

## ISRAEL



It's a stand-up pizza lunch for these children at a typical Israeli snack bar (Photo by Yael Rosen)

IN THE HEART of Tel Aviv, on a busy corner of Dizengoff Street, the newly-arrived visitor unexpectedly encounters China Town. China Town Restaurant, that is. Operated by Yam Meng Tuan, a congenial, Hebrew-speaking Chinese Buddhist from Singapore, this popular Chinese restaurant typifies the ever-expanding taste in Israel for international cuisine.

Cookery from all continents, a happy outgrowth of the diverse origins of Israel's population, has burgeoned as more and more Israelis travel abroad and widen their gastronomic horizons.

Only a decade or two ago the menu of Israeli restaurants featured either traditional European-Ashkenazi food (e.g., gefille fish, cholent, kugel) or Near Eastern-Mizrachit fare (e.g., humus, couscous, kebab). Occasionally a hybrid eating-house would cross-feed the two.

Today the impressive variety of restaurants includes American, Arabic, Argentinian, Brazilian, Bulgarian, Chinese, French, Georgian, Greek, Hungarian, Indian, Indonesian, Italian, Peruvian, Polish, Romanian, South African, Spanish, Turkish, and Yemeni. About the only culinary styles noticeably missing are Russian(!) and Japanese.

With about 5,000 eating-establishments of one kind or another throughout Israel in the appetite-appealing business—restaurants, cafés, cafeterias, inns, buffets—tourists have customarily averaged at least one meal a day away from their hotel dining-rooms. Very often, visitors found their way to a select few, well-known restaurants.

Nowadays, at these top-class restaurants like Capriccio, Casbah, Le Versailles and La Couronne in Tel Aviv, or Alla Gondola and Mishkenot Sha'ananim in Jerusalem, an excellent dinner for two, with wine, can cost between £15 and £25.

Lately, however, visitors are discovering more eating spots where the locals dine, where value-for-money is as important

as tasty food, satisfactory service and cleanliness.

How to find these places? Unless you have a local gourmet to point them out, one of the best sources of advice is the annual Bazak Guide which carries restaurant reviews in descriptive detail compiled by a "taster" who makes the rounds incognito.

## Fare far and wide

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The Ministry of Tourism also distributes a yearly "Cafés and Restaurants Guide" giving basic information on restaurants which comply with government standards as to quality of food, pleasantness of décor and experience of staff. This free guide-book does not, however, quote price ranges nor attempt to grade establishments.

Many leading Israeli newspapers publish columns on dining out. The columnists' detailed, straightforward reports, even down to the sanitary state of the loo, carry much weight with the restaurant-going public.

My own selection of some of the more reasonably priced, recommendable restaurants, where meals for two average between £4 and £7 are, in Tel Aviv: Assa (Balkan cuisine); Café Dan (Heimische); Desiré (French); Mandy's Drugstore (European-American); Monte Carlo (Greek); Nature's Way (Vegetarian); Pninat Hakerem (Mizrachit); Shuster (Seafood); Tandu (Continental); Triana (Balkan). In Jerusalem: Michel Cohen's (Mizrachit); Dagim Beni

(Fish); Feferberg (Heimische); Palmachi (Mizrachit); Philadelphia (Mizrachit); Café Tuv Ta'am (varied menu). In Haifa: Balfour Cellar (Continental); Neptune (Seafood); Yamit (French and North African); Zvi (Mizrachit).

An increasing trend in Israel today is to *sherut atzmi* (self-service) eating-places. Cafeterias now comprise 10 per cent of all restaurants and the queueing, tray-balancing diner exchanging frills for budget prices is a familiar figure. A few of the better cafeterias in Tel Aviv are: Adiv Hotel, Atara, Deborah Hotel, Frack, Taste of Honey and Tiv.

"Fast foods"—*shoarma-in-pita*, *burekas*, *blintzes*, hamburgers, and, of course, *falafel*—are readily available at stand-up snack bars, and many tourists have learned from the Israelis about these inexpensive "light lunches."

Other tourists have taught themselves about a different light lunch. Thrifty hotel guests, unaccustomed to the generous Israeli breakfast, bag a few choice leftovers—rolls, hard-boiled eggs, olives, cheese—and, especially while touring, make them do for a noon meal.

Some final words of advice on dining out in Israel are offered by Avraham Levi who produces the Bazak Guide. He advises restaurant patrons to make sure menus and prices are clearly posted. "Don't be afraid to argue on quality and prices, if necessary," says Levi.

"By registering complaints in the event of mediocre food, indifferent service, or lapses in cleanliness, you are helping to raise standards. Don't be afraid to walk out, and by the same token don't be shy about complimenting the chef or waiter if you've been served well. Get involved! Feel at home!"

The *kashrut* of some of the restaurants mentioned in this article cannot be vouched for. For a list of kosher restaurants in Israel, consult the Jewish Travel Guide.