

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS CINDY LOU-DALE

A CULINARY TAPESTRY

MEET SOME OF LONDON'S EAST END'S FOOD HEROES – THE PEOPLE WHO CREATE THE GREATEST CHOW IN THE CAPITAL.



Food speaks of a city's history, of its past residents, and in London's East End you'll get to taste its social issues, war, and immigration, just by sampling their cuisine. This small patch of London has a cultural make-up of communities from around the world who have each enriched the neighbourhood with their regional dishes. Bangladeshi, Irish, Turkish, Italian, Chinese, Jewish, Creole, Moroccan – it's a world in a city, a culinary tapestry stitched to a checkered past.

GOING FOR AN INDIAN

As part of a small group, all eager to gain insight into the East End's traditions and culture, we began our culinary exploration on the legendary Brick Lane. In England, 'going for an Indian' has become an essential Friday night dinner tradition, and in London, Brick Lane – the curry hub of the capital, is the only place for it. The curries on Brick Lane, which has more than 50 restaurants on just one street, are truly authentic. In fact, the area is often referred to as Banglatown because of its many Bangladeshi restaurants.

Excited to sample several Indian taste sensations we enter Aladin's.

Facing page: Delicious sweet treats at one of the many coffee shops in the East End.

Above: Hordes of hungry Londoners line up all night for Mr Sammy's beignets and hot salted beef.



Above: The English Restaurant's 17th-century listed premises screams tradition with an early riser's fried-egg sandwich or full English fry-up. **Below:** The English Restaurant's gloriously rich bread and butter pudding with molten velvet custard.



Here we're met with a rush of spicy curry aromas and fresh, fluffy naan bread straight from the tandoori oven. Several curries were sampled and we unanimously agreed the sweet and sour lamb curry to be the favourite. I asked owner Sam Kundu, after his preference. "Naga is much-loved by me. It's tasty and very hot – too hot for most of my European customers. You need to have been eating spicy food for a long time to eat Naga, otherwise it might make you weep."

A KOSHER KITCHEN

The intoxicating aromas of freshly-baked bagels lured us further down Brick Lane to Mr Sammy's Beigel Bake – a Jewish bakery and East End institution that turns out over 3,000 bagels every day. The bagels are made the customary way – then topped with mouth-watering salted meat, lavishly smeared with spicy hot mustard, then lathered with sour pickles. Mr Sammy, the life-force of the most famous bagel bakery in the land, says, "I've been making bagels for 50 years now. We came from Israel and then started up this bakery. We make people happy and they tell their friends and they come back. This is why Brick Lane is famous – because of us!" Any visitor to London only needs to ask a taxi driver to take them to the city's bagel shop and they'll be delivered to 159 Brick Lane, where the bakery is open twenty-four-seven.

OF ENGLISH ORIGIN

We trudged on to the historic English Restaurant (Brushfield Street), which is snug, quaint and painted a warm, russet brown on the outside. Inside, it's gentle and creaky, with newspaper-

strewn rickety old tables and wobbly chairs. They serve all the traditional English staples like buttered crumpets, bread and butter pudding, and the best hot chocolate in the city (so thick I felt the need to chew). While I dissolved in an intoxicating cloud of cocoa delirium, I listened to the BBC transmitting via a battered old radio.

For a plate of crispy battered fish, chunky chips and mushy peas visit London's favourite chippy at Poppie's Fish & Chips (Hanbury Street). Poppie's opened shop just after WWII and has been an institution in the area ever since. The interiors are diner-esque, complete with 1940s music, staff uniforms, jellied eels and newspaper-wrapped chips.

BEING FRENCH

Cheese is a pillar of civilisation, as a renowned foodie once said, and why a French cheese

merchant Androuet (on Lamb Street), added London to its civilising mission. The arresting bouquet of pungent cheese lures us cheese fanatics to The House of Androuet, cheese mongers and cheese-maturing experts, who showcase their massive waxed wheels of cheese in the shop window. Androuet is the ultimate cheese lovers' paradise and claims to have the best selection of cheese outside of Paris. Standing at their cheese bar you get to sample a variety of cheddars, blues, and brie from England and France.

A RUSTIC CHARM

Finally, onto Shoreditch High Street, a converted warehouse and showpiece of the tour – Pizza East, one of the hippest restaurants in London, serves rustic food in an industrial ambience of plaster-peeling walls, exposed arterial piping, and dense untreated wood floors underfoot. Everything on the menu, especially the desserts, looks special. Brace yourself for a religious experience when you sample their salted caramel chocolate tart.

There's nothing quite like being introduced to off-the-beaten-track small, unshowy



Clockwise from top: Along with food, get a glimpse of street art at East End's Hanbury Street; Pizza East has fused creative-cool with the vibrant tastes of Italy; Crispy battered lemon sole, chunky chips and mushy peas at Poppies Fish & Chips.



FOODCOLLECTION/ FoodCollection / Dirodia; Rose cookies: Shot by Sanjay Ramachandran - By chef Arzoozaman Irani, InterContinental, Nairman Point



Above: Pizza East Chef assembling plates of antipasti.
Below: Nostalgia rules at Poppies Fish & Chips, a quality chippy complete with jukebox, jellied eels and newspaper-wrapped chips.



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Clockwise from left: A seven-layered delight, bebinca; Indulge in some good ol' Christmas cakes; Try the heavenly almond Dundee cake!

eateries by a local food connoisseur. Whilst walking through eclectic neighbourhoods, ancient Roman burial grounds, Georgian buildings steeped in history, and numerous movie sets along Princelet Street, we took in eight unforgettable food tastings in 3½ hour. It not only redefined our collective views of British food but we tasted the foods that shaped the East End and learnt the stories of the people behind the fare.

Traditionally home to Cockney Londoner, the East End is a closely merged community that reflects the melting-pot of cultures and nationalities that forms the wild-child side of the capital. It gained notoriety in crime terms in the 60s and not so long ago was the kind of place your mother warned you about.

While other cities seduce you with their gentle charms, London's East End will knock you on the head and drag you in where you'll experience a trendy artisan food culture. ■

QUICK FACTS

GETTING THERE

Jet Airways operates daily flights to London from Mumbai and New Delhi.

ACCOMMODATION

East End has a plethora of options from apartments to plush hotels.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit www.visitlondon.com and www.eatinglondontours.co.uk