

east london

BEST IN... east london

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PICK OF BETHNAL GREEN

BRAWN FRENCH

young staff are on the ball. Dishes such as beautifully textured sea-bass ceviche sprinkled with delicate micro herbs, rump of lamb resting on wonderfully savoury green cereal grains, or confit salmon with fried aubergine and agedashi are some of the most thrilling sub-£15 offerings to be had in the capital, although picking from the short wine list will bump up the bill considerably. Set lunches also offer brilliant value, but note that there are no bookings for dinner.

PICK OF BOW

FORMANS INTERNATIONAL

Stour Road, Fish Island E3 2NT 020 8525 2365

Price £44 Wine £22 Champagne £55

Thurs-Sat 7-11pm Sat 10am-2pm Sun 12N-4pm

49 Columbia Road E2 7RG 020 7729 5692

Price £35 Wine £16.50 Champagne £45.50

Mon-Sat 6-11pm Thurs-Sun 12N-3pm (Sun-4pm)

Metal pipes, gantries and dangling lamps keep company with eclectic artwork, rustic tables and a bijou bar at this East End sibling of Terroirs, which is run along similar lines to its Covent Garden cousin. Provenance is a priority on the plate and in the glass – the serious yet affordable wine list concentrates on ‘natural’ wines from smaller producers. Meanwhile, attentive staff are happy to guide visitors through the various sections of the menu (‘pig’, ‘cold’, ‘hot’), which contain some excellent stuff ranging from artisan salame, rillettes and brawn to ‘incredibly flavourful’ lobster bisque, ‘hand-chopped’ Tuscan beef and some punchy offal (lamb’s tongues with Puy lentils and ‘kick-ass’ salsa verde, for example). Game gets a decent seasonal outing (roast partridge with fruit-and-nut couscous and harissa), while desserts might bring poached pear en croute. ‘A lovely little restaurant’, enthuses one fan.

CORNER ROOM MODERN EUROPEAN

Town Hall Hotel, Patriot Square E2 9NF

020 7871 0461

Price £47 Wine £28 Champagne £64

Mon-Fri 7-10am 12N-10.30pm Sat-Sun 7.30am-10.30pm

Nuno Mendes works his Michelin-starred magic at Viajante downstairs, but if you head up the grand staircase of the Town Hall Hotel and negotiate its winding corridors, you’ll eventually discover the Corner Room – a chance to sample his stellar food without the accompanying price tag. Original steel-frame windows, plain wooden tables, dangling vintage lamps and display cabinets set the dressed-down tone, while quirky

barn-reared chicken with air-dried ham as well as dishes such as warm smoked-eel fillets with Jersey Royals or golden syrup sponge pudding that would do Team GB proud. There are British drinks, too – from London-brewed craft beers to wines from Kentish vineyards. A lovely terrace overlooks the Hertford Union Canal, and Formans has raised its profile with a trendy new art gallery above its legendary smokehouse.

PICK OF DALSTON

MANGAL 1 MIDDLE EASTERN

10 Arcola Street E8 2DJ 020 7275 8981

Price £32 Wine £13 Champagne £-

Mon-Sun 12N-12M

As smoke fills a side road off busy Stoke Newington High Street, large buckets of charcoal are carried in to feed the roaring monster inside this Turkish ocakbasi restaurant. You’re face to face with the ocak grill as soon as you enter, and tables are packed tightly into the small room, but sit here rather than in the calmer extension next door, because the thrill of the grill is what it’s all about. A chilled cabinet is stocked with kebabs, chops, chicken wings and quails – just



SPOTLIGHT ON...

VIAJANTE Modern European

★★★

Town Hall Hotel, Patriot Square E2 9NU ☎ 020 7871 0461
Price £97 Wine £30 Champagne £70 P.Room 18,35
Mon-Sun 12N-2.30pm 7-11.30pm

His nickname is 'viajante' ('the traveller'), but Portuguese-born Nuno Mendes spends most of his time these days in the East End, helming one of London's most innovative and thrilling dining experiences. Set within Bethnal Green Town Hall, his good-looking restaurant is dominated by an open kitchen where chefs prepare various 'blind tasting' menus of up to 12 courses. This harmonious and 'extremely composed' set-up allows Mendes to tease, tweak and transform ingredients in miraculous ways. Recent highlights from his 'palate-teasing' feasts have included an extraordinary take on Portuguese açorda involving bread porridge with sweetcorn, langoustine and girolles, 'simply delicious' cod loin with a stew of tripe, parsley and potatoes, and a pre-dessert of pickled, raw and jellied cucumber with milk sorbet ('brilliant'). Equally unorthodox wines come from small producers and lesser-known regions, and you can also graze on tapas at the 'really cool' bar.

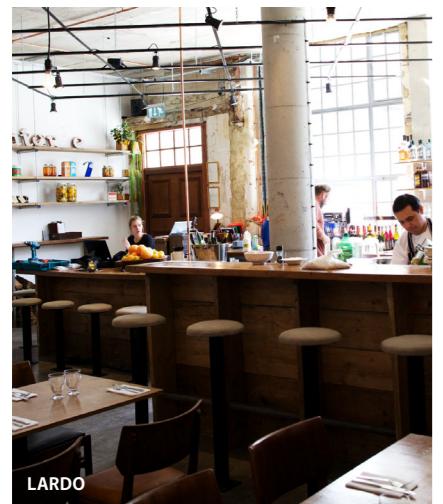
Nuno Mendes helms one of London's most thrilling dining experiences, teasing, tweaking and transforming ingredients in miraculous ways



order a plate of juicy mixed meats and a pile of spanking-fresh salad, plus some creamy cacik (yoghurt with cucumber and garlic) and tuck in. You can buy Turkish beer and red wine, but almost everyone brings their own – making dinner here even more of a bargain.

PICK OF HACKNEY
LARDO BRITISH **NEW**
The Arthus, Richmond Road E8 3NJ ☎ 020 8985 2683
Price £34 Wine £19.50 Champagne £-
Mon-Fri 12N-3pm Sat-Sun 10am-3pm Mon-Sun 6-10.30pm

Since launching in summer 2012, Lardo has quickly secured its place in the affections of local hipsters – not to mention culinary tourists willing to travel east. The young Antipodean owner used to manage nearby Bistrotheque,



and has put plenty of love into her new baby. A fat-bellied wood-fired oven squats in the corner and punters can watch as the chefs whizz rustically topped pizzas in and out of its maw. Prices are pegged around £10, and the short, daily menu also offers home-cured porky charcuterie, pasta and Anglo-Italian small plates ranging from fennel-pollen salame or burrata with pipérade to rabbit with peas, lettuce and pancetta. Drinks have been chosen with equal care – London ales, cocktails made with Sipsmith gin and European wines from small-scale producers keep patrons as happy as pigs in the muck.

THIS BRIGHT FIELD BRITISH **NEW**
268 Cambridge Heath Road E2 9DA ☎ 020 8880 7080
Price £37 Wine £17 Champagne £-
Mon-Fri 7am-7pm (Thurs-Fri-11pm) Sat 9am-11pm Sun 10am-6pm

This Bright Field is the sort of eatery everyone wishes was just a stroll from their front door. In fact, the plate-glass windows of this particular local treasure look out across Cambridge Heath Road to the flower shop of its owner, who has recently upgraded the place to a more bona-fide restaurant. A new menu is taped to the window each day, and it's enough to make passers-by drool – think crispy Suffolk ham with Windermerie black pudding, poached egg and hollandaise, or confit heirloom tomatoes with Sussex basil and Laverstoke mozzarella, followed by dark chocolate brownie with rum-and-raisin ice cream. Sourcing is clearly a big priority, and the kitchen takes obvious pleasure in marinating, sousing, smoking and candying a raft of very decent ingredients. The staff couldn't be lovelier.

BISTROTHEQUE MODERN EUROPEAN ★

23-27 Wadeson Street E2 9DR ☎ 020 8983 7900
Price £44 Wine £17 Champagne £50 P.Room 50
Mon-Sun 6-10.30pm (Fri-Sat-11pm) Sat-Sun 11am-4pm

A decade after it opened its doors to the creative in-crowd, this 1930s' edifice has been given a bit of a makeover – although it remains a buzzy one-off with a reputation far beyond E2. Head upstairs to find a white-walled, high-ceilinged space with a handsome bar of epic American proportions to one side. Nibble on small plates here, or trade up to the main menu – a trendy A3 spread embellished with arty squiggles. France and Italy meet home-grown Brit, and the results are 'spot on': regulars such as onglet with béarnaise are joined by the likes of grilled lamb rump with butternut-squash purée or roast cod with fennel and white beans, plus an eclectic selection of wines, beers and cocktails. The two-hour turnaround on tables may sit rather uneasily in such convivial surrounds, but 'lovely staff' will ensure your stay is very pleasant.

THE EMPRESS GASTROPUB
130 Lauriston Road E9 7LH ☎ 020 8533 5123
Price £37 Wine £15.50 Champagne £41
Tues-Fri 12N-3.30pm Mon-Fri 6-10.15pm Sat 10am-12M (Sun 9-9.30pm)

A change of ownership back in 2011 allowed the old Empress of India to loosen her laces. Gone are the heavy velvet drapes and ornate chandeliers; in their place are modern artworks and all manner of places to sit, from slouchy sofas to lofty window perches. You can still drop in for a pint from the excellent selection of ales,

but the pub also has a decent reputation for its food offering. The menu is a flexible affair, with plates of all sizes and humble ingredients given an elegant spin – think crispy pig's ears with apple sauce, cured salmon with blood orange, char-grilled beef and horseradish salad or guinea fowl with roasted vegetables. Suppliers are mostly local, the friendly staff know their stuff, and drinking possibilities extend to Negronis, chilled fino sherry and plentiful wines from a discerning list.

BUEN AYRE SOUTH AMERICAN

50 Broadway Market E8 4QJ ☎ 020 7275 9900
Price £41 Wine £15.50 Champagne £-
Mon-Sun 6-10.30pm Fri-Sun 12N-3pm (Sat-Sun 3-3.30pm)

Tango dancers stomp through the foliage on the elaborately painted window, a mighty mesh bull's head glares down and, at the centre of things, sits the sizzling parrillada grill. Chef/owner John Patrick Rattagan was raised in Buenos Aires, and this rustic, pint-sized eatery is a love letter to his birthplace. There are empanadas to start, and chunky chips smothered with garlic and parsley, but save room for the main event: juicy, charred slabs of pampas-reared beef – served straight up or as part of a mammoth mixed grill. It's uncompromising red-blooded stuff – vegetarians need not apply. The system of two sittings (before and after 9pm) is a tad restrictive, and staff can sometimes seem uninterested, but with a keenly priced Malbec in your glass and an enthusiastic buzz all around, you're bound to be won over by this carnivores' favourite.

GREEN PAPAYA VIETNAMESE

191 Mare Street E8 3QE ☎ 020 8985 5486
Price £28 Wine £11.50 Champagne £30
Tues-Sun 5-11pm

While Kingsland Road's Vietnamese canteens are packing them in, this family-run restaurant a mile or so east is very much the smart diner's choice. Green Papaya hasn't changed much since opening in 2000, and the interior wouldn't win any design awards, but the



THE EMPRESS

MY EAST LONDON
Tom Collins
CHEF-DIRECTOR, BISTROTHEQUE



Best coffee: All Press on Redchurch Street always gets the day off to a good start and they do tasty little breakfast items, too.

Post-work pint: Nelsons Head on the corner of Horatio Street is great. You may even see a dog fancy-dress show too if you're lucky and there's always a few familiar faces to have a drink with.

Quick bite: A pork banh mi at Keu! in Old Street. If not Keu! then the Great Eastern Dining Room for dim sum.

Foodie shop: The Deli Downstairs in Victoria Park Road has lovely seasonal produce. Then there's the fishmongers next door or The Ginger Pig round the corner for some great cuts of meat.

Insider's tip: Try the mezcal bar, Mezcalaria Quiquiriqui, on Hackney Road, tucked out of sight behind a kebab shop.

combination of cracking food and gratifyingly low prices continues to attract in-the-know locals, enthusiastic visitors and patrons from the revamped Hackney Empire up the road. While bowls of steaming pho have become synonymous with the country's cuisine, the iconic noodle soup is merely a bit player here, with stir-fries and slow-braised dishes taking centre stage. Summer rolls, banh-xeo pancakes and spicy salads are exemplary, but also check out 'new dishes' such as smoked tofu with asparagus or stewed beef shin with carrot and rice wine. To drink, order an ice-cold Vietnamese beer.



PROVENDER

PICK OF WANSTEAD
PROVENDER FRENCH

17 High Street E11 2AA ☎ 020 3641 8325
Price £37 Wine £15.50 Champagne £39.50
Mon-Sun 12N-10pm

Provender's owner may hail from Essex, but this smart yet relaxed venue delivers French bistro food comme il faut. There's baked Vacherin cheese in season, weekend brunch heralds oozy croque monsieur, and the place has a proper patisserie chef who sends out treats such as a bitter chocolate tart with crème fraîche d'Isigny. Sit down to a kir mixed just as you like it, while nibbling on radishes with aioli. After that, get stuck into the enticing menu – perhaps a bowl of creamy celeriac soup or quails' eggs with wild mushrooms in puff pastry followed by the house cassoulet. Crowd-pleasing prices are eminently reasonable for this level of Francophile finesse – no wonder first-timers are eager for more.

PICK OF WHITECHAPEL
TAYYABS INDIAN

83 Fieldgate Street E1 1JU ☎ 020 7247 9543
Price £21 Wine £- Champagne £-
Mon-Sun 12N-11.30pm

This massive Punjabi/Pakistani canteen can be hard to find, so follow your nose towards the inviting aromas of grilled meat. Also look for the queue – despite a 160-seater extension upstairs, you'll still need to wait in line. Inside, it's noisy and chaotic, as waiters rush around and gangs of locals, City suits and gastro-pilgrims gorge themselves on punchy curries, kebabs and grills such as the 'much-favoured' lamb chops or unpromisingly named 'dry meat'. Tayyabs' profile has risen to almost mythical status, but gripes about 'tasteless food' and 'rude, discourteous service' suggest it's becoming a victim of its own success. Yet with its boisterous vibe, rock-bottom prices and BYO policy, this is still a fun night out.

For more reviews of local restaurants visit SquareMeal.co.uk



TAYYABS