

WHAT THE PAPER EATS

NT staffers pick their favourites. There's a suspicious abundance of daal-bhaat and Japanese restaurants, which leads one to believe reports are filed on rice paper.

BK's Fries

A Thamel place with a difference—there's no IndianChineseContinentalNepaliSetMeal menu. They do fries. These are the best fries in the Valley, perhaps even the country. The small, medium and large servings of double-fried chips come in paper cones with a choice of dips in little leaf platters. BK's does mayo, ketchup, hot ketchup, tartar, cocktail, devil, pinda, pataje oorlog and the mysteriously named "special", which contains mayo, onion and hot ketchup. This friendly place is an open-on-two-sides storefront with four barstools off which it is easy to slide when engorged on fries. Near the Bamboo Club and Hotel Vaishali.



Thakali Bhaancha

Thakali Bhaancha, opposite BK's Fries, has that classic sign of good, down-home food—it is packed with customers, all eating the same thing. The specialty here is daal, bhaat and tarkari, Thakali style. It is ideal if you are a "bhatte", a rice lover, but you can also make a pig of yourself over more hardcore Thakali food like ghyanto (spinach gravy), dhung (thakali sausage), dhedo (corn or millet pudding), and phapaar ko rotis. Chhang is also available.

Momotarou

A small Thamel place for Japanese budget tourists—30 covers in a pinch—that encourages you to look beyond tuna rolls and norimaki. There are delicious breakfasts like tempura, egg, or onion chicken over rice, accompanied by a tiny, incredibly fresh salad and miso soup. Lunch and dinner are pitch perfect renditions of the usual suspects—sukiyaki, teriyaki, cutlets and udon. The set meals include potato and tofu, ginger chicken, mackerel and a stunning light fried whole fish with a faint zing of wasabi. All come with a generous bowl of rice, miso soup, a ginger dressed shredded cabbage salad, the breakfast salad, and a large herby cube of extremely creamy tofu. Good complimentary mukicha (barley tea) too.



Tamura at Hotel Kido

Finding Tamura on Thapathali Hill can be tricky, but once you're there, it's great. The almost exclusively Japanese clientele, wood panelled décor, bilingual waiters and piping hot hand-towels upon arrival make for a chilled out spot. The comprehensive sushi box with California rolls, or a huge slurpy bowl of udon or soba noodles with very fresh green veggies and/or prawn tempura is perfect for a light lunch. Chicken with ginger, pork with garlic, and fillet with onions are served sizzler-style with all the trimmings: rice, miso soup and a Japanese salad that's a meal in itself. Undoubtedly, the best green tea in town. Probably the best Japanese food north of Lumbini.

Upstairs

If you're a momo buff who doesn't have hang-ups about pork, go to Upstairs. This cosy outfit opposite the Bluebird on Lazimpat has the best pork momos in town. There are also excellent vegetarian, veggie cheese and buff momos on offer. And great aloo dum. The spicy potatoes are cooked Darjeeling style—not too much masala, but plenty of chilli. The perfect accompaniments to such delectations are on hand: chilled beer and good jazz (live Saturday evenings). After the momos and potatoes, try the fried pork and juicy French fries.



Didi ko Bhaancha Ghar

In Thamel, if you want daal bhaat, Nepali Standard style, go down the alleyway leading to Hotel Sagarmatha until you come to a small building that looks like it should be in a paddy field. This is where Thamel shopkeepers, guides and Chinese balm sellers wolf down achar, seasonal tarkari, *jhane ko daal*—brown lentils with ghee and *jimbu*—salad and chicken or mutton. It is the closest you will get to eating at home on a workday. And it almost is—Maya "didi" has been in Thamel for about two decades and runs a family operation.

DEBUNKING MYTHS

by MARK TURIN



Have you taken your fooding?

A white man's experience of Nepali cuisine.

Myth One: *Daal Bhaat Tarkari* (hereafter DBT) is the national food of Nepal, and Nepalis eat nothing else their whole lives. Hogwash.

Myth Two: Once you have

paste, rattle-soup and animal bits. It was delicious, once I had found a way to break bits off the summit and get them into my mouth without losing them down my shirt.

compelled to censor the opinions of rice-eating guests everywhere. Should they succeed, it will be the end of *Dietary Natural Selection* (by which people choose to eat in the tastiest restaurants) and the beginning of an era which will go down in history as *The Survival of*



the Blarney.

The culture and traditions of the countries one visits should be respected. In fact, the differences are the very reason that most people travel. However, some things go too far. Just as I believe that no visitor to Britain should be forced to converse about the weather nor to engage in the rhetorical nonsense of the "how do you do" ritual, so too I think that foreigners should not be asked to lie about food when in Nepal. In short: if it's not tasty, then don't pretend that it is. If the idea of drawing an eyeball of goat or foot of chicken is not your idea of dietary delectation, then you should not be forced to eat *evenlikti*.

Perhaps there is a solution to the political vacuum in Nepal at present: Nationalism through DBT. Given the chance, from Mechi all the way to Mahakali, I am sure that villagers would vote for *Daal Bhaat Tarkari Party* instead of *Tree, Sun or Plough*. After all, there is a limit to the number of Pajeros a plate of rice can own. When you start seeing steaming plates of rice and vegetable curry all over the billboards in town, with "Vote Daal Bhaat" stencilled underneath, you will know that real democracy has come. And while we are on the subject: Enjoy Your Fooding. ♦

tried one DBT, you have tried them all. Huhbug.

Let me speak from personal experience. Ten years ago, my first plate of Nepali village food was not quite what I had expected. I had read various guidebooks, and while they differed in certain respects, they all concurred that in Nepal, life is DBT and DBT is life.

Admittedly, I was sitting in the dark and only the flickering light from the fire illuminated our meal, but I could make out no rice, no lentils and definitely no vegetable curry. The yellowish mountain on my plate was either one very large grain of hitherto unboasted rice or it was not rice at all, and I had a sneaking hunch that it was the latter. In the place where the lentils should have been was a semi-fluorescent green soup, and where I had imagined bite-sized chunks of potato or strings of spinach, I was faced with what looked distinctly like bits of stomach lining.

Yes, I was eating *Dhab Sisinu Maasu* (hereafter DSM), roughly translated as polenta-

But it was not rice.

Perhaps the motive behind the Myth of DBT is what we can call the lowest common denominator effect. From the plains of the tarai, where breads (roti, paratha, puri) make up a significant part of the diet to the mountains where *dhab* in all of its incarnations (maize, millet wheat and buckwheat) is the staple, little unites Nepalis in terms of dietary intake. Rice is an all-rounder that is increasingly available throughout the country, and it has understandably become the carbohydrate of choice.

As for dispelling the second Myth: no two DBTs are the same. Alongside the obvious differences resulting from longitude and latitude, every household has its own trade secrets for bringing out those special flavours, and of course, as all young Nepali men will tell you, no wife cooks quite like mummy does. However, a deep and dark undercurrent in Nepali society is trying to nullify the difference between a good plate of rice and a bad one. These are the followers of the "Even If It's Not Tasty, Then Eat It As If It Were" Movement, a group of radicals who feel

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