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Calendar

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DINING OUT

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Silk road

From Allston
to Brookline,
a tapestry of
Asian flavors.

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Chinatown goes west

Far eats in
Brookline
and Allston

By Michael Bourne

If you've ever seen tough-talking master chef Anthony Bourdain host the Food Network TV show "A Cooks Tour," then you know that the high point of each episode comes when he samples the native dishes of the countries he visits.

Somehow, watching the show while eating a Hungry Man microwave dinner does not compare with dining on real Cambodian food prepared by Cambodians in Cambodia.

We all can't be tattooed street-smart New York chefs with the backing of a cable network to fund our international gustatory adventures. And while a trip to the Pacific Rim is beyond most of our means, a stroll down Harvard Street, a golden path of countless Asian eateries that cuts a swath through Brookline and Allston, is not.

To prove that you don't have to go to China, Japan, Korea, Thailand or Vietnam to eat as though you've been, I did reconnaissance, gathering every takeout menu I could find on the route like a tourist preparing for a vacation with Fodor's or Lonely Planet guidebooks. In all, I visited 20 restaurants. Here is a report on my Harvard education.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTOS/DAVID L. RYAN (TOP) AND JUSTINE ELLEMENT (ABOVE)

Above, sushi at Daiwa, a low-key Asian spot on Harvard Avenue in Allston. Color's Korean fare, like bibim-bap, pictured at top, earns higher plaudits.

China

Shalom Hunan

My journey begins in China, or as close as I can get on bus fare. Between Brookline Village and Coolidge Corner is a neighborhood favorite that has been serving locals for more than a decade, but has somehow escaped my heat-seeking palate. Its exterior is nondescript, but the sounds of a trickling fountain filled with carp, combined with warm light streaming into a spacious atrium, cast a soothing spell upon entering **Shalom Hunan**.

At this kosher restaurant you won't find pork or shellfish, the Chinese staples. As Daniel Weinberg, the mashgiach (Hebrew for supervisor) explains, the Chinese owners and staff decided to cater to the Jewish clientele searching for a meal that would pass muster with their strict dietary practices. Weinberg starts the cooking fire, cracks the eggs himself, and makes sure the vegetables and meats are clean and in accordance with kosher laws. Smiling waitress Ping Wu brings a Zombie cocktail (light and dark rum, apricot brandy, and pineapple juice) and I munch on fried flour snacks with duck sauce as I await my order. At Shalom Hunan, veal takes the place of pork. I order the moo shu veal, a stir-fried mixture of shredded cabbage, carrots, and black mushrooms with fried egg. The veal is succulent and the pancakes into which I spoon the veggies and meat are soft.

Mango chicken, tender white meat with zucchini and abundant slices of fresh mango piled on top, is a sweet and somewhat citric dish that goes well with the beef fried rice that's light and brimming with onions and bean sprouts.

Japan

Kiyoshi

In Japan, life revolves around the rowdy izakaya, casual bars where college students, businessmen in conservative suits and ties, truck drivers, and others unwind and nosh on comfort food. You could go for the glitz and upscale style of Fugakyo on Beacon Street or the steaming bowls of ramen at Tokyo City in Allston, but of all the Japanese restaurants on and around Harvard Street, none comes closer to **Kiyoshi** for recreating the atmosphere of an authentic izakaya.



Kiyoshi, a small, casual Japanese spot on Harvard Street in Brookline.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTOS/DAVID L. RYAN

Eunhwa Ahn (above) grabs some seaweed as she cooks at Color in Allston. Besides bibim-bap, the Korean hot spot turns out kimchi (clockwise from top), macaroni salad, egg pancake, and bean sprouts. Dumpling soup (at left) is popular.

A huge lantern adorns the ceiling of this one-room hole in the wall. Brightly lit in yellow tones and decked out in bamboo and palm trees, it could pass for a tropical cabana sushi bar in Saipan. Vintage blues music plays on the sound system and a sushi chef mans the bar with intense concentration.

But if you head to Kiyoshi just for sushi, you're really only getting half the experience. Like my role model Anthony, I am after wilder game. The first choice is the yakitori, grilled skewers of the meat and vegetables of your choice (minimum five orders). I choose grilled chicken giblets and gizzards; beef tongue; plain grilled



chicken; and ground chicken meatballs. Downing a Sapporo beer, I watch an elderly Japanese woman fan my yakitori over coals. Grilled chicken meatballs top the quintet; delicious, and like all of these appetizers, appropriately salted and sauced.

Seaweed salad is a light, crunchy and slightly spicy melange of green seaweed, sesame seeds, and red pepper flakes in sweet rice vinegar. The salad is a good warm-up act before the real star of the meal takes center stage.

The hiroshimayaki is fried noodles, cabbage, scallions, and egg sandwiched between two flour pancakes, and containing your choice of meat or seafood filling. The seafood version (\$13) is filled with large shrimp, octopus, and squid and the whole disk is topped with a light dressing of mayonnaise and fish flakes.

It may sound outlandish, but it's outstanding and more than a meal for two. For dessert, two little scoops of red bean and green tea ice cream arrive sealed inside mochi, pounded rice that's chewy and warm and complements the cool center.



Thailand

Dok Bua Thai Kitchen

Four years ago the Pong family decided to transform the bookstore side of their Thai supermarket into an open kitchen that serves home-style food at incredibly inexpensive prices (10 lunch specials, which come with two side orders, each cost \$5.50).

Dok Bua (it means lotus flower) has attracted a steady stream of customers eager to try dishes that are anything but by the book. Part of the charm comes from dining among shrines and groceries, but the food is what sets this place apart.

Iced beverages are good starters. Chry-

santhemum ice tea tastes like and is the color of honey. If you can't decide on an appetizer, jump to the multicourse dinner special that includes tom yum soup seasoned with lemongrass, vegetable fried egg rolls, and chicken wings. Served on a ceramic tray with sections for all of the items, the pad-see-yew special comes with your choice of chicken, beef, or seafood. The seafood version combines shrimp and squid with Chinese broccoli sauteed with flat wide rice noodles.

The grilled whole sea bass, bla pou, confirms that the best way to prepare a fish is to gut it and slap it on the grill. Green chili dipping sauce on the side adds the right splash of heat to the fish's savory, tender white flesh.

The black sesame dumplings in ginger syrup pack a snap and are a good choice to end the meal. On your way out the door, stock up on taro chips and sriracha chili pepper hot sauce from the market.

Fusions

Daiwa

Daiwa marks the Allston-Brookline line near Commonwealth Avenue, when Harvard Street becomes Harvard Avenue. It also straddles cuisines, with a full-service sushi bar and Korean and Thai favorites. Done in earth tones and full of modern art, classy light fixtures, and easy listening music, it's an unassuming place. Seating is plentiful at small wood tables, but tables are spaced a tad too closely.

The steamed vegetarian goyoza dumplings appetizer, five pockets of garlicky minced mushrooms, scallions, and onions, makes a serviceable start. On one visit, the "dynamite" roll of tuna, salmon, creamy avocado, and cucumber swathed in nori, black seaweed, and rice crusted with sesame seeds, does not live up to its name; the rice was a bit wet.

When the food moves towards the Korean peninsula, it takes several steps in the right direction. Beef dukbokki is a mixture of cylinders of chewy, pounded rice reminiscent of Italian gnocchi. With chili paste, onions, green and red peppers, carrots, and zucchini accompanying pieces of beef, it's a good head rush.

Like Buddha's Delight Too! or Mandarin down the street, Daiwa's menu is a model United Nations of cuisine. It's not to Asian cuisine what Olive Garden is to Italian, but Daiwa and others that present choices from different countries can suffer from fusion confusion. It's best to settle on the meals with recipes the cooks probably learned from their own families.

Korea

Color

If Hello Kitty (the cartoon cat on book bags and pencil cases) had chosen to be an interior decorator, she would have designed a restaurant just like **Color**. With its exterior decorated in a rainbow of colors, this miniature restaurant stands out from the drab storefronts on this end of Harvard. (walk a few doors down to the Korean video store if you have to use the bathroom; there's no space for one here).

Inside, green, purple, and blue curtains playfully hang along with handmade cartoon posters. The Korean language characters on the menu suggest that the res-



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/JUSTINE ELLEMENT

Sushi chef Eric Lai with a boat of sushi and sashimi at Daiwa in Allston.

taurant enjoys the business of expatriates studying abroad or making Allston home. On a hot evening the waitress is fast with a cold glass of iced barley tea that beats the heat.

That tea comes in handy since the appetizer I choose is the spicy kimchi pancake. Kimchi is a mix of crunchily pickled cabbage with hot chili pepper. The fried pancake made with egg has a crepe-like texture, and the ingredients come together in a savory creation topped with scallion-infused soy dipping sauce.

A Color favorite is the ttuk rice cake dumpling soup, a large bowl of steaming wonton-like dumplings of minced beef in a sea of whipped egg yolks, scallions, onions, and glutinous white rice cakes.

Bibim-bap (literally, mixed rice) arrives a big bowl. In these childish surroundings, it's OK to play cook by using your spoon to mix the bean sprouts, grated carrot, spinach, fried egg, slightly-sweet lean ground beef, and hot red sauce.

about asian restaurants

Chinese

- 18 **Chef Chow House**
230 Harvard St., Brookline.
617-739-2469
- 13 **Chinatown Seafood Restaurant**
1306 Beacon St., Brookline. 617-232-9580
- 19 **Harvard Chinese Restaurant**
145 Harvard Ave. Allston. 617-783-0270. (Mostly takeout)
- 20 ***Shalom Hunan** 92 Harvard St., Brookline. 617-731-9760
- 7 **Taam China** 423 Harvard St., Brookline. 617-264-7274. (Kosher)

Japanese

- 15 **Fugakyu** 1280 Beacon St., Brookline. 617-734-1268
- 9 ***Kiyoshi** 398 Harvard St., Brookline. 617-232-5800
- 10 **Mr. Sushi** 329 Harvard St., Brookline. 617-731-1122
- 12 **Takeshima** 308 Harvard St., Brookline. 617-566-0200
- 1 **Tokyo City** 90-92 Harvard Ave., Allston. 617-562-8888
- 14 **Tsunami** 10 Pleasant St., Brookline. 617-277-8008

Thai

- 8 ***Dok Bua Thai Kitchen**
411 Harvard St., Brookline.
617-277-7087
- 16 **Khao Sarn Cuisine**
250 Harvard St., Brookline.
617-566-7200

Fusion

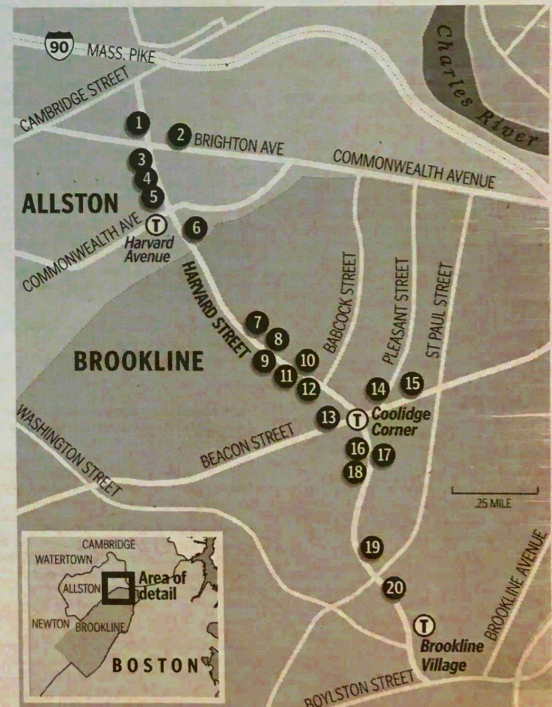
- 11 **Buddha's Delight Too!**
404 Harvard St., Brookline.
617-739-8830
- 6 ***Daiwa** 204 Harvard Ave., Allston. 617-566-7344
- 3 **Mandarin** 168-170 Harvard Ave., Allston. 617-562-8886

Korean

- 4 ***Color** 166 Harvard Ave., Allston. 617-787-5656

Vietnamese

- 17 **Pho Lemongrass**
239 Harvard St., Brookline.
617-731-8600
 - 2 **Pho Pasteur** 137 Brighton Ave., Allston. 617-783-2340
 - 5 ***Pho Que HuONG**
122 Harvard Ave., Allston.
617-254-9690
- *restaurants are featured in the story



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