

Tyler Cowen's Ethnic Dining Guide – May 2018, 30th edition.

The Guide is also available in [search-able, browse-able format](#).

I wish to offer thanks to all those who offered dining suggestions and evaluations (keep them coming!). This has made the guide better, and longer, than before. It also means the guide has more unvisited places than before. I hope to get to them soon!

You also should buy my book [An Economist Gets Lunch: New Rules for Everyday Foodies](#).

General remarks

Restaurants manifest the spirit of capitalist multiculturalism. Entrepreneurship, international trade and migration, and cultural exchange all come together in these communal eateries.

In the last twenty or so years, the Washington D.C. area has become a leader in ethnic restaurants. We lag behind New York City and Los Angeles, but we vie with Chicago and the Bay Area for third place in the United States. In some areas, such as Ethiopian cuisine, we are number one.

This guide is intended to help individuals enjoy good food, and keep my favorite places in business. Effective consumer choice improves your eating and, in the long run, improves the quality of available restaurants.

The better ethnic restaurants tend to have many of their kind in a given geographic area. Single restaurant representations of a cuisine tend to disappoint. Competition increases quality and lowers prices. The presence of many restaurants of a kind in an area creates a pool of educated consumers, trained workers and chefs, and ingredient supplies - all manifestations of increasing returns to scale.

Many of the best ethnic restaurants on this list come from the well-represented cuisines. This region is particularly strong in Salvadoran, Peruvian, Bolivian, Afghan, Ethiopian, Korean, Vietnamese, Indian, and now Chinese cuisines. And when it comes to the last few years, the rise in Chinese is the big local story.

The best ethnic restaurants are often found in suburban strip malls, where rents are lower and the degree of feasible experimentation is greater. Small and cheap ethnic restaurants are often better than large ones. Northern Virginia and Maryland are underrated; Adams-Morgan, although it has many fine places, is by no means the fount of ethnic food. West Alexandria, Wheaton, Chantilly, Springfield, and Fairfax are underrated; Georgetown, Old Town Alexandria, and Bethesda are overrated.

After you have chosen a restaurant, you must order. Ordering is often a more important decision than choosing the restaurant. Keep in mind that restaurant staff can be unreliable; sometimes they will steer you towards something safe and uninteresting. (Many Chinese still express amazement that many Westerners can eat with chopsticks, for instance.)

Some rules of thumb, none of which are absolute:

1. Avoid dishes that are "ingredients-intensive." Raw ingredients in America - vegetables, butter, bread, meats, etc. - are below world standards. Even most underdeveloped countries have better raw ingredients than we do, at least if you have a U.S. income to spend there, and often even if one doesn't. Ordering the plain steak in Latin America may be a great idea, but it is usually a mistake in Northern Virginia. Opt for dishes with sauces and complex mixes of ingredients. Go for dishes that are "composition-intensive."
2. Appetizers often are better than main courses. Meals composed of appetizers and side dishes alone can be very satisfying. Thai and Lebanese restaurants provide the classic examples of this principle.
3. Avoid desserts. Most ethnic restaurants in America, no matter how good, usually fall flat with the desserts. Especially if the restaurant is Asian.
4. Order more than you plan to eat. Keep in mind that you are ordering for variety, not for quantity. You can always take the rest home.

Actually the best advice is to do exactly what I recommend under each particular heading.

Over the last few years I see two big trends. The first is that we now have plenty of places with first-rate Chinese food. Our region used to be pathetic in this category, now it is a leading light. So if you feel you don't really enjoy Chinese food so much, think again. Second, northern Virginia has taken a clear lead. Fifteen years ago Maryland had better ethnic food, but now we are ahead in Chinese, Indian, and most other areas as well, excepting of course the Caribbean.

Now to the restaurants. But before proceeding, don't assume that it's always open (although it usually is), or even that it's still there. Typically I have restricted my entries to what I regard as the best, or most interesting, examples of that cuisine in the area.

Remember, if you don't like these, you probably didn't follow my advice for what to order. Or you are to blame in some other manner, I don't know which one, there are many possibilities. The most likely are that you simply don't have very good taste, or perhaps you are not very bright. Too bad.

Before giving you the encyclopedia, here is SOME PLACES YOU MUST TRY. This feature focuses on places you might not already know, overlooking such notable (but known) restaurants as Panjshir, for Afghan food, Duangrat's (Thai), or the Vietnamese places at Eden Center (how can you pick just one?).

SOME PLACES YOU MUST TRY:

Kao Sarn Thai, 6795 Wilson Blvd., #12, inside, in Eden Center, 703-992-7440.

This mom and pop is one of the very best Thai places. The menu is limited, and they have only about six tables and a fairly small space, but it is cooked to southeast Asian tastes. Ask for it spicy. The Yum Woo Sen bean thread salad and the Kao Soi Curry Noodle Soup are especially good. All in all, a significant addition to the repertoire and a big sign that Eden Center is making a significant comeback.

R&R Tacqueria, 7894 Washington Blvd. (Rt.1); 410-799-0001, Elkridge, Maryland, 13 minutes north of the 495/95 intersection, look for the Shell sign.

This tacqueria is in a *gas station*, with two small counters and three chairs to sit on. It is the best huarache I have eaten, ever, including in Mexico. It is the best chile relleno I've had in the United States. They serve among the best Mexican soups I have had, ever, and I have been to Mexico almost twenty times. I recommend the tacos al pastor as well. At first Yana and Natasha were skeptics ("Sometimes you exaggerate about food") but now they are converts and the takeaways have vanished. They even sell Mexican Coca-Cola and by the way the place is quite clean and nice, albeit cramped.

The highly intelligent proprietor is a former cargo pilot from Mexico City and speaks excellent English. The restaurant is called R&R after the names of his two sons.

For over twenty years I have sought such a place in the Washington, D.C. area and now I have one. For over twenty years people have been asking me how can they scratch this itch and now I have an answer. Via [Jodi Ettenberg](#), The Wall Street Journal [reports on gas station tacos](#).

Super Bowl Noodle House, 785-G Rockville Pike, Rockville, 301-738-0086.

This place is a revelation and a knock-out, one of the absolute must-visits. It is a mix of Shanxi, Sichuan, and Taiwanese styles, with some other odd dishes thrown in. Order the Shanxi Noodle Soup but also – above all – at least one of the Spicy Dry Hot Pots, one of the best dishes around in any restaurant. It is hard to describe if you don't already know it but very yummy. Get the flatbread with pork inside, the Chong Qing Dry Chili Chicken, the spicy cucumber salad, the soft tofu with numbing, and then ask for the specials. I don't know of any other Chinese place around which

serves food like this. It is both high quality and authentic, go, go, go. It is also very cheap and the staff is cheery and friendly, a winner all around.

Panda Gourmet, Langdon Days Inn, 2700 New York Ave., just east of Bladensburg, NE, 202-636-3588.

Now this is something, the best Chinese restaurant ever to grace Washington, D.C. And in a dump of a roadside motel. You must of course ask for the secret Chinese menus, as the Chinese-American fare does not appear to be of interest. They have have a special Shaanxi noodles dish, get it. They have a special Xian dish which you can think of as like a Chinese hamburger, albeit with pork. Get it. They have the best Dan Dan noodles this area has seen, ever. Get it. The best cold Chengdu spicy noodles I have had. The best cumin beef of any place around. The spicy fish wasn't bad, but not up to the other really good Chinese places around here. In any case this is a top drawer Chinese restaurant and for authenticity it is #1 around of all choices.

You will note it is hard to get here, even with a car. If you are driving west on New York Avenue, you need to make a funny U-turn at the sign for The Washington Times building, and go under an unpromising overpass back to a service road, eventually the move will pay off.

Menomale, 2711 12th St NE, Washington, DC, 202-248-3946.

The best pizza around. Neapolitan. Like letters of recommendation, the very best pizza reviews should be extremely short. Closed Tuesdays.

Masseria, 1340 4th St NE, Washington, DC, 202-608-1330, right near Union Market, don't expect the outside to look like a normal restaurant, but yes it is there behind the street garbage.

Food from Puglia and Sicily, striking in its originality for the American scene. Fixed price menu only, but you choose from a longer list. Load up on the pastas as much as possible, and the linguini with XO sauce is especially good. This is probably the best pasta served in DC right now. The interior is stylish, the food is not cheap, but right now this is one of the few places in town worth spending some money on.

Sichuan Jin River, formerly Sichuan Pavilion, 410 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, just north of Rockville Town Centre, invisibly deep into a strip mall with "Saigon" restaurant and Revere Bank, don't miss it! 240-403-7351, book in advance! But they only take reservations for groups of six or more. Go early! Go!

Get the Dan Dan Noodles and the Jelly Noodles. Get dumplings and other dumpling-like phenomena. This is the most authentic Sichuan restaurant around and it makes Hong Kong Palace look like Burger King. The spicy fish in hot pot is incredible. The crispy potato. Dan-Dan noodles. Just choosing from the starting, first section of the menu makes this a "Top Five" restaurant. First-rate ambience and clientele as well.

Alborz, 8417 Old Courthouse Road, Vienna, 703-288-4500.

Right now this is the best Persian place around. It's in some ways a carbon copy of Shamshiry, just that right now it is a little sharper and more consistent. I like best their barg [beef kabob] with cherry rice, but it is a consistent restaurant and one can visit often and experience repeated delights. The salmon with zereshk polo, barberries, I recommend too. But unlike Shamshiry, they have excellent stews, not just the kabobs with special rices. And like Shamshiry, it is good for Persian people-watching.

Bob's Shanghai 66, 305 North Washington St. Rockville, 301-315-6668, where the old Bob's Noodle used to be, the Noodle place is now across the street.

Consistently excellent Chinese food. For all of the Shanghai packaging, you can think of this as mostly Taiwanese food with Shanghai and Sichuan around the edges (a good mix!). The Xiao Long Bao are quite good and you can get them with either pork or "crab yolk," both are worth trying. The Peas with Mustard Greens are a must and in general this place has the best and freshest greens of any Chinese in the area. Get the Taiwanese cucumbers too. First-rate noodles. I also liked the flounder fillet in chili sauce and thought the Taiwanese sausage was quite subtle. Definitely recommended.

East Dumpling House, 12 North Washington St., Suite 14G, Rockville, 301-762-6200, no reservations, opens at 10:30.

Real Beijing street food. Mostly kabobs (with Chinese spices) and dumplings, though the cold dishes are good too. I count 38 different forms of dumpling, including lamb, chicken, mushroom, bean curd and cabbage, and many other options in various combinations and manifestations. Their "Tofu Prime Products" are excellent too. These are the best dumplings around and this place should immediately be considered essential dining. It has no close substitute in this area and in terms of quality and price it is excellent.

Marib, 6981 Hechinger Drive, Springfield, 703-376-3388, note the larger sign still says "BBQ Delight." More importantly, this is easier to find than most places in Springfield, easily accessible through Backlick Rd. in Annandale, or 495 or 395.

Very special, the best of the growing number of Yemeni places around. Their saltah, a boiled vegetables dish which sounds awful, is a knockout due to the herbs and flavoring. Chicken mandi has lovely, moist meat with excellent onions on top of the fluffy rice. Foul, lentil soup, layered rice dishes, breakfast dishes, plain old hummus, there are many very good dishes here. I have yet to try the lamb. And like the other Yemeni places around, they have those \$40 desserts, bread and stuff soaked in honey, I have yet to try them. Strongly recommended.

Nostos, 8100 Boone Blvd, at Tysons off of Aline, Vienna, 703-760-0690.

Finally this area has a first-rate Greek restaurant. This is not a mom and pop but rather a modestly fancy place, not cheap but relative to its market segment it is reasonably priced. I've tried maybe a dozen of the dishes here, with a wide range of choice. Every single one was excellent. My favorite, oddly enough, was the green zucchini, make sure you dip them into the tz sauce. If they keep on cooking at this level, there is even a chance that Nostos is northern Virginia's best restaurant right now. Definitely recommended.

Espita Mezcaleria, 1250 9th St., NW, 202-621-9795.

South Mexican, this is probably the best Mexican place around right now. First, the corn in all forms is superb, most of all the simple corn on the cob ("elote"). Second, these are the best moles in the area by far. The green pipian mole, on pork ribs, would impress me even in Mexico City. The rest of the menu is good but not awesome. Good ceviche, but it's not the thing to get here. The Tlayuda I found a little dull. Quite good tacos, first-rate sopes (corn!). We all know that the moles and corn are what really counts, right? Definitely recommended.

Bad Saint, 3226 11th St., Col. Heights, Washington, closed Tuesday, no one seems willing to give a phone number.

No reservations, get there well before 5:30 when they open, they have only 24 seats and your entire party had better be there at that very moment. No tables seat more than four and everywhere it is crowded, including for your knees let's hope your coat is not that heavy. The good news is that it is definitely worth it. Creative Filipino cooking at its best, and I don't mean that as faint praise. I've had most of the menu, and none of it is worse than interesting, noting they are not afraid to serve you sour-tasting food. The two best items are the bronzino, and the clams with sausage and Sichuan chiles; they are two of the very best dishes in town right now. Trendy, you get a good view of the kitchen, not cheap but reasonably priced for what you get, worth the trip and the wait for sure.

Little Serow, right next to Komi, 1511 17th St., DC, no lunch, no phone, no substitutions, no Sunday.

Imagine northeastern Thai street food, Issan style, combined with the quality ingredients and overall standards of fine dining. Right now it's the best place in DC by a long ways and the best place this area has had in a long time. The tastes are sharp, hot, sour, pungent, musty, and occasionally sweet. The level of heat can be high. You cannot choose your food. Every course was a knockout, only \$45 for a seven-course menu, no substitutions. There's nowhere else like it. It is right next to Komi, and brought to you by the same people. Remarkably, the cook is Greek-American and not Thai. Could it be the best Thai place on the East coast?

Their website and menu is [here](#). Here is [a Sietsema review](#). [Don Rockwell](#) says it may be the best new restaurant in the U.S. this year; there is more from Don [here](#). A must. No reservations, so you must show up well before opening at 5:30 or wait two hours to get in.

Charcoal Chicken, 13969 Metrotech Dr., Chantilly, 703-953-3707.

The number one Pakistani place in Virginia, better than the competitors. Get the karahi chicken and the lamb with spinach. They have knock out bread and green sauce, make sure you dip *something* in the green sauce. Everything else seems pretty consistent. The fried fish is good too. Let the spices and juices from everything soak into the bread, and then the best part of the meal has arrived. Superb, I hope you get there.

88 China Restaurant, 13635 Lee Jackson Memorial Highway, Chantilly, about five minutes' drive west of Fair Oaks mall, 703-378-0869.

I call it "The new old China Star." It's run by the people who ran China Star until 2012, and after the original Peter Chang version of the place. They have pretty much copied the China Star menu, to at least ninety percent (I don't see ma la rabbit, however). I tried three core dishes for old times' sake. The Szechuan chili chicken (on the bone!) was a whole level better than it used to be. The braised fish was clearly better and finer. The scallion fried fish had a better accompaniment of scallions than it used to have, but was slightly scalier in terms of the fried batter, overall a draw in terms of quality. So this is like the old China Star restaurant, but overall it seems to be definitely better. I will go again, and you should too.

Mokomandy, 20789 Great Falls Plaza, Sterling, 571-313-0505, Korean and Cajun.

This place received good reviews when it opened a few years back, but somehow it has fallen into the overlooked category. In fact it has some of NoVa's very best ethnic dishes. At first I thought it would be a kind of mom and pop, like the Vietnamese places which do spiced crawfish. But it's not, rather it is a fine and innovative restaurant, with a trendy look. The jambalaya, the ssam (get it with prime rib), and the Korean sliders are some of the best dishes around, period. Everything else is good or at least fun. And there is nowhere else like it around. It's not mom and pop cheap, but for the quality of what you get, and the quality of the ingredients, it is more than reasonably priced. Definitely recommended.

Hunan Gate Restaurant, 4233 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, 703-243-5678.

On the surface a mediocre Hunan place, but underneath there is a Manchurian menu, originally in Chinese only but now parts are in English. Order from that! No other place around tastes like this one. I recommend the tofu scallion salad, the julienne potato salad, the NE style pancake, the chive potstickers, and the pork riblets with Italian flat bean stew, plus the amazing chicken dish with the large, flat

wheat noodles, a real winner. I am not sure how you can get any of these but try your best. Nor should you forget the pork belly stew with wide glass noodles or the pots and dishes with fermented cabbage. This place is still getting better. Definitely recommended.

Abay Market, 3811-A S. George Mason Drive, Falls Church, 703-998-5322.

Now this is an interesting place. They have only a few dishes but those are mindblowingly good. The menu includes kitfo, slabs of raw beef (tere sega), lamb soup, and slightly cooked kitfo (mostly raw). That's it. You can get vegetables – they make the best – but you must call ahead to do so. All come with bread, sauce, and spices. No doubt this is the best raw beef emporium for miles and miles around. A+ for atmosphere. Ask for their assistance in eating the food. Recommended, but you'd better know what you are looking for. It's the place Anthony Bourdain decided to visit and he was not disappointed. Hail Abay Market!

Baan Thai, 1326 14th St., NW, Washington, 202-588-5889.

Regional Thai cuisine, from four different parts of the country, the attached sushi restaurant serves as a talisman against the uninformed. Get the tapioca chicken, the [Isan sausage](#), and the Thai vermicelli in chili peanut sauce. Get the rice cake appetizer, and the little pineapple spots with chicken on top. This is one of [three or four local places with real Thai food](#), and thus one of the best dining spots in DC. Not every dish is spectacular, but if you go with the properly weird Thai ones, you can hit a home run.

Sushi Taro, 1503 17th St NW, 202-462-8999.

A genuinely excellent place in the sense that you don't expect DC to have. I can't say they offer huge surprises, but this is consistently one of the best places in town, with fine sushi, sashimi, and byproducts. Get a fixed price menu. Not cheap, but to get a very good fixed price menu for say \$80, for the quality you get, is in relative terms a bargain. Definitely recommended.

Peter Chang China Cafe, 1771 Carl D. Silver Parkway, Fredericksburg; 540-786-8988.

Yes it's that Peter Chang. I've only been three times, but each time it was excellent, and that was without the Master in the house. The tastes are finer than in the other Sichuan places. No, I don't really know what you should get. Opting for chilies, cumin, noodles, and the like works well, though, if you are looking to take the obvious road. The coriander fish rolls are a must and they have been a Chang specialty for years now. The location is not convenient, but it is right by lots of shopping, including a big Barnes & Noble, and not too far from 95.

Kyrisan, Chinese-French, 1924 8th St., NW, 202-525-2942.

There are also Filipino and Korean inspirations, plus a general eclecticism. This place is excellent. My favorite here is the scallops with coconut rice and basil ice cream – no it's not a dessert! It is one of the best courses in town. The duck confit and cheesecake dessert are recommended as well, the tofu too. Not cheap, but for what you get reasonably priced, a fine addition to the mid-range DC dining repertoire.

To Sok Jib, 7211 Columbia Pike, 703-333-2861.

This is now clearly the best Korean place around. The broiled fish and the bibim bap are better than in any of the competitors. Everything here just tastes better, the vegetables too. Mostly soups, stews, and noodles, no barbecue or porridge. Quite small, very mom and pop. The lines start early, nonetheless I would say that half of your Annandale visits should involve eating at this place.

Hot Spot, 3232 Old Pickett Rd, Fairfax, 703-537-0325, closed for weekday lunch though.

This is Chinese food, exactly the kind of hot pot meal which has grown so popular in China itself. But note it is run and (mostly) patronized by Koreans. Fear not, the quality is excellent and the ma la spicy broth is as good and as authentic as you could expect. \$22.95 for all you can eat is a bargain because the execution on ingredients is strong. The place fills up early, so make sure you have a reservation, and also make sure you have at least 90 minutes to actually spend over the meal itself. Recommended.

DaMoim, 7106 Columbia Pike, Annandale, 703-354-3211.

Call me impressed. They call it Korean fusion. Get the Ssam with spicy pork and also get the kimchee quesadilla (really). Get appetizer #5, the short ribs. That's a great meal right there for very low cost. Focus on the small dishes. The fried chicken is quite good and the kimchee fried rich with egg (you have to ask for it) is a knockout. Some of the entrees are too sweet for my personal taste (compared to "Korean classic" at least) but they are well done and many people will like them a lot. The accompanying vegetables are above average. This place tries to be cool, by invoking odd mixes of the Beatles and the 1960s and by playing intermittent classic rock. I expect to go back a lot. It's original, reasonably priced, and lots of fun.

Keren, 1780 Florida Ave., NW, near 18th, 202-265-5764.

This place is exactly what more ethnic restaurants in DC should be like. Eritrean food will remind you of Ethiopian, but it isn't the same either. There is more bread mixed into the dishes for one thing, and the cuisine is overall less Americanized. The vegetables are less smoothed over. What you want to get here is the listed "Five

Eritrean dishes” listed on the bottom of the menu, otherwise not further specified. Also get one or two of the “Fuls,” which are available for breakfast too. The Egg Ful is especially tasty. The wheat dishes are original. Everything here is quite good, and the staff and proprietor are quite charming. A strong restaurant on all dimensions and also extremely cheap. By the way, maybe you knew the “old Keren,” but the place is under new management circa 2012 and is much improved.

Michael’s Noodle House, 10038 Darnestown Road., Rockville, (301) 738-0370.

Imagine a combination of A&J and Hong Kong Palace and you have what is perhaps the best Chinese restaurant in this area right now. The dishes are a mix of Sichuan, Taiwanese, and Manchurian. It has the best noodles and best dumplings around; the Sichuan wontons are a must. Shredded tofu is great. Singapore Noodle is surprisingly good and quite subtle. Pork with spicy noodles, in various incarnations, is excellent. I’ve yet to try the soups but they looks very good. Go mostly with the smaller dishes. The décor is slightly nicer than at most Mom and Pops, the owners are Taiwanese, not so much English is spoken by the staff, and it draws an older Chinese crowd, less raucous than many other excellent Chinese places. Highly recommended.

Nanjing Bistro, 11213 Lee Highway, Suite C, Fairfax, 703-385-8686.

Imagine a whole restaurant devoted to Chinese food as it is found in Nanjing! This place is the real deal. You do need to ask for the Chinese menu. Then simply order any dish that appears to have anything to do with Nanjing, such as the shredded tofu dish toward the end of the menu. I also quite like the simple egg with pepper, and their equivalent of spicy dumplings with soup. The pepper-fired spare ribs and the shredded potato. There is some kind of salt duck special which you (often) need to order in advance, I haven’t tried it yet. Unless you are from Nanjing or thereabouts, this place almost certainly has lots of dishes you haven’t seen before. Mostly not so spicy, by the way. I’m just getting to learn this place, but figured I should get word out right away. Excellent for atmosphere, without being a dump, do note it seems to get pretty busy so go early or reserve in advance. It is one of the current must-visits in the DC area.

Hai Duong Restaurant, 6795 Wilson Blvd., #7-9, 703-538-5289.

Again, on the inside corridor near Wilson Boulevard. This place is just first-rate. My favorite dish is the #31, Sizzling Fish Filet in Northern Style; you need to put all the pieces together on top of the chip for it to make sense. #10, Beef Underdone with Lime, is the best around and you should order this special dish if you don’t already know it. The soups are very good as are the crushed rice dishes and the noodles. Excellent atmosphere: Go, go, go.

Elephant Jumps, 8110 A Arlington Blvd, Falls Church, 22042, (703) 942-6600, in the Yorktowne Center, more on Gallows than Route 50, home page [here](#).

Home-style Thai food, pretty genuine, with a chef from Bangkok. Right now it is probably better than any other local Thai competitor. Just ask for “what Tyler Cowen gets.” Get the specials. Ask for the non-listed specials which they make for the staff, or for experiments.

I love their Ka Nom Jeen, a Burmese-influenced noodles with curry composition. The tuna appetizer looks a bit like sawdust (really) but is first-rate and original. The Hung Lay Curry is a knockout, with Laotian and Burmese influences. Gary Leff has a good review of those dishes here:

<http://boardingarea.com/viewfromthewing/2013/06/04/elephant-jumps-thai-in-northern-virginia-getting-even-better-with-new-dishes/>. Let’s hope they keep these dishes.

On the regular menu, the Green Curry Chicken Roti is especially good, but the key here is to find out what are the best half dozen dishes on a given day, they will be superb. The desserts are surprisingly good too.

Here is an update I once wrote on this review:

This place has improved so much I feel it deserves another review. It was already one of the best places on this list, nowadays it is probably the very best place. It has consistently original and authentic Thai food which is refined and improved on a regular basis. These days my favorite dishes are the Yum Pla Dook Foo (ground tuna, dried, peanuts, mango sauce), the Ka Nom Jee (hard to explain, but a mix of Thai delicious stuff on top of piles of noodles), Hung Lay curry (a kind of Thai barbecue, slow-cooked pork in tamarind sauce), crispy rice salad, and then a series of dishes which are not on the menu at all and vary in their availability. They include some spicy noodle dishes, one with pork, sour bamboo shoots curry, and a fermented fish dish as a kind of curry. Find the proprietor Tom and ask him “What would Tyler do?” And the older dishes which I previously reviewed are as good as ever, though I think no longer the very best ones.

If you are ever upset that I am not writing more restaurant reviews, the answer is that I am eating here too much.

Khan Kabob, 4229 Lafayette Center Dr., Chantilly, 703-817-1200.

Awesome Pakistani stuff, the best bread around, excellent lentils and of course kabobs, fish fry, lamb brains, karahi wok dishes, and haleem on weekends.

Everything here is subtle, not too oily as in many Pakistani places, overall a gem which gets everything right.

Al Hamra, 4230 Annandale Rd., Annandale, 703-256-1906.

Wow, did I love this place. A mix of Middle Eastern and Pakistani, the owner is from Pakistan. I’ve only gone once, and tried three dishes, still I feel it is worthy of an immediate report. The best chicken Haleem around, by far. Superb Biryani rice,

maybe also the best in the area. And the hummus was a knockout, made from actual fresh beans soaked overnight. The proprietor is also very friendly and knowledgeable. They offer yet more Pakistani dishes through their catering service, let's hope they make it to the main menu as well, I wonder if you can access them by calling ahead? Go, go, go!

Pho 75, 3103 Graham Road, Suite B, Falls Church, 204-1490, go early to avoid the line. Do not fear tripe and the other nasty bits. Learn to eat for crunch and texture.

Angeethi Indian Cuisine, 645 Elden St., Herndon, 703-796-1527.

Excellent all around, this is now one of the two or three best Indian places in the area. (Bombay Indian in Silver Spring is probably the current leader). The chat station, offered at lunch, is first-rate. Everything else is quite consistent and just generally tasty. I even enjoyed the Butter Chicken. Good breads. Good vindaloo and spinach and black lentils. What *kind* of Indian food is it? Most of all I would say it is like the Balti food you get in the UK and indeed they have a whole section of the menu devoted to Balti dishes.

Thai Taste by Kob, 11315 Fern St., Wheaton, 301-942-0288.

A Thai street food place, excellent quality. The whole fish in chili sauce is a must. The soups are very good, try the first one with various kinds of pork, make sure you stir in the condiments (ask for help if need be), the minty stuff, the bean sprouts, the full deal, the get the most out of this dish. The Thai sausage in the Nam Kao is first-rate. The menu here is huge and I don't pretend to have mastered it, but this is one of the five best Thai places around and on that list it is not the fifth. Definitely recommended for anyone wishing to explore authentic and quality Thai food at extremely reasonable prices.

Eyo Restaurant and Sports Bar, 3821-B South George Mason Drive, Falls Church, 703-933-3084.

This unassuming locale is one of the two or three best Ethiopian places at the moment. Furthermore they serve Ethiopian breakfast, starting at 10 a.m., though sometimes interpreted flexibly by management. Their fowl is simply superb and more generally you can't go wrong with anything here. This single strip mall in Virginia is raising Ethiopian food to an entirely new level and making the trip to 9th St obsolete. This place is also a favorite of the local cab drivers.

A&J Restaurant, 4316 Markham St., Annandale, 703-813-8181, just east of Beltway, or 1319 Rockville Pike, 301-251-7878.

Manchurian food and dim sum, one of the best places around. Tasty, original, and very cheap. I love the soups and dumplings. The boiled peanuts and shredded bean curd are other favorites. The smoked chicken has been especially good lately. But

you can't go wrong here, just make sure you get lots of things, and with the median item price below three dollars, this is not hard to do.

El Tapatio, 4309 Kenilworth Ave., Bladensburg, 301-403-8882, open 10 to 10 every day, don't you love those hours?

This is a real Mexican place, treasure the thought. In LA or Houston this restaurant would be only average, but that is still great in absolute terms. Get the goat ("birria del chivo"). The best chile relleno around. Very good tacos.

Bistro Aracosia, 5100 MacArthur Blvd., NW, 202-363-0400.

One of the best ethnic restaurants in D.C., and indeed one of the best restaurants period. This is from the Afghan Bistro people, except turned into a normal restaurant with nice décor, rather than a mom and pop. And yet the prices are still reasonable. Most of all, get the complex stews and the vegetable dishes. The kadu is from butternut squash, and is the best in the area. The eggplant and aushak are also first-rate, this place is a winner all-around. Reservations typically are required, even for off-hours, as the place does fill up.

Horace & Dickie's Seafood Carryout, 809 12th St. NE, Washington, 202-396-1083. There is another branch on Martin Luther King Ave., somewhere.

The best fried fish in the area, a must. Amazing atmosphere, take-out only, bad neighborhood, get the picture? Fish, fish, fish. That's all they have. And it is fried, fried, fried. You may not go often, due to the associated inconveniences, but a gem. They also have great fries, collard greens, potato salad. Crab cake surprisingly decent. Go, go, go.

Thanh Son Tofu, 6793/A Wilson Blvd., Eden Center, just north of Dragon Star, Falls Church, 703-534-1202.

They serve one main dish, tofu. That's right, just slabs of tofu, done three main ways. Five for a dollar. The best tofu around, period. Tofu to die for. Tofu. Wonderful tofu. The Vietnamese love this place. By the way, you'd better be in the mood for tofu.

Bang Ga Nae, 6499 Little River Turnpike, Alexandria, 703-941-2722.

Located in the little house where the North Korean place used to be. Now they specialize in goat dishes, done three ways, spicy or not. Soft, tender, and juicy meat, try it even if you don't like goat. Goes with excellent greens, and good cold vegetables with the meal, especially the tofu. At the end they pour some rice into the simmering sauce, pour in some black sesame seeds, and pour in some extra spices to make a Korean fried rice dish which is one of the area's best. The goat is first-rate and overall this place is highly original. The menu is short but they also

serve Cornish hen stuffed with rice, a superb dish, a cod dish, pressure-cooked pork feet, and a so-so seafood pancake. The service is also good and mostly they speak decent English. Right now this is probably the best “specialty” restaurant in the Korean section of Annandale.

Peter Chang Q, 4500 East West Highway, Bethesda, 240-800-3722.

What’s the point of a review? Your visit here will be all about *timing*. For how long will this place stay wonderful? The menu offers Peking Duck, some dim sum, and Beijing street food with the Peter Chang standbys of cilantro fish rolls, Sichuan chili chicken, scallion fried fish, dried fried eggplant, and so on. So far it’s the best Peter Chang opening I’ve been to, so you certainly ought to try the place, and we’ll see how the trajectory develops.

Esaan Cuisine, 1307 Old Chain Bridge Rd, McLean, 703-288-3901.

Another phenomenal northern Virginia restaurant, this one is food from Northeastern Thailand. I would describe this place as offering vivid flavors and full authenticity. You should get the vermicelli with fried mackerel (one of the best dishes around, period), the Kow Soi soup with noodles, and the fried chicken salad, for one of the best meals around, certainly tops in McLean. I tried a few other dishes and liked those too. One note: the prices are not super-cheap. They are entirely reasonable for the location and quality, but not the kind of steal that you might get from other places in this guide.

Those are some of my favorites, now to the longer list!

Afghan

Bistro Aracosia, 5100 MacArthur Blvd., NW, 202-363-0400.

One of the best ethnic restaurants in D.C., and indeed one of the best restaurants period. This is from the Afghan Bistro people, except turned into a normal restaurant with nice décor, rather than a mom and pop. And yet the prices are still reasonable. Most of all, get the complex stews and the vegetable dishes. The kadu is from butternut squash, and is the best in the area. The eggplant and aushak are also first-rate, this place is a winner all-around. Reservations typically are required, even for off-hours, as the place does fill up.

Afghan Bistro, Springfield.

Awesome Afghan, all around. Get the kadu, aushak, and sauce-intensive blends. The meats are very good, but order the more uniquely Afghan dishes. One of my favorites right now.

Bamiyan, 5634 Leesburg Pike, 703-820-7880, just east of Borders.

One of the best Afghan places around, the kabobs are juicy and succulent. That being said, I have some complaints. The air conditioning is overdone. The dining room is huge and understaffed. I can't imagine trying to eat here at 8 p.m. on a Saturday evening. The appetizers all have strong minty tastes. This is better than going the sweet route, but a certain sameness creeps in. With some modest changes, this place could be very very good. Right now it hovers between good and very good.

Arlington Kabob, 5046 Lee Highway, Arlington, 703-531-1498.

This small Afghan restaurant is one of the best kabob places around. It has perhaps the best fragrance of any local kabob restaurant. They serve the best chapli kabob, fresh and fragrant, full of herbs, that I have had in the U.S. It's not just some piece of gritty, fried spicy stuff, rather it will change your conception of chapli kabob. Lots of lamb. As for their bread, it is one of the best three or four places around. This is not a highly versatile restaurant, but it is worth having in the repertoire, well above average and both charming and cheap.

Panjshir, 924 Broad Street, Falls Church, 536-4566,

The most mainstream Afghan place but also the place to start if this cuisine is new to you. The kebabs are boring, get the stews, but especially the side dishes. The Kadu, the pumpkin, is a must. One side order serving is usually not enough for two people, so get two. This place offers many wonders. I love the apple, prunes, and walnut combinations. Saturday lunch is an excellent deal. For dinner for two, order all of the side dishes, plus the Mantu. The service is a bit slow, I think they do it on purpose, though for no good reason.

Kabob House, 2045 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, near the county courthouse, 703-294-9999.

The standards for Afghan kabobs have so gone up that the question for many places is more like "how close is it?" than "how good is it?" They have one of the best breads, apply the spicy light green sauce, and they are more generous with sides than any other Afghan restaurant I know. The kabobs are quite good, though perhaps not above average. In any case it is a good go-to place for this neighborhood.

Afghan Restaurant, 2700 Jefferson Davis Highway, Alexandria, 548-0022.

Smaller menu, less fine, grittier, and more authentic. A bit out of the way for me, but worth having in the repertoire.

Food Corner, 7031-A Little River Turnpike, 703-750-2185.

Very mom and pop. Relatively authentic Afghan food, including vegetable dishes, kabobs also. Excellent bread. Greasy but good. Unfortunately, they took their best dishes, Aushak and Mantu, off the menu.

Kabob Corner, 10893 Main St., Fairfax, 703-219-2078.

A superb mom n' pop Afghan restaurant. Very good kabobs, excellent fish and chips, aushak, etc. I like going there, and go here a lot with Bryan Caplan. Maybe the best bread around of any kabob place?

Charcoal Kabob, 394 Elden St., Herndon, 703-435-2400.

Above average kabob place, with some Afghan dishes too. Recommended. This mall in Herndon, and the accompanying strip, is one of the best locales around for ethnic food.

Kabul Kabob House, 514A South Van Dorn St., West Alexandria, 703-751-1833.

Excellent Afghan food. The kabobs are very good but I like the stews and mixed dishes best. Fresh salads and good use of vegetables. The best Afghan place, apart from Panjshir, for vegetables. They don't always have pumpkin, though, which is the best Afghan dish. Worth trying in any case.

Faryab Afghan Cuisine, 4917 Cordell Ave., between Norfolk and Old Georgetown, Bethesda, 301-951-3484.

Very good Afghan food, a bit slow on the service, but going is no mistake. I generally like the kadu, their fried dumplings and eggplant dishes are also quite good.

Halal Kabab House, 6245 Little River Turnpike, Alexandria, 703-354-1848.

Afghan kababs, near Landmark Center, I have yet to go.

Food Corner II, 7031 Brookfield Plaza, Springfield.

Afghan, perhaps a branch of Food Corner (see above), but they also have kept the rotisserie chicken from the Latin place that used to be here. I have yet to go.

African

See under the specific African cuisines, such as Senegalese, Ghanaian, Nigerian, and Cameroonian, as well as West African. Not to mention Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Sudanese. I hereby offer formal apology to all Eritreans for lumping them in with Ethiopian, but I simply cannot tell one cuisine from the other.

American

Isabella Eatery, Tysons II, 2001 International Drive, 571-489-8505, top floor food court.

They have branches of Arroz, Requin, Graffiato, Yona, and Pepina Cantina, among other places, but in general don't compare those to the original home bases, the menus have few similarities. Overall, I've been surprised how fun this set-up is. Tysons II just isn't so crowded, so at most hours you have the area's best food court almost entirely to yourself. Go to two or three places, ordering small dishes along the way, and finish with chocolate ice cream. It offers nice spaces to sit and chat in, and somehow vaguely reminds me of Singapore, albeit with much Asian food. I enjoyed everything I sampled (five visits, multiple plates each time), maybe the pastas in Graffiato have been my favorite (get the tagliatelle), but this is more about the experience than the single killer dish. The catch? It's just not that cheap. Still, this will remain an impressive achievement until either the crowds pour in, it goes out of business, or maybe a bit of both.

Mitsitam, in the National Museum of the American Indian, 4th St. and Independence, SW, 10-5 every day, sometimes very crowded.

They have five restaurants in one, many of them try to represent various Indian dishes. Well, sort of. You can get buffalo burgers, tamales, Northwest salmon, quinoa grain salad, corn on the cob, cranberries, pumpkin, cactus salad, tacos, and smoked turkey sandwich. I've yet to find a single dish that fully delivers, where else can you eat on the Mall? I give an "A" for effort, at the very least.

The Riggsby, 1731 New Hampshire Ave NW, 202-787-1500, open many different hours as it is a hotel restaurant too.

This deliberately "retro" place is actually quite good. They have meat, seafood, a kind of "do they serve shrimp cocktail here? 1970s kind of vibe." Doesn't that make it exotic? More exotic than kitfo in fact? The mussels, sardines, and schnitzel here are quite good. The look and décor are fun. This is a welcome change of pace, I look forward to going back. Right now it's the best place I can think of right off Dupont Circle.

The Partisan, 709 D St., NW, 202-524-5322.

You could argue for putting this one under "French," but ultimately it feels more American to me. It's all about charcuterie, and that is what you should order, including sausages, pates, and also cold cuts and other slices of meats. At first I was writing down which of the items I liked best, but then I gave up – they are all

excellent. Just get lots of stuff here, laid out on a board. Right now it is one of my favorite half dozen places in town, and it is also the kind of food I don't think the kitchen can spoil any time soon. The décor has a cool feel, as does the bar. It is also attached to a branch of The Red Apron, which I will be reviewing soon but also quite like, at a cheaper price point.

Urban Butcher, 8226 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring, MD, 301-585-5800.

Charcuterie, plus the kind of things which charcuterie restaurants are serving. I ate here once, and really enjoyed my lamb sausage, olives, tuna ceviche, pork belly appetizer, and shepherd's cheese, plus club soda. Maybe the ceviche was overmarinated, but still a tasty meal and I really went away happy. But \$76 plus tip? This is not a blog which whinges about prices, but it is hard for me to justify returning there. I guess I should have stuck with their \$12 cheeseburger. Or maybe sales taxes in Maryland went up when I wasn't looking.

The Red Hen 1822 1st St., Washington, D.C., NW, 202-525-3021, closed for lunch.

Excellent food, sometimes called Italian but fundamentally American in my book, with some pasta courses to make it even more American. The menu seems to change, but my favorite dishes (upon sampling nine or so) were the black linguini and the cod spread on toast. Everything was good or very good, except the dessert disappointed. The prices are reasonable for the quality and the level of noise is manageable and the décor is attractive, so pluses all around, an excellent addition to the DC repertoire.

Ris, 2275 L St., NW, 202-730-2500.

I went here one evening after a disappointing meal at Le Diplomate the night before. So I was willing to work hard to get something really good. I tried to get a reservation in a half dozen other places I preferred over this one, but all of them were full up for Friday night at 6:30. Finally, I settled for this place, in spite of its OK but uninspiring reviews. And when I showed up, the interior – yikes – it reminded me of a Holiday Inn dining room in Akron, Ohio. The clientele – don't ask. And yet...the food here was quite good. I had the best scallops I'd eaten in years. The Amish chicken was quality as well, and I enjoyed the meat plate. The cheese plate was boring but it had...my favorite goat cheese (chevrot). This place has about zero originality, and yet...a lot of the food tastes good. I don't know if I can quite recommend it, and I don't know if I'll end up going back, but I give it a thumbs up, sort of, kind of, but I can't deny it was much more enjoyable than the now-spoiled, overly salted Le Diplomate.

Artie's 3260 Old Lee Highway, near Rt.50, Fairfax, 7030273-7600.

Surprisingly good on all fronts, get the salmon salad with goat cheese added on top. The beef ribs, not available every night, are good as well. In fact they are the best

beef ribs around. But beware the lines at this place, and you can't make a reservation in advance. One of the best places around for food sissies.

Bazin's on Church, 111 Church St., Vienna, 703-255-7212.

Very American, the crowd is very NoVa. It's OK enough, but why would you want to spend the money there? I shared a bunch of dishes and of those I thought the lamb lollipops were clearly the best, in fact they were quite good. Genuinely Turkish and I believe the chef is Turkish as well. But otherwise it is "just another place."

For American, see also Fine Dining, Barbecue, Seafood, Southern, Cajun, and Southwest.

Argentinean

Rural Society, 1177 15th St., between L and M, open for breakfast too, early lunch and dinner, 202-587-2629.

This is in fact *northern* Argentinean food, rural style. Excellent sausage, good empanadas. I liked the soup with chicken, corn, and dumplings. The humita (corn and cheese tamale) was very good too. They serve true Argentinean pizza, which gets good reviews but I haven't tried. The way to go here is to treat it as a snack shop with some unique savory treats. I would resist the temptation to make it your main steak house. I don't doubt the meat here is pretty good (and pretty expensive), but going the meat-only, large plate route to me seemed like it would be a bore, I don't think I will ever try that. For taste and uniqueness I give this place high marks, use it properly and you should too. DC actually has a northern Argentinean restaurant, let's be proud of that.

El Patio, 12303 Twinbrook Parkway, Rockville, 301-231-9225.

Washingtonian magazine praises this place to the skies, but not a word in its favor is convincing. How can do really do this cuisine without first-rate beef, which would have to be the case at their prices?

Victor's II, Rt.29, Falls Church, where Black-Eyed Pea used to be.

Bolivian as well, but the closest you will find to real parillada. You get an enormous plate, it is quite good but not for all tastes, be prepared for huge slabs and meat and innards. Recommended. It would almost make my favorites list, except I can't eat this stuff more than once a year.

Asian (Pan-Asian)

Kyirisan, Chinese-French, 1924 8th St., NW, 202-525-2942.

There are also Filipino and Korean inspirations, plus a general eclecticism. This place is excellent. My favorite here is the scallops with coconut rice and basil ice cream – no it's not a dessert! It is one of the best courses in town. The duck confit and cheesecake dessert are recommended as well, the tofu too. Not cheap, but for what you get reasonably priced, a fine addition to the mid-range DC dining repertoire.

Chiko, 423 8th SE, 202-558-9934.

Chinese and Korean and fusion, this place is all the rage with DC food critics. Everything here is quite good, and the dish with rice, brisket, and egg is one of the better dishes in town. Nothing is outrageously priced. The space is small, it fills up early, and there are only limited reservations. Unlike most lower-priced places in DC, it genuinely seems to be well run. So I am quite enthusiastic, and if I simply stumbled upon this place I would give it a rave review. As it stands, I can't help but feel it is a wee bit overrated. Most of the dishes are on the "quite good by suburban standards for Asian" level, which is a) on its own quite good, and b) a miracle of sorts for SE Washington, D.C. But for those of us from said suburbs, we might be just a little bit less impressed.

Café Asia, 1550 Wilson Boulevard, Rosslyn, 741-0870.

Reasonably good, and quite cheap. Tasty and spicy Asian food of all varieties, most valuable to me here are the Indonesian dishes, which are good and hard to find elsewhere in this area. You might think that a Pan-Asian place won't do most things well, but this place in fact does many dishes reasonably well. Looks like a big cafeteria but the setting is nonetheless somehow attractive.

Balo Kitchen, a food stand/restaurant in The Block, 4221 John Marr St., Annandale, 703-942-5076.

I've been to The Block a bunch of times, and until now I have been reluctant to review it or any of the individual places. Each time I have felt I just don't "get it." And I guess I don't. On the bright side, The Block feels more like East Asia than anywhere else around, and it feels like the Asia of today, not the Asia or Korea of the 1980s that you get so often in Annandale. It is fun to be here, and the crowd is appropriately lively. On the down side, it is maybe the loudest place around, at least during busy hours. But that's not my real gripe. What bugs me is that this is a place for people who think there should be mayonnaise on Asian food. If that's you, go! I think many of the dishes here are well done, or at least "good enough," but I also know they are not for me. I don't like them, and when eating them I wish I was somewhere else in Annandale, because ultimately the food trumps all. So conditional on you liking this place, I am not the critic you should listen to. At the very least, you all should visit because I have seen the future and the future is The Block. Take that as you will.

Austrian

Cafe Tirolo, 4001 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, behind Tara Thai, closed weekends, 703-528-7809.

Formerly run by Austrian, it is now taken over by Koreans. The spaghetti has too much garlic. I can't recommend it any more.

Euro Bistro, 314 Elden St., at Herndon Parkway, 703-481-8158.

Austrian food, with some Thai (!) dishes. Spaetzle.

Balkans

Ambar, 2901 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, 703-875-9663.

A true Balkan restaurant, staffed by many Balkans as well. Given its location in the heart of Clarendon, it is remarkable how authentic this restaurant is. I've eaten in most of the Balkan nations (Bosnia being my favorite for food), and this comes as close as you could reasonably expect. It is perhaps more Serbian than anything else. The catch is this: how good is Balkan food anyway? You're not getting Bulgarian summer berries here, or even the very best Ottoman dishes of Bosnia. You're getting a pretty good facsimile of something that ought to be a little better in the first place. And that is indeed the catch here. I'll go back, but I am not sure it will become a regular haunt for me.

Bangladeshi

Gharer Khabar, 5151 Lee Highway, Arlington, 703-973-2432.

A new Bangladeshi place, now up and running -- sort of -- and suddenly one of my very favorite area restaurants. During their first few months they served only biryanis, and those were a clear first best in the area. Now they have an entire menu. The thing to do is go with four people and ask for all of their best dishes. You should get around eight courses for about \$30 per head. The breads, curries, and odds and ends are all first-rate and original at that. It reminds me of the early days of Thai X-Ing. It is also one of the two or three cheapest places on this whole list. Highly recommended, right now this is one of the places to frequent. Note they only have a few tables, and the kitchen is slow in any case.

Aladdin, 5169 Lee Highway, Garden City Shopping Center, Arlington, 703-533-0077.

A very good Bangladeshi restaurant. Get the shrimp curry in coconut milk, the biryanis (lamb, or goat on Saturdays if you call ahead), the channa, and the fish curry, among other dishes. The halim appetizer is spectacular and indeed they all are. This place is a knockout and our dining companions loved it too. A must try. Note that some of the dishes are fairly small in size, so it is advisable to order a lot here.

Barbecue

Texas Jack's, 2761 Washington Blvd., Arlington, 703-875-0477.

They actually serve West Texas barbecue, El Paso style. Thick beef ribs with pickles and white bread. No, it's not as good as El Paso's best, but it is good enough to scratch the itch. Genuinely good, surprisingly good I would say. Get the beef ribs. And the brussels sprouts. Don't treat this as a perfect, all-purpose barbecue restaurant, but still it is worth having in the repertoire. Not cheap at \$26 for a serving of ribs, but worth it every now and then.

Hill Country, 401 7th St., at D, 202-556-2050

This is a tough place for me to evaluate because I've spent so much time tracking down real Texas barbecue. The brisket here is pretty good, the ribs a disappointment. The sides are quite good, including the beans and collard greens. The sausages are flown in direct from Lockhart, but I get them flown to my home (you can do it too, from Kreuz Market), so that doesn't impress me, though they are good. For a lunch, I was still hungry and it cost me \$40. It is crowded and noisy. It's still the best (only?) Texas barbecue around. Is it as good as Blue Smoke in NYC? No. Will I go here much? No. Will some of you like it? Yes.

Pork Barrel BBQ, 2312 Mount Vernon Avenue Alexandria, Del Rey, 703-822-5699.

The ribs are decent in the flavor department, but too dry and overall everything is served up to you too quickly. Some of the sides are OK but not above that level. I consider this place a missed opportunity. It's in a great neighborhood, VA needs a real bbq place, it is an excellent place to sit and/or meet, but the food just isn't quite at the level it ought to be.

Texas Ribs and BBQ, 7701 Old Branch Ave., Clinton, MD, 301-877-0323.

I had high hopes going to this place, which many describe as the best BBQ around. On the plus side I'll give it high marks for atmosphere and authenticity. It really is Texas-style barbecue and the beans and bread are pretty good too. The problem is that the meat isn't great. The ribs were downright mediocre. The brisket was better, OK I would say, but not good enough to drive around the Beltway for. Until I hear more entreaties, I'm not going back. But I would continue to go if I lived next door.

Dixie Bones, 13440 Occoquan Rd., Woodbridge, 703-492-2205, south on Rt.123, half an hour south from Fairfax, right off 95.

Worth the trip, right now this is the best barbecue around. I like the ribs best. The side orders are excellent, and cooked with great care. Make sure you try the sauces on your meat. Everyone recommends their baked goods as well. This is outside my purview but they appear to be quite fresh.

Willard's, 4300 Chantilly Shopping Center, #1a, on Willard Rd. at the Dulles Expo Center, off Rt.28, not too far from Dulles Airport, 703-488-9970.

They have St. Louis ribs, Texas brisket, Kansas City burnt ends, North Carolina pulled pork, and Jamaican jerk chicken, among other dishes. No one of these is up to the original but at least it resembles pit barbecue. Real side dishes, too. Excellent characters come to eat at this place. Recommended.

Kenny's BBQ Smokehouse, 732 Maryland Ave., NW, 202-547-4553.

This is really quite good North Carolina barbecue. Very much a Mom & Pop. Get the spicy sauce, which is in any case more tangy than spicy. Good collard greens. Right now the best barbecue place in DC, without a doubt.

Urban Bar-B-Que, 2007 Chapman Ave., Rockville, 240-290-4827.

Mostly take-out, they only have ten tables, always a good sign. They plan to expand, which I take to be a bad sign. The French fries are excellent. The sauces were not exactly to my taste. In any case this is a significant sign of progress. One of the best barbecue places around.

Capital BBQ, 707 H St., NW, 202-347-8396, www.capitalbbq.com.

Not as good as it used to be, no longer worth the visit.

Red, Hot, and Blue, 1600 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, 276-7427, several other branches including one near GMU, usually open.

Many people hate this restaurant. Given the recent proliferation of barbecue in this area, there is no longer any reason to go. It defines generic, chain barbecue, and perhaps that is worth knowing, if only to see the contrast with the real thing.

Rocklands, 2418 Wisconsin Ave., NW, 202-333-2558, plus other branches.

If you are thinking of bringing your friend from Kansas City or Texas, don't.

Bare Bones, 20260 Goldenrod Lane in the Hampton Inn, Germantown, 301-916-3700.

Ribs are the specialty, I have yet to go.

BBQ Country, 14215-X Centreville Sq., Centreville, 703-968-5896, there are four others around as well.

I have yet to go.

Pierce's, in or near Williamsburg, off Rt.64.

Pulled pork, they still have an open pit, which is increasingly rare these days. It is not bad but I don't love it.

Jerk Pit, 8145-C Baltimore Ave., Rt.1, College Park, 301-441-4786.

Yes, jerk is a form of barbecue. The wings are recommended. Fridays they have oxtail stew. Service is slow, because they do it the right way. In recent times, however, they have been having problems with the fire and health authorities.

Belgian

Le Mannequin Pis, 18064 Georgia Ave., Olney, 301-570-4800, dinner only.

Yes, Belgian. Gets good reviews. Belgian food is great in Belgium, but in Olney? Everyone raves about the mussels and the beer. Not cheap, I have yet to go.

Belga Café, 514 Eighth St., SE, 202-544-0100, the hours are currently in flux.

Eh. It's OK, but this guide exists to cure you of such places.

Brasserie Beck, 1101 K St., Washington, 202-408-1717.

Good French fries, mussels, and comfort food dishes. It can get crowded and noisy but go early for what can be quite a good meal. The beers here are very popular, I would say stick with the weirder, more Belgian entrees to avoid being stuck with a boring meal.

Bolivian

La Cochabambina, 6653-E Little River Turnpike, Annandale, 703-642-2200.

At this point in Bolivian reviewing, or should I say Cochabamba reviewing, it should suffice to note the differences across places. Overall they are pretty similar. I would say this one has a somewhat broader menu than average, a larger and livelier crowd than average, and the silpancho is especially moist. So it is above-average in a field that is already itself above-average. That said, I still choose my Bolivian meals on the basis of geography and proximity, and probably you should too.

La Fortaleza, La Delicias, two food trucks, they park on Sundays just west of Present Restaurant, Falls Church, Rt.50, Sunday, roughly 11-7.

This is the most authentic Bolivian food around. Get the sopa de mani (peanut soup), enrollado (make sure you taste the green leaf with it), chicarron (superb and super soft and juicy), and solterito, which mixes beef, white cheese, onion, tomato, Bolivian corn, and potato. They also have chairo, falso conejo, tilapia Bolivian style (sometimes), and many other authentic dishes. They don't have real seating but it doesn't matter, this is the place to go. A+ for atmosphere too, knowledge of Spanish helps.

Cinthia's Bakery, 5860 Columbia Pike, Falls Church , 703-998-1771, opens at 9 a.m., closed Tuesday.

A charming bakery and Bolivian eatery with consistently good soups and meat dishes. On weekends it is packed by 11:30 a.m., excellent crowd. The Bolivian offerings in this area have seen an upgrade lately, but this is probably the single best place right now. No surprises, just very fresh and consistent on execution. If you don't know Bolivian cuisine, trying it is a must. It also is the best-smelling of all the Bolivian bakeries. Definitely recommended. There is now also a second branch on the eastern part of Columbia Pike.

Luzmary, 7151 Lee Highway, Falls Church, 703-533-1105.

I would say that Bolivian restaurants in this area are largely converging in terms of quality. When this one first opened it was OK but subpar. Now it's consistently above average, with one of the best silpanchos around, good peanut soup too. I don't think it stands above the better competitors, but it is entirely acceptable to have this as your "neighborhood Bolivian restaurant." The whole sector seems to be evolving toward geographic rather than culinary competition, with improvements along the way.

The Salsa Room, formerly known as Cecilia's, 2619 Columbia Pike, Arlington, 685-0790, usually open.

The main Bolivian place in the area, and a center for Bolivian social life. Excellent food, I really like the Pork Fricasee. The menu is not purely Bolivian (Mexican specialties are offered), but you should probably order Bolivian, even though everything looks good. Music and dancing at night on weekends.

The key to Andean restaurants in the U.S. is to avoid ordering a plain piece of meat; the quality of the meat will not be bad, but it will not be high enough to justify your choice. Look instead for sauces, stews, soups, and concoctions. Or a piece of meat with lots piled on top of it, especially chiles and green sauce.

Sibarita Restaurant, 2716 N. Washington Blvd., Arlington, 703-276-1050.

A very good mom n' pop, gets crowded too. Most of the restaurant is in the back room. I am fond of the silpancho here, chilies and tomatoes and egg piled on thin meat, pounded, on top of a bed of rice and fried potatoes, make sure you have them bring you the spicy green sauce to spray on top, liberally. The best soups appear on varied days, not all of the time.

Fanny's Restaurant, 436 S. Washington St., Falls Church, 703-532-4155.

Not my very favorite Bolivian place, but competitive with the other good ones. It is the place where you are most likely to see a huge, disgusting pile of Pique Macho with ketchup and mustard slathered on top. That's worth something. They also have a kidney soup which no other place around seems to. If you live nearby, at the very least this is worth a visit. Like most Bolivian places around, they will simply assume that you speak Spanish.

Victor's Menu, 436 S. Washington St., 703-532-8878, victor_brujo@yahoo.com.

I've now been here three times, and great every time. One of the best Bolivian places around, and probably the largest portions of any place listed on this guide.

Pike Pizza, at the intersection of Columbia Pike and George Mason, probably that is Arlington, 703-521-3010.

First-rate Bolivian. They do not, however, have pizza, despite the name. The best Bolivian sausage around, too. Amazing atmosphere.

Luzmila's Cuisine, 809 W. Broad St., Falls Church, 703-237-0047.

Mom and pop Bolivian place, good enough to enjoy and very friendly and fun. Pablo Ayala tells me that their saltenas are very good.

My Bakery Café, off Columbia Pike, after Blair Rd., and right before Full Kee.

Recommended for Bolivian pastries and breads. One Bolivian reader recommends the "api, a purplish corn-based drink, served hot," I may stick with jellyfish. The chicharron and mote are recommended as well.

Bosnian

Restaurant Cosmopolitan, N. Kings Highway, across from Huntington Metro Station.

Food in Bosnia is excellent, I am told this leans closer to the Austro-Hungarian direction (dollop of sour cream on the top) than to Turkish. Many people seem to

like it. I am also told you can find Bosnian food in Washington Grill, on Vermont Ave, just north of K St. They have fried veal sausages wrapped in bread and eaten with raw onions and a sauce called ivar, consisting of peppers and eggplant.

Brazilian

Fogo de Chao, 1101 Pennsylvania Ave., 202-347-4668, www.fogodechao.com, Saturday opens at 4:30, Sunday at 4:00.

A clear first choice for Brazilian right now. Churrascaria. All the meat you can eat. The quality is surprisingly high, and the salting is just right. From a chain based in Sao Paulo. Excellent salad bar. Not the real thing, but closer than I thought they would come. Dinner starts at \$44.50, though, lunch starts at \$24.50.

Chima Steak House, 8010 Towers Crescent Drive, Suite 100, Vienna, 703-595-7755.

Another Brazilian steak house, churrascaria, very stylish, draws a mod crowd of wealthy Latinos and sometimes Arabs. Lots of fun, not cheap, the lamb and the pork caked in cheese are the best. The salads could be improved. I like Fogo de Chao better, but because of proximity, and a Brazilian-loving daughter, I'll end up going here yet again.

Texas de Brasil Churrascaria, 11750 Fair Oaks, 703-452-4111.

How bad can a churrascaria be? This place is fun but I found the meats a bit salty for my taste.

Greenfield, 1801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Maryland, 301-881-3397.

This famous Queens churrascaria now has a branch in Maryland. The meats here are better than in the other Brazilian places of this area. That being said, the salad bar is a disappointment. Still worth the visit, however, especially if you don't know the concept. And definitely construct your own feijoada from the salad bar, see directly above for instructions.

The Grill from Ipanema, 1858 Columbia Road, NW, 202-986-0757.

For my tastes, Brazil is one of the two or three best food countries in the world, so comparisons are tough. But this is good enough to enjoy, though no better. Get the Feijoada, a stewed mix of black beans, meats, sausage, collard greens, and the powdery farina. Make sure you add in the orange slices. A treat. Some of the other dishes are mediocre. This place stands or dies on its Feijoada.

Brazil Market, 11425 Grandview Ave, Wheaton, 301 942 8412.

They have Brazilian sandwiches, snacks, canned goods, and fried yucca thingies. Not an amazing selection but if you are yearning for a touch of Brazil this does in fact supply it.

Bread

Breadline, 1751 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, 202-822-8900. Closed weekends and dinners, mainly a breakfast and lunch place.

Everyone loves this place, I have yet to go. Supposed to have first-class ingredients, but at one-third the usual price.

Burmese

Myanmar Restaurant, 7810-C Lee Highway, Falls Church, 703-289-0013.

Excellent if you order well. The place is hard to spot from the road, in Merrifield Park Plaza, I think, just west of the big cemeteries on Lee Highway, a bit east of Gallows. Get the Ginger Salad, and more generally don't be afraid to go spicy. .

The Mandalay, 930 Bonifant St., near Georgia Ave., Silver Spring, 301-585-0500.

Good, but it used to be much better. Go heavy on the noodles and appetizers, the main dishes are inconsistent and perhaps this is no longer the best Burmese place around.

A Taste of Burma, 126 Edds Lane, Sterling, 703-444-8511.

This place is supposed to be very good. As usual, in a Burmese place try some of the salads. The Post recommends the Singapore noodles as well, and the noodles more generally.

Cajun

Chasin' Tails, Cajun Seafood and Bar, 2200 N Westmoreland St., Arlington, 703-538-2565.

The name of the place says it all. I had good catfish there, good fries, good rice and beans. I didn't have time to try the signature dish of boiled crawfish, as spicy as you want them. The place does not offer you a fork but expects you to eat everything with your hands, a sign of civilizational advance I would say. Currently I would rate this place as the Cajun leader of the area. It looks distressingly corporate, and the food is too salty, but still it is good. Worth a try. When you are done walk down two

doors to the left to One More Page Books, excellent, and hardly known, most evenings they close at 8 so maybe start with the bookstore first.

Bayou Bakery, 1515 N. Courthouse Road, Arlington, 703-243-2410.

Not bad but not great either. A fun place to sit and hang out. The Andouille I quite like. The cheese plate is a good snack. The more complex dishes can be a bit of a sludge. They are supposed to have good baked goods and many people enjoy the coffee with the chicory; that is not for me. I am happy to go if I am nearby but I would not make a special trip to this place. Still, I am glad it is there.

New Orleans Cajun, 6168 Arlington Blvd., Falls Church, 703-536-2288.

Run by Vietnamese from Louisiana, and they have a touching story, ask them about it if you wish. Lots of crab. Lots of Po Boys. And boiled spicy crawfish. Fried fish too. Fresh Beignet for dessert. I quite like this place. I don't like Po Boys more generally, but if I were going to have one in NoVa, I would start here. Spicy crawfish don't really disappoint. This place does not rival the peaks of southwest Louisiana, but can you go here and enjoy yourself at very reasonable prices? Absolutely.

Acadiana, 901 New York Ave., NW, 202-393-1510, www.acadianrestaurant.com.

The Jeff Tunks place. Everyone says too much butter, not enough chiles. I have not yet been, I am waiting for someone to pay my way. I am still waiting.

RT's Restaurant, 3804 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria, 684-6010.

OK Cajun food. Messy and relatively authentic, not as cheap as you might think. I like the peppered shrimp here but overall it has been in decline for a long time.

New Orleans Bistro, 4907 Cordell Ave., 301-986-8833

I am told they serve Fried Green Tomatoes.

Okra's Louisiana Bistro, 9110 Center St., Manassas, 703-330-2729.

I have yet to go.

Cambodian-Taiwanese

Maketto, Cambodian/Taiwanese, 1315 H St. NE, 202-838-9972.

Restaurant, café, fun space to sit, space to buy sneakers, all-purpose slacker hangout, they open at 7 a.m. but not all parts of the menu are available at all times. For weekend lunch for instance you can only get the Cambodian entrees, not the Taiwanese, so check before you go at a particular time. I have tried all of the

weekend lunch items, and thought a few were excellent and the rest were at least good. The noodle soup and some kind of Khmer salad with beef and things piled on top of each other; I don't see it on their current on-line menu. The Taiwanese fried chicken gets good reviews on-line. A fun place, worth trying, it may end up as too trendy but still I found it to be a positive experience and where else can you get Cambodian food around here these days?

Cameronian – see Nigerian

Caribbean, see also Haitian, Jamaican, Cuban, and Trinidadian, among other individual headings

See also *Caribbean Grill*, listed under *Cuban*. There are also some good Caribbean places on 18th St. in Adams-Morgan.

Caribbean Corner, 4008A University Drive, Fairfax, 703-246-9040

Mostly Jamaican, this is a real mom and pop restaurant in the middle of downtown Fairfax. It's strangely silent. They only have two tables and a few chairs. The dining room is not really separated from the kitchen, or for that matter the cashier station, by any clear line. I've tried the jerk chicken and that was genuinely good. I'll go back, at the very least this place is worth a try.

Ginger Cove/Ginger Reef, 822 E St., NW, at 8th St., 202-248-6007, 202-248-7733, the two phone numbers are for the two separate places.

Ginger Reef is only for Friday and Saturday nights, get the picture? These are party places for yuppies to buy alcohol. If you must go, try the appetizers. The sad thing is, these people once ran Fish Wings n' Tings, in the good old days. They keep on reinventing the same restaurant, with successively higher prices and lower quality.

Caribbean Palace, 7680 New Hampshire Ave., Takoma Park Shopping Center, 301-431-1563, right at University Blvd.

The place smells great, but I have never eaten there. Take-out only - that's why. Those who live closer should go. See also under *Jamaican* and *Haitian*, for some other suggestions.

Also, there are several West Indian places along Georgia Ave., they tend to be clustered near the intersection with Rhode Island. Most are open only for lunch, though, which makes it hard for me to get there.

Caribbean Sea Seafood Restaurant, 6869 New Hampshire Ave., Takoma Park, 301-891-3497, closed Mondays. It is hard to see from New Hampshire but it is there, if

you are coming from Univ. Blvd. it is on the left just a bit past East-West Highway, tucked away in a strip mall, removed from the street.

Lots of lobster, lots of conch, lots of shrimp and fish. This is neither a subtle restaurant nor a restaurant with many different tastes and flavors. But their best flavors are very good indeed. Their devil sauce is one of the best spicy sauces around. It's not just hot it has real oomph in the soul. Good rice too. This is a very specialized restaurant but also a very good restaurant. High marks for atmosphere too, although note that the lobster is not cheap.

Island Café, Beltway Plaza Mall, 6054 Greenbelt Road, Greenbelt, 301-345-0462.

Good roti, curries, other West Indian specialties. It is in a wonderful shopping mall, great for people watching, I bet most of my readers have never been there. One of the best mall restaurants on this list.

The Georgia Ave. row...right now you might try C+I Jackie's One Stop, 3400 block, at Park, 202-882-7089, but the turnover is high. Usually there are a good half dozen or so Caribbean places along Georgia Ave., starting around Howard U., stretching up to Maryland.

Cheese

Cheesetique, 2411 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria, 703-706-5300, closes Sunday at 6.

The area's best cheese shop, but the restaurant/café inside keeps on getting better. I love the cheese plate here, although at about \$40 it is pricy. The accompaniments are just right and overall it is at least as good as what you would get in a very fancy restaurant. The sandwiches and macaroni and cheese are strong, and cheaper. Anything with cheese here will be very good and it is also a nice homey yuppie hangout. The wine selection is impressive. This is a limited-purpose restaurant, but it probably should be in your repertoire.

There is also the cheese shop in Union Market, probably the best cheese shop around.

Cheese steaks

Al's Steak House, 1504 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria, 703-836-9443.

I have friends from Philly who swears that good, indeed great cheese steaks exist. I'm still waiting for proof. But if five of you write and tell me to try this place, I will. In any case this is supposed to be a good place for local character.

Chicken

See Peruvian, and also Colombian.

Pollo Campero, 5852 Columbia Pike, just west of the Best Buy at Bailey's Crossroads. Try also 11420 Georgia Ave., Wheaton, 301-942-6868, and 496 Elden St. Herndon.

Not Peruvian chicken, just plain fried chicken. A Latin version of KFC but far superior. The French fries and sides are excellent. By 11:00 on weekends the crowds have arrived, sometimes parking is a real pain. Excellent for people-watching, recommended if you can stand eating fried chicken.

Chili

Hard Times Cafe, 1404 King St., Alexandria, 1117 Nelson St., Rockville, 394 Elden St., Herndon, usually open.

Chili up to five different ways, Texas and Cincinnati style. The tastes are blander than they used to be. Not up to the quality level in southern Ohio, but then again what is? Purists will never be happy here, but if you've never tried it you should.

Chinese-Uighur

Queen Ammanisa, 320 23rd St. Crystal City, 703-414-7888.

Yes, we now have a Uighur restaurant, did you know that Fairfax is a center for the Uighur community in the United States? I am fond of this place, and will continue to visit it, but there are some complexities. First, they serve a dark and complex spicy sauce which improves almost all of their dishes. But you must ask for it. Ask for it, otherwise things are too tame. Second, they have three different menus, none of which exactly describes what they offer. Third, they don't believe you when you say you want it spicy, and are otherwise resistant to offering useful instruction.

If you can fight through all of these hurdles, you will have an excellent meal, available nowhere else in this area.

The best dish is the dry spicy noodles, make sure they make them spicy. Most of the vegetables are quite good. The bread dishes are authentic, but the bread needs to be a little better. Anything with cumin is worth trying. Not all of the dishes you order will succeed, so take this into account when choosing.

Recommended, but let's hope you're up to it.

Kiroran, 10728 Fairfax Blvd., Fairfax, next to the H-Mart, please note the sign does not say "Kiroran," rather right now it is "QTea Café." 703-865-5033.

Uighur food in Fairfax! Hurray! And it's very good. In terms of selection, it doesn't go beyond the offerings at Queen Ammanisa, but it is more consistent and has an overall friendlier vibe. Get the Qurqur soup dumplings and also ask for Lahmacun noodles spicy. For all dishes, add the spicy sauce on your table. This is essential. Repeat after me: Uighur food in Fairfax!

Eerkin's Uighur Cuisine, 4008 University Drive, Fairfax, 703-352-1121.

More Uighur food in Fairfax! Of the area's Uighur restaurants, this one is the least mom and pop, the one you could take a job interview candidate to. As you might expect, it has the best ingredients of the local selection of Uighur restaurants, but is the weakest on the hot and spicy dimension. But since a lot of Uighur food is not intended to be so scorching, that can be quite a good trade-off. I very much recommend this place, while stressing it can and should coexist with Kiroran and the area's other Uighur restaurants in your regular repertoire.

Chinese

Peter Chang Q, 4500 East West Highway, Bethesda, 240-800-3722.

What's the point of a review? Your visit here will be all about *timing*. For how long will this place stay wonderful? The menu offers Peking Duck, some dim sum, and Beijing street food with the Peter Chang standbys of cilantro fish rolls, Sichuan chili chicken, scallion fried fish, dried fried eggplant, and so on. So far it's the best Peter Chang opening I've been to, so you certainly ought to try the place, and we'll see how the trajectory develops.

Tiger Fork, Blagden Alley, behind 922 N St. NW, 202-733-1152.

Hong Kong dishes mainly, I was skeptical when the Washington Post rated this as the seventh best place in all of D.C. Yet it delivers. Avoid the Sichuan dishes, which are not really hot or properly ma la anyway. Get the pork ribs, the barbecue plate, the chow foon noodles, and the fried rices. The cauliflower is also quite good. While it's hard to compare this place to D.C.'s best Western food one way or the other, it exceeded expectations in every regard. It's an order of magnitude better than any other Cantonese restaurant around. Note, though, it is pretty loud and the core style is trendy more than mom and pop. The prices are reasonable enough, though I don't think the whole fish is quite worth the price they are charging, that said it is still pretty good.

East Dumpling House, 12 North Washington St., Suite 14G, Rockville, 301-762-6200, no reservations, opens at 10:30.

Real Beijing street food. Mostly kabobs (with Chinese spices) and dumplings, though the cold dishes are good too. I count 38 different forms of dumpling, including lamb, chicken, mushroom, bean curd and cabbage, and many other options in various combinations and manifestations. Their "Tofu Prime Products" are excellent too. These are the best dumplings around and this place should immediately be considered essential dining. It has no close substitute in this area and in terms of quality and price it is excellent.

Super Bowl Noodle House, 785-G Rockville Pike, Rockville, 301-738-0086.

This place is a revelation and a knock-out, one of the absolute must-visits. It is a mix of Shanxi, Sichuan, and Taiwanese styles, with some other odd dishes thrown in. Order the Shanxi Noodle Soup but also – above all – at least one of the Spicy Dry Hot Pots, one of the best dishes around in any restaurant. It is hard to describe if you don't already know it but very yummy. Get the flatbread with pork inside, the Chong Qing Dry Chili Chicken, the spicy cucumber salad, the soft tofu with numbing, and then ask for the specials. I don't know of any other Chinese place around which serves food like this. It is both high quality and authentic, go, go, go. It is also very cheap and the staff is cheery and friendly, a winner all around.

Bob's Shanghai 66, 305 North Washington St. Rockville, 301-315-6668, where the old Bob's Noodle used to be, the Noodle place is now across the street.

Consistently excellent Chinese food. For all of the Shanghai packaging, you can think of this as mostly Taiwanese food with Shanghai and Sichuan around the edges (a good mix!). The Xiao Long Bao are quite good and you can get them with either pork or "crab yolk," both are worth trying. The Peas with Mustard Greens are a must and in general this place has the best and freshest greens of any Chinese in the area. Get the Taiwanese cucumbers too. First-rate noodles. I also liked the flounder fillet in chili sauce and thought the Taiwanese sausage was quite subtle. Definitely recommended.

Panda Gourmet, Langdon Days Inn, 2700 New York Ave., just east of Bladensburg, NE, 202-636-3588.

Now this is something, the best Chinese restaurant ever to grace Washington, D.C. And in a dump of a roadside motel. You must of course ask for the secret Chinese menus, as the Chinese-American fare does not appear to be of interest. They have have a special Shaanxi noodles dish, get it. They have a special Xian dish which you can think of as like a Chinese hamburger, albeit with pork. Get it. They have the best Dan Dan noodles this area has seen, ever. Get it. The best cold Chengdu spicy noodles I have had. The best cumin beef of any place around. The spicy fish wasn't bad, but not up to the other really good Chinese places around here. In any case this is a top drawer Chinese restaurant and for authenticity it is #1 around of all choices.

You will note it is hard to get here, even with a car. If you are driving west on New York Avenue, you need to make a funny U-turn at the sign for The Washington Times building, and go under an unpromising overpass back to a service road, eventually the move will pay off.

Incredibowl, 14005 Lee Jackson Highway (Rt.50), just east of Rt.28, Chantilly, 703-631-5888.

Where Sichuan Village used to be located. No surprises here, but this is a considerably above average take on all the usual Sichuan classics. I especially enjoyed the Fish in Hot Chili Oil and the Shredded Potatoes with Peppers. Note that the place is small and it can fill up pretty quickly.

Nanjing Bistro, 11213 Lee Highway, Suite C, Fairfax, 703-385-8686.

Imagine a whole restaurant devoted to Chinese food as it is found in Nanjing! This place is the real deal. You do need to ask for the Chinese menu. Then simply order any dish that appears to have anything to do with Nanjing, such as the shredded tofu dish toward the end of the menu. I also quite like the simple egg with pepper, and their equivalent of spicy dumplings with soup. The pepper-fired spare ribs and the shredded potato. There is some kind of salt duck special which you (often) need to order in advance, I haven't tried it yet. Unless you are from Nanjing or thereabouts, this place almost certainly has lots of dishes you haven't seen before. Mostly not so spicy, by the way. I'm just getting to learn this place, but figured I should get word out right away. Excellent for atmosphere, without being a dump, do note it seems to get pretty busy so go early or reserve in advance. It is one of the current must-visits in the DC area.

88 China Restaurant, 13635 Lee Jackson Memorial Highway, Chantilly, about five minutes' drive west of Fair Oaks mall, 703-378-0869.

I call it "The new old China Star." It's run by the people who ran China Star until 2012, and after the original Peter Chang version of the place. They have pretty much copied the China Star menu, to at least ninety percent (I don't see ma la rabbit, however). I tried three core dishes for old times' sake. The Szechuan chili chicken (on the bone!) was a whole level better than it used to be. The braised fish was clearly better and finer. The scallion fried fish had a better accompaniment of scallions than it used to have, but was slightly scallier in terms of the fried batter, overall a draw in terms of quality. So this is like the old China Star restaurant, but overall it seems to be definitely better. I will go again, and you should too.

Dumpling Queen, 13942 Metrotech Dr., Chantilly, closed Tuesdays, 703-378-4222.

An unusual bundle of real Chinese dishes and for-America corruptions. But the best items here are excellent: get the Xianjiang pork spare ribs, one of the better Chinese dishes in

this entire region. The fried tofu with chiles. The cold noodles and dan dan noodles. I am told that soon, in about a month's time, they will be gearing up their menu with a full set of Chinese offerings. Then this will be one of the very best Chinese restaurants around, it is already worth a visit.

North West Chinese Food, 7313-E Baltimore Ave. College Park, 240-714-4473, very close to University of Maryland.

I really enjoyed my meal here, because I love this cuisine and it is hard to find around these parts. This is a fully authentic mom and pop where you can get spicy cumin lamb burger, Shaanxi and Yunnan style noodles, and meat on skewers. That said, this place still has a few kinks to iron out. The waitress doesn't speak English, many on Yelp complain about the service (I had no problems), and not all of the flavors fully come together. I found it delightful, I expect it to improve, and I will definitely go back. Recommended, but with some variance around the edges.

Taste@Hong Kong, 13912 Lee Jackson Memorial Hwy, Chantilly, 703-378-7680.

Cantonese, with an enormous, sprawling menu. The food here is fresh, tasty, and consistent, with plenty of authentic options, including yams and also a big choice of casseroles. I don't know that they have any killer dishes, but you'll do very well here if you avoid the more typical American Chinese dishes and stick with the real thing. This has to rank among the top three or four Cantonese places around, recommended, it further cements my growing view that Chantilly is becoming the ethnic food center of this broader area.

Yu Zhou Café, 576 N Frederick Ave, Gaithersburg, 301-330-9808.

This is a strange but also excellent place. The clientele is either Latino or Chinese, and they order accordingly. Thus the secret Chinese menu is *in Chinese only*. I tried to order some dishes I knew. The fish with Sichuan peppercorns was excellent, and with an amazing amount of quality fish, sharp flavors too, not the muddy, gluggy route. I ordered Dan Dan noodles and received some kind of hot sesame noodles, they were pretty good. Hot and Sour Wontons are recommended. If you can't read Chinese, I don't really know how to crack this menu. I was there too early to do a lot of pointing to other tables. At the very least this place seems to be competitive with many of the other Sichuan eateries, and it has possible upside potential beyond that.

Sichuan Jin River, formerly called Sichuan Pavilion. 410 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, just north of Rockville Town Centre, invisibly deep into a strip mall with "Saigon" restaurant and Revere Bank, don't miss it! 240-403-7351, book in advance! But they only take reservations for groups of six or more. Go early! Go!

Get the Dan Dan Noodles and the Jelly Noodles. Get dumplings and other dumpling-like phenomena. This is the most authentic Sichuan restaurant around and it makes Hong Kong Palace look like Burger King. The spicy fish in hot pot is incredible. The crispy

potato. Just choosing from the starting, first section of the menu makes this a “Top Five” restaurant. First-rate ambience and clientele as well. Highly recommended.

Hunan Gate Restaurant, 4233 N. Fairfax Drive, Arlington, 703-243-5678.

On the surface a mediocre Hunan place, but underneath there is a Manchurian menu, originally in Chinese only but now parts are in English. Order from that! No other place around tastes like this one. I recommend the tofu scallion salad, the julienne potato salad, the NE style pancake, the chive pot stickers, the cumin lamb, and the pork riblets with Italian flat bean stew, plus the amazing chicken dish with the large, flat wheat noodles, a real winner. I am not sure how you can get any of these but try your best. Nor should you forget the pork belly stew with wide glass noodles or the pots and dishes with fermented cabbage. This place is still getting better. Definitely recommended.

Shanghai Taste, 1121 Nelson St., Rockville, 301-279-0806.

Ignore the regular menu, you need to order from the Chinese menu, a translation of which can be found here: <http://www.donrockwell.com/index.php?/topic/18971-shanghai-taste-shanghainese-with-special-chinese-menu-in-small-shopping-center-on-nelson-street-next-to-hard-times-cafe/?p=222735>. Get the Xiao Long Bao, which though not as good as those from NYC or California, are still pretty good, probably the best of our region. Those are the dumplings filled with liquid. If need be ask the waitress for further help but stress your bona fide credentials. The fish dishes on the Chinese menu are pretty good. IGNORE THE REGULAR MENU. This place is small and it fills up quite easily, so plan to arrive early. It is nice to have a new and fairly unique real Chinese restaurant in the basic repertoire, recommended.

Uncle Liu's Hot Pot, [2972 Gallow Road, Falls Church, VA](#), 703-560-6868.

It is located on Gallows Rd., between Rt.29 and 50, the core info is [here](#), and a very reliable source sends me the following review:

The old Sichuan restaurant a few doors down from Great Wall—I think it was called Peking Village—which used to be there has been replaced by a place called “Uncle Liu’s Hotpot.” It’s owned by [HK Palace](#) and, as the name implies (and, unlike HK Palace, it’s Chinese name is the same as the English name, though it’s really Old Liu’s Hotpot City), it specializes in hotpot. We were very excited before even going in, because, while a few Sichuan places offer hotpot (the defunct place up in Gaithersburg that was a Hui-Sichuan restaurant; [China Canteen](#); [Great Wall Szechwan](#) if you let them know in advance), none even comes close to being the real thing. The good news is that this place is as close as I think you’re going to get to real [Sichuan hotpot](#) in the US.

They have a special hotpot menu, which, though only in Chinese when it comes to ordering which type of base you want (it’s on the front of the menu;

they have a variety of choices—classic all spicy, classic half spicy half non-spicy, and then they have a mushroom broth one, one with fish head, and one or two others), has in both English and Chinese a list of all the things to order to go into the hotpot. That list is very good—has all the classic ingredients (though some are a little different from what you'd get in Sichuan, e.g., the doufu pi) and is maybe about 1/2 the number of ingredients you'd have on offer at an average hotpot restaurant in Chengdu, so it's really pretty good. The prices are very reasonable, and, even better, it's open until midnight every day (again, a very good sign of authenticity, as hotpot restaurants in Chengdu are packed until very late at night). We had the classic all spicy base (\$6 for the table; it's the cheapest option)—for our taste, it could have been a bit more oily-lardy and could have had more seasonings in it, especially chilis and Sichuan peppercorns, but it was still very, very good (and hotpot restaurants in Chengdu have been moving away from the lard as well for health reasons in the last few years; also, outside of Sichuan itself, hotpot restaurants in China tend to go lighter on the peppercorns because they know non-Sichuanese aren't as used to it). Also extremely positive is that they have a dipping sauce station (the dipping sauce, which is essential, is another \$1 per person, again, it's only in Chinese on the front of the hotpot menu where the bases are listed) that is self-serve, something you don't get even in China. You can do the classic version (which I did last night)—sesame oil, soy sauce, black vinegar, garlic, salt, msg (yes, a pinch can't hurt), scallions, and cilantro—but they have a lot more there as well if you want (though, for my mind, stuff like oyster sauce and hoisin sauce is an abomination with hotpot).

The regular menu of the restaurant combines the usual Chinese-American standards with maybe about half to 2/3 of HK Palace's Sichuan dishes (though no specials on the wall that I noticed). We didn't order from that—hotpot is definitely the way to go in the evening, and that's what every table was getting—the place was basically full around 8 but had mostly emptied out by 9. What we're also excited about, however, is that they offer a daily lunch buffet from 11-3 and, judging from the labels on the buffet setup, they include in the buffet (at least on the weekends—maybe they pare it down during the week) a lot of their very good Sichuan cold dishes and a good selection of main dishes (though less heavy on the Sichuan stuff). The buffet includes pho and bubble tea. We're now conflicted—do we try the buffet for our next trip or stick to the hotpot? Probably the latter, especially as we're definitely going to try the mushroom base.

The Sichuan dishes are excellent (see HK Palace) and the buffet is even worthwhile – Sichuan dishes – if you arrive before 11:30 a.m.

Michael's Noodle House, 10038 Darnestown Road., Rockville, (301) 738-0370.

Imagine a combination of A&J and Hong Kong Palace and you have what is perhaps the best Chinese restaurant in this area right now. The dishes are a mix of Sichuan, Taiwanese, and Manchurian. It has the best noodles and best dumplings around; the Sichuan wontons are a must. Shredded tofu is great. Singapore Noodle is surprisingly good and quite subtle. Pork with spicy noodles, in various incarnations, is excellent. I've yet to try the soups but they look very good. Go mostly with the smaller dishes. The décor is slightly nicer than at most Mom and Pops, the owners are Taiwanese, not so much English is spoken by the staff, and it draws an older Chinese crowd, less raucous than many other excellent Chinese places. Highly recommended.

Reren, 817 7th St NW, Washington, DC, 202-290-3577.

Chinese, mix of Shanghai and Sichuan, plus some Japanese too. Small, cheap. I would not make a special trip to eat here, but the place has perfect location right next to the Verizon Center. Upstairs is remarkably quiet. Several times I have had no trouble getting in without a reservation. It is pleasant. And the food is "good enough to enjoy," I do look forward to eating here when I do. The Shanghai and non-spicy Chinese dishes are better than the Sichuan, though the latter are certainly acceptable. This place is worth knowing about, if you understand its proper place in the universe.

East Pearl, 838 B Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD, 301-838-8663.

This is now the best Cantonese place around. Maybe that's not saying much but it is genuinely tasty food. The tofu dishes are especially good and the Congee is also worth trying. Many people do not like the service, which is diffident at best. Still, this place delivers on some key dimensions. It tends to attract a mix of Chinese grandparents and clueless American suburbanites, so be it.

Hong Kong Palace, 6387 E. Leesburg Pike, Seven Corners Center, Falls Church, 532-0940. In the mall with Home Depot and Barnes and Noble, though both are down below on the other side of the mall.

This was the premier Cantonese place around, but now it is Sichuan, at least if you ask for the special Chinese menu. The lamb with cumin is good, the Dan Dan noodles too, the fish in the bowl with all the chiles, but overall this place is somewhat past its former peak. Don't forget the beef with bamboo shoot and the Chengdu dumplings and the specials.

China Jade, 16805 Crabbs Branch Way The Grove Shopping Center, Rockville, 301-963-1570.

This is run by the same people who do Hong Kong Palace and it has pretty much the same menu. Oddly, for a new branch, it is not quite as good as the home base. Their braised pork belly is much superior, but the five other dishes we tried were all lesser than at Falls Church. They were still pretty good and if you live in Maryland

you may wish to come here. But right now it isn't worth the trip from VA. It may yet improve, we will see. It also has a less interesting atmosphere and décor than the home branch.

100 Degree Chinese Cuisine, 3903 Fair Ridge Drive, Unit H, in the mall with the Harris Teeter.

There is now a real Hunan restaurant in Fairfax, near Fair Oaks Mall, menu [here](#), their web site is [here](#). It attracts an almost exclusively Chinese clientele and, to my untrained eye, some of them seem to be the Uighur group which hangs out in Fairfax but does not (yet?) have a restaurant of its own.

This place is not cooking at the exalted level of [Sichuan Pavilion in Rockville](#), but it is competitive with the other semi-authentic Chinese places in this region. I sampled five dishes and all were very good. If you were getting three dishes, try the fish in black bean sauce, the hot and sour diced chicken and the green beans. Recommended to anyone with an interest in real Chinese food.

China Star, Fairfax City Mall, Rt.236 and Pickett.

China Star for the last two years has had new owners. It has regained a lot of its previous quality. Scallion fried fish is good again. Green beans are pretty good, though not braised fish. The specials are worth trying, definitely, even though they are only in Chinese. I like their crispy rice dish. The place is not perfect, and their "American-Chinese" dishes are still pretty dreadful. But I go here often, and I am happy to recommend it to anyone who has at least a clue as to how to order well in a Chinese restaurant.

Bob's Noodle 66, now sometimes called Bob's Bistro but not on the sign, 305 N. Washington St., Rockville, 301-315-6668, usually open, cash only.

Very good Chinese food, nor is it replicated by the other best Chinese places around. More Taiwanese than most local Chinese restaurants. The thick noodles are amazing. I loved the fish and the ginger casseroles. Get the oyster pancake as a starter. The last fish dish, lightly fried fish in a sweet and sour sauce, is excellent. Not to mention the tempura soft shell crab. They have duck blood too.

Distinct Taste, 617 S. Frederick Ave., Gaithersburg, 301-987-0800.

What a weird restaurant! No one seems to go here, and when I called for a reservation they were absolutely baffled, as if no one ever had done such a thing before. The restaurant is dedicated to regional Chinese cuisine, but it's not like the other regional Chinese places around. The best thing to do is go here, order a bunch of dishes you've never heard of (and they do have quite a few of those), and then half of them will be excellent, half so-so. If you order your Sichuan favorites, and expect a version of the familiar, nope sorry that is not what will be delivered. Or maybe on another day it will

be. My favorite item was the tofu skin in black bean sauce, very nice textures, the fish dishes are good too. Overall it's like pressing the hyperspace button on one of those old video games. It's recommended for the diner who has tried everything, all others you take your chances.

Peter Chang China Cafe, 1771 Carl D. Silver Parkway, Fredericksburg; 540-786-8988.

Yes it's that Peter Chang. I've only been three times, but each time it was excellent, and that was without the Master in the house. The tastes are finer than in the other Sichuan places. No, I don't really know what you should get. Opting for chilies, cumin, noodles, and the like works well, though, if you are looking to take the obvious road. The coriander fish rolls are a must and they have been a Chang specialty for years now. The location is not convenient, but it is right by lots of shopping, including a big Barnes & Noble, and not too far from 95.

X.O. Taste Seafood Restaurant, 6124 Arlington Blvd., Falls Church, 703-536-1630, note that you actually have to turn north on Patrick Henry Drive to see the place and that is also the best way to get there.

This is a quite good and authentic Cantonese place around and their menu is superb, all the way down to the casseroles. Nothing here tastes bad. The service is fine. I like the atmosphere. The name of the restaurant is excellent. It is maybe missing a bit on the wow factor, but along with Lotus Garden in Vienna this is at the top of the Cantonese choices around. Over time it has gotten better and still seems to be improving. I always enjoy eating there.

Great Wall Sichuan House Restaurant, 1527 14th St., Washington, 202-797-8888, www.greatwallszechuanhouse.com, usually open.

Most of the food is the usual junk. Their ma-la dishes, now posted on a real menu, are quite potent. Get the bean sprouts and the double cooked pork and the fish with tofu. The cucumber is good. It's not as good as the best suburban places, but a step ahead of anything else in DC. Quite authentic, numbing, and very cheap. They have evolved from neighborhood ghetto take-out to a Chinese and yuppie sit down.

China Canteen, 808 Hungerford Drive, Suite E, Rockville, 301-424-1616.

A real Sichuan place, dating back several years. Why didn't more of you write me about it? Get some of the cold dishes. The Dan-Dan noodles are excellent. Otherwise get dishes that are not otherwise available in non-Szechuan restaurants. Not as good as the best of Sichuan Pavilion, but worth going to. Perhaps the most extensive Sichuan menu around.

Full Kee's, in Chinatown, 509 H St., 202-371-2233.

The snow pea pod leaves here, or whatever they are called, are great. As are the dumplings in the soup. Some mediocre dishes, but if you order well this place is a knock-out. Mostly Cantonese. Written up by The New York Times as one of the most interesting places in DC.

Full Kee's, Rt.7, Falls Church, in the mall with Trader Joe's, across from the Borders, also accessible from Columbia Pike.

The DC place just opened a branch in VA. So far better than the original, it is excellent Chinese food. Be adventurous when you order. Excellent lobster, dumplings, tofu dishes. Critics laud the casseroles, and while I can see their merits, they don't give me much visceral enjoyment along the yummy dimension.

Seven Seas, 1776 E. Jefferson St., Rockville, 301-770-5020, usually open, they have some good whole fish dishes.

Peking Gourmet Inn, 6029 Leesburg Pike, Baileys Crossroads, 671-8088.

An old hang-out for conservative Republicans, like George Bush Sr. and Norman Schwarzkopf. But now in serious decline, don't go.

Fortune, in the Barnes and Noble Mall at Seven Corners, entrances from Rt.7 and Patrick Henry Drive, who knows what the address is? and Reston, 1428 North Point Village Center, 318-8898.

The most varied selection of Dim Sum in Northern Virginia, in terms of variety, but not actually my favorite. Not fully consistent and now overpriced. And the new quarters are simply too huge, more suitable for a Chinese wedding, which is in fact what they are used for. By no means a bad restaurant, but not fully satisfying either.

Miu Kee, Rt. 50, just east of Annandale Rd.

Real Chinese food, for Chinese. Family atmosphere, homey, comfortable. I like the soy chicken on rice, and the pork on chowfooon, very soggy but yummy. Not everything here is great, but none of it is bad, and the wise orderer can make a great meal. Cheaper than most, too.

Shanghai Tea House, 2400 Wisconsin Ave., open every day, 202-338-3816.

Sietsma likes this place but it is only OK. It does have better dumplings than anywhere else I know in DC but in Annandale it would not make the top ten. I quite liked the tofu and cabbage dishes, yummy. Cramped quarters. I can easily imagine worse places to eat, but if this is what you look forward to for your Chinese food, I feel sorry for you.

Paul Kee, 11305-B Georgia Ave. Wheaton, 301.933.6886.

One of the best Cantonese places around, although you hardly ever hear of it. Excellent seafood. I like the scallops in pepper sauce, among other dishes. There are also the casseroles, and make sure you get some greens to round out the combination.

Lo's, 3075 Nutley St., Pan Am Shopping Center, Fairfax, but very close to Vienna Metro, 280-2897.

Suburban Chinese through and through, and will not satisfy those looking for the real thing. But one of the best of its kind in the area. Will consistently satisfy. The Bird's Nest is especially good, as is the Lamb of Two Flavors. It's hard to go wrong here, as long as you don't expect real Chinese food.

Jasmine Garden, 8106 Arlington Blvd., Falls Church, 703-208-9989, actually on Gallows Rd. next to the 24-hour Safeway at Rt. 50.

I know what you're thinking. "I've discovered so many wonderful new Chinese places in the last few years I don't need another one." Well, you are wrong. This place looks too yuppy and draws a business crowd for lunch. But many of the dishes on their Chinese menu – **which you must ask for separately** – are quite good. Get the chicken with three peppers, and then experiment on the Chinese menu. Their non-special dishes are above average, too. The menu has some Thai and Japanese items as well. Plus they have a piano, with occasional performances of, get this, operatic arias.

Mark's Duck House, 6184-A Arlington Blvd., Willston Center 1, Falls Church, 532-2125. Hard to see from the road, on Rt. 50 just east of Rt.7, north side of the street, look for the CVS. Usually opened.

A real Cantonese restaurant, replete with hanging ducks in the window and everything. Get the crispy pork, and also some variant of the noodles. I love the tofu as well. I am less enamored of the duck and chicken, but this is a good restaurant, and very authentic, in the hands of a wise orderer. It's also cheap, so take advantage of the prices to order many items. Lots of dim sum too, often good but at times unreliable.

Taipei-Tokyo Cafe, Rockville Pike, Rockville, 301-881-8388, I've lost track of all their branches, which seem ridiculously close together.

Noodles and soups abound. You order, and they bring the food to your table. Not haute cuisine, but very tasty. The accompanying Japanese place, under separate ownership, is also worthwhile. Both are cheap, and both are recommended. That being said, they are not keeping up with the upgrading of all the new competition.

Incredibowl, 14005 Lee Jackson Highway (Rt.50), just east of Rt.28, Chantilly, 703-631-5888.

Where Sichuan Village used to be located. No surprises here, but this is a considerably above average take on all the usual Sichuan classics. I especially enjoyed the Fish in Hot Chili Oil and the Shredded Potatoes with Peppers. Note that the place is small and it can fill up pretty quickly.

A&J Restaurant, 4316 Markham St., Annandale, 813-8181, just east of Beltway, or 1319 Rockville Pike, 301-251-7878.

Manchurian food and dim sum, one of the best places around. Tasty, original, and very cheap. I love the soups and dumplings. The boiled peanuts and shredded bean curd are other favorites. The smoked chicken has been especially good lately. But you can't go wrong here, just make sure you get lots of things, and with the median item price below three dollars, this is not hard to do.

Joe's Noodle House, 1488-C Rockville Pike, near Congressional Lane, Rockville, 301-881-5518.

Excellent Szechuan food. Many little items. You order and they bring it to your crowded table. Get as many different kinds of noodles as you can. The hot and sour fish is one of my favorite dishes here. An exciting place to visit, highly recommended.

N.B. There are many excellent Chinese places in Wheaton and Rockville, but I don't know most of them. Let's not forget the Chinese vegetarian places on Rockville Pike, one of them is Yuan Fu Chinese Vegetarian Restaurant, at 798 Rockville Pike, near Norbeck Rd., 301-762-5937.

Chinatown Express, 746 Sixth St., NW, 202-638-0424.

Maybe the best place in Chinatown right now. Make sure you order the noodles. Good soft-shelled crab. Excellent dumplings. Not as good as Joe's Noodle House, but if you are stuck in DC you will enjoy this place. Small, and draws a crowd, so go early.

Vinh Kee, 3103-D Graham Rd., at Rt. 50, Falls Church, 703-645-0118.

Half of the way toward Vietnamese, actually. A good Asian seafood restaurant, though it does not rival my favorites, such as Seven Seas, in my affections. But it will be closer for many, and good enough to enjoy. Get the whole fish.

Far East Restaurant, 50550 Nicholson Lane, Rockville, 301-881-5552.

Quite good overall but the Kung Pao Chicken is the dish to get here, much more of a plum sauce dish than other kung paos.

Charlie Chiang's, 660 South Pickett St., off van Dorn, not so far from the Metro, West Alexandria, 703-751-8888.

They have rabbit on the menu, and a number of other interesting-looking Szechuan dishes. Don't get stuck with the American menu.

Hunan Number One, Arlington, just off Wilson Blvd. in Clarendon, open to 1:30 a.m. every night, 703-528-1177.

A fraction of this place is authentic Cantonese, the other part is trying to appeal to boring American diners. Sooner or later the place will have to choose. The salt baked chicken is excellent and you won't otherwise find that dish around. A reader recommends the clams in black bean sauce, beware the dim sum.

Cho cu Sai Gon, 6763 Wilson Blvd., Eden Center, #6D, inside the mall at the back, 703-538-2168.

An unknown and much underrated Cantonese restaurant. Good congee. Also get the salted and baked chicken. Fully authentic, try the noodles with ginger and scallion, I think this place is quite good. My favorite is the casserole with minced chicken and salt fish but there are many wonders here.

Lotus Garden, 224 Maple Ave. W., Vienna, 703-255-9888.

I've been many times, and I sway between "this is a really good Cantonese restaurant, with wonderful pulled noodles" and "this is a pretty good Cantonese restaurant for this region, with wonderful pulled noodles." Ultimately I think I have settled on the latter. You can watch them do the noodles in the window, and these dishes do not disappoint. That said, I find it a little boring over time. I've had "just right" Cantonese meals here, but too many of the dishes tend toward the gloppy and heavy. But it's still much better than most of the other Cantonese places around, though I would put it behind XO Taste. If you're into Chinese food you should try it, noting that your mileage may vary.

Sichuan Pavilion, 1814 K Street NW, Washington D.C., 202-466-7790.

No relation to the Sichuan Pavilion in Rockville. This is mostly a normal (though somewhat above average) American Chinese restaurant, but they have some legitimate Sichuan dishes yes right there in midtown DC, K Street at that! The steamed bacon (pork belly) with preserved vegetables is excellent. The Dan Dan noodles are not bad. There may be a few other gems hidden in the menu, so given its location this place offers some real value. Just keep in mind what it's good at and where it is simply K St. mainstream.

Chinese-Peruvian

Kam Po, 5884 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, 703-578-4017.

They have Chinese dishes and Peruvian dishes, with mutual influence running both ways. Visitors to Lima will be familiar with the concept, the place is run by Chinese Peruvians. An interesting novelty, and reasonably good, but it doesn't beat trying either cuisine pure up.

Colombian

Rumba Café, 2443 18th St., Adams Morgan, 202-588-5501.

A mix of Colombian and Puerto Rican dishes, with some other Pan-Latin elements thrown in. I have yet to go. Lots of arepas. Lots of mofongos (mashed plantains and garlic). It looks interesting.

Crabs

Sea Side Crab House, 6799 Wilson Blvd., #5, Falls Church, 703-241-CRAB,
www.seaside-crabhouse.com

An excellent seafood house in Eden Center. The soft shell crab is some of the best around. The crawfish are served Cajun style, although not as spicy as you would get in southwest Louisiana. It's small and not a great place to sit and chat, but absolutely worth having in the repertoire. Right now it is my go-to choice for crabs.

Fairfax Crab House, Rt.50, just a bit east of University Drive.

Formerly Captain Jack's on Rt.29, a longstanding Fairfax County institution that was forced out by gentrification of its neighborhood. How good is it? You're asking the wrong person. The crab I love is Chili or Pepper Crab in Singapore.

Mai's Rest Inc., 6763 #9 Wilson Blvd., Eden Center, Falls Church, inside the mall, 703-237-2020, Tgfriday14@yahoo.com

The best crab place in the immediate area, but it's not always open. Fresh. The proprietor likes to talk. Only crabs. Crabs, with ginger and scallions, tamarind sauce, plain, or salt and pepper. I like salt and pepper best. Recommended, noting that sometimes it closes for stretches of time. Call before going.

Cuban

Cuba Libre, 801 9th St., NW, 202-408-1600.

Not cheap, but this new “cool” place is surprisingly good. Get as many small dishes as you can and avoid the main courses (which are fine but more standard). I liked best the arepas and the raw crab [congrejo] with nuts. Some of the menu is classic Cuban, but more of it is Cuban food reimaged through the lens of modern Spanish tapas. Maybe this place will decline with time, but for now it’s further evidence that Washington is becoming a genuinely interesting dining city. There are other branches by the way in Orlando, Philly, and Atlantic City.

Caribbean Grill, 5183 Lee Highway, Arlington, 241-8947, usually open.

Mostly Cuban, also they serve some Jamaican items. The grilled chicken is good, but I’m more inclined to order the beef (Ropa Vieja) or the Pork Fried Pieces (Masas de Puerco). But the key to having a good time here is to neglect the entrees and order as many side dishes as possible. Especially the beans, in their various manifestations. Table space here is limited, but don’t let that discourage you. Cheap.

Cuban Corner Restaurant, 825 Hungerford Drive, near Ivy League Lane, Rockville, 301-279-0310, closed Sunday.

The best Cuban place around, as far as I can tell. Excellent pork and sides. The following is the rule of thumb on Cuban restaurants. The rice and beans are bound to be worthwhile. To have a great meal all you then need do is latch on to one other satisfactory dish. And here that is very easy to do. First-rate atmosphere, and I love the list of all the prominent Cubans on the wall, and the anti-Castro political propoganda. Definitely recommended, and very good for people-watching as well.

Cuba de Ayer, 15446 Old Columbia Pike, Burtonsville, 301-476-9622, closed Mondays.

A mom and pop, the Washington Post claims it is one of the best Cuban places around; it is a little out of the way for me.

Cubano’s, 1201 Fidler Lane, at Ramsey Ave., Silver Spring, 301-563-4020, 11-11 daily.

There is a flourish of new Cuban places in this area, though we do not yet have critical mass for any of them to be knockouts, as you might find in Florida or New Jersey.

Banana Café and Piano Bar, 500 Eighth St., SE, just off Pennsylvania Ave., 202-543-5906.

Cuba, Spanish, and Puerto Rican dishes. Not exactly a mom and pop, the place has a somewhat vile yuppie flavor. The Puerto Rican dishes consist of mashed plantains, in various forms, with garlic. The dishes vary greatly in quality. The best ones are

good enough to enjoy (try the Puerto Rican ones, if only for novelty's sake), but not good enough to stand comparison with the real thing. By all means go, especially if you live in the area (few good alternatives), but lower your expectations accordingly.

Yuca, 1800 M St., NW, 202-785-1177, closed Saturday lunch and Sunday.

Terrible hours, but again another new Cuban place. Has to be one of the better places in the neighborhood.

Deli

Chutzpah, 12214 Fairfax Towne Center, Fairfax, 703-385-8883, closed Sunday dinner.

No, this isn't New York City, or even New Jersey, but this place is better than you think.

Celebrity Delly, Loehmann's Plaza, Rt. 50, Falls Church.

Not as good as Chutzpah, but above average for this area.

Dominican

Manna, 8640 Flower Avenue, Takoma Park, 20912, 301-589-9390, usually open.

Go here for mofongos (see under Puerto Rico for an explanation), fried pork and chicken, cuban sandwiches, and cow feet soup. I haven't been here yet, but I have heard good reviews.

Eclectic

A Taste of the World, 283 Sunset Park Drive, Herndon, 20170, not visible from the street, call for directions, 471-2017.

They have Indian, Thai, and Mexican dishes. Better than it sounds. A kind of home cooking, tastes different than what you get elsewhere, and very good. Worth having in one's repertoire.

Egyptian

Fava Pot, The Shops at West Falls Church, 7393 D Lee Highway, Falls Church, 703-204-0609.

Finally, this dreadful strip mall has a good place indeed an excellent place. Might this Egyptian restaurant be the best Middle Eastern food around right now? Everything tastes fresh and vital, including the more or less standard Lebanese appetizers such as hummus. The veal kabob is a welcome change of pace, if you would like to try something new. This place attracts a real crowd: it is very well-lit, extremely comfortable to sit in, actually feels yuppie and bland, but in terms of the food it really delivers. A welcome addition to the repertoire. I should note that while it is reasonably priced for the quality you get, this does not qualify as a super-bargain restaurant.

Cairo Café and Restaurant, 6244-H Little River Turnpike, Alexandria, 703-750-3551.

Genuinely good Egyptian food, cooked for area Muslims, if not always Egyptians. The place to go if you wish to see people, including women, smoking hookahs (Middle Eastern water pipe, with your preferential flavored tobacco). Nineteen flavors of hookah, including "Cola." Small menu, authentic, and tasty. Worth a visit. They have a non-smoking section as well.

Alf Laylah Wa Laylah, 13975 Metro Tech Drive, Chantilly, 703-378-6677.

An excellent name, no? The owner is Palestinian, the chef is Turkish, how should I list this place? Mostly the food is "Middle Eastern," with many Lebanese dishes, but since they have hookah I will put it under the category "Egyptian."

Pasha Café, 3911 N. Lee Highway, Arlington, 703-528-1111.

I have yet to visit the new incarnation but liked the old. Focus on the appetizers. Possibly the best Egyptian place around.

Sphinx Café, 137 Spring St., Herndon, Sunset Park industrial strip mall, 703-464-0001.

This is a good strip mall, so this place has potential. I have yet to go. Here is one review, <http://www.observernews.com/stories/current/news/012805/sphinx.shtml>, they have Persian and Lebanese dishes as well.

Reston Kabob, near the International Center on Sunrise Valley Drive, 11844 Sunrise Valley Dr # A, 703-390-9070 <http://www.restonkabob.com/>.

Maybe this is not even Egyptian, but they have kabobs, recommended by a reader.

Eritrean

Keren, 1780 Florida Ave., NW, near 18th, 202-265-5764.

This place is exactly what more ethnic restaurants in DC should be like. Eritrean food will remind you of Ethiopian, but it isn't the same either. There is more bread mixed into the dishes for one thing, and the cuisine is overall less Americanized. The vegetables are less smoothed over. What you want to get here is the listed "Five Eritrean dishes" listed on the bottom of the menu, otherwise not further specified. Also get one or two of the "Fuls," which are available for breakfast too. The Egg Ful is especially tasty. The wheat dishes are original. Everything here is quite good, and the staff and proprietor are quite charming. A strong restaurant on all dimensions and also extremely cheap. By the way, maybe you knew the "old Keren," but the place is under new management circa 2012 and is much improved.

Ethiopian

Checheho, 5711 Center Ln, Falls Church, VA 22041, 703-341-6555.

The new wave of Ethiopian restaurants in and near West Alexandria is so good it is hard to review each one, as they blur together in a stream of excellence. I can say that this one has kitfo as good as any, slightly below par yellow peas, and is currently #1 for crowd and atmosphere. Definitely recommended, but how to choose between this and all the great competitors?

Eyo Restaurant and Sports Bar, 3821-B South George Mason Drive, Falls Church, 703-933-3084.

This unassuming locale is one of the two or three best Ethiopian places at the moment. Furthermore they serve Ethiopian breakfast, starting at 10 a.m., though sometimes interpreted flexibly by management. Their fowl is simply superb and more generally you can't go wrong with anything here. Great kitfo, great lamb tibs, great doro wat, maybe the best I've had. This single strip mall in Virginia is raising Ethiopian food to an entirely new level and making the trip to 9th St obsolete. This place is also a favorite of the local cab drivers.

Abay Market, 3811-A S. George Mason Drive, Falls Church, 703-998-5322.

Now this is an interesting place. They have only a few dishes but those are mindblowingly good. The menu includes kitfo, slabs of raw beef (tere sega), lamb soup, and slightly cooked kitfo (mostly raw). That's it. You can get vegetables – they make the best – but you must call ahead to do so. All come with bread, sauce, and spices. No doubt this is the best raw beef emporium for miles and miles around. A+ for atmosphere. Ask for their assistance in eating the food. Recommended, but you'd better know what you are looking for. It's the place Anthony Bourdain decided to visit and he was not disappointed. Hail Abay Market!

Meda Market, 512B S. Van Dorn St., Alexandria, 703-212-6740.

A mom and pop Ethiopian, full of Ethiopians watching TV around a bar, with an attached spice shop as well. A small menu, mostly various forms of kitfo and tibs, but with an

excellent vegetarian sampler as well. There are so many very good Ethiopian places around these days, it is disorienting to try to rank them all. Still, if you ask is this one in the top tier, the answer is yes, yes, and yes...recommended, definitely. You will note that the outside sign is in Amharic only, but if you are looking for this place you will find it, just don't expect the four letters "Meda" on the outside.

Dama Ethiopian Restaurant Pastry and Cafe, 6669 Little River Turnpike, Annandale, an offshoot of the Dama place on Columbia Pike in Arlington, 703-333-2819.

Their kitfo special is the very best around, and that is quite a prized dish. I've tried about ten of the other items and they are all above-average, no huge surprises but consistent freshness and quality. So this is definitely one of the better Ethiopian places, it is also the most "westward" really good Ethiopian place, and has nice ambience and decor. Weekends they run a buffet for 430, with lots of Ethiopian dishes to sample. Friendly service, though like many Ethiopian places it can be slightly slow. Definitely recommended.

Chercher Ethiopian Restaurant and Mart, 1334 9th St., 202-299-9703.

Could this be DC's best Ethiopian place right now? Possibly so, even if my very first choices are now in the suburbs. This place has two standout features above all others, however. First, you can order an especially large vegetarian sampler here. Second, they serve the very best Doro Wat I have ever sampled. The kitfo is average for this area (which is quite good), and the tibs seemed a bit subpar. Go here for the Doro Wat, you won't regret it, and add on the vegetables. Nice, homey atmosphere too.

Kebericho Deli Market, 3811-c South George Mason Drive, Falls Church, 703-578-6464.

It's hard to keep track of all the burgeoning Ethiopian places in this mini-mall, but since they are all excellent maybe you don't need to. This place, which is next to the fabled Abay Market, serves six or so meat-based dishes, no real vegetables. Don't expect Shiro here. The meats are above average and the atmosphere is excellent. The time I went it had the single most beautiful waitress of any restaurant on this list, so you tell me whether or not it is worth going. I say yes.

Seleme, 3825-H, S. George Mason Drive, Falls Church, 703-379-0043, in the Ethiopian cluster right behind the 7-11, back side of the strip mall.

They are beef specialists, including in the raw slabs department, plus kitfo and gored gored. They also have fish, firfir, fowl, and excellent lentils. Availability on the menu varies, so this is not an "all purpose, one-stop shopping" kind of place. The décor is pretty empty, in a charming way. In terms of quality, it's nipping on the heels of the top leaders. If you care about Ethiopian food, at the very least it's worth a try.

Enat Restaurant, 4709 N. Chambliss St., Alexandria, 703-642-3628, near 236 and Seminary.

Excellent Ethiopian, they also have breakfast dishes such as Foul and egg delights, they open at 10 a.m. most days though call in advance. Very good shiro, meats, some fish dishes too. For my taste and moistest and best injera around. Maybe not #1 but in the top five.

Ethiopic, 401 H St NE, (202) 675-2066.

It's funny how H St. NE has gone from a dump, to overpriced, without stopping for very long in between. This Ethiopian restaurant is not bad, but it can't compare to the 9th St row, much less West Alexandria. And yet everything costs more, sometimes twice as much. And the tastes are ever so slightly dumbed down. This place has made lots of "best of" lists, but that's just a sign they are desperate to pick out an Ethiopian place you can take your grandma to. It's not a dump, but it is a dominated asset.

Meaza, 5700 Columbia Pike, Falls Church, 703-820-2870, I'm not sure about the number on Rt.7, it is what their card says but some people tell me it is wrong. In any case it is on Col. Pike just east of Rt.7 by Circuit City.

Excellent Ethiopian, as good as the DC places, but not up to its former glories. Now it's serving too many people and just another good Ethiopian place. Wide variety. Attached to a coffee shop, plus they have Ethiopian music on some nights. It's still a place worth visiting.

Zenebech Injera, 608 T St., NW, WDC, 202-667-4700.

This restaurant with two tables is now probably the best Ethiopian place in Washington. It is better than Adams-Morgan, better than the 9th St. row. Especially if you don't mind hearing them grind up meat in the nearby back room. Every dish is excellent and the flavors are simply more real. Get the raw kitfo, and you do need to ask for it spicy otherwise they will notice your possibly pale face and dumb down the food accordingly. Oddly this place is right next to Thai X-ing, which has only one table and is the best Asian restaurant in town. DC is finally developing the right mix of high rent and low rent districts to support such entrepreneurial ventures.

Queen of Sheba, 1503 9th St. a bit south of the 9th St. Ethiopian row.

Above-average Ethiopian food, even for the neighborhood. This is the restaurant that serves a peanut butter dish and a flax seed dish, so high marks for authenticity. That said, the various forms of the lentils are the thing to get here. Lots of lentils here, the novelty items are interesting but they won't be the best part of your meal. Also get the Queen Kitfo, a superb dish.

Ibex Restaurant, 3813 E and F South George Mason Drive, Falls Church, 703-379-3899, www.ibexrestaurant.com.

Set in the ever-so-excellent strip mall on George Mason Drive. They have a broader selection than most and many more vegetarian dishes than the competitors in the same mall. It doesn't reach the heights of Abay market, but it is more versatile for many normal uses.

Dukem Ethiopian Market, 1114 U St., south side of the street, looks like a Deli or a food mart.

Formerly the best Ethiopian food around, but their larger size has made them shakier (go to Rome for the very best.) It remains good, but is no longer just mama's home cooking. Get the Foul (pronounced "fool") for breakfast. I love the fish too. Good tripe.

Axum, 1936 9th St., 202-387-0765.

Another good pick on the 9th St. row.

Queen Makeda, 1917 9th St., 202-232-5665.

Matt Yglesias likes this one. They are well-known for their catering.

Etete, 1942 9th St., 202-232-7600.

By far the "nicest" and most upscale of the 9th St. places. This is where you should bring your mother. They also have a few pastas on the menu. Excellent vegetarian dishes.

Salome, 900 U St., 202-518-5493.

They are known for their home-made injera, or bread. Right now it is under reconstruction.

U Turn, 1942 11th St., 202-299-9882.

The Washington Post tells us that spicy beef is their Sunday special. I have yet to go.

Habesha Buffet, 1919 9th St., NW, www.habeshamarket.com.

Ethiopian buffet and also carry out and order off the menu, run by the brother of the woman who runs Sodere. Consistently good, and the tripe may be the best in town. The vegetables are quite fresh. A fun hang-out. Ultimately "buffet" should be suited to Ethiopian food (tender foods cooked slowly, in spices, like Indian), I am curious whether this innovation prospers.

Awash, 18th St., a bit south of Meskerem.

Probably the best Ethiopian place in Adams-Morgan right now. Addis Adaba is good too.

Fasiledes, 3821-B S. George Mason Drive, 703-931-4141.

Good, but not the best Ethiopian place in Northern Virginia. In one of the best malls for ethnic food, however, which counts for something. Go if you want to, but don't render a final judgment on Ethiopian food from these places.

Warka, 275 Sunset Drive, that funny industrial park in Herndon with all the ethnic food, 703-435-2166.

Herndon continues its rise in the world of ethnic food. How bad can this place be? An Ethiopian place in Herndon; The Washington Post review describes it as intriguing but inconsistent, with better meats than vegetables.

Zed's, 1201 28th St., NW, 202-333-4710.

Not up to the others and it is long in decline. The dry cottage cheese is worth ordering as a side dish. Otherwise go to 9th St. or U St. or best yet Virginia.

Langano Ethiopian Restaurant, 8305 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring, 301-563-6700.

Ethiopian food, for those who chose Maryland. They have a lunch and weekend buffet. Not the very best, but there is something to be said for the buffet feature if you are in a hurry.

Walia, 6840 New Hampshire Ave., Takoma Park, 301-270-4545.

Another Maryland Ethiopian restaurant, but at a higher level of squalor. Let me know if you have been.

Filipino

Bad Saint, 3226 11th St., Col. Heights, Washington, closed Tuesday, no one seems willing to give a phone number.

No reservations, get there well before 5:30 when they open, they have only 24 seats and your entire party had better be there at that very moment. No tables seat more than four and everywhere it is crowded, including for your knees let's hope your coat is not that heavy. The good news is that it is definitely worth it. Creative Filipino cooking at its best, and I don't mean that as faint praise. I've had most of the menu, and none of it is worse than interesting, noting they are not afraid to serve you sour-tasting food. The two

best items are the bronzino, and the clams with sausage and Sichuan chiles; they are two of the very best dishes in town right now. Trendy, you get a good view of the kitchen, not cheap but reasonably priced for what you get, worth the trip and the wait for sure.

Purple Patch, 3155 Mt. Pleasant St., (202) 299-0022, weekend brunch but no lunch.

A consistently interesting Filipino plus American restaurant, and in a cool Mt. Pleasant setting at that, with a bar downstairs. More trendy than a mom and pop, but not obnoxious about it. I liked the chicken adobo, the shrimp in coconut milk with greens (Ginataang shrimp with kale), the Escabeche fried red snapper, and the Pinakbet, which is lots of squash and vegetables with two big shrimp. The pork belly with egg on it was good too. The lumpia are only so-so, too dry and fried. The caveat emptor here is that many people never quite warm to Filipino food the way they do say with Thai food. Still, other than the fantastic Filipino extravaganza at Restaurant Eve, which is quite expensive, this may be the best Filipino food around. For most of you it is definitely worth a trip.

Sam's II Karaoke & Restaurant, 11125 Georgia Ave., Wheaton, 301-942-0061.

I have yet to go. The best Filipino food I've had in ages was a few years ago, when a few of the Filipino GMU undergrads cooked some for sale in the GMU food court. That's the way to go, cultivate Filipino friends, the best way to learn this exquisite and interesting and undervalued cuisine.

Filipino food is best enjoyed when served in homes and at weddings. Most Filipino restaurants I have been to (usually in Los Angeles) have been disappointing. Oxtail in peanut sauce can be too fatty and only brings you so far. The lumpia (a bit like spring rolls) are often good, but they're not that special either, at least not in America. Milkfish is no treat in my book.

Fairfax Inn, 2946 Sleepy Hollow Road, Falls Church, just off Seven Corners, located in a Medical Arts Building, 703-532-0616.

Mostly they serve burgers and the like. You have to ask for the Filipino menu at the counter. Real mom n' pop food, the milkfish is pretty good. They close at 7 p.m. evenings, 3 p.m. on Sundays, and also serve Filipino breakfast.

Kababayan, Smoketown Road Shopping Center, at Smoketown Road and Minnieville Road, near Glory Days Grill, Woodbridge, 703-580-0300.

The Filipino version of cafeteria line dining, or so I am told. They do "turo-turo," or "point-point," because the diner points to what he wants to eat.

Aling Pacing, 2311 Price Avenue, Wheaton, 301-933-7070, not always open for lunch on weekdays.

See the remarks above on Filipino food under *Little Quiapo*. This one looks less appetizing, however, although it is easier to find. Oxtail and peanut sauce are often good Pilipino dishes, adobe too.

Pampanguena, 16041 Frederick Road (Route 355), Gaithersburg, 240-631-2210.

I don't usually include the excellent Gaithersburg in this guide (just too far for me), but how many good Filipino places do we have? A Filipino reader says this is the best one around.

Fine Dining

Don't smirk, ALL FOOD IS ETHNIC FOOD!

Rose's Luxury, 707 8th St. SE, Washington, 202-580-8889.

I was skeptical, but after one visit I believe this is the one of the best restaurants in DC right now and the hype and lines are actually justified. I went with four people, sampled about a dozen courses and each and every one of them was both excellent and original. The way to go here is to maximize the number of small dishes. It's not cheap, but I know at least fifteen places which cost more, none of them as good. The menu changes rapidly, but I thought the pork and lychee salad was especially outstanding.

Komi, 1509 17th Street, DC, 202-332-9200.

A mix of fine dining and Greek-American. Still good but not the dominant place it used to be. The first time you go is best, it is very good but no need to return.

Bresca, 1906 14th St NW, Washington, DC, 202-518-7926.

Not Italian but rather more of a nouvelle blend, expensive, has some very fine dishes. I recommend the linguini with uni, the foie gras, and the cabbage side dish along with the side of root vegetables. Those I all liked very much. The ribs were dull and the desserts only so-so. Expensive, worth it if you order the right stuff.

Blue Duck Tavern, 1201 24th St., Washington DC, NW, 202-419-6755.

There has been turnover and it is no longer so reliable. Still a beautiful space, however.

West End Bistro, 1190 22nd Café, Washington, 202-974-4900.

I went once and had very good ham and very good cod, right after the new sous chef arrived. The other dishes I saw didn't impress me so much. It was very noisy and not cheap. I would go back, but at this point I am reluctant to recommend it.

Central Michel Richard, 1001 Pennsylvania Ave., 202-626-0015, hard to get reservations except at 5:30.

In decline and it has become the place for tourists. Some people still like the various kinds of burgers here. It pretends to be cheap, but three courses without wine ran me \$70. Am I upset because I can get the same thing, more or less, in Buenos Aires, for \$10? Ultimately this place doesn't do me much good.

Inn at Little Washington, Washington, Virginia, 540-675-3800.

You probably know all the blah-blah-blah. But right now it is in decline. So don't go. If you must, get the Veal with Sweetbreads.

Taberna del Alabardero, 1776 I St., entrance on 18th St., 202-429-2200, opens at 6:00.

Yummy, but increasingly uneven. They often have regional specialties cooked by visiting chefs. Not cheap, but the price is high for a good reason. Good paella. Stuffer than it needs to be, but sometimes truly excellent. It has shown a remarkably ability to reinvent itself when needed, but before going try to find out where they are in the cycle.

1789 Restaurant, 1226 36th St., near Prospect St., 202-965-1789, no lunch.

Georgetown standby, it has about the most boring looking menu you can imagine. That being said, quality is uniformly good across the board. In a nice old building, the room is charming in the sort of way that appeals to fireplace lovers. Wealthy parents of Georgetown spoiled brats eat here. I can't complain about the quality, but I will only eat here if someone else is paying the bill. Many will love it, and I enjoy it when I go, but it is not my thing.

Oceanaire, on F St.

Has good seafood, predictable but still tasty. They do for fish what Morton's did for steaks. That description might put you off, but there you go. Noisy and draws a hideous crowd, but don't let that put you off.

Marcel's, 2401 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, 202-296-1166, dinner only.

Belgian, mostly, more classic than nouvelle. All the reviews are good, but hard to see it beating a trip to Europe.

L'Auberge Chez Francois does not merit my recommendation - an overrated restaurant, plus it burned down, they reopened a while back.

Fish -- See Seafood

Fondue

Bistro Bernoise, 5120 MacArthur Blvd., NW, 202-685-3939, fondue on Tuesday nights only, or other nights with advance notice.

I hate Fondue, I refuse to go.

French – see also Fine Dining

Le Diplomate, 1601 14th St., NW, 202-332-3333.

The menu here is almost a parody of what you would expect to find in a real Brasserie in France. At first it was great, lately I've been having mixed results.

La Chaumiere, 2813 M St., 202-338-1784.

Barkley Rosser loves this place. He recommends it as a “solid, mid-price restaurant that specializes in Lyonnaise cuisine, and is favored by the older Georgetown crowd...”

Recommended by a credible-sounding reader are Petits Plats in Woodley Park and Bistro D'Oc, across from Ford's Theatre. There is La Colline as well, a classic stand-by.

Georgian and Caucasus

Supra, 1205 11th St NW, Washington, 202-789-1205.

There are two questions here. The first is how well do you know Georgian food? It is the best in the Caucasus and the best from the former Soviet Union. The second is how this place compares in the broader constellation of Georgian restaurants. If you are not up to speed on Georgian, this place is a must. Georgian offerings are subtle, diverse, and combine some of the best ideas from eastern Europe, Persia, Russia, and the Middle East. Get as many small dishes and cold dishes as you can. Get the Khachapuri, the classic Georgian dish, stuffed breads, maybe the best one is with the spinach. Get the just plain Georgian bread, not on the menu you can just ask for it. Get the dumplings with meat. Avoid the larger dishes. That all said, how does this place compare with Georgian restaurants in say NYC or Berlin? Well, it is good enough to go to, but not above average. That said, the average is decently high. The downside is that this place is not super cheap. The bottom line is that in DC we now have a “good enough to go to” Georgian restaurant. And of course for people watching it is superb, hardly anyone who goes there is native-born American.

Maydan, 1346 Florida Ave., Washington, NW, 202-370-3696, dinner only.

Food from the Caucasus, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the Middle East. Excellent all around! This is a place to get many of the options, with a group, rather than to see, the single stand-out course. It also has the most fun décor of any place I know in D.C. Usually I hate places that try to look cool, but this restaurant really does look cool! This is a very nice addition to the local dining scene. It's in the "I definitely can go back many times" category rather than the "I've tried their best dishes and can move on" slot. Not cheap and not a mom and pop, but hey you wanted DC gentrification, didn't you?

German

There are no German places in this area worth eating at. And yes I have tried Café Berlin, and that Europa place up on Wisconsin. Don't even think about it, as they say. Café Berlin would be the best, I think.

Ghanaian

Calabash African Cuisine and Bar, 514-C S van Dorn, the strip mall with Savio's visible to the street, 703-823-1333, closed Mondays.

The waak ye is especially good, which is a mix of rice, beans, plantains, fish, and noodles. Plus they have fried yam with turkey, jollof rice, Red Red, and of course Fufu. The décor is very basic, the crowd friendly, service a bit halting. Ghanaian food is not to everyone's taste, but I would describe the offerings here as above average. If you are inclined to try this place, you should, that said do not expect too much variety in the offerings over repeated visits.

Akosombo, 613 K St., NW, closed Sunday, opens at 8 a.m. for breakfast, closes 8 p.m., don't go after 6 p.m. I would say.

I've heard they have spruced this place up a bit, but it remains a true mom and pop. Some of the dishes are excellent, truly spicy and authentic, but don't bring your date here. I like it, but this one is for the brave. Great atmosphere, and a favorite with taxi drivers. Note that the neighborhood requires some courage after dark, and perhaps even before dark as well.

Greek

Nostos, 8100 Boone Blvd, at Tysons off of Aline, Vienna, 703-760-0690.

Still decent, but not great as it once was.

Plaka Grill, 110 Lawyers Road, Vienna, 703-319-3131, Sunday they close at 8 p.m.

Loyal TCEDG readers will know that I am skeptical of Greek food in this country but I find this place to be pretty good, downright tasty in fact. The Plaka Gyro, stuffed with French fries was delicious. It's a bit of a cross between a snacks place and a lunch place and a dinner place but still it feels a gaping hole in NoVa dining and it is worthy of further scrutiny.

Mykonos Grill, Rockville, 121 Congressional Lane, Rockville, near Rockville Pike, 301-770-5999.

Supposed to be good, but I've never been, formerly of K St.

Athena Pallas, or is it Pallas Athena, 556 22nd St., S. Arlington, 703-521-3870, no Saturday lunch.

Again, supposed to be good but I've never had really convincing Greek food in this country outside of Queens. I recommend Germany, of all places, for Greek food.

Athens Taverna, 1732 Connecticut Ave., NW, 202-667-9211.

Ditto. But for DC eaters, a reader recommended a Greek Deli, Kosta's, 19th between L and M, NW, to me, they close mid-afternoon.

Athenian Plaka, Bethesda, 7833 Woodmont Ave., 301-986-1337.

Comes recommended by a reader, and by Washingtonian. My sixth sense suggests that it is better than most of its kind, but it is not on my short list for a visit.

Others: A correspondent recommends the following: Parthenon (Connecticut Ave., near the Avalon Theater), Taverna Greek Isles (Pennsylvania Ave., SE, near Capitol Hill), Mourayo (1732 Connecticut), and Stoupsey's, a counter in the foodcourt in Farragut West.

Guatemalan

Guatemalteca Tikal, 4320 Annandale Road, Annandale, 703-256-0020, usually opens at 6 a.m. but check, also a bakery.

Great atmosphere, the food is OK but only OK. Try the soups. They have pupusas too. Assorted, scattered items, like Philly Cheese Steak. Lots of Central American drinks. I have yet to try the sautéed flower dish. A fun place, I wish I could push it more on the food side, but at the very least I am glad I went once.

Corado's, 3217 Mt. Pleasant St., NW, 202-462-3332.

Yummy food, good atmosphere, and in DC's most Latin neighborhood. A very good restaurant, with a surprisingly high quality of beef, given the low prices. Don't let the police sirens throw you.

La Bamba Restaurant, 8241 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring, 301-589-3712.

More Pan-Latin than Guatemalan, though they have a few specifically Guatemalan dishes, such as "Beef Stew Guatemalan Style." Not my favorite, but if I lived next door I would go more than once.

Guyana

Caribbean Delight, 7811 Riggs Rd., University Blvd., Adelphi, 301-439-1270.

Goat, calaloo, curried kingfish, the usual things you have come to expect from a Guyanese restaurant.

Hamburgers

Ray's Hell-Burger, 1650 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, 703-974-7171, 11-10 most days.

It used to be clearly the best hamburger around, now it is still in the running but less clear as a total absolute winner. The new digs has less choice and fewer cheeses, and it is much larger. The place has hardly been ruined, but going is not as exciting as it used to be. You decide. That said, it is much easier to deal with the lines and hassle.

Red Apron, locations in Angelika Mosaic, 7th and D (attached to The Partisan), and Union Market.

They offer a limited number of quick-serve entries based on high-quality meat products, with prices below restaurant level but much more expensive than fast food. They also sell sausage, pates, and other meat products, again high quality offerings, red wine too. I find this a very useful outlet for both shopping and eating, especially in Angelika I often grab a hamburger here before seeing a movie. I never feel it is the very best burger around, but somehow it stands up to repeated samplings more than the "better" burgers do. While this is a place of limited scope with limited uses, it is actually one of the restaurants I eat at the most.

The Burger Joint (TBJ), Shake Shack, multiple locations and growing.

They are both fast food chains but they are also both pretty good. I'd say they are better than the median place on this list. TBJ even uses real dry-aged beef. Excellent fries in both places. They're both also more expensive than traditional fast food. I

would eat in these places more if not for health considerations. All I can say is that if you are tempted, you have my blessing.

Five Guys, 4626 King St., Alexandria, 703-671-1606, several other branches too, including on N. Fayette St. in Alexandria and 654 Backlick Rd. in Springfield, and now one on Gallows Rd., right by the Multiplex and the Szechuan place set back in the strip mall.

Once the definitive local hamburger, now it is a chain of above average but varying quality. And great albeit greasy french fries, makes you realize that most people's french fries taste like nothing. No spa cuisine here. Not for all tastes, but for what it is, it is good enough. And dirt cheap.

Elevation Burger, 442 Washington St., Falls Church, 703-237-4343.

Pretty good, they have burgers of "Kobe beef" and vegan burgers. The French fries are quite good, though I find them tastier at Five Guys. Super cheap, and recommended, though no competition for Ray's.

Poste Modern Brasserie, 555 Eighth St., NW, 202-783-6060.

Kobe beef and sea salt, it must have some potential.

Honduran

Costa Del Sol, 4906 Fairmont Ave., Bethesda, 301-656-2561

They claim to be Honduran as well as Salvadorean and Mexican. Maybe, but you would have to read Leibniz on the identity of indiscernibles to prove the point. One of the few really ethnic places in Bethesda, plus it has above average pupusas. I also like the black beans soup with onion.

Indian

Curry Leaf, 13919 Baltimore Ave #4, Laurel, Maryland, 301-497-2017, a bit north on 95, they are often closed for part of the mid-afternoon.

This much-heralded Indian place does live up to its billing. It probably has the best "simple" vegetables around, such as spinach, eggplant, and lentils. The Uttapham is excellent. Everything is at least very good. It doesn't have dishes you can't get somewhere else, but in terms of overall quality this is one of the two or three best Indian choices around. The buffet is a good option too, and I usually don't like Indian buffets.

Bindaas, 3309, Connecticut Ave., Washington, NW, 202-244-6550.

From the people who brought you Rasika, this place is more casual. If you go with four people for lunch you can order the entire lunch menu and maybe a few doubles. That is what we did. Everything was quite good, though the median dish was not a revelation. They served some cup thingies filled with avocado, I thought that was by far the best item and we ordered a few more of those. It is one of the best dishes in town. The two kinds of uttapam were stellar. Nothing was bad. So your first visit here, I say diversify. For later visits, specialize in the best dishes. There is more on the dinner menu, by the way. Overall this place is just Indian snacks, no curries, a very good idea says I.

Chettinadu Indian Cuisine, 15124 N. Frederick Rd., Rockville, 301-251-8991.

Get the goat soup, the chettinadu naattukozhi varuval (chicken in a tamil dark sauce, a real knockout), the chicken 65, the fish fry (Nethili meen fry with anchovies), a dosa, an aappam, and the eggplant. This place is a knockout, the flavors are so vivid, and a lot of these dishes you cannot get elsewhere in the region. Right now this is one of the best and most interesting Indian places going.

Jewel of India, 10151 New Hampshire Avenue , Silver Spring, 301-408-2200.

A real knockout, maybe the best Indian place around. Order any dish they might be serving from Mangalore, the chef's home town. Such as the Suka chicken and also the fish curry. They also have a separate menu of Indo-Chinese dishes. Definitely recommended, though note that the kitchen falls apart if you arrive when they are truly full and busy. The buffet isn't as good as a la carte, also.

Indigo, 243 K St NE, Washington, 202-544-4777, the hours can vary on weekends so do check.

Gujarati food, really! This is probably the most neglected Indian restaurant around, and you don't even have to go to the suburbs. Everything here tastes *real*. Do you know that kind of Indian place where the spices taste a little grainy because they haven't been ground fully to a smooth blend? That is this place. Recommended, and badly needed as well.

Street Kitchen, Tysons Corner Mall I, floor 2, near the restaurant American Tandoor, 571-633-1820.

A dosa stand in Tysons! It's not just good for Tysons, it's really good period. In fact I'll put it in the top tier of dosa places around. And the Mysore masala dosa is the spiciest dosa I've had in this area in years. The sides are decent. I've tried the wraps there too, they are OK but not the reason to go. The dosas are excellent, hurrah!

Punjabi by Nature, 2750 Gallows Road, Vienna, 571-489-8500, also 19405 Promenade Drive, Leesburg, and a branch with a smaller menu in Lotte Plaza in Chantilly.

One of the less-reported stories is the hollowing out of central northern Virginia for really good Indian food; these days it is mostly out by Dulles. But Pujabi by Nature is well above average. The main branch in Vienna has excellent vegetarian dishes, and most of all get their three chicken specials, marked as chef's specialties on the menu, some of them having a Punjabi twist. The branch in Chantilly has a more regional menu, is more of a mom and pop, maybe preferable for me but they are both good if not quite the answer to my pleas.

Masala Art, 4441 Wisconsin Ave., just south of the Whole Foods, NW, 202-362-4441.

Still one of the better Indian places, but no longer cooking at its former peaks. This is from the people who brought you Heritage India. They have some obscure regional dishes but they deliver on the standards as well. Consistency is high, the lassies aren't too sweet, and the Indian desserts are even good, which is hardly ever the case in U.S. Indian restaurants.

Angeethi Indian Cuisine, 645 Elden St., Herndon, 703-796-1527.

Excellent all around, this is now one of the two or three best Indian places in the area. (Bombay Indian in Silver Spring is probably the current leader). The chat station, offered at lunch, is first-rate. Everything else is quite consistent and just generally tasty. I even enjoyed the Butter Chicken. Good breads. Good vindaloo and spinach and black lentils. What kind of Indian food is it? Most of all I would say it is like the Balti food you get in the UK and indeed they have a whole section of the menu devoted to Balti dishes.

Turmeric, 405 Maple Avenue East, Vienna, 703-938-0100.

One of Virginia's best Indian restaurants. The buffet is well above average, even with a good biryani and on the buffet at that. They have a decent number of regional dishes, including from Goa and Kerala. Consistent all around. This isn't one of the best two or three Indian places around, but it's just below that and nipping at their heels. Vienna has been needing a place like this. Good lassies too.

Kohinoor Dhaba, 2800 South Eads, Crystal City, 703-778-5005.

Chug likes it, that should decide it. Get the fish pakora, spinach, goat biryani, this is one of the best Indian places around. Really yummy, a hidden gem.

Spice X-ing, 100 Gibbs St., Rockville, 301-610-0303.

Right now this is one of the three or four best Indian places around. Gibbs St. is not the obvious place to go eat in Rockville, but the food here is genuinely excellent. The dishes are truly spiced and I don't just mean hot. (The level of heat is quite bearable, though present.) The spices are fresh and taste like a genuine part of each recipe. It's not a mom and pop, as it actually looks like a nice restaurant, which

indeed it is. Some of the cooking has a Parsee slant, to my taste, such as mixing lamb and fruit. I was especially fond of the chicken with spinach.

Bombay Club, 815 Connecticut Ave., NW, Sunday brunch.

Gourmet, expensive, the most refined Indian food in the area. The new chief has revitalized this place and now it is much spicier and at least for the time being excellent. One of the best restaurants in Washington. Don't be put off by its previous boring tastes.

Passage to India, 4931 Cordell Ave., near Old Georgetown Road, Bethesda, 301-656-3373.

This gem is still underrated. This used to be a branch of the former Heritage India, but now it is run by the original founder. It offers unique Indian regional specialties. In fact only here in this area can you eat specialties of Bombay and Calcutta, among other parts of India. This place is more like a high-class Indian restaurant of India than anywhere else around. Highly recommended, and make sure you get the regional specialties. Check out www.passagetointia.info.

Saravana Palace, 11725 Lee Highway, #A15, Fairfax, 703-218-4182, one light west of Fairfax Wegman's, turn into the strip mall, directions are here:
<http://www.saravanapalaceva.com/>.

Formerly the best Indian place around, this place became worse. I have heard it is better again, I will try it.

Minerva Express, 4815 Lee Highway, Arlington, 703-841-9626.

They score high on the authenticity index and it also serves as an Indian grocery. Lots of take out with just a few tables and some food heated under a lamp. Talk to them directly, have them cook something up for you, ask for authentic and spicy, and it will be very good. Making your wishes known is important here, and if you do so it can be some of the best Indian food around, although without any frills. An Indian restaurant for Indians.

Mayuri, 2316 Hunters Wood Plaza, Reston, 703-860-2444.

I have mixed feelings about this place. They have the single best and most authentic Indian menu around, ranging from the Chicken 65 dosa to Kori gasi, namely chicken made in fresh coconut, red chilly, and curry leaves, plus a lot more in between. And none of it is *bad*. Yet somehow the dishes don't quite taste right. With some superior execution this could be premier places on this list, but as it stands it is an interesting curiosity of unfulfilled potential. If I lived nearby I'd go all the time, but it's not yet worth the trip.

Indique, 3512 Connecticut Ave., NW, 202-244-6600, open daily for lunch and dinner.

Nouvelle Indian, with nice dining quarters, but ultimately more Indian than nouvelle. Get as many appetizers as possible, ten or twelve I would say. Note: I have heard rumors of decline since they opened the branch, Indique Heights.

Masala Wok, Fairfax Marketplace, 10940 Fairfax Blvd., Suite J, Fairfax, 571-432-1814. There is also a branch Herndon Parkway Crossing, 905 Herndon Parkway, Suite A, Herndon, 703-657-0216.

Whenever an Indian restaurant has the word “wok” in its title you can expect something from the northwest and some spicy, ginger-laden dishes. This place runs against the current buffet trend to offer you quick-serve Indian dishes which you order at the counter. I’m surprised how good this place has turned out to be. The spicy dishes are truly spicy. Most of all the dishes have real flavor and real taste. I recommend the Coconut Curry, spicy, but everything I’ve had here has been good. Think of it as the Chipotle of Indian food. The prices are also very reasonable. Recommended.

Hot Breads, next to Sichuan Village and Il Mee in Chantilly, 14027 Lee-Jackson Memorial Highway.

Indian breads and sandwiches, chicken tikka, with some seats for sit down. Very mom and pop. Curry-filled pastries and Indian sweets. For a quick lunch, this place is quite good. Get they Bombay street snack that is basically a potato samosa inside a sliders bun, Vada something or other. They also have Indian soft drinks.

Rasika, 633 D St., NW, near MCI Center, 202-637-1222, www.rasikarestaurant.com.

Lately it has been in decline but it is still an above average Indian restaurant. The food here has real taste, much as you might find in India. Nice décor. Many fine touches in the cooking. The best dish is the spinach (somewhat fried or frittered), with corn; better than it sounds. Also get the cauliflower. The way to go here is to order starters, chats, appetizers, etc. and avoid the good but less innovative main courses. Good okra. Going all-vegetarian here is not a mistake. Good prawns.

Rasika West, 1177 22nd Street, NW, 202-466-2500.

Now better than Rasika proper, the home base. Get the spinach chat, the aloo tikki, the sev puri, the scallop appetizer, the lamb chop tandoori, the cod dish with two flavors, the duck curry with coconut milk, and the dark lentils for an excellent meal. The other dishes are generally good but not as good as those. Not cheap, but one of the better meals in town these days.

Also for *Indian, Cafe Taj*, in McLean, on 1379 Beverly Blvd., is not bad

Bombay Bistro, 3570 Chain Bridge Road, Fairfax, 359-5810, also at 98 W. Montgomery Ave., Rockville, 301-762-8798.

A good restaurant with a wide-ranging menu. They even have several kinds of dosas. The lunch buffets are good and fresh. There is also a main branch in Rockville, but I have never been there.

Supper Club of India, 13055 Worldgate Dr., Herndon, 703-736-0466.

My readers like the place. It is more influenced by Persian ideas than are most Indian restaurants. I have yet to go.

Delhi Dhaba, 2424 Wilson Boulevard, 524-0008, usually open.

The food simmers in front of you at the counter, and you order what you want. Weekend buffet. Very quick, very cheap, good atmosphere, good Indian videos and TV programs - this place fills a niche. Not the finest, but I like it.

Jaipur, 9401 Lee Highway, Unit 105, Circle Towers, Fairfax, 703-766-1111.

You would never expect to find a restaurant in this locale, attached to a condo building, but this place draws a surprisingly good crowd. It is OK, but I do not love it.

Tiffin, 1341 University Blvd. East, Langley Park, 301-434-9200.

A non-vegetarian spin-off of the former *Udupi Palace*, and just a short bit further down the road, heading away from the Beltway. Very good Indian food, and authentic, these people know what they are doing.

Haandi, 1222 W. Broad St., Falls Church, 533-3501. Also 4904 Fairmont Ave., Bethesda, 301-718-0121, www.haandi.com

They take no reservations, and sometimes the place fills up, though not as it used to. I like their wok-cooked specialties and their salmon, but I find some of the portions a bit too small and the spicing a bit too weak. This was once a prime option but now other places are passing it by.

Aroma, Shirlington, on the main street there, 4052 28th St S. and no, I won't give you the phone number.

This has to be the worst ethnic meal I've had in the last five years (and yes because of a movie time I *had* to eat in Shirlington). Everything was badly oversalted and virtually inedible. Although no one else was in the restaurant, at first they insisted that we couldn't switch tables. Service was irregular. It wasn't even that cheap. Most bad places I won't even review, but I thought this worth a note, since if you are

stuck in Shirlington you might be tempted as we were: “Indian food, how bad can it be?” Maybe they just had a bad night, but this was a total fail.

Raaga, 5872 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, just east of *Duangrat's*.

Indian food, from the folks who brought you *Connaught's* in Fairfax. Certainly good, but lacks special dishes if you know the other places on this list.

Bombay Café, 11213-E Lee Highway, Fairfax, 703-352-8282, near Jermantown Road.

Mom and pop, where they cook for you or you grab from simmering trays on the counter. Not as good as my favorites, and these days it is in decline. They took away the formerly quite good buffet.

Bombay Indian, 11229 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring, White Oak Shopping Center, 301-593-7222.

Once great, now in decline. Still, try the Kashmiri inspirations. At its best, it has rich spicing, though without being too hot. The bread with the cherries and nuts is one special dish you can get here. Maybe it will recover.

South Indian

Street Kitchen, Tysons Corner Mall I, floor 2, near the restaurant American Tandoor, 571-633-1820.

A dosa stand in Tysons! It's not just good for Tysons, it's really good period. In fact I'll put it in the top tier of dosa places around. And the Mysore masala dosa is the spiciest dosa I've had in this area in years. The sides are decent. I've tried the wraps there too, they are OK but not the reason to go. The dosas are excellent, hurrah!

Woodlands, 8046 New Hampshire Ave., at University Blvd., Langley Park, MD, 301-434-4202, also located in Fairfax, in the mall where Germantown Rd hits the K-Mart, just off of Rt. 29.

Finally Fairfax has top-rate dosas. The Fairfax branch is not quite as good as the one in Maryland but it is still very good. There is one lentils dish, with vegetables, comes with a side order of yogurt, it is my favorite here.

Saran Foods, 5151 N. Lee Highway, Arlington, 703-533-3600

Very cheap south Indian food, larger than usual selection of dosas. A hole in the wall, but worth a visit.

Amma's Vegetarian Kitchen, Vienna, Chain Bridge Rd., just across from Outback Steakhouse, Georgetown branch now closed.

Strictly Indian, strictly vegetarian, mostly dosas, has been one of my favorites as of late. Excellent channa (chickpeas). This place significantly ups the options for Vienna dining. I've never tried the Georgetown branch.

Indonesian

For Indonesian the best bet probably is Café Asia, in Rosslyn, look under **Asian**.

Iraqi

Tigris Grill, 2946-P Chain Bridge Road, Oakton, 703-255-5950, Sundays they close at 7 p.m.

An above average kabobs place, run by Iraqis with Iraqi décor. Good beef kabob and a nice mom and pop atmosphere. Decent chickpeas. You won't find special Iraqi dishes however and I would say go only if it is in your immediate region. The place also has surprisingly good vegetarian options.

Fatouche, 11099 West Broad St., Falls Church, 571-366-0561.

Yes, Iraqi, though it is mostly standard kabobs and Middle Eastern dishes such as hummus. There is a greater presence of lamb shank as special Iraqi dishes, however. I put their standard "Iraqi kabobs" in the top tier of the area's kabob restaurants, say the top 15 percent. I put their rice as the very best around, not counting the Persian specialty rices with extra ingredients. The hummus and falafel are at about the area average, OK but nothing special. Nonetheless it is worth having this place in the repertoire, friendly atmosphere too.

Irish

Don't worry, someday I'll find one you want to eat at. Just not soon, or in this universe. That being said, one savvy reader recommends The New Irish Pub (Molly Maguire's), on Washington Blvd., near Murky Coffee (formerly Common Grounds). The Washington Post recommends Irish Inn at Glen Echo, Macarthur Blvd. and Tulane Ave., Glen Echo, 301-229-6600, get the salmon with cabbage roll. There is also Finn Maccool's Irish Publick House, 713 Eighth St., SE, 202-547-7100

Israeli

Israeli Grill, 4860 Boiling Brook Parkway, 301-468-0400, Rockville.

I am told this has good grill and deli and is fully kosher.

See also **Kosher**.

Italian

Many people like **Tosca**, though, 1112 F St., near 12th, 202-367-1990, no weekend lunch. For suburban areas, I find **Buonarrati's** of Vienna to be satisfying, especially the lasagna. See also **Tutto Bene**, under Bolivian.

Fiola Mare, 3100 K St., NW, 202-628-0065.

Super-expensive, seafood and pasta, but really good. \$50 for a dish that isn't big enough to be a complete entry. I've been twice, with other people paying. Probably the highest quality Italian place in town, but I can't quite recommend it either.

Masseria, 1340 4th St NE, Washington, DC, 202-608-1330, right near Union Market, don't expect the outside to look like a normal restaurant, but yes it is there behind the street garbage.

Food from Puglia and Sicily, striking in its originality for the American scene. Fixed price menu only, but you choose from a longer list. Load up on the pastas as much as possible, and the linguini with XO sauce is especially good. This is probably the best pasta served in DC right now. The interior is stylish, the food is not cheap, but right now this is one of the few places in town worth spending some money on.

Fiola, 601 Pennsylvania Ave., 202- -628-2888

Now one of DC's best fine dining establishments, and maybe the second or third best Italian place currently. From the guy who used to run Maestro. The dates are very tasty, the pastas are excellent, the main courses are good enough to justify the prices but in my view they are somewhat ordinary, such as the short ribs. Good veal cheeks. The dessert I ordered was disappointing. If you doubt whether this is real Italian food, they even have sea urchin, crab, and chilies, a wonderful Sicilian dish.

All-Purpose, 1250 Ninth St., NW, 202-849-6174, lots of lines but going early will work.

Washington Post loved this place and perhaps it raised my expectations too high, plus I very much like Red Hen, which is run by the same people. Here I enjoyed the variety of dishes I tried, but I didn't *love* the pizza. I liked it. Eggplant parmigiana had an excellent quality eggplant, but it led me to conclude that eggplant parmigiana just isn't that good a dish. The Sicilian tuna mousse I thought was outstanding, one of the best appetizers I've had in town in a while. Overall it is a very good neighborhood Italian restaurant, not to be confused with a top DC restaurant but having its uses nonetheless.

Bibiana Osteria-Enoteca, 1100 New York Ave., 202-216-9550.

Not cheap but a more or less genuine Italian restaurant – with tripe and the like – also with subtle flavors in the pastas. Currently it is a clear first choice for Italian in the DC area, along with Marea. We have been needing a restaurant like this for some time.

Savio's, 516 E & F Van Dorn St., 212-9651, slightly funny hours, I think.

This is one of Northern Virginia's premier strip malls for food. Has excellent Thai, Japanese, Peruvian, Italian, and some good ethnic groceries. Just south of Edsall, and a bit north of the Beltway ramps on van Dorn. Despite the competition, Savio's will sometimes win out when I am in this mall. I like the pastas here, especially the Rigatoni Carbonara, or the ones with spicy sausage. The cook is from Tunisia, and does everything just a bit differently.

Esposito's, Rt. 50, just west of Fairfax Circle, on the south side of the street.

The kind of Italian place you would expect in New Jersey. Indeed the owners are from New Jersey. Some of the best pizza in the area, plus very good pasta. Exactly the sort of place you would think that northern Virginia shouldn't have.

A La Lucia, 315 Madison St., Alexandria, 703-836-5123.

Highly recommended by Washingtonian magazine, I have yet to go.

Pines of Naples, 3207 Columbia Pike, Arlington, 703-521-5039.

Quasi-Italian food, cooked by Pakistani and Brazilian owners. Not for everyone, but draws a steady crowd of regulars.

Il Pinito, 5071 Nicholson Lane, Rockville, 301-881-0085.

Recommended, the sort of place you are convinced this area does not have. Cheap, tasty, fresh Italian food. Nothing shocking, but delivers all around in a way that few Italian places here do.

Jamaican

Negril's, 7904 Woodmont Ave., Bethesda, 301-907-6800, also 2301-G Goergia Ave., NW, 18509 N. Frederick Ave., Gaithersburg, and somewhere called Mitchellville, presumably in Maryland.

Curried stews, red beans, ox-tail, and rolled breads. Cheap, and very tasty. Don't be scared off by the branching, this place is great.

Rita's, Georgia Ave., NW, no street number, west side of the road, a few blocks north of Irving, just south of the intersection with Morton. Closed Sunday.

Not for all tastes, but a real treat in my book. Great goat curry, great atmosphere, very cheap. The beans are especially good. And they stock lots of grape soda.

See also West Indian, and visit the cluster of places on Georgia Ave., near the intersection with Rhode Island, they appear worth a visit, for the brave that is...

Island Pride, 823 Hungerford Drive, Rockville, 301-315-2668, closed Sunday I believe.

I have yet to go.

Jerk Pit, 8145-C Baltimore Ave., Rt.1, College Park, 301-441-4786.

The wings are recommended. Fridays they have oxtail stew. Service is slow, because they do it the right way.

York Castle Tropical Ice Cream, 9324 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring, 301-589-1616.

Yes, they have soursop ice cream, among other flavors...worth a try...

Japanese

Takumi, 310 S. Washington Blvd., Falls Church, VA, Rt.29, just west of Rt.7, 703-241-1128.

This is the best sushi place around, period, I don't know how else to put it. It's like having a real sushi restaurant of the sort you might find in NYC or LA or heaven forbid Tokyo; I thank Don Rockwell for pointing me here. It compares favorably with the elite places of DC, even though it is in a miserable little strip mall in the crummy (wonderful) part of Falls Church. The doorway is so narrow it is hard to spot, immediately adjacent to some kind of vaping store and directly across the street from Happy Family Chinese restaurant. The main guy involved used to be with [Kaz Sushi Bistro](#) when that was a wonderful restaurant. Go, go, go. The funny thing is, I know you still don't believe me.

Sushi Capitol, 325 Pennsylvania Ave., SE, 202-627-0325.

If government is so good, then why aren't there more excellent restaurants on Capitol Hill? A good question, and now for the first time in my entire life I have found one. This little gem is one of the two or three best sushi places in town and it does everything very well, including service. Get the Omikase, for only \$50, a

bargain by the standards of quality sushi. Definitely recommended, but you do need to book in advance.

Sushi Taro, 1503 17th St NW, 202-462-8999.

A genuinely excellent place in the sense that you don't expect DC to have. I can't say they offer huge surprises, but this is consistently one of the best places in town, with fine sushi, sashimi, and byproducts. Get a fixed price menu. Not cheap, but to get a very good fixed price menu for say \$80, for the quality you get, is in relative terms a bargain. Definitely recommended.

Tanpopo Ramen House, 4316 Markham St, Annandale, 703-354-4938

I'm not such a one to judge ramen places because that food, outside of Japan itself, almost always bores me. That said, this place exceeded my expectations and I thought the pork belly ramen was pretty damned good. Not great, but good enough to visit again. The sushi is OK enough but not a reason to come here. I would also describe this place as part of the growing "Asian food for Asian-Americans" genre, without being designed for the Japanese palate per se. It's a cool place, good décor, not so many people know about it yet, worth a try for the curious though I think it helps if you go with my low expectations.

Maneki Neko, 238 W. Broad St., Falls Church, 703-534-8666.

One of the most Japanese places around. It is well known for its Okinawa ramen, which you cannot get anywhere else in this area, it is tasty although I did not catch the uniquely Okinawan element. (I don't doubt them, however.) They have dried sting ray and other Japanese dishes you might find in a country restaurant. The sushi is above average. Check the board for the specials, you might find smelt tempura for instance. This is one of the better and more authentic Japanese restaurants around, good noodles too.

Sei, 444 7th St. 202-783-7007.

Asian fusion, most of all Japanese but not just. If you go heavy on the small dishes and the sushi and sashimi you can have an excellent meal. The wasabi guacamole is quite interesting, as are the excellent pork buns. The "fish and chips" rolls are recommended as are many of the other rolls. Not cheap. All-white interior with a shi-shi crowd. Overall I have been glad the two times I ate here but beware that at least half of the main courses are boring.

Blue Ocean, 9440 Main St., at Pickett Rd., Fairfax, 425-7555.

Attracts a largely Japanese clientele. More than just the usual teriyaki dishes, also. Worth having in the repertoire. Get the specials on the daily board or pre-order the kaiseki. A lot of the food here is actually pretty good.

Sushi Yoshi, 101 Church St., Suite B, Vienna, 703-242-1350.

For some reason no one ever talks about this restaurant, yet it is surprisingly good. Above average sushi, with a reasonably authentic feel to the entire operation. Best of all they have real Japanese tapas, ranging from grated yam to tuna with soy sauce to pork belly and a few dozen others. Those are what you should get here. Not perfect, but this place deserves more attention.

Sushi-Ko, now in Chevy Chase.

One of the best sushi places around. Not cheap, but you can afford to eat here, also.

Kaz Sushi Bistro, 1915 Eye St., near 20th, 202-530-5500.

A mix of Japanese and fusion, both the beef and the sushi can be very good. It has much more variety than your typical Japanese place, you won't get bored here even after a few visits. Washington needs more of this kind of place. Get the kobe beef. Lately, however, I've seen some signs of decline. It remains well above average, but beware.

Yuraku, 19773 Frederick Road, Germantown, MD, 301-515-7448.

Recommended by a few of my correspondents, supposed to be very authentic and popular among Japanese.

Matsutake Corporation, 4121 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, 703-351-8787, also in Worldgate Shopping Center, 13049 Worldgate Drive, Herndon, 703-787-3700, Crystal City, Jefferson Davis Highway, Arlington, 703-535-8848, Union Station, 50 Mass. Ave., WDC, and Washington Reagan National Airport, 703-417-0521.

One of the best of the sushi buffet places. All you can eat sushi for lunch, and the sushi is reasonably good. Some of the branches have teppanyaki as well. Is it the single best sushi place around? No. Will it start you wondering why you ever order sushi a'la carte? Yes.

Tachibana, 6715 Lowell Ave., McLean, 847-1771, there is also a branch in Bethesda.

The best Japanese place in the suburbs. Not at all cheap, but the quality justifies the prices. Many entrees are in the \$20 range.

Arigato, 13039 Fair Lakes Shopping Center, Fair Lakes, 449-8404, closed Monday, plus a branch in Fairfax, where Germantown Rd. hits Rt. 29.

Stylish and original in its decor. The cardboard chairs are the best part of it all. Japanese food by Koreans, but still an OK restaurant. To get there, take 66 West to #55B, straight off the exit, left at the first light, then a left at the second light, into the

big shopping center, look between the Hechinger's and Toys R Us. Get the cream cheese dumplings as a side.

Temari, 1043 Rockville Pike, Rockville, 301-340-7720.

Highly authentic, too authentic some would say. Right next to a Japanese store and Japanese supermarket; patronized primarily by Japanese. More a cafe than a restaurant. If pork cutlet doused in ketchup is your thing, this is the place to go. Here you will encounter the other side of Japanese food.

Akasaka, 514-C van Dorn St., 703-751-3133, hard to see from the street, in the same mall as Savio's, the Italian place.

Solid Japanese, especially useful in an area that doesn't have much first-rate Japanese food. But it is no longer above average, as it once was. Right now just OK.

Yama, 328 Maple Ave., Vienna, 242-7703.

Above-average sushi, and a good Vienna location. Good eel, a good place to know. It has become my local "go to" sushi place.

Osaka, 6669 Little River Turnpike, Annandale, 703-256-0152.

They keep on putting not-quite-feasible Korean-Japanese restaurants in this space. This place is OK, but I don't see any reason to think it will survive.

Also see Korean. Many Korean places in this area serve Japanese food as well.

Korean-Cajun

Mokomandy, 20789 Great Falls Plaza, Sterling, 571-313-0505, Korean and Cajun.

This place received good reviews when it opened a few years back, but somehow it has fallen into the overlooked category. In fact it has some of NoVa's very best ethnic dishes. At first I thought it would be a kind of mom and pop, like the Vietnamese places which do spiced crawfish. But it's not, rather it is a fine and innovative restaurant, with a trendy look. The jambalaya, the ssam (get it with prime rib), and the Korean sliders are some of the best dishes around, period. Everything else is good or at least fun. And there is nowhere else like it around. It's not mom and pop cheap, but for the quality of what you get, and the quality of the ingredients, it is more than reasonably priced. Definitely recommended.

Korean

When the Koreans say spicy, they mean it, especially with the soups and hot pots. Korean food has an aesthetic which is raw, cold, and bare. I prize it highly. The accompanying vegetables are always excellent. The Kimchee (pickled cabbage with chilies) is an acquired taste, but that taste should definitely be acquired.

Beginners should try the Bul-Gogi and Korean Pancake. Bibim-Bansang (the spelling or transliteration may vary!) is a combination of rice, vegetables, beef, egg, and spicy brown sauce; it must be mixed together by the patron. A Korean specialty, and one of the treats at any Korean place. The seafood and bean pancakes are usually excellent as well. Korean stews, however, can sometimes be too sharp, too soggy, and too full of bizarre kinds of seafood and tripe. Some are excellent, but you should know what you are doing if you order one.

Korean restaurants in this area are remarkably consistent; there are few bad ones. I'm always looking for the perfect Bibim Bap, I will let you know when I find it, in the meantime I remain searching.

To Sok Jib, 7211 Columbia Pike, 703-333-2861.

This is now clearly the best Korean place around. The broiled fish and the bibim bap are better than in any of the competitors. Everything here just tastes better, the vegetables too. Mostly soups, stews, and noodles, no barbecue or porridge. Quite small, very mom and pop. The lines start early, nonetheless I would say that half of your Annadale visits should involve eating at this place.

Kogiya, Korean BBQ, 4220 Annandale Rd., Annandale, 703-942-6995.

This is the best Korean barbecue in the area. Though not as good as when it first opened, it is consistently tasty at every stage of the meal and dining experience and no other place around is, not after the decline of Honey Pig. It's not original or surprising, just very good. Most people get one of the two all you can eat specials, for \$20.99 or I think \$28.99, respectively. Basically you are paying extra for an option on intestines, if you wish, so for most people the cheaper of the two will do. The décor is excellent, in the metallic direction, and they have some intriguing back rooms you can dine in. Here's the catch: it is pretty small (twelve or so tables?) and it fills up early. I went on 4:30 p.m. on a Saturday and the place was already more than half full. The cool people come here to see and be seen, etc.

Blue Sand Seafood, 4231-H Markham St., 703-914-1004.

This is now the best Korean place for seafood, especially those spicy stews and soups which hardly anyone likes (but I do). Everything is fresh, and the décor is attractive, yet the place does not lose its mom and pop feel. Note that they have very little besides seafood, so this cannot also serve as a generic Korean place for those who want bul-gogi or bibimbap. Nonetheless I will visit regularly and I can

recommend it without hesitation for all who are interested in the basic set of offerings. They also do clams and crab, which I have not yet tried there.

Siroo, 4231-N Markham St., Annandale, 22003, 703-354-5488.

This is the only Korean porridge place around. I recommend the chicken with ginseng, oyster with seaweed, and abalone, all in the form of porridges. Everyone should try these, even if you think you don't want to go to a restaurant for porridge. They also serve Korean teas and they display and sell all sorts of non-traditional kimchees. This restaurant is a riot for the eye. In terms of visuals, mood, atmosphere, and sheer novelty, this is one of the two or three best places on this whole list. The food is good too.

Iron Age, 6023, Centreville Crest Lane, Centrevilla, 517-403-9743.

Korean barbecue, with a nod in the Asian fusion direction, as the place emphasizes the meats more than the vegetables and side dishes. And as a meat place it is one of the two or three best Korean barbecue outlets for the quality and general tastiness of the cuts. The décor is spectacular, the music screens are large, and it reminds me of the trendy places in Seoul. It fills up every night, is a place to be seen, and has a general atmosphere of fun and merriment. Definitely recommended, and it is also the best place around to initiate a newcomer into Korean food.

Mandu Rang Kimbob, 7217 Columbia Pike, Annandale, 703-642-8668, closed Sundays, the sign has mainly Korean characters.

In a little house, in the strip mall with the Giant, near the Auto parts place and the firing range. It doesn't look like a restaurant. This is the premier place for Korean noodles, dumplings, and also for soft tofu. Get their #6 tofu dish. Super mom and pop. Definitely recommended, though note they specialize in the areas mentioned above and don't have a full service menu. But that's a good sign!

Bang Ga Nae, 6499 Little River Turnpike, Alexandria, 703-941-2722.

Located in the little house where the North Korean place used to be. Now they specialize in goat dishes, done three ways, spicy or not. Soft, tender, and juicy meat, try it even if you don't like goat. Goes with excellent greens, and good cold vegetables with the meal, especially the tofu. At the end they pour some rice into the simmering sauce, pour in some black sesame seeds, and pour in some extra spices to make a Korean fried rice dish which is one of the area's best. The goat is first-rate and overall this place is highly original. The menu is short but they also serve Cornish hen stuffed with rice, a cod dish, pressure-cooked pork feet, and seafood pancake. The service is also good and mostly they speak decent English. Right now this is probably the best "specialty" restaurant in the Korean section of Annandale.

Evergreen Korean Cuisine, or Sang Rok Soo, in the Lotte Plaza supermarket, 5204 Port Royal Road, also facing Braddock Rd., Springfield, 571-395-8083.

Since the Korean soup place at the Fairfax Lotte Plaza closed, we have been given this in return. It actually has a wider selection of soups and is a very clear first in the Korean soup category. The selection includes soups with dumplings, beef bones, kimchee, clams, fish roe and vegetables, beef ribs and radish, and the North Korean cold buckwheat noodle soups, among quite a few others. There is also bibim-bap, bul-gogi, and the sleeper dish of kimchee fried rice, simple but very effective. This isn't quite an all-purpose Korean restaurant, but if you like Korean food at all it should definitely be in your repertoire.

BonChon, 7215 Columbia Pike, you also can enter from 236 by the Giant, Annandale, 703-914-1415.

Korean fried chicken, the classic place, there is also a branch in Arlington off Randolph Avenue and one in Fairfax off Old Lee Highway. Get it with the spicy coating, or get a mix of pieces and different sauces. If you cannot share and must choose, I like the wings best. Korean fried chicken is the best fried chicken around these parts, and it is even (somewhat) healthier for you than regular fried chicken. Everyone should try one of these branches. The menu here also has about a dozen other Korean dishes, including Bul-Gogi and seafood pancake but you can consider those irrelevant. Note this: cooking the chicken the right way takes about half an hour. Either call ahead or hope to get lucky on the timing and catch a fresh batch. These places also serve lots of beef as the accompanying drink. If you are not already on the Korean fried chicken bandwagon, now is time to jump on. BonChon has been spreading, while maintaining high quality standards.

Oegadgib, 7331 Little River Turnpike, but quite set back from the road, behind the Latino meat market, Annandale, 703-941-3100.

Very Korean, rustic-looking, good meat dishes, good bibim bap, maybe the specialty is the hot pot with kimchee, sausage, ham, and other vegetables, which tastes a bit like something from southwest France plus Korean spices. They have lots of barbecue and some all-you-can-eat specials. For the hard core there is potato and pork bone stew, quite tasty but makes few concessions to Western taste. A solid place with some dishes you can't find anywhere else in Annadale, any fan of Korean food should try it at least once.

Soju Sarang, 4231 Markham St, Annandale, 703-256-3565, open late usually until 2 a.m.

Mostly sushi and sashimi, plus some stranger Korean soups and stews, including fish head and the like. It's actually one of the very best raw fish places around outside of the expensive sushi restaurants in D.C. Many people turn their noses up at the idea of Korean sushi and sashimi, but the servings here taste very good. If you are looking to shell out \$100 for a large and impressive plate of sashimi, and wash it down with beer,

this is the place to go. Most Annandale Korean places have good atmosphere but this is above average in that department too. Recommended, worth having in the repertoire.

DaMoim, 7106 Columbia Pike, Annandale, 703-354-3211.

Call me impressed. They call it Korean fusion. Get the Ssam with spicy pork and also get the kimchee quesadilla (really). Get appetizer #5, the short ribs. That's a great meal right there for very low cost. Focus on the small dishes. The fried chicken is quite good and the kimchee fried rich with egg (you have to ask for it) is a knockout. Some of the entrees are too sweet for my personal taste (compared to "Korean classic" at least) but they are well done and many people will like them a lot. The accompanying vegetables are above average. This place tries to be cool, by invoking odd mixes of the Beatles and the 1960s and by playing intermittent classic rock. I expect to go back a lot. It's original, reasonably priced, and lots of fun.

Korean B-B-Q Grill, 7215 Columbia Pike, Annandale, 703-894-0431, in that mall between 236 and Columbia Pike with the Giant.

The real name of the place is only in Korean; I don't think "Korean B-B-Q Grill" is the true name, but it is the only part of the sign in English. An excellent place for unusual meats. Get the goat, the pork neck, the pork belly, and the brisket. Make sure to use the sauces. The diversity of the Korean vegetables selection is above average. The "standard" Korean dishes here are "good enough," but not reason to go.

Nak-Won, though I can't find that name in English characters, only in Kangu, the word "restaurant" is in English and it seems to be owned by the adjacent Nak-Won catering service. Anyway, 7317 Little River Turnpike, Annandale, 703-354-9255, across the street from Le Matin de Paris.

Very hearty, perfect for a cold day, a small place with Korean clientele. This restaurant is maybe the best place for Korean soups right now. Get the potato soup with meat, they will call it spicy but it isn't hard to eat. They also serve a grilled mackerel special and several forms of bibimbap. Recommended, hits the spot.

Han Gang Korean Cuisine, 7243 Little River Turnpike, Annandale, 703-256-7077.

This place offers a "fine dining experience" in addition to serving Korean food. It costs more than the others, and has nice décor and service, though it is still affordable compared to a typical non-Korean place. For beef dishes it is a first choice for all the Korean restaurants in this area. Get the \$60 combination of meats; it is an order of magnitude better than any other Korean meat dish you can get around here. Truly yummy. Go even if you think you are tired of all the other beef dishes at the other Korean places. They also have the best local Jae Chap. I would say it is important to go here with a large or mid-sized group and get a spread. Their sauces are also the best around.

Chinese-Korean Restaurant, 4210 John Marr Dr., Annandale, 703-354-1950.

Chinese food, Korean style, plus Korean food, Korean style. In other words, a Korean restaurant with fried sweet and sour and weird noodle dishes. The standard dish here is the dark noodles in the gloopy sauce, you know the serving which looks disgusting and, to some people, is disgusting. This place is very popular with Koreans, recommended, but note that it is not worth going here for the standard Korean options, which are better elsewhere.

Korean Food Specialists, 7031 Little River Turnpike, #21D, Annandale, 703-333-3400.

Set toward the back end of that strip mall, the same one with Il Mee and Shillah. It is the only Korean place around I know that has pork neck, be sure to dip the meat in the sauce. The steamed dumplings are excellent, above average kalbi, reasonably good Korean fried chicken. I long for a richer and more diverse selection of kimchees and vegetables, but overall this is a place worth having in the repertoire. Some of you may know their branch restaurants in Fort Lee and Palisades Park, New Jersey.

Il Mee Buffet, 7031-4A Duke St., Annandale, just west of George Mason branch of Fairfax County library, 642-2100. See also 14015 Lee Jackson Highway, Chantilly, 703-631-3400.

An excellent Korean restaurant with an amazing degree of choice. Huge, note that all they have is a very large buffet, reasonably priced. Everything is surprisingly fresh. Don't worry if you hate buffets, as I do, drop your reluctance and go. Everything here is fresh and outstanding. Get the cold soups. The kimchees. Make sure you dip your grilled meats in the sauces.

Seoul Soondae, 4231-L Markham St., Annandale, 703-642-2220.

Great seafood pancake here, Korean food for Koreans who know the difference. Gets crowded. They also have one in Wheaton, 12203 Veirs Mill Road, 301-942-5200, equally good, pretty much the same thing, and Willicott City, 410-750-0006.

PADO Seafood Restaurant, 4231-E Markham St., Annandale, 703-256-3565. An average Korean place, with sushi and some Japanese dishes. Average in Annandale is pretty good, but there's always above-average right next door, so I don't think I'll go back here.

Byol Nan Restaurant, 7118 Columbia Pike, Annandale, 703-64-3418

The interior is more stylish than the outside looks. It has the best and freshest vegetables of any Korean place around and also a varied list of Bibim-Bab, lots of

Hot Pot Dishes, and Katsu. The non-vegetable items are slightly above average. Very much a Korean place for Koreans.

Chinese-Korean (sorry the business card is in Kangul only!), 2847 Gallows Rd, at Lee Highway, in the strip mall with the H Mart, 703-645-8787.

This place gives a good overview of Chinese-Korean food, a bit goeey, a bit sweet, and with liberal use of ketchup. I don't like the genre, but I don't want to put you off trying it. The staff is friendly and charming, plus they have some regular Korean dishes as well. For me it is a dominated asset, but if you never went it would be a shame.

Mandu, 1805 18th St., NW, 202-588-1540.

The District gets Korean food, reviews are bad, and I will never try this place. Shame on you for even thinking of going, you've got to get to Annandale.

Sam Woo, 1054 Rockville Pike, 301-424-0495.

I've been to dozens of Korean restaurants in my life, and never experienced a bad one. This would be my second choice of the ones I know in Maryland, after Seoul Soondaе on Veirs Mill Road.

Ju Mak Jib, further east on Rt. 236 than most of the Korean places, across from the Salvation Army store.

Hardly anyone comes here, but this is one of the best Korean places around. The goat dishes are especially recommended, don't forget to use the mustard sauce. You should get the bone marrow special as well.

Woo Lae Oak, 1500 S. Joyce St., Arlington, 521-3706.

The best of the mainstream Korean places, as opposed to the mom and pops. You could even take a business client here. Right near Pentagon City, also. The best place to go for an introduction to Korean food, and the place with the best ingredients, though the overall feel of the restaurant is a bit sterile for my tastes.

Yechon, 4121 Hummer Rd., just off 236, Annandale, 703-914-4646, always open, 24 hours.

One of the best and most versatile Korean places, plus it has a festive atmosphere. The grilled deluxe specials are excellent but everything is consistent. The only drawback – many of the major dishes have to be ordered by both people. They have sushi too, though not early in the morning for breakfast.

Yee Hwa, 10090 21st St., NW, near K St., 202-833-1244.

Finally DC gets a Korean place. Living so close to Annandale I have no reason to go, but there are no bad Korean places around here.

Tofu Lighthouse Restaurant, or Vit Goel ToFu, 41121 Chatelain Rd., Suite 100, Annandale, 703-333-3436.

For Annandale, this place is not above average Korean. In other words, it is really good. Limited menu, this place has decided to specialize in tofu and barbecue dishes.

Sorak Garden, 4308 Backlick Rd., at 236, 703-916-7600.

One of the most ambitious and most popular of the Korean places, their beef is especially yummy, broad selection as well. Recommended.

Annan-Gol, 4215 Annandale Center Drive, 703-914-4600.

Better than average Korean, very cozy and cute too, get the spicy pork ribs. The marinated pork bellies are good also. Pork, pork, pork, if you go here.

MeeGa Korean Barbecue, 4070 Jermantown Rd, Fairfax, 703-691-3606, near the K-Mart.

Very mixed in quality. The lunch box specials aren't great. The stand-alone Bul-Gogi, cooked at the table, is quite good. The vegetables are above-average, if a bit on the sweet side. The seafood pancake was too thick in batter and utterly mediocre. This is a good place if you figure out what works for you, use it with care but it is worth a try if you live in the area.

Pokchangdong, 7601 Little River Turnpike, Annandale, 703-658-0508.

I have yet to go.

Po Jang Ma Cha, 7203 Columbia Pike, near the Giant, above the Small Arms Range of Annandale, 703-941-7020.

Koreans come here to drink and listen to the sounds of gunfire.

Jang Tuh, although their business card calls it "Kyong Suk Yi." 7271 Columbia Pike, Annandale, 703-642-8668.

The quaintest-looking place on this whole list, it is set in a little house with Korean characters on the outside. Right across from Korean B-B-Q, in the strip mall with the Giant in downtown Annandale. They specialize in noodles, are closed Sundays, and don't have a word of English on the menu. Excellent dumplings. Recommended.

Palace Restaurant, 7131 Little River Turnpike, 703-256-9292.

Set back from the road a bit, this is the most expensive Korean place around. The Shabu with Lycium Fruit, for instance, is \$36.95, it goes up to \$39.95 if you want the Nok Yong with that. And can you believe it, \$29.95 for Gop-Nak Jun Gol? Even the Dioscorea (yum!) Porridge runs \$13.95. Can it be worth it? The place claims to serve “Yhak-Sun” cuisine, using Korean herbal medicine. The standard Korean meats are quite good here, though. Worth a visit, even if you don’t buy into their theories about ginseng.

Seoul Gomtang, 8413 Old Courthouse Rd., 703-821-1110.

Their specialty is the beef soup.

Gom Ba Woo Restaurant, 7133-C Columbia Pike, Annandale, 703-642-1577.

In the mall with the Giant, between Rt.236 and Columbia Pike. Good dumplings, squid, seafood pancake, pork belly, the usual specialties. Good array of vegetables, and nice homey feel. Recommended.

Yett Gol, 12337-G Georgia Ave., Wheaton, 301-949-9060, and Woo Mi Garden, 2423 Hickerson, 301-933-0100.

Given how close to Annandale I live, I probably will never get to either one. The chance of them being bad is small, however.

Seven Star Restaurant, 7133-A Columbia Pike, set in the Korean strip mall with the Giant, but in the back side of that mall, more easily spotted from Columbia Pike.

I have yet to go, but surely it is good.

Hee Been, 6231 Little River Turnpike, near Beauregard St., Alexandria, 703-941-3737.

Recently expanded and refurbished, I have yet to revisit.

Korean Mini-Mall, 12814-C Braddock Rd., also 13814-B, 13860-B, Centreville, at Rt.29, technically it is called Old Centreville Crossing Shopping Center.

It has Cheogajip Chicken, 703-815-8744, Tae Hwa Won Restaurant, 793-266-4785, and Hahmji Bahk BBQ, 703-266-6681. The chicken place specializes in Korean Fried Chicken, fresh, along the lines of the Korean chain back home. I expect they are all excellent.

Kosher

Max's Kosher Restaurant, Wheaton, 2311 W. University Blvd, north side, about two blocks east of Georgia Ave, 301-949-6297.

A central spot for Jewish and Kosher dining and shopping in the area. Good falafel, I am told. See also Tel Aviv Café under Israeli.

JCC Café, 1529 16th St., NW, inside the D.C. Jewish Community Center, 202-387-3246.

Supposed to be good, run by a French-trained chef who has cooked for The White House.

Royal Dragon Kosher Chinese Restaurant, 4840 Boiling Brook Parkway, Rockville, 301-468-1922.

I have never gone.

Siena's Pizzeria, 11417 Woodglen Dr., Rockville, 301-770-7474.

Unlikely that I will get here soon, since I have no reason to seek out a kosher version of pizza.

Pita Plus Kosher Deli, College Park, 4425 Lehigh Road, Corner of Baltimore Ave. and Knox Rd., 301-864-5150.

One reader recommends the lafah, not the pita bread.

Laotian

Bangkok Golden Thai Restaurant, 6395 Seven Corners Ctr, right next to Hong Kong Palace, Falls Church, VA, 703-533-9480.

It's called Thai, and they do have Thai food (including a mediocre buffet), but there is also a separate Laotian menu – which you have to ask for but please do that. Throughout most of its history this place has been first-rate, though there are some bumps lately with the opening of a DC branch, let's hope they get on track. The Nam Khao is one of the best dishes in this whole area, get two of them. You can even get the dishes which don't sound too interesting. Use the dipping sauces a lot. The chicken on a skewer is good, as are the small dishes to start and the soups and the tilapia. There is also now a new Laotian menu, kind of a secret menu behind the secret menu, no English. Insist they show it to you. Tell them to bring you the best things from that menu. Sticky rice too, of course. Overall awesome, but with some recent caveats.

Thip Khao, 3462 14th St., Washington, NW, 202-387-5426.

An offshoot of Bangkok Golden, they have now brought Laotian food to DC. There is also an entire separate menu of “dishes we don’t have at Bangkok Golden,” which I can recommend. The soups here are very good, as are the ant eggs. Everything is fragrant and subtle, maybe more so than at the home branch. Prices are definitely higher, but not through the ceiling. What is lacking is heat, spice, and chilies, even though we asked for it. You will have to try harder in your requests than I did. This is an excellent place, but not yet perfect. And it gets very, very crowded. If you could put the best qualities of this branch and the mother ship together, you would indeed have a perfect restaurant. In any case you definitely should go, even if you think “why should I?: Bangkok Golden is already close to me.” This place is different, and in some ways better, though not all.

Laotian

Padaek, 6395 Seven Corners Ctr., Falls Church, on the other side from the Home Depot.

This used to be Bangkok Golden, now it is fully Laotian. They’ve upped the quality of the ingredients, but made the food sweeter. Still excellent, not exactly what you used to get, but a stellar place in the local dining scene.

Lebanese

Ya Hala, 409 Maple Ave. West, Vienna, 703-255-7070.

A remarkably fresh and yummy Lebanese mom and pop place. The best meat hummus around. Consistent. They also serve “foul and hummus” on weekends and occasionally they will have it on week nights, do ask. There is nothing really surprising here, but the execution is first-rate and the prices are very reasonable, definitely recommended. They open for Sunday breakfast at 10 a.m., by the way.

Zaaki, 6020 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, Baileys Crossroads, 703-379-2254.

Hookah, but lots of Lebanese food too, including all the classics and also a variety of sandwiches. Consistently good, this is one of the best in the area for Middle Eastern. It has maybe my favorite hummus around. You also have the very best views of Baileys Crossroads when you look out the window. I didn’t expect much when I walked in here, as it looks like neither a “nice restaurant” nor the right kind of “mom and pop,” but I can give this place quite a good recommendation.

Mount of Lebanon, 2922 Annandale Rd., Falls Church, 703-241-7071.

This is a reopened version of the excellent restaurant which used to be in Falls Church City, attached to a Lebanese butcher, before it burned down. It’s now much larger and, for some reason, the food is even tastier. Extremely authentic and

reasonably priced, much cheaper than either Cava or Me Jana. Get the hummus with meat, the grape leaves, the lamb with yogurt sauce (lamb fete), the spicy sausage. Definitely recommended, an excellent place across all dimensions. They also serve lamb brains, for those who seek that. Some day I will try the quails.

Me Jana, 2300 Wilson Blvd., 703-465-4440.

The sausage, and dishes involving fatty meats, are especially good. As is the raw meat. Simply an excellent restaurant, tasty all around.

Lebanese Taverna, on Washington St. (Blvd.), in Arlington, not far from Falls Church, also on Connecticut Ave., NW., Woodley Park, and a new one on Pentagon Row, 703-415-8681.

Very tasty Lebanese food. Draws an older, more traditional sort of Virginia crowd. Don't let them put you off. Good yogurt sauce, especially when pomegranates are involved.

Lebnan Zaman, 8411 Old Courthouse Rd., Vienna, 703-748-1400

A neglected place, surprisingly authentic given its Tysons location. The dishes with yogurt sauce are great, and none of the others are bad. Reasonable prices and good selection. The atmosphere is "order at the counter," not fine dining. They have hookah in the front parlor, if you want to get stoned. Recommended, go soon in case they don't make it in the long run.

Neyla, 3206 N St., NW, 202-333-6353.

Readers have been recommending this place to me, Chug likes it too. I have yet to go. They are supposed to have good pita, among other dishes.

Layalina, 5216 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, 525-1170.

Reasonably good food, but a bit overpriced to me, not a place I am enthusiastic about.

Pita House, 407 Cameron St., Old Town, Alexandria, 703-684-1118.

One of my favorite places in Old Town, and one of the best Lebanese places around. Very reliable, and will prove outstanding comfort food for many. Get the dishes with the yogurt sauce, most of all, but you can't go wrong here.

Cedar Café, 6409 Shiplett Blvd., Burke.

Recommended to me, I haven't yet been, a Lebanese person emailed me and said their Tabouleh was excellent.

Zaytinya, 701 9th St., NW, 202-638-0800.

Has received much attention and a few awards. It is uneven, but often excellent, much variety, and many of the dishes have genuinely new ideas. Not just the same old stuff. Lots of vegetarian. Get the mezzes. But two notes of caution. First, the dining room is far too noisy and crowded, even on weekdays. Second, the “beautiful people” come here to eat and drink.

Mama Ayesha’s, 1967 Calvert St., Washington, 202-232-5431.

Recommended by Washingtonian magazine, dates from the 1950s, I am suspicious.

Malaysian

Pete’s Diner, near Capitol Hill.

They are supposed to have some Malaysian specials, see http://www.wamu.org/mc/crummy_petes.html.

Mexican

How can I get good Mexican food around here? That is perhaps the most common query I receive. It is getting better just about every month and here are your best options:

La Chiquita, 2911 Columbia Pike, Arlington, 571-970-2824.

Formerly an Arlington food truck, this is now the best Mexican place and tacqueria in Northern Virginia, excellent all around. The tacos are consistent in quality, my favorite are the carnitas. The huaraches are better than anywhere else around I know. Weekends they serve pozole. If you like spicy, get the green peppers snack filled with cheese. I am delighted to now have this place in my repertoire, we haven’t had anything nearly this good in NoVa. Very casual, a comfortable place to sit down and eat, but not quite a restaurant either.

Taco Bamba Vienna, 164 Maple Ave., 703-436-6339, note they open at 8:30 a.m. and thus are a breakfast option.

If you read this guide, you probably already know the superior tacos of the original Taco Bamba outlet in Falls Church. The newer branch is yuppified, with longer lines, and the menu is broader, with more kinds of tacos, chilaquiles, tortas, and more sides. I was suspicious, but there seems to be no diminution in quality and a much bigger selection. Definitely recommended. Note that ordering a single taco here gives you much more food than in any other tacqueria I’ve seen, decide accordingly.

Espita Mezcaleria, 1250 9th St., NW, 202-621-9795.

South Mexican, this is probably the best Mexican place around right now. First, the corn in all forms is superb, most of all the simple corn on the cob ("elote"). Second, these are the best moles in the area by far. The green pipian mole, on pork ribs, would impress me even in Mexico City. The rest of the menu is good but not awesome. Good ceviche, but it's not the thing to get here. The Tlayuda I found a little dull. Quite good tacos, first-rate sopes (corn!). We all know that the moles and corn are what really counts, right? Definitely recommended.

El Sol Restaurante, 1227 11th St., NW, there is another branch at 3911 14th St., the Logan Circle branch at least is open mornings, there is conflicting information on exactly when, it is either 8 or 10 a.m. maybe call ahead.

The Washington Post said these were the best tacos around, so of course I tried them. The Washington Post is right! I especially liked the tacos del pastor. The pozole I thought was only so-so, and overall I am not entirely convinced by the notion that this is a serviceable full-scale Mexican restaurant with mole and the like. The atmosphere is more mom and pop than the web site might lead you to expect. Don't get carried away here, but definitely recommended, cheap too.

R&R Tacqueria, formerly 7894 Washington Blvd. (Rt.1); 410-799-0001, Elkridge, Maryland, 13 minutes north of the 495/95 intersection, look for the Shell sign. **Now I am told they have moved directly across the street, however, plus they have a branch in an IKEA somewhere.**

This tacqueria is in a *gas station*, with two small counters and three chairs to sit on. It is the best huarache I have eaten in the United States. It is the best chile relleno I've had in the United States. They serve among the best Mexican soups I have had, ever, and I have been to Mexico almost twenty times. I recommend the tacos al pastor as well. At first Yana and Natasha were skeptics ("Sometimes you exaggerate about food") but now they are converts and the takeaways have vanished. They even sell Mexican Coca-Cola and by the way the place is quite clean and nice, albeit cramped.

The highly intelligent proprietor is a former cargo pilot from Mexico City and speaks excellent English. The restaurant is called R&R after the names of his two sons.

For over twenty years I have sought such a place in the Washington, D.C. area and now I have one. For over twenty years people have been asking me how can they scratch this itch and now I have an answer. Via [Jodi Ettenberg](#), The Wall Street Journal [reports on gas station tacos](#).

Tacqueria Habanero, 3710 14th St., Washington, 202-722-7700.

This place is pretty good, Washington now has a tacqueria it doesn't have to feel ashamed of. I liked best the tacos tinga poblana. The memelas also are excellent, if you

don't know a memela is a Oaxacan version of sopas, the memelas here are better than what the menu calls sopas. The mole is pretty good, though not to die for, a slight bit sour for my taste. The other dishes I tried were all at least pretty good, with no clunkers in the batch. Lines form, so it is best to get here early. Not up to this nation's very best tacquerias, but definitely recommended, especially by the standards of the Washington, D.C.area.

Taco Bamba, 2190 Pimmit Dr., Falls Church. 703-639-0505. [tacobamba restaurant.com](http://tacobamba.com).

Suddenly NoVa has a real tacqueria! It's not up to par with the best of LA, Houston, or Chicago, or for that matter R&R, but it's better than anything else around. It's quite good. The tacos are good, the tamales are good, and the sauces and condiments are good, though the guacamole did not thrill me. Lots of take-out, countertop seating only, arrive early. Definitely worth having in the repertoire. Note that it is owned by the same guy who created Del Campo, namely Victor Albisu. And they have Mexican Coca-Cola.

Alegria, 111 Church Street Northwest, Vienna, 703-261-6575, their hours seem to be in flux but don't count on them being open at lunch.

Run by a Turk, with an oddly yuppie feel, extremely noisy, but still some of the very best Mexican food in Virginia. The chile relleno is the real thing. High standards of quality. Recommended, especially if you get there early. It tastes truly fresh, though the prices are not so cheap. Currently they seem to be opening at 4 and not taking reservations, we'll see if that policy persists.

El Tapatio, 4309 Kenilworth Ave., Bladensburg, 301-403-8882, open 10 to 10 every day, don't you love those hours?

This is a real Mexican place, treasure the thought. In LA or Houston this restaurant would be only average, but that is still great in absolute terms. Get the goat ("birria del chivo"). The best chile relleno around. Very good tacos. A lifesaver, despite its inconvenient location. It's right where the old "Cielito Lindo" used to be.

Tacqueria Tres Reyes, 5403 Kenilworth Ave., Riverdale, 301-779-6060.

On weekends they open at eight in the morning, as a good Mexican place should. Fully authentic, the shrimp soup is wonderful. Huaraches are tasty too. Superb for atmosphere and people watching, even when the jukebox is a bit too loud. Recommended.

La Flor de Puebla Bakery V, 6300 Kenilworth Ave., Riverdale, 301-699-8657.

A real Mexican bakery, lovely stuff. I don't usually cover bakeries, but they also sell chile tamales for a dollar a piece. Worth it every time, stop in if you are in the neighborhood.

La Sirenita, 4911 Edmonston Rd., just a bit off Kenilworth Ave., Hyattsville, 301-864-0188.

The best chile relleno around, and also the best beans. Excellent posole. I have yet to try the fried quail. The waitress recommends the "stripe soup." They get an A+ for atmosphere, recommended.

Costa Alegre Restaurant, 5815 A Greenbelt Rd., near Branchville, could this be Riverdale? College Park? Hyattsville?, 301-474-2278.

I ate here with Jane Galt, who also liked it. Excellent tacos, and get the barbacoa and the beef cheeks, it is a good sign that they serve it. The guacamole was only average but I liked the place, very friendly and good atmosphere.

La Sandia, Tysons Corner Center, Level 1, by Barnes and Noble, 703-893-2222, www.modernmexican.com

A Rick Sandoval place, it opened in May of 2008. I went during the first week and thought it was the best Mexican place around. It's traditional Mexican rather than fusion but genuine and with high quality ingredients. The tortillas were excellent as is the guacamole and the queso fundido; make sure you use the sauce on the latter, and in a tortilla. I liked the chile relleno, the skirt steak tacos, and especially the carnitas. The chicken tamale was disappointing. The prices are entirely reasonable and in fact cheaper than the other restaurants in that lower level Tysons area. But alas Sandoval places don't stay great for long, so now it is only "pretty good." Every now and then it shows some flashes of the former consistency.

Tacqueria Nacional, behind Johnny's Half Shell, 400 North Capitol St., NW, it closes at 3:30 and I am not sure if it is open weekends.

A lunch place, run by serious people, with real tacos, including fish tacos. I went once and thought it good but not worth all the attention. Plus it's hard to get a seat at lunchtime. And now I hear it is in decline.

Super Tacos & Bakery, 1762 Columbia Road, NW, 202-232-7121.

Maybe the most authentic Mexican place in DC right now. They are really trying. Tacos and classic Mexican dishes of all sorts. It is a bakery and sandwich place as well; they have all the classic sandwiches you can get in Mexico City. They have huaraches too. Not perfect but pretty good. Excellent for snacking. Opens at 8 a.m. in the morning. A sign of progress. Lots of take out and some stools.

El Mariachi, 765C Rockville Pike, by Wootton Parkway, Rockville, 301-738-7177.

Many (not all) people love this place, and it is usually crowded. I have yet to go.

Taco Jalisco, Rt.1, near Fort Belvoir.

A reader recommends this as a good hole-in-the-wall place. I have yet to go. I believe there are other worthwhile places nearby. Also recommended to me are El Charro, in Dale City, La Jaibita in Manassas, and El Puerto, in Alexandria. Caveat emptor, but do let me know what you think, I bet at least one of them is good.

Taco Rico, 4811 Edmonston Rd., Hyattsville, 301-779-8001.

Tacos for \$2.00 a piece, including tongue and cheef, cueritos and carnitas. Huaraches of many different kinds. I have yet to eat here, but I can't wait. In a friendly Mexican neighborhood.

Oyamel, now reopened near Verizon Center, where Andale used to be, 7th and about D

The best attempt we have at fancy Mexican. Still often excellent, though the number of flaws is growing. The clientele is now downright gruesome. But get the stuffed peppers (including jaral), the fried potatoes in mole sauce, the tomato salad, the short ribs, the seared scallops, cochinita pibil tacos (barbecued, slowly simmered pork), and small dishes only, never get the main courses. The last time I went the fish tacos were mediocre and the cuitlacoche (corn fungus, that word is Nahuatl for "shit of the gods," which is apt) was at best so-so. Expect decline, but it is still worth going, especially if you are a wise orderer.

Lauriol Plaza, 1835 18th St., NW, 202-387-0035, closed Mondays.

A long time ago they provided good Mexican and Spanish dishes in Adams-Morgan, but now they are execrable. And expensive. A hangout, and a huge one at that, no longer a restaurant. Not to mention the interminable waits to be seated.

Mixtec, 1792 Columbia Rd., NW, 202-332-1011.

An old Washington standby, but still reliable. Fairly genuine Tex-Mex food in crowded surroundings. At least yummy. Nor is it evil, unlike Lauriol Plaza.

Taqueria Poblano, 2400-B, Mount Vernon Ave., closed Tuesdays. Plus a new branch at 2503A N. Harrison St., Arlington, 703-237-8250, right off of Rt.29 by the Harris Teeter, this branch open every day but closed 3-5 weekdays.

Taquerias have some of the best Mexican food in Houston, parts of L.A., or the southwestern side of Chicago. This place was quite good when it opened but now it

is in decline. It is too commercial and the branch is content to serve reheated, not totally freshly cooked food. It is not moving in a promising direction.

Picante's! The Real Taco, 14511-B Lee Jackson Memorial Highway, Chantilly Park Shopping Center, 703-222-2323, Chantilly.

Mom and pop Mexican, in Chantilly, once good, now in decline.

Taco Baja Grill, 6136 Arlington Blvd., Willston Center, 703-534-5434.

Occasionally they reheat bad food so beware. Good atmosphere, though the possibility of leering men cannot be dismissed and indeed is to be expected. Overall it has been eclipsed by the competition.

Taco Pepitos Bakery, Adams-Morgan, Columbia Rd. somewhere.

Recommended on Chowhounds, I have yet to go.

Guajillo, 1727 N. Wilson Blvd., Arlington, near Rosslyn, by the Citgo, in the strip mall, 703-807-0840, usually open.

If you don't know the real thing, you will be pretty happy here. If you do know the real thing, you will know they are at least making a valiant effort. A quasi-yuppie Mexican place, not a hole in the wall, the mole is probably their best dish. The sauce is excellent though the chicken ends up a bit dry. Check out the amates on the wall.

Rosa Mexicano, 575 Seventh St., NW, 202-783-5522.

I went twice, and was not impressed. It is better than your local chicken fajitas, but much more expensive. It doesn't come close to what comes out of my own kitchen. The interior is nice, though, and some people will come here for the location and the singles scene. The real eater should head to Kenilworth Avenue.

Zengo DC, 781 7th St., NW, www.modernmexican.com.

Richard Sandoval and Placido Domingo own this place. Modern Mexican mixed in with Pan-Asian, once one of the best places in town but now only OK. The look is very stylish, and reminds the visitor of Manhattan or Mexico City. A hip crowd. The hamachi is good, also get the empanadas; don't say "I don't like empanadas, they are dull, crusty things." Swallow each arepa in a single bite.

Samantha's, 631 East University Boulevard, Silver Spring, 301-445-7300

Gives every sign of being a yummy, upscale version of a mom and pop restaurant. There is only one catch: the food is bland and uninteresting. Nor is it cheap, as

Mexican food goes. A disappointment. A bit Pan-Latin, but not in any way to its advantage.

Pancho Villa, 910S. Main St., Culpeper, 540-825-5268, branches also in Stafford and Fredericksburg.

That's right ***Culpeper***. Many of the dishes here are only so-so, but they have the best chile rellenos in the area. Get two of those.

El Charrito Caminante, 2710-A North Washington Blvd., Arlington, 703-351-1177.

Looks, smells, and feels like a real taqueria. The goat tacos are first-rate, probably the best Mexican dish you can get in Virginia. Next in line are the loroco pupusas, but many of the dishes here are no better than ordinary, noting that "ordinary" ain't so bad. N.B.: there is nowhere to sit inside, this place is mostly take-out. I also get the passion fruit juice to drink.

Mexican-Korean

Taco Ssam, 6017 Leesburg Pike, Baileys Crossroads, Culmore Shopping Cener, Falls Church, 703-347-6969.

Mostly Mexican, with some Korean mixes, such as fusion tacos with bul-gogi and spicy pork. Overall I quite like this place. Only six seats at the counter, and a cool vibe, not really a mom and pop in terms of presentation although I believe it is nonetheless a mom and pop. For Mexican food, and tacos, I would put it at the bottom of the top tier in this area, which these days is pretty good. Oddly, what misses are the Korean fusion dishes – the flavors don't gel and they just taste like weird tacos. Stick to Mexican, and get there early, and you will have a rewarding and repeat-worthy experience.

Mongolian/Chinese

Little Sheep Mongolian Hot Pot, Eden Center, 6799 Wilson Blvd., #10, Falls Church, 571-405-6947.

When I go to a new hot pot place, I typically feel it's going to be a bit more of the same. But this one I enjoyed more than expected. It has a broader selection than most hot pot places and the vegetables are clearly above average. The key to eating well here, in my view, is to opt for the spiciest hot pot broth. You see, they don't have the typical sauces readily available (though you can pay and beg for them). But if you dip your items into

the spiciest broth they offer, the spices come through strongly enough and you don't need an additional dipping sauce. Note that this place gets crowded and a reservation is probably needed. The service is also a bit uneven, though friendly. Overall this is a plus for the area, worth having in the repertoire. It, along with the newish Thai and Korean places in Eden Center, shows the shopping mall has made a big comeback as an outlet for restaurant innovation and not just a large number of Vietnamese places.

Moroccan

Arroz, 901 Massachusetts Ave., NW, 202-869-3300.

Located inside a big hotel complex, this Mike Isabella Moroccan-Spanish restaurant is far better than you might be expecting. I had six appetizers and every single one was excellent. The eggplant and the shrimp stood out, but they were closely clustered in quality. First-rate Moroccan bread, too. I suspect the question is not so much what to get, but when it will run out of gas and collapse into the "only somewhat above ordinary" category. Not cheap.

Mazagan. 2901 Columbia Pike, Arlington, right next to the Drafthouse Cinema, 703-566-4173.

Genuinely good Moroccan food, consistent across all fronts. I've tried about fifteen of the dishes here, and not a single miss, so in that sense I don't have many particular recommendations. Maybe the shrimp in spicy garlic sauce. More a trendy place than a mom and pop, but somehow it avoids the feel of being pretentious or unpleasant. It's simply a very nice restaurant to sit and dine in. There is nothing here which is strikingly original, but everything here is well above average and this is definitely a place to have in the regular repertoire.

Marrakesh, 617 New York Ave., NW, 202-293-9393.

Fixed price meal, with many delicious courses. The lamb in honey with almonds is a favorite, as is the Bistillah (chicken pie with cinnamon and sugar), and chicken with olives. Needn't be done more than once a year, but must be done at least once in your life. Be hungry when you go. And try to avoid the belly dancing, if possible. Excellent decor.

Fettoosh, 5100 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, 703-527-7710.

They masquerade as Lebanese, but mostly the place is of value for the Moroccan dishes. Creative, not just the usual, very mom and pop. You may need to ask for a separate Moroccan menu, worth doing. The Lebanese stuff isn't bad, but not a reason to go there. Get a Moroccan stew of some kind. Very basic décor, charming to me but perhaps not to all.

Evo Bistro, 1313 Old Chain Bridge Rd., McLean, 703-288-4422.

To say a place is “as cool as McLean gets” may not sound like high praise, but I suppose now it is. This mix of Moroccan and Spanish tapas is genuinely excellent, even if the Merlot-sipping wine bar crowd is a turn-off. The various forms of sausage are excellent, as is the tuna. Focus on the most Moroccan dishes, I would say. It’s very good. Really. Good cheeses and dessert too.

A Taste of Morocco, City Place Mall, 8661 Colesville Rd., Silver Spring, 301-588-4003, tasteofmorocco.net, usually open.

The Silver Spring branch of the well-known Arlington place by the same name. Right near AFI. Moroccan salads are never a mistake, plus there is the Bistillah.

Mozambique

Nando’s Peri Peri, 819 7th St., NW, 202-898-1225.

You also could call this food from Macau, Portugal, China (with a stretch), or the fast food of South Africa. They basically have one dish, chicken, and it is marinated in a tart sauce with chilies, of varying degrees of hotness. The sauce is good, the chicken is moist and cooked properly. The sides (rice, fries, salad) aren’t bad. It is fairly quick and reasonably cheap for its neighborhood, overall it’s not a “make a special trip there” kind of place but it will come in handy. Besides how often do you get food from Mozambique?

Nepalese

Royal Nepal Restaurant, 3807 Mt Vernon Ave, Alexandria, 571-312-5130.

Right by the Birchmere, a while ago there was a Sri Lankan place here. I am happy to recommend the lamb chops, tikka masala, and duck-fried rice, at the moment this place is a clear first choice in the Nepalese category. It mixed in many Indian dishes, is not really trying to place and mom and pop game, and maybe they don’t have the very best momos. But their best dishes are really quite special.

Himalayan Heritage, 2305 18th St., Washington D.C.

Both Nepalese and Tibetan, I am a big fan of this place. The momos – dumplings – are excellent. Anything they do with beans is recommended. The spicy chicken dishes, including the different forms of chicken barbecue, are very tasty and different from what you can get elsewhere in the area. This is quite simply a very good ethnic restaurant with a pleasant environment and it does not cost a fortune either.

Shangri-La restaurant, 7345-A Wisconsin Ave, Bethesda, 301-656-4444.

I put this in the pretty good, not great category. The momos are delicious and the two Nepalese thalis are decent, not superb. Of those two I prefer the vegetarian thali, as the meats are a bit tasteless and overcooked. I would say try this if it is nearby, but it is not worth making a special trip for. Much of the menu is Indian food, by the way, and those dishes I have not tried.

New Zealand

Cassat's, on 4536 Lee Highway, Arlington I believe, in the strip mall with Arrowine, (703) 527-3330.

The atmosphere is amazing reminiscent of a New Zealand café, including the art for sale. New Zealand has the world's best seafood and this place does not, but it is still above average for the area. For me it has significant nostalgia value as well (I once lived in Wellington). Monday is fish and chips night, I have been meaning to try that. This place definitely has its fans, very homey in a nice way, gets crowded for lunch.

Nigerian

Kingsway Café of Laurel, 13919 Baltimore Ave., Laurel, 240-294-4144.

Full of charm and good humor, this is one of the few Nigerian places around. For better or worse, it makes few concessions to the taste of the Western diner. The fufu comes in the form of a big lump, and is perhaps not as moist and juicy as one might ideally like. The vegetables have real flavor, and the goat is...bony. I enjoyed this place, taken in as an overall dining experience, but it was not "the Nigerian place I have been looking for." On execution they still need to improve. That said, I wouldn't mind going back, if only because there is nowhere else around quite like it.

Pakistani

Al Hamra, 4230 Annandale Rd., Annandale, 703-256-1906.

Wow, did I love this place. A mix of Middle Eastern and Pakistani, the owner is from Pakistan. I've only gone once, and tried three dishes, still I feel it is worthy of an immediate report. The best chicken Haleem around, by far. Superb Biryani rice, maybe also the best in the area. And the hummus was a knockout, made from actual fresh beans soaked overnight. The proprietor is also very friendly and knowledgeable. They offer yet more Pakistani dishes through their catering service, let's hope they make it to the main menu as well, I wonder if you can access them by calling ahead? Go, go, go!

Khan Kabob, 4229 Lafayette Center Dr., Chantilly, 703-817-1200.

Awesome Pakistani stuff, the best bread around, excellent lentils and of course kabobs, fish fry, lamb brains, karahi wok dishes, and haleem on weekends.

Everything here is subtle, not too oily as in many Pakistani places, overall a gem which gets everything right.

Toosso, 20921 Davenport Dr., Sterling, VA, 703-433-1233. There is also a branch in Rockville, at 1596A Rockville Pike, Rockville, 301-768-4645.

An excellent Pakistani place, fresh-tasting and closely tied to Pakistani street food. I like most of all the potato dish, the channa, the samosas, and nihari, a kind of beef stew. Chicken tikka is usually a boring dish but here it shines. The biryani is OK but I did not find it above average. Definitely recommended, and a fun scene too.

Kabob n Karahi, 15521 New Hampshire Ave., Silver Spring, 301-879-0044, a ways north of the Beltway.

This is probably the #1 Pakistani place in Maryland right now. I recommend the Karahi specialties, the lamb chops, haleem (weekends only), the chick peas, and the bread. Everything tastes real. The Chat is supposed to be good, I have not had it. A strong restaurant across the board, also good for people-watching.

Charcoal Chicken, 13969 Metrotech Dr., Chantilly, 703-953-3707.

The number one Pakistani place in Virginia, better than the competitors. Get the karahi chicken and the lamb with spinach. They have knock out bread and green sauce, make sure you dip *something* in the green sauce. Everything else seems pretty consistent. The fried fish is good too. Let the spices and juices from everything soak into the bread, and then the best part of the meal has arrived. Superb, I hope you get there.

Chutny's, 7081 Brookfield Plaza, Springfield, 703-569-7700.

I went here on a Ramadan evening, with Mike Munger and Chug Roberts. Everything started at about quarter to eight, the place was packed, and the atmosphere and people-watching rated an A+. What about the food? It was buffet style and the concentrated arrival of everyone meant that it was quite fresh. The haleem and the spicy, folded beef were both first-rate I thought, among the best around or perhaps the best. The tandoori, spinach, egg curry, and chick peas were pretty good, if not quite the best they were "good enough to enjoy." The rice was tasty, the samosa was for me too doughy, the desserts I did not try. Overall I had a very positive experience here, though perhaps Ramadan was weighing in my favor. The regular menu also serves up brains, though they were not on the buffet table to be had.

Note, by the way, that Brookfield Plaza has become a Pakistani center of sorts. It has numerous Pakistani restaurants and garment shops, and it even has a halal Chinese restaurant, owned and run by a Pakistani. This is a place which demands further exploration.

Ravi Kabob House, 305 N. Glebe Rd. Arlington, 703-522-6666, just north of Rt. 50.

Formerly the best kabob and Pakistani restaurant around, with very good karahi dishes. Yet I hear rumors of decline, I need to get back here and check.

Rawal Kabob House, 3531 S. Jefferson St. Falls Church, 703-738-6816, right on the edge of West Alexandria in a deep, forbidding strip mall.

I ate here once and thought the Pakistani fried fish was above average. The spicy green sauce was above average. Everything I saw on other people's plates looked good. At the moment I'm not tempted to put it up with my one or two favorite Pakistani places, but it's above average and I look forward to trying more dishes there. Fun atmosphere, TV news, Pakistani clientele, cheap prices. Worth a try.

Tabeer, 1401 University Boulevard, International Mall, upper level, Langley Park, 301-434-2121.

The menu resembles that of the old Food Factory. Whenever I am in the neighborhood, I cannot resist going to *Udupi Palace* or *Woodlands* (see *Indian*).

Mayur Kebab House, 1108 K St., NW, 202-637-9770.

A good kabob place, especially for DC.

Kabob Palace, 2315 S. Eads St., near Jefferson Davis Highway, Crystal City, 703-486-3535.

Tasty all around, plus there is Punjab Kabob next door, which I have yet to visit.

Village Kabob, 3013 Annandale Rt., at Rt.50, Falls Church, 703-536-3002.

Every time I go it becomes more of an El Salvadoran restaurant...

Mehran Restaurant, 2138 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, 202-342-0056.

Very mom and pop, pretty spicy, very yummy. Nothing more than the usual Pakistani selections, but I can be pretty happy with that. A good alternative in a part of town that doesn't have much hard-core ethnic food.

Merrifield Kabob, 8428 Lee Highway, Fairfax, 703-204-4400.

More of a dump than you would expect, given the location. The core influence here is Pakistani, and shady characters smoke hookay during the off-hours. This kind of food is almost always good enough to enjoy, but so far this place doesn't compete with Ravi or my other favorites of similar ilk. Go for locational reasons, that makes sense, a special trip not.

Aabshar Kabob & Sweets, 6550 Backlick Rd., Springfield, 703-866-1155.

Very authentic, but in this case that means the food is too oily. Can be tasty, but not for the novice. They have haleem virtually all the time, a plus, but anything fried simply isn't that good.

Skewers, 9736 Traville Gateway Dr., Rockville, 301-279-6999.

Supposed to be an above-average kabobs place.

Shahi Kabob House, 724 Pien St., Herndon, in the older part of Herndon.

An avid reader recommends the Chicken Karahi there.

Palestinian

Jerusalem Restaurant and Catering, 3405 Payen St. (right on Rt.7), Mount of Olives Center, 8666 Lessburg Pike, Bailey's Crossroads, 703-379-4200.

Good Middle Eastern food, get the chicken with red onions on bread if you want something especially Palestinian, the red onions are delicious.

Haifa Grill, 3541 Carlin Springs Rd, Falls Church, 703-820-4243.

A fun mom and pop, Palestinian rather than Israeli, with most of the usual Middle East specialties. My advice here is to load up on all the vegetarian entrees and split them. In fact, it may be the best place around for that strategy. The red pepper dish is especially good. Besides, you eat too much meat anyway.

Panamanian

Esencias Panameñas, 3322 Georgia Ave. NW, 202-688-7250.

Quite a charming place, and as far as I know the only Panamanian restaurant around. And it is Panamanian. Plantains, arroz con pollo, tamales, ceviche, plus some more boring "continental-style dishes." Some entrees can run over \$20, but overall if you are looking for Panamanian food this will indeed deliver that to you. The service is extremely friendly, so I would go back if I were in the area again. Located where the formerly great Rita's once was.

Persian

Alborz, 8417 Old Courthouse Road, Vienna, 703-288-4500.

Right now this is the best Persian place around. It's in some ways a carbon copy of Shamshiry, just that right now it is a little sharper and more consistent. I like best their barg [beef kabob] with cherry rice, but it is a consistent restaurant and one can visit often and experience repeated delights. The salmon with zereshk polo, barberries, I recommend too. But unlike Shamshiry, they have excellent stews, not just the kabobs with special rices. And like Shamshiry, it is good for Persian people-watching.

Marjan, 155-A Maple Ave., Vienna, 703-272-7374.

The most authentic Iranian place around. It is a semi-buffet, with daily specials, and yes they do run out of dishes, always a good sign. Nonetheless there is always something of interest. Stews more than kabobs. They serve many dishes beyond the usual panoply you find in the other Iranian places. They mostly do take-out and catering, but have four seats along a counter, and a fun mom and pop atmosphere. Definitely recommended, let's hope it can survive Vienna commercial pressures.

Shamshiry, 8607 Westwood Center Drive, Vienna, VA, 703-448-8883. Off of Route 7, near the Dulles access road. Not visible from any road. Turn left at the *American Cafe*, and head towards the back. Near Oriental Regency, down a bit from United Airlines.

An excellent Persian place. Kabobs only, which I usually find dry and unexciting, but this place is a winner. Best rice in the area, very fragrant. The Barberry Rice and Cherry Rice, with chicken or beef respectively, are highly worthwhile. The Barberry Rice is wonderfully tangy and sour and the berries are luscious. What kind of rice you order is the real decision here, not what kind of meat. Ask for the beef medium rare, or even rare, if you order meat. The salmon is my favorite, with Zereshk Polo, make sure you rub Maast Moosir (a kind of thick yogurt sauce) into the whole thing, liberally. Excellent people-watching also, if you are interested in the Persian upper-middle class.

Yas Bakery, and Gourmet Groceries, now at 137 Church St., 703-242-2800.

I don't usually cover ethnic groceries, but they bake their own bread and it is #1 in the whole area. First you grab a number, then you wait, sometimes up to fifteen minutes if there is a crowd. It comes out fresh, piping hot, absolutely delicious. Worth a visit, and yes you will come back. It doubles as northern Virginia's best grocery.

Rose Restaurant, 126 W. Maple Ave., Vienna, 703-255-9696.

Yes this is from the folks who brought you the old Café Rose, in Falls Church. The new incarnation is brighter, quicker, and has a broader menu. The eggplant appetizer is first-rate, the yogurt dipping sauce for the bread excellent. The two stews are both good, the best kabob is the lamb, one of the best kabobs around right

now, very juicy. Very low prices, in terms of value-added this is a real winner. The velvet paintings on the wall only add to the atmosphere.

Bread & Kabob, 3407 Payne St., Bailey's Crossroad, just off Rt.7, north side, east of Peking Gourmet Inn, 845-2900, usually open. They just opened one in Vienna too.

My favorite here is the Dizi. Dizi is "traditional Iranian lamb stew with beans, chick-peas, onion, potato, tomato, garlic, dried lime, rolled oat and spices cooked overnight and served in the same pot." One of those meals where the consumer contributes to the production process, using what appear to be instruments of dental torture. The kabobs, while good, do not stand up to the competition elsewhere.

Open Friday and Saturday nights until 5:00 a.m.; they also serve Kalle-Pacheh and Haleem at those times.

Amoo's, 6271-A Old Dominion Drive, near Kirby, McLean, 703-242-1709.

They have expanded the menu, get the lamb kabob with the pistachio rice but everything here is very good, this is a place on the rise, after having been around for a long time it reinvented itself and brought some major improvements. And it was really good to begin with!

Moby Dick House of Kabob, 6854 Old Dominion Road, McLean, VA, 448-8448, also branches in Georgetown (Wisconsin Ave. south of M), Bethesda, and Fairfax (12154 West Ox Road, other locales.

OK, but just another chain at this point.

Duke Kabab, 6301 Little River Turnpike, Suite 140, Alexandria, 256-0009, across from the street from the Alexandria Tower Records.

Above average kebabs. More truly ethnic than *Moby Dick*, and a more Persian atmosphere.

Kabob Bazaar, 3133 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, 703-522-8999, just across from Clarendon Metro.

The best ground beef kabob around, period. The daily stews are great, too. Doesn't look like much, but this place is excellent. Addictive. And don't be afraid to get the ground beef kabob, which in most other places is just boring. Here it could be the best dish. With the barberry rice, if they have it that day, they usually do on Thursdays or Fridays.

Sam's Restaurant and Café, 765 Rockville Pike, Rockville, 20852 - (301) 424-1600.

Stews, kabobs, lamb shank, special rice dishes. Sounds pretty good, I have yet to go, one reader claims they make the best gelato in the DC area.

Peruvian

Nazca Mochica, 1633 P St. NW, 202-733-3170.

I've been here twice, once in the downstairs bar area, the second time upstairs in the main dining room. It is nice to see DC have another good Peruvian place that goes behind chicken. I enjoyed everything here I tried, but overall I say your best course of action is to order as much of the ceviches as possible. Good quinoa. Worth having in the repertoire, but doesn't quite succeed in being DC's definitive Peruvian place in the way that maybe it could have.

Huascaran Restaurant, 3606 Mount Vernon Ave., Alexandria, 703-684-0494, right across from the Birchmere.

This is a broadly average Peruvian restaurant with lots of local color and atmosphere. Its distinguishing feature is that they serve cuy – guinea pig – on a regular basis. Technically it is listed as a special, so call ahead, but usually they seem to have it. The sauce is delicious, especially on the potatoes. The key to eating the cuy is to chew on the fatty skin and the sauce and not obsess over getting all the meat. You can't, not even if you use your fingers and teeth, as you ought to. Overall this restaurant is not perfect but it has high points and I definitely recommend it as a unique experience.

Super Chicken, 422 S. Washington St., Falls Church, 703-538-5366.

How good can any chicken be? Should any roast chicken place be on the "must-tries" list? Maybe not, but this is the best chicken place around and it didn't make my guide at all last time, so I believe it could use the extra publicity. Northern Virginia magazine did a blind taste test of about ten different roast chicken dishes from leading restaurants. Super Chicken was a clear winner, including in my eyes. I since went to the restaurant and found it was even better on-site. They also have the best rice and beans around and occasional Peruvian dishes such as fried fish and tripe stew. No, it doesn't transcend its category but it does win its category. Worth a try.

Lima, 1401 K St., NW, 202-789-2800

A hip place, and some of the best ceviche in town. Not cheap and hard to get in on Friday and Saturday. Parts of the décor are stunningly attractive, while other parts resemble a bad high school cafeteria. Friendly service. I thought the short ribs were excellent, plus of course the ceviche. I recommend focusing on the appetizers. I don't feel I need to go here often, and I suspect that not all the menu items (of course

I picked the best ones) are good. But it is definitely a place worth trying. I'll add that at least half the menu items are not "Peruvian," in the classic sense, but the same could be said for the hot spots in Lima, Peru. This place is aptly named.

Wild Chicken, 11039 Lee Highway, Fairfax, West Fair Shopping Center, in the rear, this is the hardest place to find in this whole guide, it is simply behind the big buildings facing the main street.

They have Peruvian chicken, a 7 on a scale of one to ten. On Monday there is Lomo Saltado, Tuesday has Aji de Gallina, and Friday has Seco de Carne (beef stew with cilantro). Those dishes are quite good, and occasionally on offer other days as well. An intriguing mom n' pop, and certainly worth trying at least once. They also offer unusual (and tasty) Latino ice creams, seasonally. It's still getting better, too.

Edy's Chicken and Steak, Las Brasas, Leesburg Pike, Bailey's Crossroads, on the north side of Route 7, just east of Chesapeake Plaza, where the old Borders used to be; 820-5509.

In fancy new digs, at first the quality declined but now it has recovered. That being said, the waits for chicken are now sometimes interminable, once it took a solid 35 minutes. One is reminded of Yogi Berra's old adage: "Nobody goes there anymore, it's too crowded." Still, I love this place. And an A plus for atmosphere and good general fun. Oh, get the chicken, not the steak. For yucca fries, I think the best is Brasa Roja, in Fairfax, or the place in Willston Plaza, on Rt. 50, the yucca here is actually substandard.

The Chicken Place, 5519 Leesburg Pike, Bailey's Crossroads, where the old Edy's used to be.

They have one of the tastiest chickens, a place to go if you are tired of the large crowds at Edy's, you can eat here with no sacrifice in quality, plus the chicken comes more quickly.

Another good Peruvian chicken place is Pollo Inka, in a Herndon mini-mall, 656 Elden St., 703-481-9090. A correspondent recommends Pollo Real, again in Herndon, Elden St. at Herndon Parkway.

El Pollo Rico, 932 Kenmore St., Arlington, 703-522-3220, near the GMU Law School, they have moved from the old location.

You have to admire any restaurant that has only one item on the menu. One of the best chicken places. Maybe the best chicken. And certainly the best fries. But no yucca. On the negative side, the portions are smaller than in many places. Great for people-watching.

La Granja de Oro, 2920 Annandale Rd., Falls Church, 534-5511, 5519.

The place to go for Peruvian mixed grill, including beef heart, tripe, calf liver, etc. The other items are adequate, though not the very best around. Not on a major strip, so most people don't know about it. Not so far from either Rt.7 or 236. Live music on some evenings. I've heard there is a good branch in Washington, also.

By the way, don't drink Inka Kola, no matter how many locals you see ordering it. It's like boiled, sweetened, liquefied bubble gum.

Peruvian Chicken and Steak, 6198 Arlington Boulevard, 237-7704.

Yet another chicken place, yet another good chicken place. In Willston Shopping Center strip mall. They have interesting fruit juices, too.

Chicken House and Family Kitchen, 6007 Leesburg Pike, in Culmore Shopping Center, 703-379-1255.

The most stripped down chicken place you can imagine, barely deserves to be called a restaurant. Not above average, but not below average either. The immediate area has stiff competition, but occasionally I end up here.

El Chalan, 1924 Eye St., NW, 202-293-2765

Peruvian food for the World Bank crowd, basically. Not an extensive menu but it does draw on several parts of Peru, including Ariquipa Acts like a real restaurant, differs from the other Peruvian places listed here. Worth visiting, order the lamb in beer sauce and the chicken in peanut and onion sauce.

El Pulgarcito del Callao, 11333 Elkin St., Wheaton, 301-942-5395.

Peruvian, El Salvadorean, and Mexican dishes, but Peruvian at its core. I have yet to try it.

Pio-Pio, 3360 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, 703-465-5200.

OK rotisserie chicken, but there is Pollo Rico nearby. That is why they sometimes have a chicken standing outside the front, waving a large placard.

Peruvian-Chinese-Japanese

China Chilcano, 418 7th St., 202-783-0941, open between lunch and dinner times by the way.

I like this Jose Andres place, but it's not quite what I expected. I thought it would be overpriced, occasionally brilliant, but fundamentally unsound. I've now tried about twenty of the dishes and they are pretty consistent, and tasty, but without truly

memorable standouts. The innovation is virtually always interesting – imagine unagi sushi on top of a Peruvian purple potato. Tasty, yes, but I’m not sure I need to eat it again. That said, the place has enough interesting dishes that you can just keep on trying them and remain more or less perpetually entertained. On top of that they have a bunch of Peruvian standards. And while it isn’t cheap, I find it affordable for what you get, especially if you just order one of the Peruvian dishes. Overall I’ll keep coming back here. I definitely recommend it, but to some extent your reaction will depend on your expectations. Note that it gets quite crowded and noisy, so I strongly recommend going early.

Pizza

Pizzeria Orso, 400 South Maple Avenue, near Blanca’s, Falls Church, 703-226-3460.

New owners, for the most part, still pretty good but no longer at the top.

Menomale, 2711 12th St NE, Washington, DC, 202-248-3946.

The best pizza around. Neapolitan. Like letters of recommendation, the very best pizza reviews should be extremely short. Closed Tuesdays.

Pupatella, 5104 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, 571-312-7230, funny hours, closed Sunday and Monday, and also closed 3:30 to 5.

Excellent all around, it makes up for the demise of Orso. First-rate Neapolitan pizza. Everything is fresh. Service is good. Execution is strong. Cheese and crusts are consistent. The seating quarters are modest but they are comfortable enough. I have yet to try their gelato, but this place should be in everyone’s repertoire. I don’t even have to crave pizza (rare for me) to want to go here.

Pete’s New Haven Pizza, 3017 Clarendon Blvd, Arlington, (703) 527-7383.

Eh. Some people swear by this. It’s OK, but overpriced and too popular, for me there is no reason to go, though of course you can do worse. Sadly, the clams are the worst of what they have to offer. Maybe the DC branch is better, but I wouldn’t bet on that.

I like the pizza at Liberty Tavern, in Clarendon, get with apples and Vermont cheese. Matchbox, near the Verizon Center, is tasty but almost always has crowd and a wait. Excellent pizza, good food, recommended. See also Esposito’s, under Italian, the owners are from Elizabeth, New Jersey. 2 Amys, 3715 Macomb St., 202-885-5700, is perhaps the best place in DC. Pizzeria Paradiso, 2029 P St., is considered very good by many, now also at 3282 M St. Coppi’s, 1414 U St., comes recommended. Two old places are Ledo in Adelphi, and Mario’s Pizza in Arlington, both about fifty years old.

If you're really desperate, drive to New Haven, Connecticut, the best pizza in the U.S., or try Brooklyn. Chile and Sweden are strong pizza countries.

Portuguese

Tavira, 8401 Connecticut Ave., Chevy Chase, 301-652-8684.

Here's my theory of Portuguese food: go to the Ironbound section of Newark, otherwise forget it, at least outside of Portugal and Fall River, Massachusetts. This place gets good reviews, but I expect it to struggle. And at \$17.95 an entrée, why bother unless it is truly fine? Let me know if you go and find out.

A Caravela, 4615 Wisconsin Ave., NW, 202-537-3200, closed Sunday and Saturday lunch.

Salt cod, in many different manifestations. I have yet to go.

Carmello's & Little Portugal, 9108 Center St., Old Town Manassas, 703-368-5522, no weekend lunch.

They have Italian food also, and it is expensive. I have yet to go.

Puerto Rican

Mio, 1110 Vermont Ave NW, 202-955-0075.

Let's start with the good news. This is an entire restaurant of Puerto Rican food, a cuisine hard to come by in these parts. It has more Puerto Rican dishes than just about any restaurant in Puerto Rico proper, namely dozens. So it's worth going. But then there is the bad news. It tastes good but not great. It is not cheap. And for others, the trendiness of this place may be further bad news. Now here's the "can't decide whether this is the good or bad news": I suspect if you ordered every item on the menu, and figured out which were the best ones, you could have a properly good meal here. But for most of you, that's not in the cards. So this is a place to be tried, but revisited only if you can crack the code, which I couldn't.

Cancun, 11260 Georgia Ave., Wheaton, 301-949-9838.

Mostly a Mexican and El Salvadorean restaurant, but they serve some Puerto Rican specialties on weekends. Sleeveless shirts are not allowed, that kind of place. Alas, no mofongos, however, which means not enough garlic for my taste.

See also Banana Café, under Cuban, they have some Puerto Rican dishes.

Rinconsito Caribeno, on Columbia Ave., just east of 18th, in the Adams Morgan street food plaza, Friday, Saturdays, Sundays lunch, or as God allows.

The best Puerto Rican food around, this is street food only. Most of the other vendors serve El Salvadoran food and there is one decent Mexican place there (Viva Mexico). I recommend the stuffed pepper (most of all), the Puerto Rican lasagna, the mofongos, and the Puerco asado. The chicken isn't bad but nothing special.

Russian

Mari Vanna, 1141 Connecticut Ave., NW, 202-783-7777.

Let me first say this is one of the very few places in DC that actually has charming and original décor. And the two floors offer very different ambiances. The food? Well, I don't like most Russian food. That said, this menu is more authentic and more detailed than you might expect. I tried numerous dishes, and while I didn't like most of them, I blamed at least 2/3 of that on the country rather than on this restaurant. I thought the sour cherry dumplings and the Georgian bread stuffed with cheese were quite good, so you can always get those, and I bet they have a few more good dishes too. And this place is very good for people-watching. Russian people, that is. In any case an interesting experience and I am glad I went.

Russia House, 790 Station St., Herndon, 787-8880.

I drove to this place once, but it looked boring and overpriced. So, I reoptimized and opted for Peruvian chicken in a nearby strip mall, I think it was called Pollo Inka.

Russia House, 1800 Connecticut Ave., near Florida, 202-234-9433, closed Sunday.

Some claim it is excellent, I need to check it out. The best places I know are in Helsinki.

Salvadorean

Antipaqueño Restaurant, 2504 Ennalls Ave., Wheaton, 301-942-1129.

This place is a total wreck and mess when it comes to service, décor, and organization. They also serve the best pupusas I've eaten in the U.S., ever. It's worth it. The soups look pretty good too. The menu is ghastly in its presentation and it doesn't list a lot of what they serve. Just try to talk your way into what you want to eat. The cute waitresses will giggle and mess up your order, but they do know what a pupusa is. I call this a find, though you need to go with the proper expectations.

Atlatl, 4701 Columbia Pike, Arlington, VA 920-3680, usually open.

In decline, and no longer the best El Salvadorean in the area. The herb pupusas are still good, though. If you've never had this kind of food before, still good enough to be a revelation. Nice funky décor, too.

Restaurante El Salvador, 4805 Columbia Pike, Arlington, 703-521-3225,

One of the best Salvadorean places, in a universe of dozens. Juicy pupusas, nice atmosphere. Also get the corn tamales, tamale de elote. When going to an El Salvadorean restaurant, always order the pupusas. Always order the pupusas. Always order the pupusas. A Pupusa, for the uninitiated, is a Salvadorean "pancake," made of corn-based bread, stuffed with meat, cheese, or both. Make sure you put lots of spicy cabbage on the top (called "curtido"). The cheapest good meal around, also. They have some Peruvian dishes, too.

Sarita's, 102 E. Fairfax St., Falls Church, 533-9448.

Authentic, to say the least. Plus you can find Sarita's II in the Culmore Shopping Center on Rt. 7, Bailey's Crossroads. A good rule of thumb is the following: just about every El Salvadorean place in the area is worthwhile if you order well. Which means getting the pupusas. In Sarita's II they dress the waitresses to maximize the number of leering male customers, so beware if you go.

El Buen Gusto Restaurant, 10012 Main St., Fairfax, 703-218-3489.

Surprisingly good, their tacos are excellent and fairly authentic. No one there speaks English. Limited menu. Very good chicharron (fried pork) with yucca. Worth a visit.

Las Placitas, 517 8th St., SE, 202-543-3700, no weekend lunch.

Overpriced Salvadorean food, with real napkins and tablecloths. Pretends to be a real restaurant. For that reason, the only Salvadorean place many people would go to. The food is still good enough to justify the price, just realize you're paying twice what you have to. Good for those stuck near Capitol Hill.

El Paraiso, various branches, I ate at 4716 King St., Alexandria, 703-820-2040.

Below average, everything was a bit dry. In the El Salvadoran category there is too much competition for this place to merit a repeat visit. I might have hit a bad day but at my favorites that never happens.

El Golfo, 8739 Flower Ave., near Piney Branch Road, Silver Spring, 3-1-608-2122.

It is hard to review all of these Salvadorean restaurants, and say something new about each one, don't you think?

Chirilagua, a neighborhood in Alexandria/Arlandria, at Mount Vernon Avenue and West Glebe Road.

Did you know that maybe 400,000 Salvadoreans live in this area? I've decided that when it comes to El Salvadorean restaurants, there is no point in simply listing more of them. The key is to find out which dishes you like, not which restaurants you like.

Saudi Arabian

Aldeerah, 262 SE Cedar Lane, Vienna, 703-573-3205, closed Monday lunch.

Wow, this place is fun, just opened in early 2015. I've only been once, but immediately I saw the menu has about fifteen items which, not only had I never heard of before, but which I had not imagined before. It seems to be real Saudi stuff. What I tried was excellent. It had lamb on top, high quality meat, and three layers underneath. The bottom layer was rice with a viscous yogurt, the intermediate layer was rice with lamb fat, and the top layer was just plain fragrant rice. I think the name of the dish started with an M. It's probably not even the best dish they have. For people watching this is an A+, also. I don't pretend to have figured out the "code" of this place, but based on what I have seen I would call it a "must visit."

Seafood

Horace & Dickie's Seafood Carryout, 809 12th St. NE, Washington. There is another branch on Martin Luther King Ave., somewhere.

The best fried fish in the area, a must. Amazing atmosphere, take-out only, bad neighborhood, get the picture? Fish, fish, fish. That's all they have. And it is fried, fried, fried. You may not go often, due to the associated inconveniences, but a gem. They also have great fries, collard greens, potato salad. Crab cake surprisingly decent. Go, go, go.

Fiola Mare, 3050 K St., Washington, 202-628-0065.

Here's a restaurant that breaks virtually every Tyler Cowen rule of good dining. It is in Georgetown (ugh). It offers riverfront views (ugh). The staff is well-trained and has a pleasant and cloying manner (ugh). I could go on. But – here's the thing – it is really good. The food tastes really good. To be sure, there is a catch. For lunch my small piece of fish, while superb, cost \$40, and that is before tax and tip. I wouldn't spend my own money here. And that also means I won't be going back enough to see if/when the quality declines. But if you have the chance to eat here at someone else's expense, by all means take advantage of the opportunity rather than fighting it.

Coastal Flats, 11901 Grand Commons Avenue, Fairfax, (571) 522-6300, there is one in Tysons Corner as well, near the movie theatres.

A chain-looking seafood place, but it is packing them in regularly. The fish is surprisingly good and consistent in quality. The food here is anti-interesting, but sometimes I eat here before going to the movies and it's always good. The vegetable specials are first-rate, against all odds.

Sea Pearl, 8191 Strawberry Lane (Gallows Rd., more or less, by the boarded up cinema), Falls Church, 703-372-5161.

A seafood place, owned by the same people who run Four Sisters Vietnamese restaurant. I've had three dishes here and thought they were pretty good, not great but I enjoyed them. The restaurant hasn't yet quite figured out what it wants to be. It's only slightly Asian, somewhat of a nice place but not very nice, and a seafood place but not really that either. At the very least it's worth a try. They also do a reasonable Sunday brunch. Beware the ugly view out of the window.

Oceanaire Seafood Room, 1201 F St., NW, 202-347-2277.

Art deco interior, excellent quality seafood, the best seafood around. Not cheap, but better than the equally high-priced competition. Don't be put off by the trappings, or by the vile nature of most of the other customers. Worth trying, even if you think it is not for you.

Black Salt, 4883 MacArthur Blvd., NW, near U St., 202-342-9101, closed Monday.

Fancy seafood, this place gets very good reviews. I went once and was not overwhelmed.

Hank's Oyster Bar, 1624 Q St., NW, 202-462-4265.

Overrated. Warning you off places like this is exactly what this guide is good for. I wanted it to be good, I really did. It is just not that good, sorry. Many people love it though.

Crisfield's, 8012 Georgia Ave., Silver Spring, 301-589-1306.

Just off Georgia Ave. Plain fish of high quality, though overall it is getting a bit tired. The Art Deco architecture and atmosphere is stunning. Is this 1953 or what? Great clock. Order the Flounder stuffed with crabmeat. Don't expect so much from the salads or soups. Not cheap. The accompanying visit to Silver Spring is an object lesson in how Maryland and Virginia differ.

Seafood Hokkaido Buffet, 5900 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, Baileys Crossroads, 703-845-0888, www.hokkaidova.com.

Huge, cavernous, and culturally unidentifiable despite the Japanese name. They serve sushi, kimchee, 1950s style cafeteria food with roast beef and jello, dim sum, crab, salt and pepper frog legs, ice cream, something resembling Texas barbecue, and much much more. \$18.95 a pop, with cheap drinks. It's packed and it mixes immigrants from all over the world. Too bad none of it tastes good, but for people-watching it is A+ and the place is a fun concept to think about. Of what I sampled, the crab was best.

SoBe Seafood Co., 3100 Clarendon Blvd., Arlington, 703-528-0033.

In the trendy part of Arlington, which usually spells death for food. The Washington Post says it is "pretty good, not great." Some of the dishes have a vaguely Caribbean tinge.

Senegalese – see Nigerian

Somalian

Safari Restaurant, Columbia Pike, Baileys Crossroads, right by the Acura dealer and behind the strip mall with Full Kee and Best Buy.

I didn't write down the phone number or address because I thought I could Google to them but so far nothing is on line, even though the restaurant has been open for seven months, since mid-2011. Was it a dream? All that broken glass on the doorstep? The rolled-up carpet obstructing the entrance way? The apparent surprise from the staff that a customer might show up and request some food?

I enjoyed my visit. The menu had I think four items, none of which were so clearly explained. I asked them to bring me the two best items. I received a fried chicken steak, some plain beef bits which are good if you apply the spicy green sauce, a delicious rice, and decent spaghetti noodles. It came with a free lemonade. Then they brought some Somalian empanadas (pretty good), a few empty doughy things (decent), and two plain unpeeled bananas, all in rapid succession. There was talk of goat in the future. All for \$25.

You can pick nits with the food, but I'll go back, it's been my most unique eating experience in some time.

Soul food – see Southern and also Barbecue

Southern (see also Barbecue)

Jose Andres America Eats, 1700 Tysons Blvd., more importantly in the Ritz-Carlton, free valet parking with validation by the way, 703-506-4300.

American and mostly southern dishes, this is based on a pop-up restaurant which Andres tried in DC for a few months a few years ago. It has the best hush puppies I have ever sampled. Excellent peanut soup. Brunch for breakfast and a good place for a business breakfast proper. Quality salmon but the portion is too small. Good egg dishes for breakfast. The fried chicken is tempting, though I did not try it. Overall a very good entry but somewhat overpriced, as befitting the Ritz location. Some of you should definitely visit this one, however.

Georgia Brown's, 950 15th St., NW, 202-393-4499. On the west side of the park, at the place where there appear to be two 15th Sts.

A visit here will almost make you think you that America is an integrated nation. Here is where the black upper and middle class hangs out. Great atmosphere, and sometimes excellent food. Make sure you get some grits. The place has slipped from its early days, but I have had some excellent meals here, usually at Sunday brunch. Sometimes the music is too loud. In any case worth a visit.

Vidalia, 1990 M St., NW, 202-659-1990, closed Sunday.

Nouvelle Southern food, extremely tasty and creative, can be one of Washington's best restaurants. One meal I had here was superb, and the other was mediocre. You are taking your chances. Order the Pecan Pie for dessert. Expensive. Lots of World Bank and IMF types go here, in search of what is to them exotic. It's reinvented itself a few times, so caveat emptor, let's hope someone else is paying the bill.

Flavors Soulfood, 3420 Carlyn Hill Dr., Falls Church, 703-379-4411.

I am fond of this place. The sides are good. I get the trout, candied yams, and mashed potatoes. More soul food than barbecue, but recommended, and first-rate atmosphere.

Hodges Carry-Out, 616 New York Ave., NW, near the Convention Center, 202-628-0606.

Supposed to have good collard greens, fried chicken, sandwiches, etc. This place has been there for more than one hundred years, really.

Vantage Point, 1900 N. Fort Myer Drive (Holiday Inn), Rosslyn, Arlington, 703-527-4814.

The Washingtonian magazine describes the offerings as "Southern Coastal," and cites crab cakes and peanut-roasted pork tenderloin. Sounds too hotel for me to go unless you tell me otherwise.

Southside 815, 815 S. Washington St., Alexandria, 836-6222.

Biscuits, grits, mashed potatoes, etc. I have yet to go. I am told they have some New Orleans dishes as well, such as Po' Boy with fries and slaw.

Soul Vegetarian Restaurant & Exodus Carry-Out, 2606 Georgia Ave., NW, 202-328-7685.

Huh? All-vegan, no lard, excellent food, lousy service. At least that is what I hear.

Southwest

Anita's, several branches, the main one is on Rt. 123 in Vienna, often they are open quite late.

Once an excellent restaurant, now merely a good restaurant, sometimes a mediocre one. An attempt to mimic the food from New Mexico. Go spicy here, if you can. I like the Mr. T's special, spicy pork with potatoes. Quick, convenient, and sometimes hits the spot. Still has a place in my repertoire, whether it deserves it or not. And the atmosphere is total, classic Vienna Virginia. A good hang-out. The breakfast specials look intriguing, but I have never tried them.

Spanish

See also Arroz, under Moroccan. It is one of the best Spanish places, too.

Ser, 1110 N. Glebe Rd., Arlington. 703-746-9822.

I tried about six dishes here, and liked all of them. I consider it competitive with the other good tapas places around, and would rather eat here than La Tasca. The real standouts here are the vegetable dishes, one vegetable stew in particular. If you are a vegetarian frustrated with Spanish food, here is the place to come. Others should enjoy it too. It is also spacious and with nice décor and very good service. If you are thinking about parking, just surrender to the underground lot, I don't think close spots nearby even exist, never mind finding an open one.

Taberna del Alabardero, 1776 I St., entrance on 18th St., 202-429-2200, opens at 6:00.

Yummy, but increasingly uneven. They often have regional specialties cooked by visiting chefs. Not cheap. Good paella. Stuffer than it needs to be, but sometimes truly excellent. It has shown a remarkably ability to reinvent itself when needed, but before going try to find out where they are in the cycle.

Boqueria, 1837 M St NW, Washington, DC, 202-558-9545.

Right now the best tapas place around. It's not dramatic or even especially original. But on execution it is very consistent. I recommend the spinach, the lamb skewers, and the quail egg dish, among others. I've sampled about fifteen of the small dishes here and none were bad or mediocre. Not cheap, but one of the better places in midtown these days, especially for lunch.

Estadio, 1520 14th St., NW, 202-319-1404, no lunch.

The best items here are the cheeses and the plain meats. If you think of your meal here as a catered, more expensive Whole Foods experience it can be valuable in that way. The more creative dishes, such as the smoked salmon with honey and yogurt, are only OK. The small sandwich (bocadillo) with the blood sausage was the best course I had. It's crowded and noisy and they take reservations only for the very early hours. If you think of getting cheese and snacks here at 5 or so, I am enthusiastic. Otherwise it is too costly an experience for me to recommend.

Jaleo, 480 7th St., NW, 202-628-7949. Plus a new branch in Bethesda, Woodmont at Elm St., 301-913-0003.

Near the MCI Center, and trendy. Spanish tapas, some of which are quite innovative. Not every dish here is a total winner, but still a worthy part of the repertoire, especially if you know how to order. Many claim this is not up to previous glories, and maybe they are right, but still it can be enjoyed.

La Tasca, right across from the MCI Center, 722 Seventh St., also a branch in Arlington, near Whole Foods, 2900 Wilson Blvd., 703-812-9120.

I like the cheese plate, and a few dishes, but most of the tapas are mediocre. A place where yuppies go to drink.

Churreria Madrid, 2505 Champlain St., NW, 202-483-4441.

I have yet to go.

Sol de Espana, 838-C Rockville Pike, Rockville, 240-314-0202.

From the former managers of Andalucia, in Bethesda. In other words, they had to lower their rent, so they reinvented their place. If you do go, get the shellfish.

El Pueblo, 9550 Old Keene Mill Road, Burke Town Plaza, Burke, 703-455-4401.

It doesn't have to be real Spanish food, it only has to be "Spanish food by the standards of Burke." They have Mexican dishes as well.

Sudanese

Al-Khartoum Restaurant, 1782 Florida Ave., NW, 202-986-5031.

Oilier than it needs to be, and not a huge menu. But where else are you going to get Sudanese food? The tastes are unique and also pretty good, start with the fava beans and the okra. Draws a cool crowd.

Taiwanese

See **Chinese**, especially Bob's Noodle House in Rockville.

Thai

Baan Thai, 1326 14th St., NW, Washington, 202-588-5889.

Regional Thai cuisine, from four different parts of the country, the attached sushi restaurant serves as a talisman against the uninformed. Get the tapioca chicken, the [Isan sausage](#), and the Thai vermicelli in chili peanut sauce. Get the rice cake appetizer, and the little pineapple spots with chicken on top. This is one of [three or four local places with real Thai food](#), and thus one of the best dining spots in DC. Not every dish is spectacular, but if you go with the properly weird Thai ones, you can hit a home run.

Little Serow, right next to Komi, 1511 17th St., DC, no lunch, no phone, no substitutions, no Sunday.

Imagine northeastern Thai street food, Issan style, combined with the quality ingredients and overall standards of fine dining. Right now it's the best place in DC by a long ways and the best place this area has had in a long time. The tastes are sharp, hot, sour, pungent, musty, and occasionally sweet. The level of heat can be high. You cannot choose your food. Every course was a knockout, only \$45 for a seven-course menu, no substitutions. There's nowhere else like it. It is right next to Komi, and brought to you by the same people. Remarkably, the cook is Greek-American and not Thai. Could it be the best Thai place on the East coast?

Their website and menu is [here](#). Here is [a Sietsema review](#). [Don Rockwell](#) says it may be the best new restaurant in the U.S. this year; there is more from Don [here](#). A must. No reservations, so you must show up well before opening at 5:30 or wait two hours to get in.

Thai X-ing, 515 Florida Ave., 202-332-4322, no lunch,

A legendary place but they now have too many tables and can't quite handle it. Hit and miss, with some superb dishes still, such as the drunken noodles and the curries. I also like the salmon, the larb, and the pumpkin curry. Quirky décor, mostly designed by the chef/owner. Here is one good review:

<http://www.intowner.com/fr/food/reviews/September2006.htm>. Here is the menu: <http://www.inshaw.com/blog/Thai%20X-ing.htm> but right now they are doing a no-choice, fixed price menu for \$40 or so. Previously you had to call and order in advance. You still need to reserve to get in.

Elephant Jumps, 8110 A Arlington Blvd, Falls Church, 22042, (703) 942-6600, in the Yorktowne Center, more on Gallows than Route 50, home page [here](#).

Home-style Thai food, pretty genuine, with a chef from Bangkok. Right now it is probably better than any other local Thai competitor. Just ask for "what Tyler Cowen gets." Get the specials. Ask for the non-listed specials which they make for the staff, or for experiments.

I love their Ka Nom Jeen, a Burmese-influenced noodles with curry composition. The tuna appetizer looks a bit like sawdust (really) but is first-rate and original. The Hung Lay Curry is a knockout, with Laotian and Burmese influences. Gary Leff has a good review of those dishes here: <http://boardingarea.com/viewfromthewing/2013/06/04/elephant-jumps-thai-in-northern-virginia-getting-even-better-with-new-dishes/>. Let's hope they keep these dishes.

On the regular menu, the Green Curry Chicken Roti is especially good, but the key here is to find out what are the best half dozen dishes on a given day, they will be superb. The desserts are surprisingly good too.

Here is an update I once wrote on this review:

This place has improved so much I feel it deserves another review. It was already one of the best places on this list, nowadays it is probably the very best place. It has consistently original and authentic Thai food which is refined and improved on a regular basis. These days my favorite dishes are the Yum Pla Dook Foo (ground tuna, dried, peanuts, mango sauce), the Ka Nom Jee (hard to explain, but a mix of Thai delicious stuff on top of piles of noodles), Hung Lay curry (a kind of Thai barbecue, slow-cooked pork in tamarind sauce), crispy rice salad, and then a series of dishes which are not on the menu at all and vary in their availability. They include some spicy noodle dishes, one with pork, sour bamboo shoots curry, and a fermented fish dish as a kind of curry. Find the proprietor Tom and ask him "What would Tyler do?" And the older dishes which I previously reviewed are as good as ever, though I think no longer the very best ones.

If you are ever upset that I am not writing more restaurant reviews, the answer is that I am eating here too much.

Kao Sarn Thai, 6795 Wilson Blvd., #12, inside, in Eden Center, 703-992-7440.

This mom and pop is one of the very best Thai places. The menu is limited, and they have only about six tables and a fairly small space, but it is cooked to southeast Asian tastes. Ask for it spicy. The Yum Woo Sen bean thread salad and the Kao Soi Curry Noodle Soup are especially good. All in all, a significant addition to the repertoire and a big sign that Eden Center is making a significant comeback.

Esaan Cuisine, 1307 Old Chain Bridge Rd, McLean, 703-288-3901.

Another phenomenal northern Virginia restaurant, this one is food from Northeastern Thailand. I would describe this place as offering vivid flavors and full authenticity. You should get the vermicelli with fried mackerel (one of the best dishes around, period), the Kow Soi soup with noodles, and the fried chicken salad, for one of the best meals around, certainly tops in McLean. I tried a few other dishes and liked those too. One note: the prices are not super-cheap. They are entirely reasonable for the location and quality, but not the kind of steal that you might get from other places in this guide.

Thai Food, 7031-2A Little River Turnpike, Annandale, 703-750-3334.

Yes "Thai Food" is the name of the restaurant – how can you improve on that? Appropriately, you should ask for the Thai menu. Then you should get two dishes: the raw shrimp with fish sauce and the catfish pile with mango, they are Foo Goong Chae Nampla and Yam Pla Dook, respectively. Then you are eating one of the best Thai meals in this area. The other items are good, above average I would say, but not extraordinary. Next in line are maybe the pork with plum sauce and the beef jerky, again see the Thai menu and also ask about the chalk board, written in Thai. Definitely worth a try, especially if you are good at following orders. If you discover any more extraordinary dishes there, do please let me know.

Duangrat's Oriental Food Mart, 5888 Leesburg Pike, 703-578-0622, usually they close at 8 p.m., right next to Rabieng and around the corner from Duangrat's.

This place is neither Duangrat's nor Rabieng though it cooks from the same kitchen. They make the food in a very different – and better – style, intended for local Thai visitors. It is an open counter in the back of a Thai grocery where they will cook Thai dishes for you, home style. 2/3 of the menu is in Thai only and *there is nowhere to sit down to eat*. Take out only. Don't be put off, eat on the hood of your car if you have to -- it is superb. The Nam Kao Tod is one of the best dishes in this entire region. The Beef Nam Tok is first-rate, as is the Bamboo Shoot Salad and the Drunken Noodles. I believe they have other gems as well. A bit of a hassle, but worth it.

IMM Thai Cuisine, 7203 Columbia Pike, Annandale, 703-750-0880, near the intersection with 236.

Not a yuppie Thai place and not quite a mom and pop, but rather imagine a Thai restaurant created for, among others, non-Thai Asians. This reminds me of the kind

of Thai restaurant you might find in Seoul. Most dishes are above average, though I cannot say extraordinary. The Mieng Kham is “A traditional Thai snack...green leaves filled w/roasted peanuts, pieces of limes. Shallot, ginger, roasted coconut ship and homemade sauce.” It is one of the best Thai dishes in this whole area and it is reason enough to visit this restaurant. Overall this restaurant is definitely good, but if it took more chances it could be better yet.

Nava Thai, 11301 Fern St., Wheaton, 240-430-0495.

The [Floating Market Soup](#) is excellent, although too spicy for many. The Penang Curry – usually a boring dish – is a revelation. The tamarind sauce on the roast chicken is very good. The curry puffs are recommended as well. Very good pineapple curry too. The service is now quite slow and not every dish is great (though all are at least good if you are confused just mimic the Thai customers with your order), and often the place frustrates me. But the curries – even the ones you are bored with -- are the highlight here.

Sisters Thai, The Living Room Café, 4004 University Drive, Fairfax, 703-267-9619.

It doesn't even try to look like a Thai restaurant, but rather goes the cutesy, overtly decorated for educated people in cutesy ways route. It has an extensive selection of Western desserts and trendy drinks, often involving milk products. It has Thai food too. The latter is pretty good. Not comparable to my favorite Thai places, and not worth making a trip for, but pretty good if you are hanging around Fairfax anyway. It is more expensive than most Thai restaurants. Furthermore the “in Thai only” menu is an affectation of sorts, and what you get from that menu is not noticeably more authentic than anything else hanging around the restaurant, the crème brulee excepted that is. Still, it tasted pretty good.

Thai Taste by Kob, 11315 Fern St., Wheaton, 301-942-0288.

A Thai street food place, excellent quality. The whole fish in chili sauce is a must. The soups are very good, try the first one with various kinds of pork, make sure you stir in the condiments (ask for help if need be), the minty stuff, the bean sprouts, the full deal, the get the most out of this dish. The Thai sausage in the Nam Kao is first-rate. The menu here is huge and I don't pretend to have mastered it, but this is one of the five best Thai places around and on that list it is not the fifth. Definitely recommended for anyone wishing to explore authentic and quality Thai food at extremely reasonable prices.

Thai Square, 3217 Columbia Pike, just east of Glebe.

Excellent atmosphere, lots of small Thai kids. No longer at its peak but still above average. Good satay and good green curry. Very original pig's knuckle dish with fragrant spicing.

Pasara, 360 Engelhardt Lane, right off Duke St., Alexandria, 703-299-8746.

Definitely worth a try. I ate here after a talk I gave at Motley Food, in downtown Alexandria. They told me they were taking me to an “average” Thai place. I insisted they let me “speak sternly” to the waitress. It took a few rounds, some back and forth, and some visits from the kitchen. I told everyone that we were “serious eaters” and had been to Thailand and wanted the food “Thai style” and that I wanted their best dishes. I refused to order anything but simply repeated these instructions. They told me this would require an adjustment, but eventually it came, a meal for five people, hand-cooked by the chef. It was one of the very best Thai meals I’ve eaten in this area -- ever -- superb in every way. The minced chicken with basil was especially good, also the drunken noodles and the chinese broccoli with small pork fritters. I can’t promise you’ll succeed in getting the same treatment, but like I said it’s worth a try.

Thai Thai, 5123 Lee Highway, Arlington, 703-533-1964.

This place has new ownership and has been renovated. It’s now quite good and attracts a Thai clientele. I quite like the beef with pepper and garlic (#33) and the fried shrimp with fried green beans. The other dishes are good too. I wouldn’t rate this with the very best Thai places around, but it’s way better than the median and it still has room to get better. It is the local favorite of many Thais.

Duangrat's, 5878 Leesburg Pike, Bailey's Crossroads, 820-5775, usually open.

Gourmet Thai at reasonable prices. The ruling mainstream Thai restaurant in this area. There is another branch of the same restaurant, with a slightly different menu, right next door, called *Rabieng's*. Has more modern decor than Duangrat's, but fewer offerings, although I am told you can still order off the Duangrat's menu. It used to be that every dish here was great, then for a while it turned spottier. Now it has been reinvigorated. It remains not fully consistent but the best dishes are better than ever and the menu is more innovative than ever before. The weekend “Thai tapas” are fun.

Thai Spoon Cuisine, 6795 Wilson Blvd., #B1, Eden Center, 703-538-2899.

Yes Eden Center now has a Thai place. It’s pretty good, but not some holy grail of authenticity. The best dishes are the fish, the whole fish, and with the complex sauces. For instance try the Plah Sam Rod with a three-flavored sauce, pineapple, roasted garlic, and trio of chili. I would be happier to eat here if there was not the entire rest of Eden Center sitting right nearby.

Ruan Thai, 11407 Amherst Ave., Wheaton, 301-942-0075, not so far from Rt.29 and University Blvd.

Not just the usual stuff. Fresh ingredients, and truly spicy. When it comes to ordering, you can’t go wrong. This place is what a Thai restaurant should aspire to be.

Ghin Na Ree, 2509 N. Harrison St. and Lee Highway, Arlington, 536-1643, closed Monday lunch.

A classic mom and pop. They even let the small child have one of the tables for her toys and crayons. Charming decor, and one of the most authentic Thai places around. Is this the best Thai place in the area? No. Is it worth going anyway? Yes. Spicy.

Benjarong, 855-C Rockville Pike, Wintergreen Shopping Center, Rockville, 301-424-5533, closed Sunday lunch.

A very good Thai place, somewhat more expensive than most but also nicer than average and better than average.

Rincome Thai Cuisine, 3030 Columbia Pike, 703-979-0144, rincomethai.com.

It has been too sugary. That being said, I will take the sugary Mee Krob. Attached to a hotel. One drawback: you have to take an elevator up to the second floor for the bathrooms. But not up to the other Thai places on the same road in the same area.

Manee Thai, 2500 Columbia Pike, Arlington, 703-920-2030.

A good but uneven excellent Thai place, in the Columbia Pike Thai row.

Luang Thai, Herndon, recommended by a correspondent, on Baron Cameron/Elden St., in the Virginia Power Building, across from an Outback ("somewhat," writes Rick Gonzalez), hidden from the street.

Hidden from street, that is usually a good sign.

Vannipa Thai Restaurant, 6037 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, next to Peking Gourmet Inn, 703-671-2201.

The Thai place in this spot is always OK, but never really worth going to. That has yet to change.

Tibetan

See Nepalese.

Trinidadian

Teddy's Roti Shop, 7414 Georgia Ave., NW, 202-882-6488.

Any of the rotis with goat are superb, make sure they put some of the spicy sauce in it (you have to ask). Get the buss-up-shut. The pumpkin is first-rate. The soups are very good. The “shark and bake” is a Trinidadian classic and it is pretty good here. The “Boiled Provisions” [sic] are only so-so. Ask about the fruit juices. This part of town used to be run down but now it is quite nice. This place is definitely recommended. For authenticity it gets an A+. And if you like a proprietor who is chatty and will tell you what to do, make that A++.

Tunisian

Fairouz Mediterranean Café, 3815-A S. George Mason Drive, 703-845-7929.

A mix of Tunisian and Lebanese dishes, I have yet to go. They have okra on the menu, fowl, chopped liver, stuffed quail, and lots of kabob platters.

Taste of Tunisia, formerly Chez Manelle, 2313 Wilson Blvd, Arlington, 703-522-2141, near Courthouse Metro.

Everything here tastes real, from the French fries to the eggplant to the sausage. It's exactly the kind of place we need more of, namely a reasonably priced restaurant which makes its way through good ingredients. They don't have many seats, so make sure you come at the right time or have a reservation. Definitely recommended, better than I thought it was going to be from the outside, the location, or the menu. Since it is very close to Me Jana, we can now consider that mini-region to be the area's epicenter for MENA food.

Turkish

Kazan, 6813 Redmond Drive, McLean, 734-1960, closed Sunday.

One of the first oases in the dining drought known as McLean. Not perfect, but reasonably good on a consistent basis. Still there, too.

Yayla Bistro, 2201 N. Westmoreland St., Arlington, 703-533-5600, note that it feels like Falls Church to me.

Very good cold appetizers and they serve lahmacun, a kind of Turkish pizza and very authentic, and various kinds of pide, or flat breads with toppings. Plus there are the more formal dishes of bronzino, kebabs, and the like, which are probably fine but not what I would try. Suddenly we have a new Turkish restaurant, and it is one of the best around, definitely worth a visit. More going for the business and yuppie lunch trade than a mom and pop, but not outrageously priced. Nice décor.

Atila's Restaurant, 2705 Columbia Pike, Arlington, 703-920-6524, 8100.

Turkish food, tied to an ethnic grocery, doner kebab on Fridays and Saturdays.

Café Divan, 1834 Wisconsin Ave., NW, 202-338-1747, opens 7 a.m. on weekends.

Good but not spectacular. Does fill a gap in DC Dining, by giving the town a real Turkish place. But too bland and not adventurous enough. Still, good enough to enjoy.

Bistro Med, 3288 M St., NW, Washington, DC, 202-333-2333.

Turkish food in Georgetown, eggplant and lamb are the specialties.

Meze, 2437 18th St., near Columbia Rd., 202-797-0017

Middle Eastern appetizers, broadly Turkish and also Lebanese, main courses at your peril.

Uruguayan

Del Campo, 777 Eye St., NW, 202-289-7377.

Get the rib-eye (easily arranged for sharing, and one of the best in DC), the empanadas, the chorizo, the sides, and don't forget the superb bread they start the meal with. Real gaucho food, and the restaurant has a nice ambience to boot. The sandwiches are supposed to be good, but I have not tried them. Not cheap, but a winner all around and it fills a gap in the DC dining scene.

Fast Gourmet at Lowest Best Price Gas, 1400 W St., 202-448-9217.

Yes, Uruguayan in a gas station. Furthermore they have the best sandwich I've eaten in the Washington area, ever. Get the chivito. Wikipedia defines it thus: "**Chivito** is the name of a sandwich-style national dish in [Uruguay](#), and consists primarily of a thin slice of filet mignon (*churrasco* beef), with mayonnaise, black or green olives, mozzarella, tomatoes and commonly also bacon, fried or hardboiled eggs and ham. It is served in a bun, often with a side of French fries." It's not actually goat as the name would suggest.

The empanadas I thought were quite authentic, everything else looked good. It's a fun place to sit, and it actually has a very nice interior. For hangout value I give it at least a nine out of ten. It's not super cheap (\$13 for the chivito) but a unique experience with quality at every step. Definitely recommended.

Uzbekistani

Silk Road Choy Hona, 28 Bureau St., Gaithersburg, 301-330-5262.

The best Uzbekistan restaurant in this entire area! And an A+ for clientele and atmosphere. That said, most Uzbeki food is boring, and their rather large selection of Russians dishes is only so-so. Still, you can have an excellent meal here. The soups are delicious, including the cold yogurt soup and the third soup on the menu, the Mastava, make sure you put in the hot red stuff and the cream for full effect. The cabbage salad was pretty good and the manti were above-average, not too doughy. The Kutabi was my favorite, thin breads with ground meat or green inside, put on the yogurt sauce for a very yummy snack and then order some more of them. The kabobs were OK but not as good as the best Afghan places around. In sum, definitely recommended but if you are uncritical in your choices it is easy to walk away unimpressed.

Rus-Uz Restaurant, 1000 N Randolph St, Arlington, VA, 202-468-8472.

Worth a visit, though it could be better. The appetizers are only so-so and rely too much on the qualities of “fried” and “bready.” The manti and the fried pasta with lamb (your best choice) were both quite good. This is the unusual restaurant where the main courses are better than the small dishes. The salads have that Russian mayonnaise thing going, ugh. I liked what I had, they don't have enough variety here, but still at the very least you should go. It also draws an interesting crowd of Uzbekis and Russians.

Vegetarian

Sunflower Vegetarian Restaurant, 2531 Chain Bridge Road, 319-3888, just a bit south of Nutley Rd.

Many vegetarian dishes, good quality ingredients, but I find each dish combines too many ingredients. Many vegetarians love this place, though. If you want it really spicy, speak up, don't just say "spicy" or they will treat you like a wimp.

For real vegetarian food, see Indian and South Indian.

Venezuelan

Café Azul, on Rt.1, Baltimore Ave., but the address is given as 4423 Longfellow St., Hyattsville, 301-209-0049, they close early so check. NB: the web site claims they will be changing their name to “Caracas de Ayer”.

At the center of Hyattsville's “arts district,” this is a good introduction to a fun and rapidly improving part of town. Everything here is tasty, but my favorites were the tamale and the big, thick corn thingy stuffed with white cream, namely the cachapas. The arepas are delicious, they seem to rotate which kinds they have on a given day. Some

Cuban dishes too, and sandwiches. Fun, and there is no other place like it around. Not glamorous as a site, but I'm very glad I made the trip.

La Caraqueña, 300 W. Broad St., Falls Church, 703-533-0076, where Café Rose used to be in Falls Church City.

They serve Venezuelan, Bolivian, and Chilean dishes; the proprietors are Bolivians who lived for quite a while in Venezuela. Definitely above average. I loved the peanut soup (Sopa de Mani). Chilean sandwiches are hard to mimic in this country, so I didn't order one, but I saw two go past and they looked delicious. Even their Bolivian dishes are not exactly the standard. An original place, worth having in the repertoire and a nice homey atmosphere.

Vietnamese

Hai Duong Restaurant, 6795 Wilson Blvd., #7-9, 703-538-5289.

Again, on the inside corridor near Wilson Boulevard. This place is just first-rate. My favorite dish is the #31, Sizzling Fish Filet in Northern Style; you need to put all the pieces together on top of the chip for it to make sense. #10, Beef Underdone with Lime, is the best around and you should order this special dish if you don't already know it. The soups are very good as are the crushed rice dishes and the noodles. Excellent atmosphere: Go, go, go. My favorite in Eden Center.

Rice Paper, 6775 Wilson Blvd., Eden Center, Falls Church, 703-538-3888.

The trendiest Vietnamese place around, and the one hardest to get in to, and the one with the most beautiful women. The food here is above average, but it's for me not worth the hassle. The dishes are made too sweet to appeal to the crowd, even though the ingredients are above average and the décor looks nice. Many of you will have this place as your favorite, but for me it is a dominated asset. Astute diners will note the presence of snails in coconut cream, otherwise they don't seem to have special dishes. If you can get a table, however, there is no particular reason not to go.

Little Viet Garden, 6783 Wilson Blvd., Falls Church, 703-532-1069.

An offshoot of the quite good, Viet Garden, this place feels a little fresher. The baby clams, the vermicelli, the broken rice, and the caramel fish are all well above average. I don't think you'll find any startling revelations here, but if you are looking for a good all-purpose, go-to Vietnamese restaurant, and with reasonable crowds, this is surely one of the main contenders.

Phung Hoang, Eden Center, Saigon West Mall (near Hai Duong, inside), 6795 Wilson Blvd., 703-538-6732, 9-8.

Are you, like me, sick of trying new Pho places? Don't let that put you off this one. It looks like Pho, and maybe technically it counts as Pho, but this place serves up very different tastes. Yes it is noodles in a bowl. Yes it comes with bean sprouts and lime. But it's not the same tastes as everywhere else! The spicy #2 with beef is a good place to start. They have other soups with fish paste, crab, shrimps, etc. This is not an all-purpose restaurant, but if you're a fan of Vietnamese food there are numerous original soups here worth trying, quality is uniformly good.

Thanh Van Restaurant, 6795 Wilson Blvd. #37, inside the corridor near the western side of Eden Center, 703-639-0901.

All-vegetarian and it appears to be all-vegan as well. Their Hue Spicy Soup is excellent and has one of the most interesting broths around. Their pancake is juicier and crisper than average. Overall the menu is limited but there are additional items on a buffet, of varying quality. For a vegetarian interested in Vietnamese, this place is a godsend, for others it is nonetheless above average and worth having in the repertoire.

Present Restaurant, 6678 Arlington Blvd., Falls Church, (571) 233-500.

This is in the mall with J.V. Restaurant and Merchants' Tire. The restaurant is finer in décor than most Vietnamese places and you could even take a business client here. The menu has vague, flowery descriptions of the dishes, so if you know real Vietnamese food you may at first be a bit confused. Don't be. Right now this is one of the best Vietnamese restaurants around. The dishes are done in very classic style, with French influence. GET THE LARGE FISH, it is the best whole fish dish around.

Saigon Café, 6286-B Arlington Blvd., Falls Church, 703-237-1899. this place is best accessed by Wilson Blvd, it is directly across the street from Eden Center.

They specialize in Central Vietnamese cuisine and so it is quite different from the other Vietnamese places around, although they still serve many of the staples. The rice cakes are the specialty, especially the larger platter with different kinds of shrimp rice cake on it. Delicious and quite novel. Make sure you dip them in the accompanying sauces. The shrimp on sugar cane is very good too. I believe this place has other excellent dishes which I haven't discovered yet. Recommended, but make sure you take advantage of their novelties.

Anh Hong & Asian Spices BBQ, Eden Center, 6793-C Wilson Blvd., 703-99-6099.

In the home of the former Tay Do, they specialize in "7 Courses of Beef" and have cornered the market there. Their treatment is consistently good, though it's actually not enough food to make a whole meal. Reasonably priced, though, at \$14.99 a head for the 7 courses. Excellent sausage spring rolls, #5 on the menu, and in general they have above-average Vietnamese meat dishes. Worth trying, especially since 7 Courses of Beef is hard to get in this area.

Bay Lo, 6757 Wilson Blvd., Eden Center, northeastern corridor, #21, 703-241-4094.

A very handy Vietnamese place. They have “Seven Courses of Beef,” frog dishes, goat, organ meats, Hot Pot, plus some (but by no means all) of the standards. Good for when you are craving something different. The best “shaking beef” around.

Banh Cuon Saigon, 6795 Wilson Blvd., #54, 703-534-4482, open 9 a.m. to 8 p.m., on one sign the name of the place is given as “Sajgon.”

This small eatery is inside what has rapidly become the best corridor of Eden Center, namely the new inside corridor which is quite close to Wilson Blvd. itself. The shrimp soup, given as one of the specialties, is first-rate here and it has a richer and different taste from other local Vietnamese soups. It is a very fine dish. Very good crushed rice dishes as well.

Viet Royale, In Eden Center, Arlington, off Wilson Boulevard, near Rt.7. This center is the center of Vietnamese and Asian life in northern Virginia. Excellent stores as well. I suspect no one goes to the Eden Center just once.

Avoid anything that sounds like Chinese food, the standard advice in a Vietnamese restaurant. The lobster is excellent, for one thing. On weekdays, order the Bo 7 Mon - Seven Courses of Beef. Not as intimidating as it sounds. Fish in caramel sauce is one idea. Vietnamese pancake. Sweet and sour soup. You get the idea.

Nhu Lan, 6763 Wilson Blvd., Eden Center, Falls Church, on the interior, a very small place, 703-532-9009.

Vietnamese subs, banh mi they are called. Some involve mayonnaise, carrots, pickled carrots, radishes, and fresh cilantro. Not my cup of tea – especially the mayo -- but some swear by it. If you are like me, perhaps try the pork meatballs.

Huong Viet, 6785 Wilson Blvd., Eden Center, Falls Church, 703-538-7110.

Opens at 10 a.m. and is full by noon in the Eden Center. Get the picture? All the Vietnamese staples, definitely recommended.

Cho Cu Saigon, inside the mini-mall, 6763-6D Wilson Blvd., Falls Church, 703-538-2168. Get the roast pork there. You might call this Cantonese but it is a Vietnamese vision of Cantonese food. Duck and seafood as well, recommended.

Thanh Son Tofu, 6793/A Wilson Blvd., Eden Center, just north of Dragon Star, Falls Church, 703-534-1202.

They serve one main dish, tofu. That’s right, just slabs of tofu, done three main ways. Five for a dollar. The best tofu around, period. Tofu to die for. Tofu.

Wonderful tofu. The Vietnamese love this place. By the way, you'd better be in the mood for tofu.

Thang Long, East Eden Center, 6737 Wilson Boulevard, #22, Falls Church, 703-534-1746.

Indoors, against the back right corner of the mall. Their #1 dish is excellent -- one of the best dishes in Eden Center -- just don't ask me to describe it. It's not weird, though, just original. The menu here is limited but they specialize in what they do and they do it well. Worth a visit.

Nam-Viet, 1127 N. Hudson St., Arlington, 522-7110. Maybe the best Vietnamese place in Clarendon, currently. Clarendon, however, is no longer the area's center for Vietnamese food, Falls Church is, especially in and around the Eden Center. My favorite here is the caramel pork in ginger sauce.

Minh's Restaurant, 2500 Wilson Blvd., at Cleveland St., Arlington, 703-525-2828

Along with Nam-Viet, one of the better Vietnamese places in Clarendon. More yuppie than most, a deliberate attempt at outreach. For me, this is ultimately a turn-off; although the food here is reasonably good, it is a little more expensive than it need be.

Green Papaya, 4922 Elm St., near Woodmont Ave., Bethesda, 301-654-8986.

The Maryland equivalent of Minh's. Good enough if you live too far from Eden Center, but frankly I feel sorry for you. Ten years ago Maryland had better ethnic food than Virginia, now the reverse is clearly true.

Viet House, 9966 Main St., Fairfax, 703-691-0090.

I don't list most of the soup places, which are uniformly good, this one has lunch dishes too, an OK place for Fairfax.

Pho Cyclo, 8102 Arlington Blvd., really on Gallows Rd. next to the 24-hour CVS, Falls Church, 703-573-2210.

Not just Pho. Excellent lemon grass chicken.

Vietnamese soups

For Vietnamese soups, try any number of local Pho places, first choice is Pho 75, 3103 Graham Road, Suite B, Falls Church, 204-1490, go early to avoid the line. Then try Eden Center, but the one in Culmore Shopping Center, Bailey Crossroads is also quite good. I frequent the one on Main Street (236) in Fairfax, just a bit east of

Robert Road, on the left side, it is close to my work. I have been told that the original branch of Pho 75 has reopened, on Wilson Boulevard, up the hill from Rosslyn in a small strip shopping center, on the right, past the fire station. A reader recommends Pho 495, 7215 Commerce St., Springfield, 703-451-9495, www.pho495.com.

The soups will be fragrant, filling, very cheap, and often intriguing. Beef, mint, bean sprouts, brisket, tripe, chilies, and lemon, are among the ingredients that are in the soup already or can be mixed in. Vietnamese fast food. Blows McDonalds away. Should be a staple for us all. Why isn't it?

West African

See also *Ghanian, Nigerian, Senegalese, Cameronian*.

Bukom, 2442 18th St., NW, 202-265-4600, closed Sunday lunch.

More generic West African than Ghanaian, but since Bukom is an area in Accra, the capital of Ghana, I believe this is a Ghanaian restaurant of sorts. I find the curries here to be very yummy. Recommended, and they have very good music almost every night of the week. See also West African.

And now here are two reviews from Jeff Bryan, who works at AID:

Sumah's

1727 Seventh St. NW (near 7th and R, Howard U metro stop)

Washington, DC 20001

Phone: 202-462-7309

"Down-home West African (Sierra Leonean and Guinean) cooking including house-made ginger beer, rice akras, pepper soup, peanut butter soup, potato leaf, crain-crain, tola, fufu, eba, fried fish, plantain, okra, couscous, cassava leaf stew, and more". The owner, Sumah, is very friendly and welcoming. In addition, the best African CD shop in town is in the same restaurant, so pick up a CD while you're there. They used to have a sign by the door that said "no political discussions", but unfortunately it's been gone for a few years. Easily as good as Ghana Café, friendlier and cheaper too.

Rainbow, 312 E. Diamond Ave., Gaithersburg, 301-947-0099, open daily 11-9.

I don't usually cover the dining paradise that we call Gaithersburg, but West African places are hard to find. I have yet to go. The cooks are from Ghana and Sierra Leone.

West Indian

I've now put these under Caribbean.

Yemeni

Marib, 6981 Hechinger Drive, Springfield, 703-376-3388, note the larger sign still says "BBQ Delight." More importantly, this is easier to find than most places in Springfield, easily accessible through Backlick Rd. in Annandale, or 495 or 395.

Very special, the best of the growing number of Yemeni places around. Their saltah, a boiled vegetables dish which sounds awful, is a knockout due to the herbs and flavoring. Chicken mandi has lovely, moist meat with excellent onions on top of the fluffy rice. Foul, lentil soup, layered rice dishes, breakfast dishes, plain old hummus, there are many very good dishes here. I have yet to try the lamb. And like the other Yemeni places around, they have those \$40 desserts, bread and stuff soaked in honey, I have yet to try them. Strongly recommended.

Saba restaurant, 5820 Seminary Rd, Falls Church, 703-379-0168.

Marib in Springfield is still the very best Yemeni restaurant, but this is probably number two. Especially good sambusas and lamb mandi, the saltah I thought could have been better. For people-watching, this place is a clear number one, given its close proximity to West Alexandria.

Saba, Yemeni restaurant, 3900A Pickett Road in Fairfax, uncertain phone number.

Wow, a real Yemeni place and an authentic one at that. Where Sheba used to be and right next to Wild Chicken. I've tried I think seven of their dishes and all are excellent. The lentil soup and the breakfast dish clay oven bread mashed with honey and dates stand out as my two favorites. If you order the sambusas, make sure you ask for the dipping sauce, makes a big difference. In general ask if the breakfast dishes are available, often they are. I am told they have a lunch buffet but only Monday through Wednesday. The photo is of a quite good yogurt soup, note some of the portions here are quite large, not a complaint but plan accordingly. Good for people-watching as well. Everyone who enjoys ethnic food should visit this place, it counts as a new favorite. The desserts look and sound remarkable, although I am not eating much dessert these days.

House of Mandi, 5515 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, 703-527-3333.

Hey people, pull out those old lecture notes on duopoly theory, northern Virginia now has two Yemeni restaurants! This one is excellent too. I've only had one visit and two dishes, but I thought I should let you know about this one sooner rather than later. The lamb is quite good but the killer dish is the chicken biryani (which by the way I am not sure they always serve, so call ahead). Whatever you get, make sure you use the spicy and yogurt sauces properly. Other food which went by me looked very good too, and the menu had a wide variety of what seem to be very

appealing Yemeni appetizers. Definitely recommended, and it has the potential to get better yet.

Happy eating, and stay tuned for future editions!

Try also www.food-plan.org, and the Chowhounds site, and www.washingtoncitypaper.com/restaurants. Better not to visit the Virginia Department of Health site, <http://www.healthspace.ca/vdh>, though it does have useful information on names and addresses of many of my favorites.

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