kebabs are, well, kebabs. But some of the food here is unusual and wonderful, and the prices are low. 241 Kilburn High Rd, NW6 7JN (3490 6709). Brondesbury rail or Kilburn tube/rail. Meal for two with drinks and service: around £25. BYO: no corkage charge.

Delhi Grill

Indian

Inspired by roadside stalls, Delhi Grill replicates the earthy flavours of Punjabi street food with a short menu of smoky grills and slow-cooked

curries. A goat curry ordered from the daily specials line-up was a triumph. Cooked on the bone for robustness, the meat was succulent and scented with hits of cardamom, complementing a caramelised onion, garlic and ginger base. Rajmah (kidney beans), a stalwart of Punjabi kitchens, was utterly delicious. Cooked for hours, they were further enhanced by a melange of soft onions, crushed tomatoes, and ginger spiked with green chillies. Don't miss the juicy tandoori lamb chops, simmered in a garlic and lime marinade, then blasted in a tandoor and served in a cloud of aromatic smokiness. 21 Chapel Market, N1 9EZ (7278 8100/www.delhigrill.com) Angel tube. Meal for two with drinks and service: around £35.

Tenshi

Japanese

This little Upper Street restaurant didn't look far to choose its name – 'tenshi' translates to 'angel'. It impresses with a wide selection of Japanese dishes: sushi, sashimi and tempura, yaki-soba (fried noodles), katsu curry and udon noodle soups. There's even a selection of okonomiyaki, Japanese 'cabbage pancakes' which come with various

toppings and lashings of mayonnaise and okonomiyaki sauce, similar to Worcestershire. Finish off the meal with some black sesame ice cream or various aduki bean desserts.

61 Upper St, N1 0NY (7226 4665). Angel tube. Meal for two with drinks and service: around £25.

Vy Nam Café

Vietnamese

This informal place might be selling itself a bit short with the 'café' tag. Inside it's bright and clean, with displays of dried and fresh flowers; staff, especially if you're used to the more unceremonious treatment dished out in some Hackney Vietnamese joints, are welcomingly courteous and friendly. We tried beef with lalot (wild betel leaves), and although the meat was thinly sliced rather than more conventionally minced, it was a good version. Soft-shell crab was a generous pile of deep-fried spindly limbs and tender body. We also enjoyed a zesty papaya salad with sliced prawns, beautifully presented and sharply dressed with a fish sauce and chilli dressing. A real test of any Vietnamese kitchen is the pho. Happily, Vy Nam's was spot-on, served with plenty of rare beef, and, at £7.20, good value.

371 Regent's Park Rd, N3 1DE (8371 4222/www.vynamcafe.com). Finchley Central tube. Meal for two with drinks and service: around £35.

Yum Cha

Chinese

Affordable good food in the stretch between Camden and Chalk Farm tubes can be hard to find. But there's one refined and inexpensive culinary spot, opposite the spectacle of Camden Stables market: Yum Cha. Disregard the pan-Asian fare and jump straight to the dim sum. Classics such as Chinese prawn and chive dumpling (£2.60 lunch, £3.50 dinner) and Sichuan minced pork and peanut dumplings (£3.50 lunch, £4.50 dinner) sit next to more unusual varieties such as turnip cake with wind-dried meat and shrimp (£2.60 lunch). The evening dim sum menu might be less extensive than its lunchtime equivalent, but head to Yum Cha on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday night to indulge in the dumplings, all at half price. 27-28 Chalk Farm Rd, NW1 8AG (7482 2228). Chalk Farm tube. 50 per cent off dim sum 5.30-10.30pm Mon-Wed. Meal for two with drinks and service: around £40.