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Cheap Eats

The secret to eating well in Boston on a budget? Go ethnic. Consider this your cheat sheet: 35 ethnic restaurants – and dishes – you can't afford to miss.

By **DONNA GARLOUGH, JOLYON HELTERMAN, AND AMY TRAVERSO**
April 2010

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We know how easy it is to fall back on burgers, pizza, and pub grub when you're feeling less than flush. We do it all the time. But we also know there's another way to eat affordably in Boston: Explore the city's wealth of Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Brazilian, Mexican, Middle Eastern, Caribbean, Greek, and other world cuisines. Delighting both palate and wallet, ethnic restaurants deliver as much knock-your-socks-off flavor and belly-filling goodness as any fine-dining restaurant, but at a fraction of the price. There's just one teensy little thing: You have to know where to go — and what to order.

WEB BONUS: Cheap eats in Chinatown and other neighborhoods.

PLUS: 10 of the city's best **bargain cocktails**.

Consider this your cheat sheet: 35 ethnic restaurants — and dishes — you can't afford to miss, from enchiladas mole in Eastie to Korean fried chicken in Allston, plus breakdowns of each neighborhood's best bets. So go on, ditch the silverware for chopsticks. Slurp on soupy dumplings. Experience a habanero high. Your taste buds, and your bank account, will thank you.

SO YOU'VE GOT...\$5

Shanghai Gate

WHAT TO ORDER Lion's-head casserole, \$2.95 **WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD** Nearly every culture has its own take on meatballs in savory sauce. But if you've never tried the Chinese version called lion's-head casserole, you're in for a game-changing treat.

Shanghai Gate's meatballs are served in broth seasoned with soy sauce, giving them a

meaty intensity, and paired with steamed bok choy. If you've been wondering what *umami* tastes like, this is it. 204 Harvard Ave., Allston, 617-566-7344, shanghaigateboston.com.

Pho Viet

WHAT TO ORDER *Banh mi*, \$3.25 **WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD** Even if this classic Asian sandwich weren't so tasty, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better deal in town. The folks at Pho Viet turn out flavor bombs tucked into crackly mini baguettes: pickled veggies, cucumbers, cilantro, chilies, and a pile of nicely caramelized meat. 1095 Commonwealth Ave., Allston, 617-562-8828.

Sofra

WHAT TO ORDER Chocolate-hazelnut baklava, \$4; *kunefe*, \$5; pistachio and semolina custard flute, \$4 **WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD** If too many syrupy phyllo-based sweets have turned you off Middle Eastern desserts, the pastries at Sofra will be a welcome reintroduction. Chef and co-owner Maura Kilpatrick's genius lies in making traditional recipes with a twist, such as *kunefe* (a sort of Turkish cheesecake) laced with cardamom and anise, and the nicely balanced chocolate baklava with hazelnuts instead of the usual walnuts. The flavors are fresh, a little exotic, and utterly delicious. One Belmont St., Cambridge, 617-661-3161, sofrabakery.com.

Burritos Express

WHAT TO ORDER Breakfast burrito, \$4.25 **WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD** Two components make this morning roll-up the best burrito in town, breakfast or otherwise. First, the meat: Ground chorizo packs far more piquancy per ounce than does plain old sausage. Second, the griddle-crisped tortilla: It stands as a tasty — not just functional — wrapper for the black beans, cheddar, and guacamole within. 86 Bedford St., Boston, 617-482-8899.

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1. alexandra says: July 21, 2011 at 9:12 am

don't really count as cheap eats! East by Northeast's pork belly buns, for example, are amazing, but one order does not make a meal. Full disclosure, people?

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Help us decide who really deserves to be crowned the King (or Queen) of burgers! Send your favorite Boston burger to Battle!



MEDICAL PROFILES

It's no secret that Boston is a hub of world-class healthcare. With this guide, you'll be able to make informed decisions about your healthcare when the time comes.

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