

Queens for a day

Eat your way around the world without leaving New York's most delicious borough.

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FIVE MINUTES AGO, it was as though we were in Nepal, eating steamed momo dumplings from a brightly painted food truck. Now it's Colombia, scarfing down arepas – pillowy cornmeal cakes stuffed with cheese and chorizo, which the late chef Anthony Bourdain and I agree are some of the best in the world. Over the next few hours, we'll also swing by Bangladesh and Mexico – all without leaving Queens, the New York City (NYC) borough that, thanks to its more than 120 nationalities, is said to be the most ethnically diverse place on the planet.

If you've flown into JFK Airport, you've visited Queens, NYC's largest borough, where hundreds of tongues are heard and

ATMs offer numerous languages to conduct your transaction.

"Peel back Queens' food landscape and you'll find successive waves of immigrants – from Ireland and Bhutan to Ecuador and Lebanon – who've brought their rich culinary heritage with them," says Amanda Adler-Brennan, guide on a food walking tour of Jackson Heights, the Queens suburb with the largest foreign-born population (and an impressive array of food trucks).

But back to those arepas. We slather them in green garlic sauce, as Adler-Brennan tells the story behind the Arepa Lady, the busy restaurant we meet at. Founder Maria Cano, a former judge from Colombia, started a food cart in Jackson Heights decades before



1. The 7 train in Queens.
2. Dumplings from Mom's Momo.



expanding into the bricks-and-mortar eatery her sons now run. Hungry punters flock here to sample the tasty empanadas, arepas and patacones (fried plantain) that Bourdain raved about on his TV show.

Heading north we come across the bright green Fuska House food truck, which specialises in Bangladeshi street food. Specifically, fuska, circles of semolina dough that puff up when slid into hot oil before being filled with potatoes, onions and a dash of tamarind water for a delicious, crunchy sweet and sour snack. Around the corner at Tong, NYC's first Bangladeshi food truck, the heat dials up with punnets of jhal muri, a popular street food made from puffed rice and so many fragrant spices I lose count.

Cross the street and the food offerings shift north of the Himalayas. The Tibet food truck, which opened in 2018, is doing a roaring trade in momo (steamed dumplings filled with chicken, pork and vegetables). They aren't much to look at, but the first bite – moist carrot and cabbage with a jolt of spice – is a revelation. Our last stop, under the constant thump of the elevated 7 subway train, is Mexico. Taco trucks have been feeding hungry New Yorkers for decades but the Antojitos Charly truck's claim to have "the best Mexican food in NYC", isn't far off the mark. Since 2008 they've served hot tacos, tortas, quesadillas and tortillas filled with pork carved from a vertical spit, chunks of pineapple, guacamole and a fiery salsa verde we eat with contented sighs.

If you want to create your own culinary adventure, hop on the 7 subway train, nicknamed the "international express" because it rumbles through the most diverse sections of Queens. Buy a subway pass and get on and off at whatever stop takes your fancy for smells, tastes and culture from all over the globe. Corona, for example, skewers Latin American, and next to the 103rd Street-Corona Plaza Station you'll find a market specialising in home-style food from Ecuador, Guatemala and Mexico, the kind



3. Cheese arepas, Arepa Lady. 4. Fuska House food truck. 5. Tong serves up Bangladeshi treats. 6. Pork on a spit at Antojitos Charly. 7. Main Street, Flushing.

Hungry punters flock here to sample the tasty empanadas, arepas and patacones.





you can't easily find in restaurants.

Walk a few blocks south, veer down a suburban side street, and you'll come to the Lemon Ice King of Corona. Started in 1944 by the Benfaremo family, this iconic cafe turns classic Italian ices into an art form. Long-time employee Michael Zampino took over the ice-king crown a few years ago and today he serves around 50 classic flavours, from lemon and mint to sour apple, cherry and the super moreish peanut butter.

If you've ever wondered what authentic Cuban lechon adako (roasted suckling pig) tastes like, jump off at Junction Boulevard Station for Rincon Criollo, a family-run Cuban restaurant that's been feeding homesick Cubans with the succulent pork classic since 1976. The last stop of the 7 train is Flushing, home to some of NYC's best Chinese food. Locals will steer you towards Tangram, a hotel/retail and food hall inspired by the open-air markets of Asia, which opened in downtown Flushing last year. Choose from Korean hot dogs, Filipino ube yam ice cream, Thai street food and dim sum with a twist.

Don't leave Flushing without visiting Flushing Meadows, home of the US Open



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The Ice King serves around 50 classic flavours, from lemon and mint to sour apple.

Tennis tournament. The stadium is tucked into a corner of Flushing Meadows Corona Park, 360ha of greenery, lakes and historic walks that was the site of two world fairs – 1939 and 1964. Tennis stadium aside, the most famous attractions are the 43m-high spherical steel Unisphere and the nearby World's Fair Pavilion, both of which had starring roles in the film *Men in Black*. Build up an appetite for dinner with a stroll around the park, which also includes the Queens Zoo, Queens Museum and Queens Botanical Garden. nyctourism.com



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- 8. Asian food hall good eats at Tangram mall.
- 9. Lemon Ice King of Corona.
- 10. Chinese buns in Flushing.
- 11. Arthur Ashe Stadium.
- 12. Unisphere, Flushing Meadows Corona Park.



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Getting there



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