



New global eats

Learn how to tell your lagman from your lassi with this primer on seldom-seen-in-Chicago cuisines

By Erin Brereton

Burned out on burgers and pizza? Expand your palate at one of these four recently opened--or about-to-open--restaurants offering international eats not often found in Chicago.

Jibek Jolu (pictured)

Meat-eaters will go mad for this Lincoln Square eatery's Kyrgyzstani beef and lamb dishes, which are served with white rice or potatoes.

Food fundamentals: Co-owner Marat Bilimbekov says Jibek Jolu is the first restaurant in the city to serve Kyrgyzstani cuisine, which includes Russian, Mongolian and Persian influences in traditional meat-based dishes and soups.

Sipping suggestions: Jibek Jolu is BYOB, and red wine is a good match for the hearty entrees. Need an unleaded option? Try a glass of airan, a cold, slightly salty milk drink.

Distinctive dishes: Manti, large dumplings filled with beef, onion and pumpkin (\$8); lagman (\$8), a beef-based dish that includes bacon, green and red peppers, and the restaurant's homemade noodles.



Klopa Grill & Cafe

Much of this Lincoln Square restaurant's menu focuses on traditional pork- and beef-based Serbian dishes, but the way they're prepared is new to Chicago, says co-owner Nash Zivkovic. "We have a few Serbian restaurants and cafes [in Chicago]. But we didn't have a place for Serbian grilled food."

Food fundamentals: Klopa serves all of its grilled entrees Serbian-style--that is, with a side of chopped raw onions and French fries.

Sipping suggestions: For a quick caffeine jolt, try the Serbian coffee, similar in taste to Greek coffee, but stronger. Klopa is BYOB while waiting for liquor license approval.

Distinctive dishes: Opanak, a 1.1-pound beef-and-pork sausage stuffed with cheese and ham and wrapped in bacon (\$15); crepes, including a breaded, deep-fried version filled with swiss cheese, ham and mushrooms (\$5), and several sweet crepes with fillings such as bananas and white chocolate-hazelnut cream (\$3.50).

Conoce Mi Panama

Owner Antonio Bailey describes this Logan Square spot's Panamanian cuisine, new to Chicago, as "a Caribbean-type food, mixed with European and Asian spices".

Food fundamentals: Entrees here are prepared the traditional Panamanian way: using spices such as garlic and culantro (a strongly flavored, leafy herb popular in the Caribbean--not to be confused with cilantro) and marinating main ingredients for two to three days.

Sipping suggestions: Homemade chicheme (\$3.50), a corn-based beverage that's typically served cold but can double as a breakfast drink if heated. For a more amorous experience, try saril, a sweet drink made with ginger that's rumored to be an aphrodisiac (\$3.50). Conoce Mi Panama is also BYOB.

Distinctive dishes: Pollo guisado con coco (\$12), chicken cooked in a rich coconut sauce; hojaldras, a fried bread side dish (\$3.25)

Cumin

The blue, red and brown decor at this Wicker Park spot aiming for a mid- to late-March opening is contemporary, but the Nepalese- and Indian-focused menu reflects traditional tastes.

Food fundamentals: "We wanted to serve authentic food-not fusion," says Sanjeev Karmacharya, who co-owns the restaurant with his brother, Rajesh. Cumin will offer a dozen Nepalese entrees, which typically don't include dairy ingredients and are made with a milder mix of spices-including coriander and, of course, cumin-than Indian cuisine, according to Karmacharya.

Sipping suggestions: Lassi (\$3), a yogurt-based Indian and Nepalese libation that comes in sweet, salty and mango flavors. Cumin also hopes to have a liquor license when it opens.

Distinctive dishes: Namche bazarko sekuwa (chunks of goat meat marinated in Nepalese spices, \$15), a popular upper-Himalayan dish named after a village that people pass through en route to Mt. Everest; Indian staples such as chicken tikka masala (\$13) and more than 10 types of naan, including garlic, sesame and onion (\$3 each)

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