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## EATING

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Of all of the transformations brought on by prosperity, none has been so dramatic, so downright *revolutionary*, as how Dubliners deal with grub. Gone are the days when food was nothing more than a biological necessity to be endured – or enjoyed after a bellyful of pints. Now, it's all 'did you hear about that new Vietnamese place? You absolutely *have* to go, the spring rolls are divine, just like the ones in that little place in Hanoi we ate in a couple of years ago.' Food – how it's eaten, where it's eaten, even how it's talked about – is the new drug of choice for so many Dubliners that in some social circles you aren't so much *what* you eat but *where* you eat.

Eating out – once the preserve of the idle rich, business-lunch crew and extraordinary celebration – has become a remarkably popular pastime, enjoyed by Dubliners in their thousands nightly in the hundreds of restaurants, bistros and brasseries that have opened their doors in recent years to an increasingly picky audience who fancy themselves natural-born food critics.

And in Dublin, critics have a field day – and not simply because giving out is a favourite sport. Not so long ago, your average Dubliner would have accepted steak as hard as shoe leather surrounded by veggies boiled beyond recognition because to complain would have appeared ungrateful. No more. The opening of so many eateries has turned a dormant dining town into a culinary bear-pit, where restaurateurs paying exorbitant rents are in a perpetual dogfight for the patronage of a clientele that no longer feels awkwardly grateful crossing the hearth of the latest themed epicurean fantasy.

Of which there are an awful lot. The city is now awash with super-cool restaurants sporting fab décor, funky menus and staff who really should be strutting the length of a catwalk. But décor, beauty and plenty of press do not necessarily a good restaurant make. Substance is usually more important than style to your average Dublin diner, and you can rely on at least half the population to point out that the Emperor is, in fact, stark bollock naked. Thankfully, a growing number of chefs and restaurateurs have cottoned on to this fact and are working to increasingly higher standards.

## HISTORY

Irish food is great until it's cooked, laughed generations of travellers who used to visit these shores *in spite* of the grub. They were right and it was a thing to be mocked. The cuisine was thrown together by an indifferent, almost penitent race and was best characterised by charred chops, mushy vegetables and an overreliance on an overrated tuber. But although the reputation lingers, the cap no longer fits, for nowhere is Dublin's renaissance more obvious than at the table.

Ironically, although never renowned for its culinary dash, Ireland has always been blessed with a wealth of staples and specialties, and its meat, seafood and dairy produce have long been feted around the world. It was what to do with these riches that baffled generations of Irish mothers. Then, in the twilight of the 20th century, as Ireland rode the wave of its economic boom, a brigade of talented cooks and dedicated foodies went back to consult the original model for Irish cuisine. They added a pinch of this, took back a bit of that

and came up with what the media quickly described as New Irish Cuisine. In truth, there was very little new about this cuisine at all; it was more a confident return to a tradition that combined the finest local ingredients with simple cooking techniques.

It aroused the taste buds of the nation, and Dublin diners in particular suddenly became more discerning and adventurous. They started banging on their tables, sending the old rubbish back to the kitchen and demanding something to savour rather than to just soak up the drink. Restaurants had to lift their game if they were going to cash in on the new culture of dining out, and cooks sought influences from all over to satisfy the adventurous appetites of their cashed-up clientele. In the space of a decade, Ireland's gastronomy was transformed. Of course, you can still find leathery meat, shrivelled fish and vegetables so overcooked that they can barely cling to the prongs of a fork, but you're more likely to experience simple and sophisticated fare that will make your head spin and your palate sing.

## ETIQUETTE

Conviviality is the most important condiment at the Dublin table. Meal times are about taking the load off your feet, relaxing and enjoying the company of your fellow diners. There is very little prescribed or restrictive etiquette. In fact, the only behaviour likely to cause offence could be your own haughtiness. Dubliners will happily dismiss any faux pas but if they think you have ideas above your station, they're quick to bring you back down to earth.

## SPECIALITIES

Although many old Dublin staples have been consigned to the scrapheap of culinary history, some have earned their longevity while others are kept around for the sake of the tourists.

Perhaps the most feared Irish speciality is the fry – the heart attack on a plate that is the second part of so many B&B deals. It's really three meals in one – who can say no to a plate of fried bacon, sausages, black pudding, white pudding, eggs and tomatoes, washed down with lots of tea or coffee and usually accompanied by a basket of toast? But hysterical health fears have seen the fry disappear from the menus of most Dubliners and, with only a handful of exceptions, your best chance of a fry is in the hotel breakfast room.

The most Dublin of dishes is coddle, a working-class concoction of rashers, sausages, onions, potato and plenty of black pepper. Another specific to the capital is gurr cake, which 19th-century bakers made out of stale bread and cakes mixed with candied peel and dried mixed fruit. Because it was very cheap, it became popular with street urchins 'on the gurr' from school. The term 'gurrrier' entered the Dublin dialect to describe rough tearaways. Bacon and cabbage – once the epitome of bad, flavourless Irish cooking – is making a comeback, but its rich and delicious reincarnation proves that there was never anything wrong with the produce, just the person boiling it to death.

The most famous Irish bread, and one of the signature tastes of Ireland, is soda bread. Irish flour is soft and doesn't take well to yeast as a raising agent, so Irish bakers of the 19th century leavened their bread with bicarbonate of soda. Combined with buttermilk, it makes a superbly light-textured and tasty bread, and is often on the breakfast menus at B&Bs.

Scones, tarts and biscuits are specialties too. Barm brack (from the Irish for 'speckled bread') is a spicy, fruity cake long associated with Halloween. Various charms are traditionally baked in the brack, and the one you get decides your destiny for the following year. Discover the ring and you'll get married, bite into the penny and you'll be wealthy (which is some consolation for the cracked tooth); the pea denotes impending poverty while a little stick cheerfully prophesies domestic violence.

Soda bread is a wonderful platform for smoked salmon, and you should take every opportunity to sample the fruits of the Irish seas, be it on a platter or wrapped in batter from a traditional chipper. Of course, you should also sample the cockles and mussels that Molly Malone made famous, oysters from the west coast, and Dublin Bay prawns – which are actually local lobsters and taste superlative at their best. If you get a chance, be sure to down a Dublin lawyer. Before you go getting yourself into trouble, this is a lobster dish cooked with whiskey and cream.

Better known is the national edible icon, Irish stew, the slow-simmered one-pot wonder of lamb, potatoes, onions, parsley and thyme (note, no carrots). In summer look out for mountain lamb from Connemara or Kerry.

Savour the dairy produce, which is some of the best you'll taste anywhere (all that rain's got to be good for something); the butter is deliciously rich and the thick and luscious cream is a joy to behold. The resurgence of cheese-making has been one of the most exciting culinary developments of recent years and Irish farmhouse cheeses win many international awards and plaudits.

## WHERE TO EAT

The epicentre of decent dining is on the south side of the city centre, where the vast majority of Dublin's best and most popular eateries sit cheek by jowl with each other. The most concentrated restaurant area is Temple Bar, but except for a handful of places the bulk of eateries offer bland, unimaginative fodder and cheap set menus for tourists. Merrion Row, St Stephen's Green and the swathe of streets west of Grafton St have plenty of options, but prohibitively high rents round these parts have forced restaurateurs to serve their specialties a little further afield, including south along the Grand Canal and east towards Grand Canal Dock.

The same pecuniary logic has forced a re-evaluation of the north side as a gourmet hotspot. Besides the plethora of greasy diners, crappy fast-food outlets and a few grand dames that have been part of the scene for decades, the north side has seen the arrival of some pretty fancy restaurants and – most excitingly – a whole new world of genuinely ethnic cuisines, from Chinese to Polish, especially along Parnell St, which runs a perpendicular line off the northern end of O’Connell St.

If you’re really lucky – or just smile and make nice with the right people – you’ll get the chance to share a homecooked meal, which remains the best way to cut right to the heart of this unique culture. Irish cuisine isn’t just about sampling sensational seafood, fine farmhouse cheeses and mountain-bred lamb, it’s defined by the warmth and conviviality around the dinner table, the chat over a cup of tea and the sizzle of the traditional Sunday roast.

## PRACTICALITIES

### Opening Hours

Dubliners follow a fairly rigid fuelling schedule; they like to eat their evening meal early, generally between 7pm and 9.30pm, while lunch goes down between 1pm and 2pm. Cafés are open 8.30am to 6.30pm Monday to Saturday, and 10am to 6pm Sunday. Most restaurants are open Monday to Saturday for lunch between noon and 3pm, and dinner from 5.30pm until 10.30pm, although many midrange restaurants stay open throughout the day. Top-end joints are more likely to close for Saturday lunch. Throughout these listings you can presume every place is open daily, unless otherwise specified. While we’ve noted where places stray from the standard, if you’re going out of your way it’s always safest to telephone ahead.

### How Much?

It’s a frustrating cliché at this stage, but food is bloody expensive in Dublin and you’ll rarely get what you’d consider value for money (unless you’re earning sterling or yen). Go to a smart restaurant, order three courses à la carte and wash them down with a decent European red, and two of you will be lucky to get change out of €150. On the other hand, choose well and you get a memorable meal for half that. For around €15 you can eat surprisingly well, although you won’t get much more than a bowl of soup and what goes between two slices

## PRICE GUIDE

|     |                               |
|-----|-------------------------------|
| €€€ | Over €25 for a main course    |
| €€  | €15–25 for a main course      |
| €   | €15 or less for a main course |

of bread for less than €10. The city’s better restaurants only get interesting if you’re willing to part with €15 to €25 for a main course, while for that special meal you will need to fork out even more. As a rule, wine is very expensive and will add the guts of €20 to your bill for even a basic red – go for a known vintage and you’ll be charged twice that.

In these pages, we’ve given you an even spread of the city’s eateries, from the choicest cheap to choicest chic – scan them well before you go out.

## Booking Tables

Reserving a table has become just about compulsory for most of the city’s restaurants from Thursday to Saturday, and for the hippest ones all week. Many of the latter have also gone for the multiple-sittings system, which means ‘yes, we have a table for you at 7pm but could you please vacate by 9pm?’ In response, some places have snubbed the reservations system entirely in favour of the (equally annoying) get-on-the-list, get-in-line policy that usually encourages a pre-dinner drink in a nearby pub.

## Tipping

It’s industry standard these days to tip between 10% and 12% of the bill, unless the waiter has dumped the dinner in your lap and given you the finger, while the gratuity for exceptional service is only limited by your generosity and/or level of inebriation. If you’re really unhappy don’t be afraid to leave absolutely nothing, though it will very rarely come to that.

The rule of thumb is simple: the classier the restaurant, the classier the service, but even at midrange and basic places you will be treated with courtesy and attention. Dubliners are not especially obsequious and generally eschew the kind of I’m-your-slave-for-the-evening take on serving tables, but that doesn’t mean that you won’t get quality service with politeness and a smile. The real treat among Dublin waitstaff is a bit of personality – they might be serving your table but they’re not afraid to have a laugh and share a joke.

## Self-Catering

Dubliners’ new taste for food extends to cooking and market shopping, and a number of artisan street markets have opened up in recent years. If you’re keen to self-cater – or just to take advantage of a sunny afternoon and an empty park – the most famous and authentic market is on Moore St, where the colour of the produce is matched by the language of the dently challenged spruikers. The more discerning shopper should head south of the river where there are a few terrific delis, cheesemongers and bakeries.

## GRAFTON STREET & AROUND

There’s no doubt about it: south of the Liffey is where all the eating action is at...well mostly anyway. It is impossible to walk 10 paces south of the river without coming across a menu in a window. The diversity of eating options will satisfy most palates and the wide variety in taste is matched by a range in prices, from good and groovy cheap eats to world-class cuisine.

**THORNTON’S** *Map pp66–7* French, Irish €€€  
☎ 478 7015; [www.thorntonsrestaurant.com](http://www.thorntonsrestaurant.com);  
Fitzwilliam Hotel, St Stephen’s Green; 3-course set lunch €45, 5-course tasting menu €85; ☒ closed Sun & Mon

Kevin Thornton shrugged his shoulders when Michelin saw fit to strip him of one of his two stars, and replied by ordering a refurb of his über-trendy room on the 1st floor of the Fitzwilliam Hotel overlooking St Stephen’s Green. The food – a mouth-watering Irish interpretation of new French cuisine – remains as good as ever, offering a mix of succulent seafood and gamey dishes like roast woodcock. Want to watch a grown-up squirm? Ask for ketchup.

**SHANAHAN’S ON THE GREEN**  
*Map pp66–7* American €€€  
☎ 407 0939; [www.shanahans.ie](http://www.shanahans.ie); 119 West St Stephen’s Green; steaks €36–45; ☒ from 6pm Mon–Thu & Sat–Sun, from noon Fri

‘American-style steakhouse’ hardly does justice to this elegant restaurant where JR Ewing and his cronies would happily have done business. Spread across three floors of a stunning Georgian building are four

elegant dining areas, where impeccable service and a courteous bonhomie attract the great, the good and the not-so-good to its well-laid-out tables. Although the menu features seafood, this place is all about meat, notably the best cuts of impossibly juicy and tender Irish Angus beef you’ll find anywhere on the island. The mountainous onion rings are the perfect accompaniment, while the sommeliers are among the best in the business.

**JACOB’S LADDER** *Map pp66–7* Modern Irish €€€  
☎ 670 3865; [www.jacobsladder.ie](http://www.jacobsladder.ie); 4–5 Nassau St; mains about €30; ☒ closed Sun & Mon

Looking over the playing fields of Trinity College – which counts as a view in Dublin – this fashionably formal restaurant is spread over two floors and is renowned for its exquisite and innovative Irish cuisine, which flirts with modern European influences. The food is a winner, with entrées like grilled goat’s cheese and mains such as mackerel and potato terrine guaranteed to impress.

## TOWN BAR & GRILL

*Map pp66–7* Modern European €€–€€€

☎ 662 4724; [www.townbarandgrill.com](http://www.townbarandgrill.com); 21 Kildare St; mains €23–39; ☒ closed lunch Sun  
On any given night, you’re likely to share the low-ceilinged basement dining room with a selection of Ireland’s most affluent and influential people, who conduct their oh-so-important affairs barely above a murmur. But the slight stuffiness of the place is swept aside by the simply mouth-watering food, which ranges from basics like lambs’ liver to slow-roasted rabbit or sweet pepper-stuffed lamb. The only stars it has are homegrown ones, but this is our favourite meal in town.

**PEPLOE’S** *Map pp66–7* Wine Bar €€–€€€  
☎ 676 3144; 16 St Stephen’s Green; mains €23–29; ☒ closed Sun

Lots of air-kissing and comparing of shopping-bag contents takes place at this sophisticated and sumptuous wine-bar, which is basically Dublin’s answer to London’s Ivy Rooms. It’s all about elegance and attention to detail – check out the sumptuous tableware – and not really about the perfectly adequate continental cuisine, which is merely a complement to the superb wine list.

**TROCADERO** Map pp66–7 International €€–€€€☎ 677 5545; [www.trocadero.ie](http://www.trocadero.ie); 3 St Andrew's St; mains €19-30; 🍴 dinner only, closed Sun

There used to be a time when the Troc was the only place in town for a splash-out celebratory meal, hopefully alongside the glitterati of Dublin's screens and stages.

No more, but the thespians, hacks, musos and TV execs are still partial to this warm and friendly Art Deco restaurant that won't challenge your taste buds but rarely fails to deliver old favourites, just as your mother dreamt of making them.

**BALZAC** Map pp66–7 French €€–€€€

☎ 677 8611; 35 Dawson St; mains €18-30; 🍴 6-11pm

It's official: one of the best chefs in Ireland is Paul Flynn, who made his name with the simply stunning Tannery in Dungarvan, County Waterford. His first Dublin venture will only serve to cement his growing reputation. The elegant old-world dining room is a fitting setting for the superb cuisine on offer; how about oysters *mi-gnonette* followed by champagne and truffle risotto?

**TIGER BECS** Map pp66–7 Thai €€–€€€☎ 677 8677; [www.lastampa.ie](http://www.lastampa.ie); 36 Dawson St; mains €18-27; 🍴 dinner Mon-Sat, plus lunch Mon-Sat Dec only

Below SamSara (p163), this long and cavernous restaurant serves high-end Thai nosh to Dublin's beautiful young things. The lamb massaman, a mild curry from southern Thailand, is a popular choice on a menu that sparkles but doesn't often shine. You'll probably feel you're paying a little too much for the sense of style, but nevertheless this loud, buzzing venue has oodles of atmosphere and is a great place to launch yourself into a night on the razzle.

**FALLON & BYRNE**

Map pp66–7 Contemporary European €–€€€

☎ 472 1000; [www.fallonandbyrne.com](http://www.fallonandbyrne.com); 11-17 Exchequer St; deli mains €6-9, brasserie mains €17-28; 🍴 deli 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun; brasserie noon-4.30pm & 6.30-10.30pm Mon-Wed, to 11.30pm Thu-Sat, 11am-4pm Sun

Dublin's very own Dean and Deluca-style upmarket food hall (see p133), wine cellar and restaurant has been an absolute smash hit since it opened in 2006. The queues for the delicious deli counter are constant

(which is partly due to the often inefficient staff), while the chic buzzy brasserie upstairs – with long red banquettes, a diverse menu of creamy fish pie, beef carpaccio or roast turbot and excellent service – hasn't failed to impress either.

**AYA** Map pp66–7 Japanese €–€€€☎ 677 1544; [www.aya.ie](http://www.aya.ie); Clarendon St; mains €12-28; 🍴 to 10.30pm

Aya looks like it belongs in downtown Tokyo, with its chic, designer ambience and revolving sushi bar favoured by shoppers laden down with bags from the attached Brown Thomas store, and anyone else looking to gossip over raw fish and sake. Problem is, the sushi belt consists mainly of fruit plates, desserts and mostly non-sushi bites; the few bits you do get are generally of the salmon and fake-crab type. If you want the real deal, you have to order à la carte, and even then it's not that brilliant. Still, it is a great place to meet and greet and it looks just fabulous.

**SABA** Map pp66–7 Japanese €–€€€☎ 679 2000; [www.sabadublin.ie](http://www.sabadublin.ie); 26-28 Clarendon St; mains €12-28; 🍴 to 11.30pm

The name means 'happy meeting place' and so far this Thai-Vietnamese fusion restaurant has proven to be just that, packed virtually every night with all sorts tucking into the extensive Southeast Asian menu amid the kind of contemporary décor that screams designer cool. We thought both the menu and the look were good without being exceptional, but it's really popular, so what the hell do we know?

**YAMAMORI** Map pp66–7 Japanese €€☎ 475 5001; [www.yamamorinoodles.ie](http://www.yamamorinoodles.ie); 71-72 South Great George's St; sushi €3-3.50, mains €16-25; 🍴 closed lunch Sun

Hip, inexpensive and generally pretty good, Yamamori rarely disappoints with its bubbly service and vivacious cooking that swoops from sushi and sashimi to whopping great plates of noodles, with plenty in between. It's a great spot for a sociable group – including vegetarians – although you'll have to book at the weekend to be one of the happy campers. They've recently opened a mostly-sushi branch north of the river (p157) that we think is just that little bit nicer.

**LOCK'S** Map pp66–7 French €€☎ 454 3391; [www.locksrestaurant.ie](http://www.locksrestaurant.ie); 1 Windsor Tce; mains €16-23; 🍴 dinner only, closed Sun

When chef Troy Maguire left the immensely popular L'Gueuleton (right) in early 2007 to team up with ex-Bang manager Kelvin Rynhardt to take over one of the steady stalwarts of the Dublin dining scene, the bar was suddenly set very, very high. Would Lock's shake off its old-town dust? Could Maguire recreate the informal-but-superb French *campagnard* cooking that made his former kitchen such a huge hit? Would Lock's be as cool as Bang used to be? And would the prices stay this side of decent? Thankfully, yes on all counts, and while it's still early days, Lock's promises to be one of the most sought-after tables in town for years to come.

**CEDAR TREE** Map pp66–7 Lebanese €€

☎ 677 2121; 11a St Andrew's St; mains €17-22; 🍴 to midnight

An old stalwart of Dublin's restaurant scene, this marvellously low-key Lebanese eatery is still a top spot to while away an evening in the company of friends, delicious meze (falafel, spicy sausage, dips), meatballs, kofta and several bottles of red wine. The service here is warm and personable.

**JAIPUR** Map pp66–7 Indian €€☎ 677 0999; [www.jaipur.ie](http://www.jaipur.ie); 41 South Great George's St; mains €19-21

A stylish and contemporary room sets the scene for some of the best Indian cuisine in town. Critics rave about the subtle and varied flavours produced by Jaipur's kitchen, which is down to its refusal to skimp on even the smallest dash of spice; what you get here is as close to the real deal as you'll get anywhere outside India.

**EL BAHIA** Map pp66–7 Moroccan €€

☎ 677 0213; 1st fl, 37 Wicklow St; mains €16-18; 🍴 closed lunch Sun

Dark and sultry, Ireland's only Moroccan restaurant looks a little like how we imagine a desert harem might be. Or maybe we just got carried away with the Moroccan sounds and smells. There are some rather fetching geometric designs on the ceilings and walls, and the gimme-gimme food includes the likes of tasty *tajines* (stews), couscous and *bastile* (pastry stuffed with chicken), while the sweet-and-spicy Moroccan coffee is an unusual treat.

**L'GUEULETON** Map pp66–7 French €–€€

☎ 675 3708; 1 Fade St; mains €11-23; 🍴 closed Sun

Dubliners have a devil of a time pronouncing the name (which means 'a gluttonous feast' in French) and have had their patience tested with the no-reservations-get-in-line-and-wait policy, but they just can't get enough of this restaurant's robust take on French rustic cuisine that makes twisted tongues and sore feet a small price to pay. The steak is sensational, but the Toulouse sausages with *choucroute* and Lyonnaise potatoes is a timely reminder that when it comes to the pleasures of the palate, the French really know what they're doing.

**IMPERIAL CHINESE RESTAURANT**

Map pp66–7 Chinese €–€€

☎ 677 2580; 12a Wicklow St; lunch from €4, mains €13-22; 🍴 noon-midnight

This long-established restaurant is a favourite with the Chinese community and is noted for its lunchtime dim sum and its we-don't-smile-but-we're-efficient service. If you're looking for some genuine Chinese dishes in an authentic atmosphere, there's no better time to go than Sunday, when the Imperial serves brunch Chinese-style in what is known as yum cha, or 'drink tea', the traditional accompaniment to dim sum.

**ODESSA** Map pp66–7 Mediterranean €–€€☎ 670 7634; [www.odessa.ie](http://www.odessa.ie); 13 Dame Ct; mains €13-20; 🍴 11.30am-4.30pm Sat & Sun, 6pm-late daily

Odesa and the hungover brunch go hand in hand like Laurel and Hardy. But this stylish eatery's dining credentials have long been maintained by its excellent dinner menu, which combines solid favourites like the homemade burger with more adventurous dishes like roast fillet of hake served with chorizo, clams, white bean stew and Serrano ham. Although it's been around for more than a decade, the loungy atmosphere with comfy sofas and retro standard lamps have kept it a perennial fave with the cool crowd.

**SIXTY6** Map pp66–7 International €–€€

☎ 400 5878; 66 South Great George's St; mains €12-20; 🍴 8am-11.30pm Mon-Sat, from 11am Sun

This swanky New York-style brasserie is one of the most popular party-dinner spots in town – the kind of place at which you'd want to celebrate your birthday with

friends. It does a mean rotisserie chicken, four different ways at any given time. Besides its signature dish, the meat-heavy menu features things like lamb shank and a particularly good bit of liver. For that special occasion, there's a whole roast pig, but you need to order seven days in advance and be in a group of eight.

### DUNNE & CRESCENZI Map pp66-7 Italian €-€€

☎ 677 3815; [www.dunneandcrescenzi.com](http://www.dunneandcrescenzi.com); 4 South Frederick St; mains €9-20; ☎ closed Sun This exceptional Italian eatery delights its regulars with a basic menu of rustic pleasures, such as *panini*, a single pasta dish and a superb plate of mixed antipasto drizzled in olive oil. It's always full, and the tables are just that little bit too close to one another but the coffee is perfect and the desserts are sinfully good.

### CHEZ MAX Map pp66-7 French €-€€

☎ 633 7215; 1 Palace St; mains €13-19; ☎ from 7.30am Guarding the main gate to Dublin Castle is a French café that is Gallic through and through, from the fixtures imported from gay Paree to the beautiful, sultry staff who ignore you until they're ready and then turn the sexy pout into a killer smile. The lunchtime *tartines* – basically open sandwiches – are good enough to get us misty-eyed for Montmartre, but its coffees are a timely reminder that while the French do an awful lot really, really well, they still don't know how to make a decent brew.

### CAFÉ MAO Map pp66-7 Asian €-€€

☎ 670 4899; [www.cafemao.com](http://www.cafemao.com); 2-3 Chatham Row; mains €12-19; ☎ to 10.30pm Mao's often spicy mix of Vietnamese and Thai specialities, cooked to order and served with a musical soundtrack that declared its super-cool credentials, really did the business until a fire gutted the place in early 2006. A whole year and a half went by before the reopening, but once again Dubliners could feast on the likes of nasi goreng and *bulkoko* – best enjoyed alfresco in fine weather. A long-time favourite of the trendy lunchtime crowd.

### BISTRO Map pp66-7 Modern European €-€€

☎ 671 5430; 4-5 Castle Market; mains €10-19 The real draw at this place is its outdoor seating in summer, on a lively pedestrian-

ised strip behind the George's St Arcade. An excellent menu of fish, pasta and meat specials, a well-stocked wine cellar and efficient service make this the warm weather choice for alfresco dining.

### CHILLI CLUB Map pp66-7 Thai €-€€

☎ 677 3721; 1 Anne's Lane; mains €13-18; ☎ lunch & dinner

Cosy, comfy and a million miles from the hubbub of modern Dublin – well, a block – this is one of the longest-serving Thai restaurants in town. It has built its reputation on unflinchingly good – and unremotely hot – curries, satays and soupy broths served in a slightly cramped but stylish room. A great choice for a quiet first date!

### CLARENDON CAFÉ BAR

Map pp66-7 Contemporary European €-€€

☎ 679 2909; [www.clarendon.ie](http://www.clarendon.ie); Clarendon St; mains €12-18; ☎ noon-8pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun Spread across three stylishly designed floors, the Stokes brothers (of Bang fame; see p152) have given pub food a go at the Clarendon, and come up trumps: the chicken burger with guacamole is about the plainest thing on a menu that changes regularly. The only difference between here and a proper restaurant is that the waitstaff won't flinch when you order lager to go with your meal.

### GOOD WORLD Map pp66-7 Chinese €-€€

☎ 677 5373; 18 South Great George's St; mains €11-18; ☎ to 3am

A hands-down winner of our best-Chinese-restaurant competition, the Good World has two menus, but to really get the most of this terrific spot, steer well clear of the Western menu and its unimaginative dishes. With listings in two languages, the Chinese menu is literally packed with dishes and delicacies that keep us coming back for more.

### WAGAMAMA Map pp66-7 Japanese €-€€

☎ 478 2152; [www.wagamama.ie](http://www.wagamama.ie); South King St; mains €11-18; ☎ lunch & dinner

There's ne'er a trace of raw fish to be seen, but this popular chain dishes up some terrific Japanese food nonetheless. Production-line rice and noodle dishes served pronto at canteen-style tables mightn't seem like the most inviting way to dine, but boy this food is good, and the basement it's served up in is surprisingly

light and airy – for a place with absolutely no natural light.

### LÉON Map pp66-7 French €-€€

☎ 670 7238; 33 Exchequer St; mains €11-17; ☎ breakfast & lunch

Unashamedly baroque in style and unmistakably French in substance, this wonderful new brasserie has us humming Edith Piaf as we tuck into the sublime fresh salmon blini or the lovely *salade paysanne*. Round it off with a genuinely sinful pastry. The fruit tarts are excellent but for something truly divine you'll have to tuck in the belly and tackle a *rêligeuse*, a chocolate or coffee pastry so named because it looks like a nun in her habit. They are so damned good that you will be singing '*non, je ne regrette rien...*'.

### JUICE Map pp66-7 Vegetarian €-€€

☎ 475 7856; [www.juicerecstaurant.ie](http://www.juicerecstaurant.ie); Castle House, 73 South Great George's St; smoothies €5, mains €12-16; ☎ to late Fri & Sat, closed Sun

Lighten up, folks, it's just food! If the staff at this trendy, self-conscious vegetarian restaurant lost some of their attitude and smiled occasionally, we might actually forget the cool-out and focus on the terrific Pacific Rim-style cuisine, as well as tasty stir-fries, soups, wraps, soya desserts, organic wines and, of course, delicious fresh juices and smoothies. Isn't yoga supposed to be *relaxing*?

### VILLAGE Map pp66-7 Pub Grub, International €

☎ 475 8555; [www.thevillagevenue.com](http://www.thevillagevenue.com); 26 Wexford St; mains €10-15; ☎ noon-8pm Mon-Sat

Forget plain old pub grub; even an accomplished chef would be proud of the menu at one of Dublin's most popular pub venues. How about pan-fried piri piri perch with vegetable ratatouille for €14.95? A great choice for lunch or early dinner.

### AVOCA Map pp66-7 Café €

☎ 677 4215; [www.avoca.ie](http://www.avoca.ie); 11-13 Suffolk St; mains €11-14; ☎ breakfast & lunch

This airy 1st-floor café was one of Dublin's best-kept secrets (because of an absence of any obvious signs) until discovered by the Ladies Who Lunch. If you can battle your way past the designer shopping bags to a table, you'll relish the simply delicious, rustic delights of organic shepherd's pie, roast lamb with couscous, or sumptuous salads from the Avoca kitchen. There's also

a takeaway salad bar and hot counter in the basement. For more information on the handicrafts, see p132.

### CAFÉ BARDELI Map pp66-7 Italian €

☎ 672 7720; [www.cafebardeli.ie](http://www.cafebardeli.ie); Bewley's Bldg, Grafton St; mains €10-14; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner

With two branches in the south city centre, the folks behind Café Bardeli have created a winning formula: great crispy pizzas with imaginative toppings such as spicy lamb and tzatziki, fresh homemade pastas or salads like broccoli, feta and chickpea, all served within the stylish environs of what were once branches of Dublin's most beloved café, Bewley's. No reservations allowed, so prepare to wait on a busy night. There's a second city branch (Map pp66-7); ☎ 677 1646; 12-13 5th Great George's St; ☎ lunch & dinner) and another in Ranelagh (see p156).

### PIZZA MILANO Map pp66-7 Italian €

☎ 670 7744; [www.pizzaexpress.ie](http://www.pizzaexpress.ie); 38 Dawson St; pizzas €10-13; ☎ lunch & dinner

There are four branches of this large and pretty stylish pizza emporium spread throughout the city centre, all sharing a similar menu, but this one is our favourite because of the alfresco dining area on Dawson St and the on-site free child-minders, who entertain your little ones while you eat, on Sunday between noon and 4.30pm.

### LA MAISON DES GOURMETS

Map pp66-7 French €

☎ 672 7258; 15 Castle Market; mains €5-12; ☎ 9am-6pm, to 8pm Thu

This thoroughly Francophile café changed hands in 2006 and suffered a dip in form, but it remains a wonderful spot to enjoy a *tartine*, salad specials or a plate of charcuterie. It also has a fine range of pastries, baked goodies and herbal teas. We prefer sitting on the street outside, where you can watch the world go by on Castle Market; the upstairs room is just that little bit too lacking in atmosphere.

### LISTONS Map pp66-7 Deli €

☎ 405 4779; 25 Camden St; lunch €5-12; ☎ closed Sun

The lunchtime queues streaming out the door of this place are testament to its reputation as Dublin's best deli. Its sandwiches

(with fresh and delicious fillings), roasted-vegetable quiches, rosemary potato cakes and sublime salads will have you coming back again and again – the only problem is there's too much choice! On fine days, take your gourmet picnic to the nearby **Iveagh Gardens** (p75).

**SILK ROAD CAFÉ** Map pp66–7 Middle Eastern €  
☎ 407 0770; www.cbl.ie; Chester Beatty Library, Dublin Castle; mains around €11; ☎ 11am–4pm Mon–Fri

Museum cafés don't often make you salivate, but this vaguely Middle Eastern–North African–Mediterranean gem is the exception. On the ground floor of the Chester Beatty Library, it is the culinary extension of the superb collection upstairs, gathering together exotic flavours into one outstanding menu that is about two-thirds veggie. Complementing the house specialities like Greek moussaka and spinach lasagne are daily specials like *djaj mehshi* (chicken stuffed with spices, rice, dried fruit, almonds and pine nuts and served with okra and Greek yoghurt). For dessert, there's Lebanese baklava and coconut kataif, or you could opt for the juiciest dates this side of Tyre. All dishes are halal and kosher.

**BOTTEGA TOFFOLI** Map pp66–7 Italian €  
☎ 633 4022; 34 Castle St; sandwiches & salads €8–11; ☎ 10am–6pm Tue–Sat

Tucked away on a side street running alongside Dublin Castle, which you'd miss unless you were specifically looking for it, is this superb new Italian café. It's the home of one of the best sandwiches you'll eat in town – beautifully cut prosciutto, baby tomatoes and rocket salad drizzled with imported olive oil on a homemade *piadina* bread that is just too good to be true.

**MARKET BAR** Map pp66–7 Spanish €  
☎ 677 4835; Fade St; mains €7–11

This one-time sausage factory, now fashionable watering hole (see p163), also has a super kitchen knocking out Spanish tapas and other Iberian-influenced bites in a light-filled, cavernous room, which is just perfect for a slow lunch. The dishes also come in convenient half-size portions, so you can mix and match without feeling like you've gorged.

**BOBO'S** Map pp66–7 Burger Bar €  
☎ 400 5750; 22 Wexford St; burgers around €10; ☎ 9.30am–11pm Mon–Sat, from 1pm Sun  
Cow-hide leather banquettes suggest a

burger joint with a difference, and Bobo's is just that: a dozen different kinds of organic burgers with Irish names flesh out the menu at this cute spot that promotes the notion that fast food can be healthy. The burgers are exceptional but the home-cut chips, which promise so much in their old-fashioned metal bucket, are very disappointing.

**CAKE SHOP** Map pp66–7 Pastries €  
☎ 633 4477; Pleasant Pl; mains €4–8; ☎ 10am–6pm

Dublin's best-kept pastry secret is this great little café on a tiny lane parallel to Camden St. The easiest way in is through **Daintree** (61 Camden St) stationery shop; through the back is the self-contained yard, which in good weather is the best spot to enjoy a coffee and a homemade cake.

**HONEST TO GOODNESS** Café €  
Map pp66–7

☎ 677 5373, George's St Arcade; mains €6; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, noon–4pm Sun  
A devastating fire kept this wonderful café under wraps for much of 2007, but it finally reopened and went back to the business of dispensing wholesome sandwiches, imaginative breakfasts and homemade soups and smoothies. Add to that delicious home-baked goodies and fair-trade coffee, all at rock bottom prices. Niiee.

**NUDE** Map pp66–7 Sandwich Bar €  
☎ 675 5577; 21 Suffolk St; wraps €5–6; ☎ closed Sun

This fabulous and environmentally friendly take on Dublin fast food looks like the juice bar at the end of the universe. The massive kitchen is fronted by a space-age counter and the communal benches are very human and sociable. Just checking out the huge pre-packaged display, with all its juices, salads and cold dishes, makes your vitamin count surge, while the hot menu mainly features hunky and healthy Asian-style filled wraps.

**LARALU** Map pp66–7 Food Stall €  
George's St Arcade, Drury St; sandwiches €5; ☎ 10am–6pm Mon–Sat

Offering a carefully selected range of deli delights very much in keeping with its 'slow food' philosophy, this popular counter at

the Drury St entrance of the George's St Arcade offers healthy soups (including wheat and dairy-free options), sandwiches and specials like slow-cooked Moroccan lamb and Thai chicken curry with cardamom and coconut. The coffees are superb and the Valhrona hot chocolate is the best in town.

**LEMON** Map pp66–7 Crêperie €  
☎ 672 9044; 66 South William St; crepes from €4.50; ☎ to 7pm, 8pm Thu

Dublin's best pancake joint has branches on both sides of Grafton St, one on South William and the other on **Dawson St** (☎ 672 8898; 60 Dawson St). Each serves up a wide range of sweet and savoury crepes – those paper-thin ones stuffed with a variety of goodies and smothered in toppings – along with super coffee in a buzzy atmosphere that is popular with literally everyone.

**SIMON'S PLACE** Map pp66–7 Café €  
☎ 679 7821; George's St Arcade; ☎ to 5pm, closed Sun

Hogging a prime corner spot off the very groovy **George's St Arcade** (p135), Simon's Place is a bustling café that serves up big, chunky sandwiches, nutritious, rich soups and decent pastries. The coffee is only satisfactory, but the cute European staff are more than all right. Avoid the downstairs part, which is dark and dingy.

## MERRION SQUARE & AROUND

The best of Dublin's restaurants are gathered in the area surrounding Merrion Square, which is also full of sandwich bars catering to the busy lunchtime business trade. You'll never land a table at any of the top end spots without making a reservation first.

**RESTAURANT PATRICK GUILBAUD** French €€€  
Map pp78–9

☎ 676 4192; www.restaurantpatrickguilbaud.com; Merrion Hotel, 21 Upper Merrion St; 2-/3-course set lunch €35/47, mains €48–90; ☎ closed Mon & Sun  
Handing out the title of 'Best in the Country' involves some amount of personal choice, but few disagree that this exceptional restaurant is a leading candidate, not least those good people at Michelin, who have put two stars in its crown. As a result,

## CAFÉ CULTURE & BEST COFFEES

Dublin's coffee junkies are everywhere, looking for that perfect barista fix that will kill the hunger until the next one. Sure, you can top up in the likes of O'Briens, Café Sol, **Insomnia**, West Coast Coffee Company and the recently arrived Starbucks, but why drink a crappuccino when you can get a proper caffeine high at the following places:

**Brown's Bar** (Map pp66–7; ☎ 679 5666; Brown Thomas, Grafton St) Not as cool as it used to be, thank God, this is in Dublin's finest department store and is the best place to stop for a mid-shop revival.

**Butler's Chocolate Café** (Map pp66–7; ☎ 671 0591; 24 Wicklow St) Heavenly hedonistic; the coffee might not be the very best in town, but the combination of a delicious handmade chocolate and damn good coffee is hard to beat. Actually, sod the coffee and double up with its famous hot chocolate for an unforgettable treat. There are branches around the south side.

**Coffee Society** (Map pp102–3; ☎ 878 7984; 2 Lower Liffey St) It looks most uninviting from the outside and only has paper cups, so it's a good job that this place has some of the best coffee-to-go in the city. There are various branches around town.

**Milk Bar** (Map pp66–7; ☎ 487 8450; 18 Montague St; ☎ closed Sat & Sun) Don't go to **Iveagh Gardens** (p75) without visiting this groovy little sandwich bar, which serves some of the best coffee in Dublin. The blend is a little mild, but if its standard offerings don't hit the mark, these are the most benevolent baristas in Dublin and are happy to tweak their coffee – a little cooler, warmer, stronger, milkier, sweeter – until you get your fix exactly how you like it.

**Queen of Tarts** (Map pp66–7; ☎ 670 7499; Cork Hill; breakfast €6–9; ☎ lunch to 1–2pm Sat & Sun) Diet dodgers rejoice, for this doughy little café is to cakes what Willie Wonka was to chocolate, and you'll think you're in a dream when you just see the displays of tarts, meringues, crumbles, cookies and brownies, never mind taste them. There are also great brekkies – such as potato-and-chive cake with mushroom and egg – the coffee's splendid and the service sweet. A treasure.

this is the most prestigious restaurant in the country, where the service is formal, the setting elegant, the wine list awesome and the fare proudly French. While the food is innovative it's rarely too fiddly, just beautifully cooked and superbly presented. The lunch menu is an absolute steal, at least in this stratosphere.

### L'ECRIVAIN Map pp78-9 French €€€

☎ 661 1919; [www.lecrivain.com](http://www.lecrivain.com); 109a Lower Baggot St; mains €47-53; ☹️ closed Sun, lunch Sat A firm favourite with the bulk of the city's foodies, L'Ecrivain trundles along with just one Michelin star to its name, but the plaudits just keep coming. Head chef Derry Clarke is considered a gourmet god for the exquisite simplicity of his creations, which put the emphasis on flavour and the use of the best local ingredients – all given the French once over and turned into something that approaches divine dining.

### UNICORN Map pp78-9 Italian €€€

☎ 676 2182; [www.unicornrestaurant.com](http://www.unicornrestaurant.com); 12b Merrion Ct, Merrion Row; mains €28-45; ☹️ closed Sun

Saturday lunch at this Italian restaurant in a laneway off Merrion Row is a tradition for Dublin's media types, socialites, politicians and their cronies who guffaw and clink glasses in conspiratorial rapture. At lunch many opt for the extensive anti-pasto bar, but we still prefer the meaty à la carte menu – a particular favourite are the kidneys on a bed of risotto, but there are pastas and fish dishes to cater to all palates.

### DOBBINS Map pp78-9 French €€€

☎ 676 4679; [www.dobbins.ie](http://www.dobbins.ie); 15 Stephen's Lane; mains €26-35; ☹️ closed Sun, lunch Sat

This old stalwart, opposite a row of council houses, was where the privileged came for lunch before the Celtic Tiger brought privilege to half the city. Its traditional French fare, homely setting and old-fashioned hospitality have served it well over the last quarter of a century, and it's still a favourite with politicians, journalists and spin doctors (often at the same table).

### DAX Map pp78-9 Fench €€€

☎ 676 1494; 23 Upper Pembroke St; mains €22-35; ☹️ lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner only Sat

Olivier Meissonave, convivial ex-maître d of Thornton's stepped out on his own with Irish chef Pól ÓhÉannaí to open this posh-rustic restaurant named after his home town, north of Biarritz. In this bright basement venue, serious foodies will be able to sate their palate on sea bass with celeriac purée, pork wrapped in serrano ham or truffle risotto.

### BANG CAFÉ Map pp78-9 Modern European €€-€€€

☎ 676 0898; [www.bangrestaurant.com](http://www.bangrestaurant.com); 11 Merrion Row; mains €18-33; ☹️ closed Sun

The biggest problem with hype is that disappointment is invariably nipping at its heels, and so it is with this stylish spot owned by the handsome Stoke twins – but only just. The innovative and meaty modern European menu was once credited with trailblazing a touch of London to an eager Dublin palate, but that was 10 years ago and the city's trendy diners have grown a little blasé with the always excellent fare on offer here. It's still very popular, so reservations are a must, even for lunch.

### DIEP LE SHAKER Map pp78-9 Asian €€-€€€

☎ 661 1829; [www.diep.net](http://www.diep.net); 55 Pembroke Lane; mains €19-29; ☹️ closed Sun, lunch Sat

Diep le Shaker is a modern, light-filled space that is tucked down an alley off prestigious Pembroke St. It is popular with the local business crowd, establishment movers and shakers, and people generally consumed by their own self-importance. It's the ugly side of the Celtic Tiger. The predominantly Thai grub is inventive and excellent, but you get the impression you're paying for the company and it ain't worth it.

### ELY Map pp78-9 Wine Bar €€-€€€

☎ 676 8986; [www.elywinebar.ie](http://www.elywinebar.ie); 22 Ely Pl; mains €15-29; ☹️ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat

Scrummy homemade burgers, bangers and mash, or wild smoked salmon salad are some of the dishes you'll find in this basement restaurant. Meals are prepared with organic and free-range produce from the owner's family farm in County Clare, so you can rest assured of the quality. There's a large wine list to choose from, with more than 70 sold by the glass. There are two more branches on either side of the Liffey – see p157 and p155.

## top picks

### IRISH CUISINE

- Chapter One (p156)
- Winding Stair (p157)
- Tea Rooms (below)
- Jacob's Ladder (p145)
- Avoca (p149)

## TEMPLE BAR

Scattered among the panoply of crap, overpriced and underwhelming eateries in Temple Bar are some excellent spots to get a bite that will suit a variety of tastes and depth of pocket.

### TEA ROOMS Map p85 Modern Irish €€€

☎ 670 7766; [www.clarence.ie](http://www.clarence.ie); Clarence, 6-8 Wellington Quay; mains €31-37; ☹️ closed lunch Sat

Designed to resemble a church, the Clarence's Tea Rooms are spacious with a soaring ceiling and double-height windows, flooding the room with natural light. Appropriately, Mathieu Melin's innovative menu commands respect, with an ambitious marriage of classic French cuisine and typically Irish produce. How about traditional Cork city crubeens (pig's trotters), soft quail eggs and potato salad topped with mustard dressing followed by chartreuse of red leg partridge, smoked sausage, savoy cabbage and carrot, and juniper flavoured jus? The three-course Market Menu, available before 8pm Monday to Thursday, is excellent value at €39.

### MERMAID CAFÉ Map p85 Seafood €€-€€€

☎ 670 8236; [www.mermaid.ie](http://www.mermaid.ie); 22 Dame St; mains €19-28

The largely seafood-serving Mermaid is one of the city's favourite restaurants, as much for the superb cuisine as for the friendly and informal atmosphere. The menu is loaded with inventive ingredient-led organic food, such as roast monkfish tail with sweet potato and chorizo mash and roast poussin with cassava chips, lentils and shallots. But what makes this place that little bit extra special is the atmosphere, fostered as much by the excellent staff as by little touches like free coffee refills at brunch. Call now and make a booking.

### EDEN Map p85 Modern European €€-€€€

☎ 670 5372; Meeting House Sq; mains €23-27; ☹️ lunch & dinner

The epitome of Temple Bar chic, Eden's minimalist look – designed to look something like the interior of an (empty) swimming pool – and contemporary European menu has earned plenty of kudos over the last decade. The menu, which offers dishes as diverse as braised lamb shank with Moroccan spices and organic beef and Guinness stew, is generally excellent, but we enjoy it best at brunch on the much-sought-after ground-floor terrace. Try to avoid the upstairs dining room, which can get very hot.

### TANTE ZOË'S Map p85 Cajun, Creole €€-€€€

☎ 679 4407; [www.tantezoes.com](http://www.tantezoes.com); 1 Crow St; mains €16-26; ☹️ closed Sun

This well-established favourite serves up a Mardi Gras for the senses almost every night, with its menu of *gumbos*, *jambalayas*, *bayou* steaks, Cajun-blackened this and Creole-infused that. It ain't subtle and it won't win a lot of gourmet foodie awards, but the crowd couldn't care less: they come to *laisser rouler les bons temps* and that's exactly what they get.

### CHAMELEON Map p85 Indonesian €€

☎ 671 0362; [www.chameleonrestaurant.com](http://www.chameleonrestaurant.com); 1 Lower Fownes St; mains €15-25, 6-dish set menu €30; ☹️ dinner, closed Mon

Friendly, cute and full of character, Chameleon is draped in exotic fabrics and serves up perky renditions of Indonesian classics, such as satay, *gado gado* and nasi goreng. If you can't decide what dish to have, you can always plump for the *rijsttaffel*, a selection of several dishes with rice. The top floor has low seating on cushions, which is perfect for intimate group get-togethers.

### IL BACCARO Map p85 Italian €€

☎ 671 4597; Meeting House Sq; mains €15-22; ☹️ dinner daily, also lunch Sat

Want a free Italian lesson? Drop into this fabulous trattoria and eavesdrop in this rustic piece of the Old Boot, where the food is exuberantly authentic, and includes bruschetta, homemade pasta, Italian sausage, cannellini beans and the like. The Italian wines are *buonissimi*.

## VEGGIE BITES

Veggies are having it increasingly easier in Dublin as the capital has veered away from the belief that food isn't food until your incisors have had to rip flesh from bone and towards an understanding that healthy eating leads to, well, longer lives. There's a selection of general restaurants that cater to vegetarians beyond the token dish of mixed greens and pulses – places like **Nude** (p151), **Yamamori** (p146), **Chameleon** (p153) and **Jacob's Ladder** (p145). Solidly vegetarian places include the following:

**Blazing Salads** (Map pp66–7; ☎ 671 9552; 42 Drury St; mains €3-7) Organic breads (including many special diet varieties), Californian-style salads, smoothies and pizza slices can all be taken away from this delicious deli.

**Cornucopia** (Map pp66–7; ☎ 677 7583; 19 Wicklow St; mains from €7) For those escaping the Irish cholesterol habit, Cornucopia is a popular wholefood café turning out healthy goodies. There's even a hot vegetarian breakfast as an alternative to muesli.

**Fresh** (Map pp66–7; ☎ 671 9552; top fl, Powerscourt Townhouse Shopping Centre; lunch €6-12) This long-standing restaurant serves a variety of salads and filling, hot daily specials. Many dishes are dairy- and gluten-free, without compromising on taste. The baked potato, topped with organic cheese (€5.50), comes with two salads, is very reasonable and is a hearty meal in itself.

**Govinda's** (www.govindas.ie; mains €7-10) Aungier St (Map pp66–7; ☎ 475 0309; 4 Aungier St); Merrion Row (Map pp78–9; ☎ 661 5095; 18 Merrion Row); Middle Abbey St (Map pp102–3; ☎ 872 7463; 83 Middle Abbey St) An authentic beans-and-pulses place run by the Hare Krishna, with three branches in the city centre. Its cheap, wholesome mix of salads and Indian-influenced hot daily specials are filling and tasty.

## AR VICOLETTO Map p85 Italian €-€€

☎ 670 8662; 5 Crow St; mains €13-25; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sat, from 3pm Sun

When it's good, this cosy little *osteria* is very, very good, with excellent Italian dishes washed down with splendid Italian reds and enjoyed in a convivial atmosphere. But it's a little inconsistent and sometimes the standard menu of pasta, meaty mains and seafood misses the mark. At these times it doesn't seem like good value at all, although the warm Gorgonzola salad never disappoints. Absolutely worth the risk.

## MONTY'S OF KATHMANDU

Map p85 Nepalese €-€€

☎ 670 4911; www.montys.ie; 28 Eustace St; mains €14-18; 🍷 closed lunch Sun

It has won a ton of ethnic dining awards, but Monty's still leaves us a little flat. The food is good if not exceptional, focusing primarily on Nepalese dishes like *gorkhali* (chicken cooked in chilli, yoghurt and ginger) or *kachela* (raw marinated meat). The atmosphere is muted, but on weeknights it can tend towards the moribund.

## GRUEL Map p85 International €-€€

☎ 670 7119; 68a Dame St; breakfast €4, lunch €3.50-8, brunch €5-12, dinner mains €11-18; 🍷 breakfast, lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, brunch & dinner Sat & Sun

Noisy, cosy and beloved by its ever-

lengthening list of devotees, Gruel is one of the best dishes in town, a deli-cum-rustic trattoria that has them queuing out the door. They come for the super-filling, taste-defying, lunchtime roast-in-a-roll – a rotating list of slow roast organic meats stuffed into a bap and flavoured with homemade relishes – and the exceptional evening menu, where pasta, fish and chicken are given the exotic once-over. It doesn't accept bookings, so just go, queue and share elbow space with the table behind you; it's worth every effort.

## LARDER Map p85 International €-€€

☎ 633 3581; 8 Parliament St; mains €10-18; 🍷 lunch & dinner

This new caff-by-day, restaurant-by-night eatery has a positively organic vibe to it, with its wholesome porridge breakfasts, gourmet sandwiches like serrano ham, gruyere and rocket, and Japanese speciality suki teas (try the China gunpowder). They're confident about their food – even listing their suppliers – and so are we.

## BAR ITALIA Map p85 Italian €

☎ 679 5128; www.baritalia.ie; Bookend, 4 Essex Quay; lunch €6-12; 🍷 to 6pm

One of a new generation of eateries to show the more established Italian restaurants how the Old Country *really* eats, Bar Italia is a favourite with the lunchtime

crowd, who come for the ever-changing pasta dishes, homemade risottos and excellent Palombini coffee. Its larger sister restaurant is across the river in the Italian Quarter (see p157).

## ZAYTOON Map p85 Middle Eastern €

☎ 677 3595; 14-15 Parliament St; chicken shish-kebab meal €10; 🍷 to 4am

It's the end of the night and you've got a desperate case of the munchies. Head straight for this terrific kebab joint and gobble the house speciality, the chicken shish-kebab meal, complete with chips and a soft drink.

## KILMAINHAM & THE LIBERTIES

Gourmet experiences are a little thin on the ground west of the south city centre, but if you are traipsing towards the Guinness Storehouse, IMMA or Kilmainham Gaol and are looking for something to sustain you, there are two spots worth considering.

## GALLIC KITCHEN Map pp90–1 French, Café €

☎ 454 4912; www.gallickitchen.com; 49 Francis St; meals around €8; 🍷 to 5pm, closed Sun

'Our food is so fucking good you won't believe it' advises the sign on the front wall of this little bakery shop. Standing at a bench, devouring a goat's-cheese brioche, salmon roulade, smoked haddock quiche and chocolate pecan tart, we – wait for it – tend to agree.

## LEO BURDOCK'S Map pp90–1 Fish & Chips €

☎ 454 0306; 2 Werburgh St; fish & chips €7-9; 🍷 to 11pm

You will often hear that you haven't eaten in Dublin until you've queued in the cold for

## DINING ON THE CANAL

One of the most atmospheric ways to experience the Grand Canal – and enjoy a fine dinner – is on an evening barge trip. Board **La Peniche** (Map p99; ☎ 087 790 0077; www.lapeniche.ie; Grand Canal, Mespil Rd; mains €15-19; 🍷 lunch & dinner Tue-Fri, dinner only Sat), sit on deck with its twinkly lights and enjoy fine Belgian wine and food while your skipper navigates the locks.

a cod 'n' chips wrapped in paper from the city's most famous chippy. Total codswallop, of course, but there's something about sitting on the street, balancing the bag on your lap and trying to eat the chips quickly before they go cold that smacks of Dublin in a bygone age. It's nice to revisit the past, especially if you don't have to get stuck there.

## BEYOND THE GRAND CANAL

If you fancy a change of pace, head to the inner southern suburbs ringing the Grand Canal, including Ranelagh, Ballsbridge and around the Grand Canal Basin itself, where you can find some excellent nosh.

## ELY HQ Map p99 Contemporary European €-€€€

☎ 633 9986; www.elywinebar.ie; Hanover Quay, Forbes St, Grand Canal Basin; mains €18-29; 🍷 lunch & dinner Mon-Sun

As part of the ongoing development of Dublin's docklands, Ely opened a branch of its successful city-centre restaurant in what they assume will be one of the hippest spots in town. The new restaurant is suitably impressive – lots of exposed concrete coupled with modern designer touches more often seen in a high-end Bangkok restaurant – and the food is made to match, even if the menu isn't all that adventurous and you won't eat anything that will absolutely blow your socks off. Still, it's a good spot to eat off a hangover.

## FRENCH PARADOX Map p99 French €€

☎ 660 4068; 53 Shelbourne Rd; mains €16-18; 🍷 closed Sun

This bright and airy wine bar, over an excellent wine shop of the same name, serves fine authentic French dishes such as cassoulet, a variety of pâté de foie gras, cheese and charcuterie plates, and large green salads. All are there to complement the main attraction: a dazzling array of fine wines, mostly French unsurprisingly, sold by the bottle, glass or even 6.25cL taste! A little slice of Paris in Dublin 4.

## OCEAN Map p99 Seafood €-€€

☎ 668 8862; Charlotte Quay Dock, Ringsend; mains €12-18

Once the docks are redeveloped, Ocean will have one of the best views in town (hence



## THE PUB CARVERY

Dublin's greatest contribution to its own gourmet heritage has been the pub lunch, invariably made up of three kinds of meat, three kinds of potato, overboiled cabbage and carrots and lashings of droopy gravy, all kept warm under the toxic glow of the heat lamp. And if you needed something a little lighter, how about a ham-and-cheese toastie wrapped in plastic? Ah yes, the good old days – but they're still with us. The cuts of meat have improved, the cooking time for veg has been reduced by half and a whole bunch of new delights have been added to the menu, including curries and – shock, horror – fresh salad. Besides those pubs whose cuisine is so good that they stand alone as proper restaurants (and are included in our main reviews), we recommend the following pubs for their better class of pub grub.

You'll get solid steak and chips at the **Stag's Head** (p166) and good pasta at the ever-fashionable **Bailey** (p162). **Dayv Byrne's** (p163) has been associated with food since Leopold Bloom dropped in for a Gorgonzola sandwich and a burgundy in *Ulysses*; a century later, oysters, salmon and other seafood make up the fare. Dublin's oldest pub, the **Brazen Head** (p169), does a mean carvery and a summer alfresco menu.

the floor to ceiling windows). The problem is, it's already charging for the view while it – and the food – aren't quite there yet. Standards include oysters, crab salad and a langoustine (lobster) cocktail, but portions are small and the convoluted cooking unreliable. That said, there's a nice terrace, should the sun stick its head out.

### CAFÉ BARDELI Map p99 Italian €

☎ 496 1886; [www.cafebardeli.ie](http://www.cafebardeli.ie); 62 Ranelagh Rd; mains €10-14; ☎ 12.30-11pm Mon-Sat, to 10pm Sun If it ain't broke, do it again: CBD hit Ranelagh a few years back with the same no-fuss menu that made its city-centre sisters such roaring successes on Grafton and South Great George's Sts (see p149) and it just hasn't looked back.

### MASH Map p99 International €

☎ 497 9463; Castlewood Ave, Rathmines; mains around €12; ☎ closed Sun

This tiny, eclectic place is run by Bobby and Jerome, possibly the friendliest hosts in the capital. It is well regarded for its tasty, homemade dishes and cosy atmosphere, and the small menu features daily specials such as Thai chicken curry, roast red snapper, organic steaks or the popular range of Mash potato cakes, all made with TLC and served with a smile.

### JO'BURGER Map p99 Burger Bar €

☎ 491 3731; [www.joburger.ie](http://www.joburger.ie); 137 Rathmines Rd, Rathmines; burgers €7.95-11.50; ☎ noon-midnight A playful, kids-in-the-70s theme (the menus are pasted into children's almanacs), DJs playing great music loud enough to hear but not too loud to be annoying, and a sensational burger menu make this the coolest, hippest, best burger joint in the city. The

organic burgers – beef, lamb, fish, veggie – come in a variety of options, all with funky names. The mapetla has beetroot salad, rocket and relish; the zondi comes with green thai curry mayo, coriander and chilli.

## NORTH OF THE LIFFEY

Like just about every facet of Dublin life, cafés and restaurants north of the Liffey tend to be more down-to-earth than their southern counterparts. O'Connell St itself is lined with fast-food factories, although there are a couple of cracking restaurants close by. The area around Parnell St has exploded in the last couple of years and is now chock-a-block with ethnic eateries, mostly Chinese.

### CHAPTER ONE Map pp102-3 Modern Irish €€€

☎ 873 2266; [www.chapteronerestaurant.com](http://www.chapteronerestaurant.com); Dublin Writers Museum, 18-19 Parnell Sq; mains €33-70; ☎ closed Sun, lunch Sat

One of the best restaurants in Dublin, this venerable old trooper sets its ambitions no further than modern Irish cuisine, which it has realised so brilliantly that those Michelin lads saw fit to throw one of their sought-after stars its way. Menus change regularly but the dishes are always top-notch, the service first class and the atmosphere reassuringly reserved. Get there before 7pm for the three-course pre-theatre special (€35), a favourite with those heading to the **Gate** (p186) around the corner.

### RHODES D7 Map pp102-3 British €€-€€€

☎ 804 4441; [www.rhodesd7.com](http://www.rhodesd7.com); Mary's Abbey; mains €23-30; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, closed dinner Sun & Mon

The northside got its first real taste of trendy dining when celebrity TV chef Gary Rhodes

decided that this was the spot to open his first Irish venture. While you won't spot the Tintin-haired one sweating it out in this big, brash restaurant's kitchen, he did devise the menu and his British staples – cheddar rarebit, roast cod with lobster champ – have been given an Irish twist, which really just means that the ingredients are local.

### ELY CHQ Map pp102-3 Contemporary European €€-€€€

☎ 672 0010; [www.elywinebar.ie](http://www.elywinebar.ie); IFSC, Docklands; mains €18-29; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sun

The International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) finally has a decent restaurant to cater to the throngs of blackberry-addicted power-diners who need sustenance to fuel their busy lives – and this gorgeous tobacco warehouse conversion is the perfect spot to take a break. Ironically, the only criticism of the place is that the service is a little bit slow, although that doesn't matter too much in the evening, when there are fewer suits in a hurry.

### HALO Map pp102-3 Modern Irish €€-€€€

☎ 878 2999; [www.morrison.ie](http://www.morrison.ie); Morrison Hotel, Lower Ormond Quay; mains €23-27; ☎ dinner only Housed in this superslick hotel, the visually stunning Halo has soaring ceilings, a wall of mirrors and striking artwork, but don't let this distract you from the Ireland-meets-continental Europe fusion fare that includes the likes of fillet of sea bream and Carlow lamb rump. Its critics complain that the menu competes with the staff to see who can be more stuffy, but in truth it's the moneyed clientele that win hands down.

### WINDING STAIR Map pp102-3 Modern Irish €€-€€€

☎ 873 3292; [www.winding-stair.com](http://www.winding-stair.com); 40 Lower Ormond Quay; mains €15-26; ☎ noon-4pm & 6-10pm Tue-Sat, from 1pm Sun

There was much tearing of hair and gnashing of teeth when this Dublin institution closed a few years ago. Thankfully it reopened in 2006 with the same simple décor and warm atmosphere but with the addition of an excellent wine list and wonderful Irish menu – creamy fish pie, bacon and organic cabbage, steamed mussels or Irish farmyard cheeses – all prepared with much TLC.

### YAMAMORI SUSHI Map pp102-3 Japanese €€

☎ 475 5001; 38-39 Lower Ormond Quay; sushi €3-3.50, mains €16-25; ☎ lunch & dinner Sun-Wed, dinner Thu-Sat

Sushi arrives on the northside and immediately proves successful, but that's hardly surprising considering that its southside sister has been doing the Japanese thang with great aplomb for a very long time. The menus in both are largely the same, but we prefer this newer location – right on the river – because it's just that little bit more airy and spacious. The bento boxes are a popular choice, but we really just can't get enough of the sushi moriawase (€20).

### BAR ITALIA Map pp102-3 Italian €

☎ 874 1000; 28 Lower Ormond Quay, Quartier Bloom; mains €9-15

The food here is exactly the same as that served by its sister spot across the river (see p154) but what's with the attitude? When we visited, the waitstaff were brusque to the point of rudeness, a complaint that was echoed by others during our research. More's the pity, because this could be a terrific place.

### ALILANG Map pp102-3 Korean €

☎ 874 6766; 102 Parnell St; mains €8-13; ☎ to late

With elements of Chinese, Japanese and Thai cuisine, this Korean restaurant on multicultural Parnell St has plenty to whet Western appetites. Tasty dishes like *padun* (a seafood pancake), cod-and-tofu hotpot and barbecued meats are brought to your table with gas burner, skillet and spicy marinade, for you to tuck in DIY-style, making the food a talking piece. Although the bright and shiny décor may not be conducive to romantic first dates, the atmosphere at Alilang is strangely inviting. Steer clear of the dull wine list in favour of the Korean Hite beer.

### DUBLIN CITY GALLERY – THE HUGH LANE Map pp102-3 International €

☎ 874 1903; [www.hughlane.ie](http://www.hughlane.ie); 22 North Parnell Sq; mains €8-12; ☎ to 6pm Mon-Thu, to 5pm Fri-Sun

There's hardly a better way to ruminate the art in the gallery than over lunch in the new gallery café, an airy room in the basement next to a small garden. The menu tends largely towards the healthy eating side of things, offering a range of scrumptious savoury tarts and exotic seasonal salads.

**PANEM** Map pp102–3 Café €

☎ 872 8510; 21 Lower Ormond Quay; mains €7-10; ☺ to 5pm, closed Sun

Pasta, focaccia and salads are the standard fare at this diminutive quay-side café, but the specialities are wickedly sweet and savoury pastries, which are all made on-site. The croissants and brioche – filled with Belgian chocolate, almond cream or hazelnut *amaretti* – are the perfect snack for a holiday stroll along the Liffey Boardwalk. Lunchtimes are chaotic.

**COBALT CAFÉ & GALLERY**

Map pp102–3 Café €

☎ 873 0313; 16 North Great George's St; mains €6-10; ☺ closed Sun

A splendid little café just opposite the James Joyce Centre (p108), the Cobalt occupies the ground floor of an elegant Georgian building and serves honest-to-goodness sandwiches stuffed with lots of lovely fillings. The big fireplace is the spot to warm those winter toes.

**LA TAVERNA DI BACCO** Map pp102–3 Italian €

☎ 873 0040; Quartier Bloom; salads &amp; sandwiches €5-8, mains €8-9; ☺ closed lunch Sun

Football-mad developer Mick Wallace has managed to single-handedly create a thriving new Italian quarter with cafés and eateries popping up all over Quartier Bloom, the new lane from Ormond Quay to Great Strand St. La Taverna and *Enoteca Delle Langhe* (Map pp102–3; ☎ 888 0834), just a few doors up, serve simple pastas, antipasti and Italian cheeses along with the delicious produce of Wallace's own vineyard and others in Piemonte.

**SOUP DRAGON** Map pp102–3 Soup Bar €

☎ 872 3277; 168 Capel St; soups €5-10; ☺ closed Sun

Eat in or takeaway one of 12 tasty varieties of homemade soups, including shepherd's pie or spicy vegetable gumbo. Bowls come in three different sizes and prices include fresh bread and a piece of fruit. Kick-start your day (or afternoon) with a healthy all-day break-

fast selection: fresh smoothies (€4.25), generous bowls of yogurt, fruit and muesli (€4.50) or poached egg in a bagel (€3.70).

**EPICUREAN FOOD HALL**

Map pp102–3 International €

Lower Liffey St; ☺ closed Sun

This place is essentially just a food court, but some of Dublin's best eateries have outlets here, and it's a worthy daytime stop-off for a snack, a coffee, lunch or specialist supplies. The food court is perfect if you're not sure what you feel like or if there's discord among your number, because once you get here you can choose between bagels, Italian, French, Mexican, Japanese, Indian and Lebanese, to name just a few.

**BEYOND THE ROYAL CANAL**

Every Dublin suburb has its foreign eatery – Chinese and Italian are the big faves – but, in terms of restaurants, there isn't much to recommend in the northern wildlands outside of the trendy burghs of Malahide (p216) and Howth (p214). With one very notable exception...

**WONGS** Off Map p118 Chinese €€

☎ 833 4400; 436 Clontarf Rd; mains €17-18; ☺ closed lunch Mon-Sat

This top-rated Chinese restaurant, 5km from the city centre, is a family-run classic with subdued décor and friendly service that raises the bar on warmth and courtesy. The menu is not especially adventurous – it sticks to tried and tested dishes that won't offend the conservative Irish palate – but what it does serve is generally excellent. Our absolute favourite is the duck in a carved-out pineapple shell surrounded by pieces of the fruit and dripping with sauce. Upstairs is a *teppanyaki* room – a private dining room where the food is cooked in the middle of the seated group – for that special occasion or business dinner.

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