

Eating Out

Mary Luz Mejia, producer of the television series “Street Eats” on Sun TV, loves immersing herself in other cultures and there’s no better way to do it than to try out some exotic dishes. Mejia was happy to share her tasty excursions in and around Toronto, her home and haven for international cuisine.

Words & Photography **Mary Luz Mejia**



Seoul Restaurant

621 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON
(416) 532-9669

Sometimes, after a long day’s work, all I want is to sit down to some good, healthy comfort food. If the comfort food happens to be Korean, Seoul Restaurant in Toronto’s own Korea Town is a good option. Very much a family enterprise, this bona fide mom’s kitchen serves up home-made traditional Korean fare at a price that has turned nearby University of Toronto students into repeat customers. Dining on a cold and damp night, we begin with the soothing dakkal-soo jaebee – a generous and hearty chicken soup made with noodles, vegetables and wheat flakes. It comfortably feeds two and leaves just enough room to share another treat or two. We opt for the yukkae jang, a warmly satisfying combination of shredded beef brisket and vegetables in a hot and spicy beef broth that leaves a glow in our bellies and tingling spicy aftertaste in our throats. Service is polite and unobtrusive, and many tables linger over their food, forgetting the rush outside. Happy and content, the value offered by Seoul Restaurant has us double-checking the bill to make sure we didn’t sneak in a dish for which we weren’t charged!

Dinner for two including tax and tip: \$30.00

Thai Basil

467 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON
(416) 840-9988
www.thaibasil.ca

What differentiates one Thai restaurant from the rest? If you take quality ingredients, attentive service, good value for your dollar and a stylish interior into consideration, you’ve got your answer in Thai Basil. University students, couples on dates, and families alike flock to this sage- and silver-hued dining room for everything from green curry chicken served alongside fluffy jasmine rice to the requisite pad Thai noodles prepared just so. The scene-stealer, however, is the Thai basil and chili noodle dish. Brimming with complex and bold flavours, it’s a welcomed alternative to the usual suspects. Stir-fried flat rice noodles are tossed with basil, green bean spears, peppers, chili and minced chicken or pork in a spectacular house sauce. You can up the heat ante if you like; just ask the servers. And if it gets too hot, soothe the burn with a mango tea packed with Vitamin A and C – think Thai Chai with a sweet mango twist!

Dinner for two including tax and tip: \$50.00



EATING OUT

Lee Restaurant

603 King Street West, Toronto, ON

(416) 504-7867

www.susur.com

As we enter Susur Lee's more casual dining spot, we are greeted by a row of birds whimsically screened onto the wall, apparently imitating the line of diners seated at the sleek bar. We take our perch with these diners as the tables are filled to capacity and start with the red sake blaze and tapioca kir cocktails. Made with imported sparkling blueberry sake, the blaze is fresh and fruity while the kir is a decidedly grown-up version of bubble tea. Efficient and unobtrusive servers bring out a pyramid of paper-thin frite ribbons that defy gravity, sprinkled with a blend of sixteen spices and a dollop of spiced mayo. Next is the javanese salad – a mildly piquant mélange of avocado, pineapple, blanched shrimp, crisp tofu squares and a rich ground peanut dressing – a textural treat. My hands-down favourite is the caramelized black cod with onion that melts in the mouth with every tender-sweet bite. Save room for a generous pot of tea and the spiced black rice coconut pudding with a Marsala sabayon and marinated prunes. Fragrant and subtle, this pudding is as warm and welcomed as a South Pacific breeze.

Dinner for two including tax and tip: \$155.00



Saravanaa Bhavan

4559 Hurontario Street, Mississauga, ON

(905) 290-0769

www.saravanaabhavan.ca

Throw out any misconceptions you might have about Indian or vegetarian food, as Saravanaa Bhavan is neither gratuitously spicy nor boring. Instead, this vegetarian South Indian eatery packs in families and curious culinary explorers looking for tender, deep-fried vada (lentil donuts) or crisp onion bajji (chickpea flour coated onion slices). After a quick hand wash at one of the many sinks at the back of the restaurant, you'll want to try the house specialty – the dosa (a giant crêpe made of rice, lentil or cream of wheat flour) that you eat with your hands. A personal favourite, the paper masala dosa, is all golden goodness filled with mildly spicy potatoes and onions. Served alongside a trio of chutneys including coconut, mint coconut, tomato and a lentil sambar dipping curry, the flavour sensations are plentiful and harmonious. Friendly and accommodating staff will encourage you to conclude with a traditional sweet and milky madras coffee – eat your heart out!

Dinner for two including tax and tip: \$40.00

Lee Garden

331 Spadina Avenue, Toronto, ON
(416) 593-9524

Located in the heart of Toronto's downtown Chinatown, Lee Garden is a long-time firm favourite with Asians and non-Asians alike. We arrive early in order to avoid the crowds and luckily have our pick of tables. While we ponder the extensive menu, our server brings us a complimentary pork bone broth – a light, clear consommé that's both mild and comforting. We opt for the hot hot beef with baby bok choy; the tender meat is sautéed in soy sauce, chili and shallots, disappearing from our plate in a flash. If the beef dish is attention-grabbing, like a fireworks display leaving trails of chili enhanced heat on the palate, then the snow grouper made with ginger and onion is subtle sophistication. Fall-apart fantastic, the fish is beautifully presented and served whole. It induces a hush over the table as we concentrate on the delicate dance of texture and flavour. Fully satisfied now, we prepare to pay our bill as the line-up congregating near the front door lives up to its reputation.

Dinner for two including tax and tip: \$45.00



Soba Sundays at Hiro Sushi

171 King Street East, Toronto, ON
(416) 304-0550
www.sobacanada.com

To eat like a proper Edokko (a third generation resident of Tokyo), you must have cold, freshly-made soba (buckwheat) noodles prepared by a fully-trained soba noodle master. Tetsuya Iizuka (call him Ted) is Toronto's own noodle-making master who painstakingly prepares a wide variety of noodle dishes along with GMO-free tofu every Sunday afternoon at Hiro Sushi. The oboro soba is sophisticated refinement; a bowl of freshly-prepared soba noodles sit in a delicate dipping soup (tsuyu), under an exquisite silken cloud of Ted's own tofu. A small dot of wasabi and minced long onion add extra zip to the dish. The asakusa bowl is a favourite in Tokyo. Pink bonito flakes, grated daikon radish, nori and onion slivers as well as crunchy fried batter crumbs sit atop a tangle of noodles in their own flavourful sauce. Follow up with a hot cup of soba noodle water and a dash of tsuyu sauce – a traditional way to end a soba meal – and a piece of delicate buckwheat cake, and you've enjoyed a cultural excursion without ever leaving your seat.

Lunch for two including tax and tip: \$50.00

