



# New York City isn't exactly a **NEGLECTED** culinary destination – unless you're talking about **QUEENS**. Now, however, the “other borough” is being fêted for **UNFORGETTABLE FOOD** from around the globe. We took the 7 train from Manhattan to eat our way through the **MELTING POT**

Words < Clare Vooght → Photography < Winnie Au

In New York, stories of food and immigration are often inseparable. Back in the 1820s, German sailors hankering for a taste of home would buy the first hamburgers from vendors at the Lower West Side docks. By the early 20th century, Italians had brought pizza to Little Italy, while a boom in Chinese restaurants, following the relaxing of immigration laws in the 1960s, inspired a craze for chicken chow mein.

It may well follow that the next big trends in American cuisine could come from Queens, where – according to the Endangered Language Alliance – more languages are spoken than anywhere else (138 in the last census). Certainly, food critics and journalists are beginning to take notice of NYC's easternmost and least explored borough, thanks to its street carts and restaurants that serve treats from across the world.

Anthony Bourdain got the more adventurous diners onside when he visited for his *Parts Unknown* series in 2017, calling Queens a “wonderland” for global food. Now, Michelin's inspectors are taking notice, too. The borough received seven new mentions in Michelin's 2019 Bib Gourmand list (which recognises quality and value for money), boosting its number of Bib restaurants to 19. »





Most of these serve international cuisine, from fiery Sichuan at Alley 41 to Thai fare at Pata Café – an edible microcosm of its global community.

“The food scene in Queens reflects what Queens is right now,” says Medellín-born Esneider Arevalo (*shown previous page*), who has 25 years of experience in New York kitchens and leads the Queens Culinary Backstreets tour. “We have cuisines from just about anywhere else in the world. And they’re not geared towards an American taste so they’re not tame, the spices have not changed.”

On his tour – or under your own steam – you can find more authentic restaurants here than you can physically eat at in one trip. Many have decent, sit-down lunches for as little as US\$10; all cook an honest reflection of international cuisines – maybe even from nations you’ve never heard of.

“These restaurants are made to cater to that community from that country,” says Arevalo. “It’ll be just like we were sitting in the middle of Tibet, or down in Medellín, Colombia. It’ll be the same quality and the same original products from the area – that makes it quite special.”

As well as its immigrant purveyors, Queens’ reputation for great street food is now tempting independent restaurateurs over from Manhattan – providing them with the space to be creative and experimental, at a more affordable price. After establishing a successful modern Indian restaurant in Greenwich Village, chef Chintan Pandya looked to Long Island City for his newer, more casual restaurant concept, Adda (meaning “place where people hang out”), which serves the home cooking he had grown up eating in India.

“Queens is the Mecca of international flavours in NYC and it offered affordable enough rent for us to take a chance in serving the food that Indians actually eat in their homes,” he says.

At over 280km<sup>2</sup> of land, Queens is New York’s biggest borough (though Brooklyn is more populated), so there’s a lot to cover. The quickest way in is to take the “International



## “We have cuisines from anywhere in the world – they’re not tame”

Express” – the number 7 subway, which gets you to Queens from Grand Central Station in as little as eight minutes. It won’t get you everywhere – Astoria’s Greek restaurants and Elmhurst’s Asian joints are well worth exploring, too – but it’s certainly the best way to access restaurants concentrated around Long Island City, Jackson Heights, Corona and Flushing (*see following pages for our recommendations*).

Who knows, maybe hopping on the purple line will help you find America’s next hamburger. [nycgo.com](http://nycgo.com)





## 7 87th Street– Jackson Heights

### *Alight here for curry and Colombian carts*

New Yorkers will already know Jackson Heights for its curry houses, but the late-night street-food carts on Roosevelt Avenue are really special, too. Maria Piedad Cano made her name as the Arepa Lady here, serving Colombian comfort food from a cart (she's also Culinary Backstreets' Esneider Arevalo's mum). Unimpressed by the fuss people made about her cooking when word got out, she famously hung up on the Food Network when they called asking for an interview (she also apparently slapped *Bizarre Foods* presenter Andrew Zimmern for not making arepas properly). Cano is now retired, but the Arepa Lady brand lives on, in a quiet, more residential spot tucked away from the Roosevelt Avenue hustle – where you'll find buttery corn cakes filled to burst. "It's corn masa and lots of mozzarella cheese that gets folded over and over again until it gets the right consistency, then it's put onto the griddle," says Arevalo. "Then you just do the pork rind – Colombian chicharrón (left) – which is deep-fried until it's nice and crisp and most of the fat has drained." Before taking a bite, choose from a holy trinity of sauces: pineapple, garlic mayo and a mildly spiced aji with a touch of vinegar. [facebook.com/areperiaarepalady](https://www.facebook.com/areperiaarepalady)





## 7 103rd Street- Corona Plaza



From top right  
Tulcingo Bakery aims to introduce customers to the tastes – and colours – of Mexican pastry, and has special cakes for celebrations



### *Alight here for Mexican treats and sweets*

This predominantly Hispanic area is home to countless hearty and affordable Latin American food options. A local favourite is La Espiga's tender goat, which takes a day to marinate and another day to cook – and the restaurant also serves crunchy cricket quesadillas for the adventurous.

The most eye-catching things around, though, are the Technicolor treats at Tulcingo Bakery (left), from full-sized cakes decorated with jelly and concentric fruit circles to cream and cherry-topped pastries.

You should also come to try the sometimes neon pink, sometimes beige *conchas*. “Concha means shell. The top is supposed to resemble the shape of a sea shell,” says Arevalo. “You can have this Mexican sweet bread as a snack or breakfast item. It’s less sweet than a doughnut: more of a sweet brioche with a sugar flour top.”

And for a typically Mexican breakfast, ditch the Starbucks for a *champurrado* – hot chocolate thickened with corn masa and spiced with cinnamon, cloves and allspice. “It’s the same corn masa that you use to make tortillas and tamales. It’s supposed to nourish you, warm you up to get the day going.” [laespigaqueensnyc.com](http://laespigaqueensnyc.com), [nyc.tulcingobakery.com](http://nyc.tulcingobakery.com)



## 7 Vernon Blvd– Jackson Ave

### *Alight here for adventurous Asian*

Just over the water from Manhattan, Long Island City's glossy, high-rise developments are home to young professionals, and its former industrial buildings provide space for artists' studios – fuelling demand for some of Queens' hipper and more upscale restaurants.

Bib Gourmand-awarded joint Mu Ramen serves artfully presented trout okonomiyaki pancakes topped with flying-fish roe and drizzled with foie gras syrup; or try the tequila-marinated skirt steak at New York's first Michelin-starred Mexican, Casa Enrique.

Don't miss Chintan Pandya's buzzy, busy Adda. Standout plates include a tender Lucknow slow-cooked goat biryani and a spicy goat brain bheja fry, like soft scrambled egg doused with fiery home-made masala sauce.

"The idea behind this dish might seem adventurous, but in India it's nothing crazy," says Pandya. "In the West, we are recently waking up to the idea of cooking all parts of an animal. But in India, it's been ingrained in the culture for hundreds of years. There were no statements we were trying to make by serving it. The train of thought was, 'We grew up seeing it. It's not here in NYC. Let's share it with everyone.'"

[muramennyc.com](http://muramennyc.com), [henrincyc.com/](http://henrincyc.com/)  
[casa-enrique.com](http://casa-enrique.com), [addanyc.com](http://addanyc.com)



Clockwise,  
from top right  
Don't miss out on the  
okonomiyaki savoury  
pancakes at Mu Ramen;  
biryani and curry at  
Adda; its executive chef,  
Chintan Pandya







## 7 Flushing– Main Street

### *Alight here for New York's other Chinatown*

Flushing's Mandarin-speaking Chinatown, as opposed to its Cantonese counterpart in Manhattan, is one of the largest and fastest-growing Chinatowns in the world. Frenetic New World Mall Food Court is a great place to try it all: from tongue-numbing Sichuan dishes to steaming congees and Lanzhou noodles, hand-pulled in front of you.

For a relaxed dinner, Tianjin-born chef Helen You's Dumpling Galaxy offers more than 100 different takes on the dumpling (and counting). Her inventive menu – featuring everything from spinach-dough soup dumplings to chocolate dessert creations – secured the restaurant a Bib Gourmand. The prettiest is the “four seasons” dumpling, an open riff on a closed vegetable dumpling.

“It's much more visually attractive,” says You. “Each colour symbolises a different season: edamame symbolises spring, carrots symbolise the summer, corn is fall and mushroom winter.” You is constantly coming up with new dumpling ideas, so expect that menu to grow even larger.

[dumplinggalaxy.com](http://dumplinggalaxy.com)

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From right  
One-time tax analyst  
Helen You's Dumpling  
Galaxy started out as  
a stall in a food court  
in 2006; dishes at the  
restaurant now

