

The Canal House

This list was compiled by our friend and IT advisor, Echo Hopkins.

Echo Hopkins recently completed a master's course at the Courtauld Institute in London. Despite all the warnings she got beforehand about "terrible" British food, she has fallen in love both with the cuisine and the city itself, thanks to her boyfriend David Sommer. David is a native Londoner armed with a list of tiny, gemlike restaurants safely hidden from the tourist.

These are the places they find themselves going to time and time again. Being a student means keeping on a tight budget and not going to the Wolseley every night, and these places give you lots of food for not a whole lot of dosh. Read more about Echo's adventures at absolutelyswell.blogspot.com.

For Fried Eggs:

Leila's
15-17 Calvert Avenue
Arnold Circus
Shoreditch
London E2 7JP
Tube: Old Street/Liverpool Street

Leila's is the kind of café that is completely aware of its charm and wonderfully okay with having less than ten items on their menu, a place so tiny that you have to walk through the open kitchen to get to the bathroom. This is the place to come for fried eggs. They have sandwiches and soup as well, but the fact that they serve eggs in a cast-iron skillet with either sage or ham, and a basket of bread all day long is the reason I keep coming back. Jack pulls some of the finest espresso in London, and there's a grocery next door too. It's the place David took me to for lunch the day after we met; this definitely earned him a few points very early on.

For Cupcakes:

Violet Cakes
47 Wilton Way
London E8 3ED
or at Broadway Market
Tube: Hackney Central/Dalston Kingsland
violetcakes.com

I was first told about Violet Cupcakes by the Canal House ladies before I got to London, and it was by chance that I stumbled upon it at Broadway Market. Violet just opened a retail shop in North London. This is the place for the basics, but also if you want to have some fun, try cupcakes that are salted caramel or quince flavored. Everyone in London raves about Hummingbird, but I honestly prefer Violet's cupcakes.

For a Place that's been there 100 years

E. Pellicci
332 Bethnal Green Road
London E2 0AG
Tube: Bethnal Green
classiccafes.co.uk/Pelliccifeature.htm

When you walk into E. Pellicci you immediately know it's something special. You could walk past it hundreds of times before you notice it, but once you peer in, you realize that the wood-paneled walls and cramped tables (you might have to share) probably serve delicious food. I went with two others, and we quickly decided just to ask the

server's advice because everything on the menu looked great. This is the place for traditional English and Italian food that's somehow served together seamlessly. It's been around since 1900 and it's very reasonably priced, verging on surprisingly too cheap. That keeps the people coming back.

For Traditional English:

Albion
2-4 Boundary Street
London E2 7DD
Tube: Liverpool Street
albioncaff.com

I found out about Albion before I even got to London, and was very pleasantly surprised when I realized it was less than a fifteen-minute walk from where I would be living. It's one of Terence Conran's ventures. I've found myself here an embarrassingly high number of times, as you can always count on it for traditional English comfort food. Somehow, the fish and chips and Bourbon biscuits always end up in front of me.

For Vietnamese:

Viet Hoa
70-72 Kingsland Road
London E2 8DP
Tube: Old Street
viethoarestaurant.co.uk

Kingsland Road is home to an abundant number of Vietnamese restaurants. However, Viet Hoa has set itself apart with an aesthetically sleek interior and friendly service. Everything I've ever ordered here or grabbed off of a friend's plate has been wonderful. Perhaps another one of the massive draws is that it's open until 11:30, late by London standards and convenient for quick late-night dinners. Whenever we can't decide where to go, we always end up here.

For Rustic Italian:

Campania
95 Columbia Road
London E2 7RG
Tube: Old Street

Campania sits at the very end of Columbia Road nestled amongst all of the kitschy shops that line the street. Their menu is on a chalkboard on the wall and the tiny place always seems packed to the limit. They have a window that looks out onto the street from which you can order coffee and sandwiches, convenient if you're in a hurry (although I've always had to wait in a pretty substantial line). Their menu boasts antipasto platters, eggs done in a variety of ways, and hearty pasta dishes. This is a good place to go when you feel like filling up on cozy Italian food or after you've battled your way through the Columbia Road Flower market on Sundays.

For Lamb Chops and Dhal:

Tayyabs
83-89 Fieldgate Street
London E1 1JU
Tube: Whitechapel/Aldgate East
tayyabs.co.uk

After passing by all of the Brick Lane curry houses and being offered every kind of deal imaginable by the men standing outside their restaurants, you get to Tayyabs. It's a place that seems to be a "secret", but is always massively crowded. Expect to wait at least 30 to 45 minutes if you haven't booked a table in advance. If you are looking for smoky Punjab-style meats and vegetable dishes such as baby aubergine (eggplant) and dhal instead of chicken tikka masala and saag paneer, this is the spot. The fact that it's BYOB keeps the already unbelievably cheap prices even cheaper.

For Greasy Fry-ups:

Arthur's Café
495 Kingsland Road
London E8 4AU
Tube: Dalston Kingsland

It took months of living in London before I finally had a true, greasy fry-up. The fact that this was the café that finally served me the huge plate of eggs, beans, toast, and tomatoes means that it's near and dear to my heart. Judging from the number of gruff regulars and the way the waitresses in pink call you "luv", I'd like to think that this is the real deal.

For Pizza:

Story Deli
Old Truman Brewery
91 Brick Lane
London E1 6QL
Tube: Aldgate East/Liverpool Street
storydeli.com

I wasn't quite sure what this place was at first glance, but then one day I decided to stop walking past it and just go inside. Turns out they have really great thin-crust pizza with lots of interesting toppings. It's situated across from my favorite record shop, Rough Trade, which adds some bonus points.

For Pub:

The Carpenter's Arms
73 Cheshire Street
London E2 6 EG
Tube: Whitechapel
carpentersarmsfreehouse.com

The Carpenter's Arms is tucked away off Brick Lane a bit, which makes it charmingly quiet in the afternoon. Their menu is great, as are the beers on tap, which include a few very locally brewed choices. You can accidentally find yourself spending five or six hours drinking pints here.

For a Discreet Drink:

Lounge Bohemia
1 E Great Eastern Street
London EC2A 3EJ
Tube: Liverpool Street
loungebohemia.com

Pretty hidden, and with a mysteriously vague website that doesn't help, this isn't the easiest place to stumble upon. It's lucky that I'm dating a Londoner who is in the know. Saarinen furniture and a swanky Czech theme give this tiny reservation-only bar a definite vibe. If you're looking for Cuban cigar-infused rum or cocktails that involve candy floss, this is the bar for you. It's fun and mellow, and reasonably priced to boot, just make sure you call ahead.

For Health:

Food for Thought
31 Neal Street
Covent Garden
London WC2H 9PR
Tube: Covent Garden

foodforthought-london.co.uk

If you're feeling like you need a healthy boost, or just some wholesome tasty fodder, head directly to Food For Thought. This vegetarian café is always packed to the limit, but I've never had a problem finding a seat, and you can get takeaway as well. They give generous portions, offer a wide variety of health food, and there's always a soup and lots of different salads.

For Coffee:

Monmouth
27 Monmouth Street
Covent Garden
London WC2H 9EU
Tube: Covent Garden
monmouthcoffee.co.uk

For coffee in London, this is kind of the only real option. Both the café in Covent Garden and the shop in Borough Market serve up serious coffee. Don't go if you want tea or hot chocolate (they'll look at you like you're crazy). They roast their own beans locally, which are also for sale in lots of other shops around London. Their staff is absurdly knowledgeable, so if you feel like a long discussion about exactly what will match your mood or what to take home, you're in the right place.

For Light Meals:

202 Café
202-204 Westbourne Grove
London W11 2RH
Tube: Notting Hill Gate
nicolefarhi.com/content/restaurants/202-london.htm

202 Café is located in the Nicole Farhi store on Westbourne Grove. I've been back to this café repeatedly over the years and have never been let down by its simple food. Their salads are highly recommended.

For Greek:

Tsiakkos and Charcoal
5 Marylands Road
London W9 2DU
Tube: Warwick Avenue

There is almost no reason you'd look for or even find this restaurant, which perhaps makes for at least half of its glorious and scruffy charm. Xen is a wonderful and outrageous host. I've never seen a menu so I couldn't tell you what's on it, but the chicken kebabs and lamb kleftiko are why the cars are double-parked outside. Don't forget to try the homemade taramasalata, too.

For Markets:

Borough Market
8 Southwark Street
London SE1 1TL
Tube: London Bridge
boroughmarket.org.uk

Borough Market is for all things food. If you want a chorizo sandwich, they have it. If you want Turkish delight, they have it. If you want a beet and ginger smoothie, they have it. Also a good spot if you want to have a serious gourmet meal with the freshest ingredients. Make sure to check out Brindisa and the sea salt stand!

Broadway Market
London E8
Near London Fields
Tube: Bethnal Green
broadwaymarket.co.uk/home.html

Unlike Borough, Broadway Market has crafts along with the food stalls. My routine is as follows: bratwurst, Violet cupcake, coffee, sit in London Fields. The days spent at Broadway tend to turn idyllic, dragging on until sunset.

For Sweet Vermouth on Ice:

Fernandez and Wells
Food & Wine Bar
43 Lexington Street
London W1F 9AL
Tube: Oxford Circus/Tottenham Court Road
fernandezandwells.com

Café
73 Beak Street
London W1F 9SR
Tube: Oxford Circus

Espresso Bar
16a St Anne's Court
London W1
Tube: Tottenham Court Road

We were invited to a little Christmas party at the espresso bar and got treated to a few rounds of a most delicious sweet Spanish vermouth served over ice. It proved to whet the appetite, and repeat visits to the other F&W venues (not at the same time!) have yielded a lovely stew and glass of wine for lunch at the wine bar, and a ham, tomato and aioli focaccia sandwich without equal at the café. Not long ago, it was included in Saveur magazine's Top 100, to boot.

For Turkish Glory:

Antepliler
44 Grand Parade
Green Lanes
London N4 1AG
Tube: Manor House, Harringay Green Lines

That old maxim about trusting a restaurant that's full of native eaters has never been truer; Antepliler is not your typical kebabs-in-pita joint. The varied food is sensational and alarmingly cheap, some things you know (great hummus, caçik and ezme salad) and some you don't. The çiğ köfte (raw lamb kneaded with spices), lahmacun (Turkish pizza), and patlican kebab are musts if you've never tried them, and can help bridge the 30 to 45 minute wait if you're greedy enough to order one of the tava stews as well. Best of all is going next door to their patisserie for coffee and baklava afterwards. And because it's well off the beaten track, you'll have time to digest on your way home.