

# Best for home-cooked food

When homesickness kicks in and the only thing that'll do it for you is the taste of home, what better way to quench the nostalgia than by going to your favourite restaurant and ordering yourself a trip back to your childhood flavours? The spiciest Tandoori in town? The freshest Ceviche in Belgium? The most mouth-watering Picanha this side of the canal? The steamiest Momos? We've got you covered. Indeed, following up on the invaluable tips from our embassy contacts, we've scoured the country on the lookout for the best in home-cooked foods – Iranian, Tibetan, Congolese, Senegalese, Chinese, Peruvian, Chinese and more. Because, you know, there's really no place like home.

Writer SARAH SCHUG  
Photographer MILES FISCHLER



BEST FOR TIBETAN

## Kunthun Café



Although Kunthun Café only opened its doors about a year ago, it's already made quite a name for itself with its authentic and hearty Tibetan snacks and meals at affordable prices. It is run by Xiong Tai Lhamo (36), who has worked for hotels and restaurants back in Lhasa, and Chong Weng Luobo (40), a former monk who perfected his cooking skills in the monastery kitchen. "As it gets extremely cold in Tibet, dishes need to be very warm and nutritious," Xiong explains. Accordingly, the menu features a great selection of soups, including the one her grandma used to make every day back in Tibet and which you'll find here under the name "Gebakken deeg," a delicious broth filled with handmade, square-shaped noodles. The menu also includes Tibetan-style blood sausage, ribs, the typical steamed bread and – of course – the famous momos, a Tibetan take on dumplings. While this is as authentic as it gets, the couple also did a few adjustments for their non-Tibetan customers. "In Tibet we eat a lot of meat. Here not so much, which is why we created a vegetarian momo version," Xiong says. Kunthun's special homemade spicy sauce, a savory mix of chili, salt, tomatoes, oil, onions, and soy sauce, is also worth a taste.

⇒ Rue Verheyden 7 Verheydenstraat (1080)

BEST FOR ISRAELI

## Beni Falafel



Beni Falafel, suitably located in Antwerp's main Jewish neighbourhood, has become a veritable institution. Established back in 1973, some of its regulars have been enjoying the Israeli-style falafels ever since they were kids. "When I was a child, Beni didn't have the shop yet and came to our school with his pushcart," recalls one long-time customer. For decades now the unassuming but immensely popular eatery has been holding the reputation as the country's best falafel place, and rightly so. Nothing has changed over the years: the aromatic, juicy chickpea balls are not pre-cooked but freshly fried upon ordering, and the bread is heated up with vintage flat irons. It's served with lettuce and delicious, homemade humus, and – if you want the real Israeli deal – topped with sauerkraut. The menu is both kosher and vegetarian and also features a number of other Israeli snacks such as Latke, a sort of potato pancake, and bureka, pastry filled with cheese or spinach.

⇒ Rue de Laeken 86 Lakensestraat (1000)

BEST FOR IRANIAN

## Shuka



Shuka, a family business in the truest of form, has less of a restaurant and more of a snack bar feel to it, but with reason: "The smaller menu allows us to offer fresh ingredients every day and focus on quality," the owners say. Ali (62), Rohan (54) and their son Edris (33) directly make you feel at home, which explains the large amount of regulars the gregarious Iranian eatery has accumulated in the 15 years of its existence. Many don't only come for the honest, grandma-style food, but also for the chat. "We always have a dish of the day, and even text our clients when their personal favourite is on the menu," Rohan adds. Almost all meals are based around Persian-style saffron rice, which she lovingly prepares in a special one-hour-long procedure. As the Iranian kitchen varies from region to region, the Kabab Koobideh is the only proposal on the menu emblematic of the whole country: a tasty combo of grilled tomatoes, minced meat and, naturally, saffron rice. Also worth a try: the eggplant omelet typical for the Northern part of Iran, where the family is originally from.

⇒ Rue de la Borne Paal 78 Paalstraat (1080)

BEST FOR BRAZILIAN  
**Jobim**



Belgium's best Brazilian joint is located in a rather unlikely place, the little town of Bever, where Belgo-Brazilian couple Geert (43) and Tereza (49) run a restaurant on the ground floor of their roomy family home. Their daughter Christie (28) – whose caipirinhas are to die for – chips in too, making this a real family affair. While the majority of customers are locals, some purposely make their way from Brussels to get a taste of Tereza's Brazilian steaks or her fantastic Bobo de Camarao, a traditional fish stew from Bahia combining shrimp, rice, coconut milk, razor-thin fried potato strips, red peppers, tomatoes and more. "She cooks just like she used to at the huge weekly family gatherings back in Brazil, with love and compassion. This is why people come back," says Christie. Jobim, named after the famous Brazilian composer, is cozy and elegant at the same time, and the family also pays a lot of attention to the food's presentation, adding a sophisticated touch to its dishes: "I want it not only to be tasty, but also visually pleasing, which is not really a thing in Brazil," Tereza explains. By the way, if you want to really dive into Brazilian culture, sign up for one of Jobim's Brazilian nights, complete with concerts, dancers, a three-course dinner, and cocktails.

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⇒ Chausse de Boondaal 365  
Boondaalsesteenweg (1050)

BEST FOR CHINESE  
**Panda**



If you think you know Chinese food, think again. The food at Panda, founded in 2011 by a young couple from China, is nothing like the Westernised version you'll find at most Chinese restaurants across the country – and most of Europe for that matter. Situated in the Brussels commune of Auderghem – not far from the Chinese embassy as well as a number of Chinese companies – the casual, unpretentious joint's mainly Chinese clientele plays testament to the authenticity of its menu. Tasks are clearly divided: while she takes care of the management and customers, he oversees the kitchen. If you can, try to get a glimpse through the large see-through window when the skilled cook prepares his famous "Nouilles éfilé au couteau," a must-try. Typically from the Shanxi region, it takes two years to learn to master the special technique, in which the very filling noodles are cut with a knife from a big block of dough. They're served with a rich, tasty black bean sauce, beef, carrots and cucumber. Mouth-watering.

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⇒ Rue du Bailli 9 Baljuwstraat (1000)

BEST FOR KOREAN  
**Maru**



Maru is especially popular among the capital's art crowd, which might have something to do with the owners' background, who both are originally artists. This undoubtedly shines through when it comes to the restaurant's interiors: everything is beautiful and thought-through, from the minimalist fixtures and fittings with subtle Scandinavian touches and stylish copper and granite tableware to the colourful hand-written menu made by Boris Beaucarne, the Belgian half of the dynamic duo. "Running a restaurant is an art in itself, a cultural business," states his Korean-born wife Kyoung Her, who also oversees the traditional Korean kitchen. "I don't believe in fusion food, it has no soul," she adds. A highlight on the varied menu is the Bibimbap, a signature Korean rice-based meal in a burning hot granite bowl, which is only mixed and cooked when served on the table right in front of you. And if there is room left for dessert, try the Hotteok, a typical Korean street food dish and a rare find here in Europe.

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⇒ Chaussée de Vleurgat 73a  
Vleurgatsesteenweg (1050)

BEST FOR SUB-SAHARAN

## L'Horloge du Sud



L'Horloge du Sud is not only a restaurant but also a cultural project, launched about 18 years ago by Senegalese sociologist and anthropologist Ken (56). Situated exactly between the EU quarter and the predominantly African quarters of Matongé, it draws customers from both crowds, which fits Ken's intention to create a true meeting place bringing together different cultures. "Many African joints come across as a bit closed-off, which can be intimidating for non-natives," he says. At L'Horloge du Sud, this is not the case at all. The restaurant – with its large windows, big dining hall and restrained, wooden interior – goes out of its way to be inviting and friendly, and has a bit of a coffee house feel to it during the day. "I want to show a positive image of Africa through music, theatre, film projections and food; without clichés and kitschy lion heads," Ken clarifies. The menu doesn't focus on one country but offers a great selection of classics from several sub-saharan countries, giving guests the chance to discover different traditional dishes from Western and Central Africa, such as Senegal's Yassa or Moambe and Liboke from Congo.

⇒ Rue Marconi 55 Marconistraat (1190)

BEST FOR CAMEROONIAN

## Le Vieux Mila



Cameroon-born Monsieur Parfait, the charismatic creative mind behind Le Vieux Mila, is not only a food but also a football passionate. Consequently, the friendly restaurant, nestled into a narrow street full of ethnic eateries right next to the Parvis St Gilles, turns into a sports bar at times and prides itself in sponsoring the local St. Gilles team. The decoration is a charming mix of African masks, faded travel posters and football fan scarves, giving the small, colorful place a very unique feel. The authentic Cameroonian dishes are filling and heavy, and not softened at all for European tastebuds, which might take some getting used to. Most guests come for the traditional Cameroonian "ndolé", a stew served with African bitter leaves, not unlike spinach, and served with fried bananas on the side. Another favourite is Poulet DG, a Cameroonian fricassee made of chicken, banana, and carrots. Best served with a rum cocktail, Cameroonian beer, or the spicy homemade ginger juice of course.

⇒ Boulevard Industriel 141 Industrielaan (1070)

BEST FOR ETHIOPIAN

## Toukoul



Toukoul's meticulously-trained team of eight cooks is led by Ethiopian-born Abrham Girma (36), who learned the ins-and-outs of his country's cuisine back in Addis Ababa. We learn from him that in Ethiopian culture family meals are very important and of a ceremonial nature: "Parents give the first piece to their children, couples feed each other... it's a way to express love and show affection," he explains. Toukoul makes sure to translate this tradition into a truly social eating experience, where guests share big common plates and use their hands. The varied menu, which comes with a useful glossary, offers a multitude of choices, which are always served on the typical injera sourdough bread that also serves as cutlery. Abrham recommends two classics: Doro Wat, a flavourful, spicy stew, and Kitfo, the Ethiopian take on steak tartare. A key to Ethiopian cooking are the manifold spices, first and foremost the berberé, a special homemade seasoning blend. "We import all spices from Ethiopia, because they just don't taste the same here," says the head chef. By the way, if you're a coffee addict, do pass by on a Sunday for the traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

⇒ Rue Saint-Denis 117 Sint-Denijsstraat (1190)



BEST FOR MEXICAN  
Taco Mobil



Good Mexican food is hard to come by in Belgium, which is exactly why Mexico native Selene, a communication graduate, and her Belgian boyfriend Oli, who also works as an architect, decided to launch the Taco Mobil last year. The authentic taco eatery is constantly on the move, trying to share Mexican street food culture with as many people as possible. Recreating her simple but savory mother's and grandmother's recipes, Selene makes sure that there's always a meat as well as a vegetarian dish on the menu, while ingredients are mostly local and organic. One mouth-watering example: Veggies, chipotle salsa, beans, guacamole, radish, and coriander sour cream. As offerings and locations change constantly the best way to keep up-to-date is by liking Taco Mobil's Facebook page.

⇒ Rue Ransfort 27 Ransfortstraat (1080)

BEST FOR TURKISH  
Has Kebap



The area around the St. Mary's church in Schaerbeek, fittingly dubbed "Petite Anatolie," is home to Brussels' Turkish immigrants and, accordingly, its main artery Chaussée de Haecht, is jammed with Turkish food joints. Has Kebap, opened by Turkish native Turan (35) back in 2010, sits right in the middle of it, and although it has the looks of a snack bar, the diverse menu filled with authentic, homemade meals suggests otherwise. Indeed, the restaurant offers a multitude of typical Turkish dishes. One of them is Tandir, a popular lamb specialty that is slow-roasted for about 11 hours. "We wanted to do something different and offer all the typical Turkish meals we know from home," head cook Ibrahim explains. Many dishes are named after the city they originate from, as Turkish cuisine differs from region to region. "Around Izmir people eat a lot of fish and Adana is known for its spicy food," Ibrahim points out. The common denominator are ingredients such as tomatoes, eggplant, parsley, red pepper, black pepper and oregano, as well as the high meat consumption (mainly lamb), which makes the spot a bit less attractive if you are a vegetarian.

⇒ Chaussée de Haecht 115 (1030)

BEST FOR LEBANESE  
Mont Liban



© Eva Donckers

"We pride ourselves in having the most complete Lebanese menu in the country," says Mont Liban founder, Georges Boujaoude. Nestled between Place du Chatelain and Place Stéphanie, Mont Liban includes a charming restaurant, a snack bar as well as a catering service. "There are many offices around, and people want something quick and light for lunch," he explains. The Lebanese native left his war-ridden home country back in 1991, with a decades-long friend and colleague, who is still Mont Liban's head chef today. Together they make sure that the food is as authentic and fresh as possible. The varied menu, a true delight for vegetarians, features everything from Lebanese cuisine basics such as humus, eggplant purée and tabbouleh to more traditional family meals such as Moghrabieh, a kind of stew based on pearl couscous and chicken. There's also an opulent brunch buffet every Sunday, for which the cook always has some off-menu surprises in store.

⇒ Rue de Livourne 30 (1000)