

LONDON RESTAURANT GUIDE 2026

Just a few favourites. Many are well known but I've marked some of the ones that are a bit below the radar with 📍

The Full Monty

Row on 5 (**)

Jason Atherton who now runs at least a dozen restaurants worldwide, most with a star, has unfinished business: to prove he has what it takes to land 3. He's recruited in Spencer Metzger, latterly of the Ritz, and one of the brightest young talents in the UK to help him get there. Japanese orientated ethos, similar to **Humble Chicken (**)** (nearly neck-and-neck incredible for the food) but with more classically European notes and the full Michelin deluxe experience. Witness the trolley-mounted Imperial bottle (6l) of Chateau d'Yquem wheeled in at the end. It's on Saville Row so an excuse for the men to doll themselves up for once too. Dust off your wedding suit and they'll even have your coat pressed whilst you dine.

Gordon Ramsay at Royal Hospital Road (***)

For all the Hell's Kitchen nonsense, the restaurant that first had his name above the door remains serene and seriously good. It is elegant and classical, innovative enough to remain fresh, without ever drifting into the avant garde and abandoning its identity. GR trained under Guy Savoy in Paris and then the volatile, changed-the-face-of-British-cooking, genius of Marco Pierre White at the legendary Harvey's in Wandsworth (look up the cookbook "White Heat"). Since then, it is this restaurant that has taken on the mantle of training the finest chefs in the UK (including Atherton above, and Angelo Sato last night). Service, first honed under the equally legendary-but-now-retired Jean-Claude Breton, is equally impeccable. I think it is at its best for a luxurious lunch on a bright day.

Trinity (*)

Brave enough to travel outside Zone 1? Twenty minutes southbound on the Northern Line from Leicester Square, on the edge of Clapham Common looking across to Holy Trinity Church (the spiritual home of the abolitionist movement in England), is Adam Byatt's restaurant. It is the perfect example of a one-star Michelin restaurant, serving classically French-inspired dishes in charming but open and relaxed surroundings. It makes you feel a little bit special...and leaves you knowing you have eaten well. Go for the beef tartare. Upstairs is a very good, less formal restaurant called, well, **Upstairs**. And as a bonus Adam Byatt recently started a youtube channel taking you through cooking some classic dishes. It's interesting, accessible and (a treat these days), done simply for the love of sharing his knowledge. A real gift.

Jamon, Jamon

Sabor

In 2003, the Hart Brothers opened their first restaurant - Fino - with Nieves Barragan at the stoves. In the near quarter of a century since the answer to the question "what is the best Spanish restaurant in London" has always been the same: the one Nieves is cooking at. Sabor was her first restaurant on

her own and it is amazing. There are two parts: tapas downstairs, asador upstairs. The asador is worth the trip for the experience of the wood-roasted suckling pig (did this for my Brother-in-Law's 60th, what a feast!) but go for the tapas downstairs. Not just the best in London, it would rank amongst the best in Spain also. The tortilla is sensational. They do now release some bookings but otherwise it's turn up and queue (if you get there 30mins before service that works – it's the only restaurant in London Jo and I will queue for!). If you're over on your own for business, the counter format works perfectly.

Brat

It's one of those Welsh Spanish restaurants...OK, the chef, Tomas Parry, is Welsh but he is cooking the food of the Basque country. Brat is an old Welsh word for turbot and, whilst everything on the menu is delicious, you should choose the *rodaballo* – the whole turbot roasted in a wood fire. You might also have to set fire to your grandmother to get a reservation.

Lurra

Txuleton – the Basque steaks cut from dairy cattle who, in cow years, have lived to the age of Dick Van Dyke – is very much in vogue in London these days. But Lurra was doing it before it got trendy. They source their beef from some of the same places as Etxebarri. Exemplary steak and worth indulging in some of the high-end Rioja's and Ribero's they have on the list. Their burnt Basque Cheesecake (à la La Vina in San Sebastian) isn't bad, either.

Flowers of Shanghai

A Wong

I first went here in the 90s when it was called Kym's and run by Andrew Wong's parents. Then it was just a neighbourhood Chinese, albeit a little different and better than the Cantonese norm. When his father died suddenly Andrew Wong stepped in out of duty to help keep things going. Fifteen years later, "keeping things going" amounts to two Michelin stars and a breathtaking feast of over 30 dishes showcasing what can be achieved when love and innovation are combined with a passion for the culinary traditions of China. And Andrew Wong is still the humblest guy – when was the last time that, on your way out, you saw a two-star Michelin chef helping with the washing up?

Bar Shu

Much like sumptuary laws, there used to be some iron rules governing eating and drinking in Britain. Ice was almost banned; olive oil was for earaches, not cooking; and, if you were eccentric enough to want to eat Chinese foreign stuff, it must be strictly Cantonese. (After all, what otherwise was the point of owning Hong Kong?). Bar Shu was one of the new-wave that introduced Britain to the concept that China had regions...and that some of those regions had invented the chili. This is a menu full of the classics of Sichuan, and covered liberally with the heaven-facing chilis and the peppers of its cuisine. (But if you fancy the famous Sichuan hotpot, try **Chili Cool** near Kings Cross).

Min Jiang

On the list by dint of having the best Peking Duck in London. Also, a specular rooftop view over Hyde Park, the Albert Memorial and Kensington Palace whereby you can watch the sun set and the British monarchy with it (don't worry about it – you have your own now...)

Hunan ☎

Chef Peng trained under his namesake Peng Chang-kuei, who cooked for Chiang Kai Shek and invented General Tso's Chicken. Thirty-five years ago, it was just Mr Peng in the kitchen and, indeed, pretty much the restaurant as a whole. He would put menus on the table but then fall into meat-cleaver-wielding fits of apoplexy if you looked like ordering from them. The rule was you ate what Mr Peng served you and you thanked him for it. These days Mr Peng confines himself to the kitchen and his son runs front of house. The apple has fallen a long way from the tree when it comes to customer relations...and also a genuine passion for wine which converts to great service and a decent list. What hasn't changed is that you still eat what Mr Peng wants you to – over about 16-18 courses in the traditional structure of a Chinese banquet. It is utterly delicious and utterly unlike anything else in London. Go there – you'll thank me for it!

À Bout de Soufflé (See what I did there? Sorry.)

Casse Croute ☎

These days when you go round France, you find yourself asking through the disappointment where all the magical little French bistros went to. You know, the ones with paintwork stained yellow by the smoke of Gitanes and the aromas of onion soup. The answer is that one of them is still to be found in Bermondsey St, sporting a tiny room, a few huddled tables and a menu and wine list that appear to be apologising for the excesses of Proust in their concision. An atmospheric delight. (Also, opposite London's second-best tapas bar, the equally tiny **José**)

Bouchon Racine

What's better than a traditional 300-year-old British pub? The answer is: that pub with an exemplary French bistro on its top floor. Henry Harris does the cooking. He's heard of La Nouvelle Cuisine and wants nothing to do with it. Instead, it is the classics: eggs mayonnaise with anchovies; lamb's brains with black butter and capers; leeks vinaigrette. All done superbly, the cooking showing why simple has stood the test of time. If you see the Lapin au Moutarde, go for it. If they were alive today this is where Julia Child and Elizabeth David would be eating.

Elystan St

Phil Howard was another of the few originals in Marco's kitchen alongside Gordon Ramsay. Later, and for nearly twenty years, he ran The Square – a classically French two Michelin star, and possibly my favourite restaurant ever. Because every plate that came out of that kitchen had thought, refinement, elegance and taste. 20 years and not a single poor dish. He then sold up, opened a neighbourhood restaurant (OK, neighbourhood-for-Chelsea) abandoned the tablecloths and Michelin, and started cooking more informally. He was given a Michelin star. Not on purpose, you understand, but just because there's a limit to how badly this man can cook. Easy-going but with skill in every plate. Often has interesting guest-chef evenings and does a great Sunday lunch.

Otto's ☎

There is one reason only to go to Ottos but it's a good one and it's called *Canard a la Presse*. Duck in four services, with truffle, madeira, fois gras, caviar, cognac and the demi-cuit carcass crushed in the silver press at the table to extract the blood and juices that are transformed into the sauce. This is the fabled dish of the Tour D'Argent restaurant in Paris (where Otto – the Maitre D' - worked as a waiter in the 1970s, and from where he bought his duck press). It is an astonishing indulgence of *haute-cuisine* in the Escoffier style and possible the pinnacle of the *Art de la Table*. It is also a dying art. Nowhere else in Britain serves it (or would dare to!). A handful at most in France. It is a dish to try once in your lifetime and, by the end of this lifetime it may be lost entirely. Eye-wateringly expensive, it is a dish for two people to share and must be reserved at the time of the booking well in advance. (Actually, I fibbed a little about the only reason...also buried on the menu at Otto's is *Poluet de Bresse 'Demi Deuil' en Vessie* the signature dish of the legendary Mere Brazier, in Lyon when she became the first female chef to be awarded three Michelin stars in the 1930s. Look it up).

One Night in Bangkok

You already know Kiln, so...

Supawan

From the outside you'd mistake this for any one of hundreds of neighbourhood Thai restaurants in London. From the first bite you won't. Wichet Khongphoon is so lovely and so passionate about his food heritage. And it shows on the menu and on the plate. When he started, he was serving the Thai classics (cliches?) he felt he had to. But the reception from customers has given him the confidence to serve the food he wants to instead: his Dad's beef curry; a fierce orange curry of mackerel. It slants towards the food of southern Thailand and it is fiery and authentic.

AngloThai

Why is London a great city? Step into AngloThai and find out. John Chantarasak is embracing both his heritages – by challenging himself to capture the spirit of Thai Cuisine using only the ingredients of the UK. I mean, Thai cooking without rice? The result is uniquely delicious – including (especially) the vegetable dishes and garnishes.

Kiln

Very well known, hence the queue around the block, so go very off-peak. But absolutely worth it for authentic (and mostly Northern) Thai cooking all of which is done over open fire. Few things can beat a fiery Thai curry with an ice cold beer whilst watching a chef work in hellish heat next to roaring flames to deliver it! The pots of glass noodles with crab are a must order.

Carry on up the Khyber

Gymkhana

Ok, you've landed a reservation at the best Indian Restaurant in Britain. So, what do you eat? Go for the *Kid Goat Methi Keema* (and have the side of *Bheja* – goat brains). The *Guinea Fowl Pepper Fry*. Maybe the *Pig Cheek Vindaloo*. Or the stand-out *Venison Biryani*. What I love about Gymkhana is that it doesn't temper the heat and the spice to make itself more "Michelin acceptable". We once sat next to an Italian lady who got quite distressed by this. But then, that's just Italy's fault for not getting

up off its arse and invading India. If you want to appreciate the food, at least put the effort in, lads... (In Marylebone is Gymkhana's older sister: **Trishna**, less well known, easier to reserve, very good)

New Tayyabs Φ

In the heart of the East End by the old London Synagogue, behind the new east end mosque, in the street where they forged the Big Ben bell and a stone's throw from the scene of Jack the Ripper's crimes. In the past 50 years it's tipped progressively further from grill caff to restaurant. It used to be you couldn't book – now you need to. But you'd still not call it polished. And thank God. You don't come here for polished. You come here for the rough, the raucous, the Bring Your Own wine, lager or whisky. The melting pot of London. You come here for the home-style Punjabi dry curries. Above all, you come here for the grilled masala lamb chops, the smoke of which fills the place.

A note on Indian Restaurants (and Fish and Chips) in Britain

Neither Gymkhana nor Tayyabs – or even the restaurants in Indian areas of London like Tooting (**Jaffna House**, **Apollo Banana Leaf**) - are actually what most Brits would recognise as "their" Indian. The British Indian restaurant (which is mostly likely run by Bangladeshi's (or Brits of that heritage), not Indians...) is a different affair. It's full of 6 pints of Cobra beer and bright red Chicken Tikka Masala. Huge stacks of poppadums that are karate-chopped in half at the beginning of the meal before being soured in lime pickle and mango chutney. They're neighbourhood staples, not guide-book glamour girls, and every Brit has their local curry house, and every Brit has their go-to curry on the menu to which they show the same loyalty as their football team. There's no point in recommending one here – and the same goes for Fish and Chips – because it is such eat-with-the-locals thing (but for the record, ours is called **Curry Paradise** in Brixton – it's just down the road from our chippie **The Fish Lounge** - and I'm a *Prawn Dhansak* man).

Tokyo Story

Kikuchi Φ

OK, the Tokyo Story thing is a bit misleading...Kikuchi-san is from Kyushu. Whilst there are some other things on the menu, it is, essentially, a sushi restaurant. And an old-school one at that. The modern trends of adding innovative combinations, of playing with caviar and foie gras, of the sushi become a bit, well *frou-frou*, are all eschewed here. It's a more mixed clientele from 35 years ago when it was exclusively Japanese salarymen, but the menu is the traditional offerings of o-toro, unagi, tai and tamago. But exceptional quality and cut. Japanese standards. Some nice sake offerings too. Get a counter seat.

Road to Damascus

Imad's Syrian Kitchen

Or, in the case of Imad Alarnab, the road from Damascus – and a hard one at that. But it has manifested in a vibrant, joyous restaurant serving dishes of the Levant which many times seem familiar but then present a little twist or shimmy reflecting their Syrian difference. A place to sit in,

eat well with friends, and reaffirm a little of your faith in humanity (I attach a link to Jay Rayner's original review giving something of the backstory...¹)

Uncorked

Noble Rot

Arguably, Row on 5 may have the greatest wine list in the UK but nowhere is more passionate than Noble Rot. It caresses with love the wines of the world but holds a special place in its heart for those of Burgundy. Not a list drawn up by numbers, name-checking the obvious producers, but created through obsession and understanding and just drinking the stuff. Every waiter can take you with knowledge through the list and then not be afraid to offer their own genuine interests and opinions. All of this is accompanied by sensible, unfussy but accomplished cooking. When I took an ex-Chef out for dinner I chose here because it's the kind of place a chef can recognise is doing things right in the kitchen. My favourite (of the three restaurants) is Noble Rot Mayfair in historic Shepherd Market, but a shout-out to Noble Rot Soho in Greek street if you can go in truffle season. Have them shaved over their signature *Chicken in Vin Jaune with Morels*, open a bottle of the better sort of white Burgundy and reflect that all is well in this, the best of all possible worlds.

The Next Best Thing

And the ones currently top of my "haven't been yet but want to go" are:

Brooklands (**)

Claude Bosi used to run our favourite 2-star in London, called Hibiscus. Then he shut it and opened up our new favourite 2-star, called Bibendum in the Michelin building in Fulham (the most beautiful dining room in London on a sunny day). Last year that shut in an argument over rental costs. In the meantime, he opened Brooklands which was awarded 2 stars in about an hour and a half. Why have we not been yet?!!

Impala

Meedu Saad was head-chef at Kiln. He's moved on from there. He kept the open fires in his new restaurant but is now cooking the food of Cairo.

Teal

Sally Abé, like Clare Smyth, is a graduate of the kitchens at Royal Hospital Road. Teal is her first restaurant returning to the capital and going it alone.

Ibae

OK, another Basque steak joint. This one gets swooning reviews and it's beginning to irritate me that by the time I remember how much I want to try it, it's already too late to find a reservation...

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/food/2021/jun/20/jay-rayner-restaurant-review-imads-syrian-kitchen-represents-all-the-good-things>