

on the menu



Mockingbird Bistro Chef/Owner John Sheely.

Insider's Extra

Mockingbird Bistro has a wonderful neighborhood. We have great neighbors who love to come in and have a drink and some good eats. People eat out all the time here in Houston and they're not afraid to try things. Since I came back to Houston in 1995, there has been an explosion of independent chefs like Mark Cox of Mark's and Charles Clark and Grant Cooper of Ibiza who show off our local ingredients. It's really put Houston on the map for cuisine. All these chefs are of course competition, but we all get along and there's a great camaraderie among us.

—John Sheely, Chef/Owner,
Mockingbird Bistro

The city serves up stellar **restaurants** and **nightlife**, including a wide range of cuisines and scenes, so you're sure to find the perfect fit for any meal or mood.



Yatra Brasserie

Aside from India itself, London was arguably the best place to enjoy authentic, homemade Indian food — until Yatra Brasserie set up shop in downtown Houston. In Sanskrit, Yatra means “a sacred journey,” and co-owners Micki Hidayatallah and Sonu Lalvani, also the owners of London's Yatra Brasserie, seem intent to take their patrons on such a journey.

Yatra opened in November 2006 and has since earned a loyal following — at lunch as well as dinner. “We are proud of our return clientele,” said Lalvani. “They keep coming back; they enjoy our food,” he said. Among the repeat diners are a significant number of South Asians/Indians, which is perhaps not surprising, considering Houston has the eighth largest Asian population in the United States. “We have many loyal Indians who eat here,” said Lalvani. “Many say it's the best food they've tasted, that they used to have to go to London for food like this,” he said.

Now, all they have to do is head to Main Street for succulent Indian dishes, many authentically prepared in a tandoor. Starters include house specialty samosa chaat (\$5) and Yatra crab cakes served Goan-style (\$7). Entrées include rogan josh (\$14), traditional chicken tikka masala (\$14), and Yatra's royal feast for two (\$48), which has a little bit of just about everything. Numerous vegetarian and low-carb options round out the robust menu.

If you don't find what you're looking for on the menu, the chefs at Yatra will prepare any dish upon request (time and available ingredients permitting), so you can enjoy your sacred journey of Indian fare — stateside.

—Kristi Van Aken

Details: 706 Main St. (downtown), Houston, Texas 77002, (866) 786-4012, www.yatrausa.com. (9J)



E. Carter Smith

Monarch at Hotel ZaZa



Courtesy: Hotel ZaZa

seared Mediterranean lamb salad (\$15), or one of three pizzas/flat breads (\$11).

The menu is reviewed frequently to ensure that the fare is fresh, though Monarch focuses on more than cuisine alone. “We take as much pride in our product as we do in our service,” says Salaam. Dining at Monarch is a unique experience — funky but not weird, regal but not overwhelming, attentive but not fussy — much like the city it calls home.

—Kristi Van Aken

Just outside the front door of the Monarch restaurant at Hotel ZaZa, Mecom Fountain marks the spot where Houston’s Museum District, the Texas Medical Center, and eclectic Montrose intersect. Inside, Monarch reflects a similar blend of contrasting worlds. Simultaneously baroque and avant-garde with a dash of safari — animal-print carpet and a zebra head on the wall — this Houston newcomer is quickly earning its stripes.

“The reception of the people in Houston to our restaurant has been remarkable,” says Fawaz Salaam, Monarch’s director of food and beverage. “We have connected with them both in terms of food creativity and service.”

Chef Bradley Manchester’s flair shines in a number of ways. A deconstructed ahi tuna roll (\$17), with multi-layered ingredients, and foie gras sliders (\$19) grace the appetizer menu. Entrée choices range from wild mushroom-coated halibut (\$33), to smoked bison ribeye (\$45). Want the best of both worlds? Try Monarch’s version of surf and turf: Kobe beef short ribs and Maine lobster (\$42). For lunch, savor chicken paillard (\$15), the

Details: 5701 Main St. (Museum District), Houston, Texas 77005, (713) 526-1991, www.hotelzaza.com. (8K)



Courtesy: Hotel ZaZa

Houston’s Best Buffets

Courtesy: Hugo’s



Weekend brunches bring out some of the best buffets in town. In the Montrose area, the highly acclaimed **Hugo’s** stages an over-the-top buffet that features a staggering selection of beautiful cuisine from several regions of Mexico. Enjoy fabulous cocktails and save room for the handmade desserts. Complete with live music, this phenomenal feast is worth the \$27 price tag (\$10 for children). Sunday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., 1600 Westheimer at Mandell, (713) 524-7744.

The very quirky and quaint **Baba Yega Restaurant** is a Montrose fixture for laid-back, but delicious dining with kooky charm and relaxing atmosphere. Cozy up to the fireplace on cool days and relish the outdoor seating during milder weather. The impressive Sunday brunch offers table after table of breakfast treats, lunchtime hits and oh-so-brunch in-between items, such as bagels and lox, fruit blintzes and frittatas. Brunch service offers expanded seating in the beautiful garden, with views of the koi pond and waterfall. The buffet is priced at \$17.95 per person. Sunday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 2607 Grant Street at Missouri (one block east of Montrose), (713) 522-0042.

Over in the Galleria area, **Magnolia Bar & Grill** boasts a 40-foot Cajun and Creole-style spread, bursting with Southern flavors for Sunday brunch. You can pile up shrimp, catfish and fried chicken next to your waffles and custom omelettes. Don’t forget the gumbo! Cost is \$24.95 for adults and \$12.95 for the kiddos. Sunday, 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., 6000 Richmond at Fountainview, (713) 781-6207.

Way beyond brunch, **Sam Houston Race Park’s Winner’s Circle Restaurant** serves up a beautiful buffet Thursdays through Sundays. Carving stations, shrimp galore, salads, hand-dipped Blue Bell ice cream, chocolate fountains and more allow guests to customize their culinary experience while enjoying the live thoroughbred racing. You can claim your table for the duration of the day’s races, so you can come and go as you like. Tables offer outstanding views of the finish line, so you can cheer on your pick between bites. There’s a host of beverages and full bar service. Reservations recommended. Thursday, Friday, Saturday 6 to 9:30 p.m. and Sunday 1:30 to 5 p.m. 7575 N. Sam Houston Pkwy., (281) 807-8700.

—Sandra Cook

A Night on the Town

Live it up any way you like! Houston has everything from cosmopolitan flair to low-key lounging.



Dean's Credit Clothing.

Downtown Scene

Start your evening with dinner and live jazz at Red Cat Jazz Café, featuring Gulf Coast and Cajun cuisine, or Sambuca, celebrated for fine dining.

Stay in a sophisticated mood with drinks at the State Bar in the old Rice Hotel building. Laid-back types may prefer a few pints at the Market Square Grill or Flying Saucer Draught Emporium. For a pub-like setting and a tasty fare, try the Oyster Bar at St. Pete's Dancing Marlin.

Butterfly High and Bar Bollywood, both at 902 Capitol, offer Asian and Indian style. This pair of nightspots (offshoots of the popular Yatra Brasserie) feature creative cocktails and stellar Indian cuisine. Bar Bollywood spins a worldly variety of dance music.

Out on a weeknight? The Empire is always hopping, even on Mondays. Dean's Credit Clothing (a bar and vintage clothing store) screens art films. The nearby Char Bar, an elegant lounge, boasts a full-service tailor!

Midtown Mix

The Midtown area brims with nightlife options. Catch some cool live music at the renowned Continental Club (3700 Main), or move to a Motown groove at Sammy's (2016 Main) while enjoying the sweet soulful sounds of its namesake, Sammy Reylford.

For a rollicking party scene, check out the musical antics of Howl at The Moon, a

festive bar with a contagious good mood. Sing along with the tag team piano performances Wednesday through Saturday nights.

Experience the Red Door's unique yin and yang of a bustling first-floor bar scene paired with a serene rooftop bar with penthouse flair and great views downtown and midtown. Look for the unmarked red door 2416 Brazos St. at McIlhenny (just to the right of El Patio).

Sip with sophistication at Ibiza Next Door, a luxe lounge located adjacent to their popular Ibiza Food and Wine Bar (2450 Louisiana at McGowan). The lounge offers an extensive selection of wine and champagne, plus a full bar. The Lounge's lush interior includes serpentine banquettes and chairs, while the patio boasts sleek chairs and loveseats.

More casual spots include the easy-going Front Porch Pub at 217 Gray and the pretty, but unpretentious Pub Fiction at 2303 Smith.

Gotta Dance

Just blocks from The Galleria, The Roxy draws '80s maniacs, Hip Hoppers and anyone with a case of dance fever. The west side's Hush goes for Las Vegas abandon, and the seasoned DJs of the upscale Belvedere in Uptown Park fill your night with fabulous. Looking for a dance floor with Latin flavor? Strut your salsa steps at El Rodeo.

Ready to Relax

Sample sushi and sip hip cocktails for hours in the deliciously modern Rickshaw Far East Bistro, or perhaps a bucket of longnecks and po-boy sandwich at Big Woodrow's is more fitting. There's always Kenneally's Irish Pub for unique local ambiance and excellent pizza, and downtown's funky old bars La Carafe and Dean's Lounge offer tastes of Houston history.

Those with higher brows can savor fine wines in posh hotel bars such as the Four Season's Lobby Lounge or the Alden-Houston's A+ Bar. Late in the evening, the ultra-elegant patio at Mosaic (in Bayou Place above Vin restaurant) offers the perfect vantage point for viewing the Theater District and downtown skyline. ■

★ Please look for advertisements in this magazine. Map locations coincide with the Houston Easy Guide Map, page 37.

DOWNTOWN

AMERICAN

★ **HARD ROCK CAFE, 502 Texas Ave., Houston, TX 77002;** (713) 227-1392. Located in the glittery Theater District downtown, Hard Rock Houston has a social force, bringing together all ages and all social levels to a common meeting ground. Surrounded by priceless memorabilia, you will feel the energy of the music phenomenon that swept the world. Let our energetic and entertaining staff make you feel like a Rock Star! (9J)

★ **VIN RESTAURANT, 530 Texas Ave. at Smith, Houston, Texas 77002;** (713) 237-9600. Enjoy culinary excellence at Houston's Bayou Place, as VIN (pronounced vine) delivers sleek and sophisticated dining to the downtown Theater District. Savor the menu of contemporary American cuisine with Southern European influence with the perfect wine and outstanding service. Lunch and dinner daily. www.vinhouston.com. (9J)

INDIAN

★ **YATRA BRASSERIE, 706 Main St., Houston, TX 77002;** (713) 224-6700. Come to Yatra Brasserie for a fine Indian cuisine. With 25 years of restaurant experience, we also operate a location in London that's been in service for seven years. Let our friendly wait staff serve you delicious curry platters and vegetarian dishes for lunch or dinner. www.restauranteur.com/yatra. (9J)

JAPANESE

★ **BENIHANA, 1318 Louisiana St., Houston, TX 77002;** (713) 659-8231. A meal at Benihana is an experience the smile of their chefs, the sizzle of their grill, the aroma of their steaks and the unmistakable taste of our teppan-yaki cooking. (9J)

STEAKS

★ **STRIP HOUSE, 1200 McKinney, Houston, TX 77010;** (713) 659-6000. Strip House, is an American Steakhouse with a seductive ruby red interior that engages the senses. Known for its perfectly charred prime Dry Aged Steaks its namesake is richly marbled and bursting with juice. The creative side dishes such as black truffle creamed spinach and crisp goose fat potatoes exceed all expectation. Hundreds of bottles of wine have been carefully chosen to extend your dining pleasure. "Every piece of meat I encountered was impeccably broiled and seasoned."—Alison Cook, *Houston Chronicle*. (9J)

★ **VIC & ANTHONY'S, 1510 Texas, Houston, TX 77002;** (713) 228-1111. This world-class steakhouse delivers the best of the best, starting with the wine list: an extensive collection from around the world. Our menu features USDA Prime steaks, Australian Rock Lobster, and live Maine Lobster, plus gourmet sides, elegant soups, amazing appetizers, outstanding salads and desserts. www.vicandthonys.com. (9J)

UPTOWN/GALLERIA AREA

CONTINENTAL

★ **VARGO'S, 2401 Fondren, Houston, TX 77063** (713) 782-3888. A Houston landmark for more than 36 years, Vargo's has been voted one of the 10 most romantic restaurants in Houston with superb food, elegant service and a legendary storybook setting. Our romantic, awe-inspiring location is enhanced by a private lake, acres of magnificent gardens, graceful swans and strolling peacocks. www.vargosonline.com.

ITALIAN

★ **GROTTO, 4715 Westheimer at Loop 610, Houston, TX 77027;** (713) 622-3663, and at 6401 Woodway Dr. at Voss, Houston, TX 77057; (713) 782-3663. Enjoy our authentic Italian cuisine, as close to the Bay of Naples as you can get without a trip overseas. Both locations combine a lively, casual, fun place with sensational food — a combination unmatched in Houston. www.grottohouston.com. (6K)

SEAFOOD

★ **THE OCEANAIRE SEAFOOD ROOM, 5061 Westheimer Rd., Ste. 8050, Houston, TX 77056;** (832) 487-8862. As sleek as a 1930s ocean liner, yet as relaxed as dinner on the shore, the Oceanaire Seafood Room provides the perfect setting to enjoy ultra-fresh seafood, flown in daily from around the world. (6K)

★ **WILLIE G'S, 1605 S. Post Oak Blvd. near The Galleria Houston, TX 77056;** (713) 840-7190. Nationally recognized as one of the top seafood restaurants in the U.S., Willie G's specializes in freshly prepared gumbo, blackened snapper and shrimp Creole. For the heart-healthy, enjoy grilled or broiled flounder, snapper and shrimp. Also certified Angus steaks. All major credit cards. & (6K)

SOUTH AMERICAN

★ **FOGO DE CHÃO, 8250 Westheimer Rd., Houston, TX 77063;** (713) 978-6500. An exciting Southern Brazilian steakhouse, where savory cuts of meat are presented on skewers and sliced tableside by their authentic "Gaucho" chefs. Voted "Houston's Best New Restaurant" by *Houston Business Journal* readers. Open lunch and dinner. (4K)

STEAKS

★ **BOB'S STEAK & CHOP HOUSE, 1801 Post Oak Blvd., Houston, TX 77056;** (713) 877-8325. Enjoy our warm, comfortable atmosphere and Galleria-area location. Bob's private dining rooms offer a sophisticated setting to enjoy their prime beef, fine wines and excellent service. Convenient valet parking. Call for hours; Reservations recommended. www.bobs-steakandchop.com. (6K)

★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 520 Meyerland Plaza;** (713) 665-2226. In the mid-1800s, Salt Grass Trail was known for the best beef in Texas. We recapture campfire flavor with Certified Angus Beef™, chicken and seafood chargrilled to perfection. Breads, soups and desserts from scratch daily. Call-ahead seating available. Visit www.saltgrass.com. (6M)

GREENWAY PLAZA/UPPER KIRBY/RIVER OAKS

ITALIAN

★ **LA GRIGLIA, 2002 West Gray, Houston, TX 77019;** (713) 526-4700. Enjoy New Italian cuisine in a stylish setting. Located in River Oaks Shopping Center.

★ **PESCE, 3029 Kirby Dr., Houston, TX 77098;** (713) 522-4858. Enjoy beautiful seafood with Asian, Creole and Mediterranean influences. The glamorous scene features elegant lighting, sleek woods and shiny marble to complement our sensational appetizers, fabulous entrees and superior service. (7K)

JAPANESE

★ **RA SUSHI BAR RESTAURANT, 3908 Westheimer Rd., Houston, TX 77027;** (713) 621-5800. There's never a dull moment in the RA. Freshly prepared sushi and Japanese fusion cuisine with an atmosphere that is as stimulating as a big bite of wasabi. Located in Highland Village. www.rasushi.com. (7K)

HWY. 59 SOUTH/SUGAR LAND

JAPANESE

★ **BENIHANA GRILL, 2579 Town Center Blvd., Sugar Land, TX 77479;** (281) 565-8888. See listing in Downtown area. (1P)

STEAKS

★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 9110 Southwest Fwy.;** (713) 771-1777. See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com. (4M)

WESTSIDE

JAPANESE

★ **BENIHANA, 9707 Westheimer Rd., Houston, TX 77042;** (713) 789-4962. See listing in Downtown area. (7K)

SEAFOOD

★ **LANDRY'S SEAFOOD HOUSE, 22215 Katy Fwy., Houston, TX 77450;** (281) 392-0452 and at 8816 Westheimer at Fondren, Houston, TX 77063; (713) 975-7873 (4K). Featuring fresh seafood from the Gulf of Mexico; enjoy gumbo, blackened snapper and shrimp Creole. Grilled or broiled flounder, snapper or shrimp. For a dining experience on a water setting, visit locations in Kemah and Galveston. &

STEAKS

★ **BRENNER'S STEAKHOUSE, 10911 Katy Fwy., Houston, TX 77079; (713) 465-2901.** A Houston Tradition since 1936! Known for warm atmosphere, prime beef, chicken and seafood specialties. In collaboration with the original owner, we offer the popular Crunchy German Potatoes, Homemade Roquefort salad dressing and the incomparable Apple Strudel, while adding exciting items such as Australian rock lobster tail and a jumbo lump crab cake. www.brennerssteakhouse.com. (6I)

★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 8943 Katy Fwy.; (713) 461-6111 (4I), and at 21855 Katy Freeway; (281) 647-9400.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com.

NORTH SIDE/GREENSPPOINT/FM 1960

STEAKS

★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 20090 Hwy. 59 N.; (281) 540-5116 (12A), and at 14909 I-45 North; (281) 872-4545 (7A).** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com.

THE HEIGHTS

★ **RAINBOW LODGE, 2011 Ella Blvd., Houston, TX 77008; (713) 861-8666.** Celebrating our 30th anniversary at a fabulous new location! Houston's original lodge restaurant features seafood and wild game. Our historic log cabin offers three fireplaces, as well as dining on the deck, overlooking a peaceful ravine and hillside. Lunch, dinner and Sunday Brunch. Ella Blvd. and East TC Jester, inside Loop 610. www.rainbow-lodge.com. (7H)

NORTHWEST

STEAKS

★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 17275 Tomball Pkwy.; (281) 477-0952.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com. (4C)

CONROE/THE WOODLANDS

JAPANESE

★ **BENIHANA, 1720 Lake Woodlands Dr., The Woodlands, TX 77380; (281) 292-0061.** See listing in Downtown area.

SEAFOOD

★ **LANDRY'S SEAFOOD HOUSE, 1212 Lake Robbins Dr., The Woodlands; (281) 362-9696.** See listing in Westside area. &

STEAKS

★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 19533 I-45 S., The Woodlands; (281) 298-7527.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com

BAY AREA HOUSTON

MEXICAN

★ **THE CADILLAC BAR, #7 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-9049.** The Cadillac Bar offers authentic Mexican food, world famous margaritas, lively music, a fun, casual atmosphere and great service. Great for your banquet, meeting or party. Where else can you write on the walls? Leave your mark at The Cadillac Bar! (18B)

SEAFOOD

★ **THE AQUARIUM, #11 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-9010.** Dine on sensationally fresh seafood and expertly prepared salads and steaks as you watch more than 100 species of fish in a 50,000-gallon artificial reef! Our desserts look as good as they taste. Taking seafood to new depths! (18B)

★ **THE CRAB HOUSE, #3 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-3360.** The Crab House is the place for East Coast-style seafood! Along with a full selection of fresh fish, we offer Chesapeake Bay Style crab cakes and New England clam-filled chowder! Our trademark seafood salad bar features smoked salmon, ceviche, marinated mushrooms, oysters, bean salads and more. (18B)

★ **THE FLYING DUTCHMAN, #9 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-7575.** The Flying Dutchman is the longest running restaurant at the Kemah Boardwalk. The Legend of The Flying Dutchman recounts an 18th-century sailor condemned to sail the seven seas without rest. Our fresh seafood and comfortable atmosphere at The Flying Dutchman are no legend, you can count on that. (18B)

★ **JOE'S CRAB SHACK, #5 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-2881.** The deck is the perfect place to sit and feel the breeze as you break into freshly boiled crabs and a cold one. The sign on the building sums it up: "...the crabs are always free tomorrow!" &

★ **LANDRY'S SEAFOOD HOUSE, #1 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-2513.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. (18B)

★ **WILLIE G's, Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-0192.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. (18B)

STEAKS

★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 20241 Gulf Fwy.; (281) 338-9778. 213 Kipp Ave., Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 538-5441.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com.

GALVESTON

AMERICAN

★ **FUDDRUCKERS, 111 23rd St., Galveston, TX 77551; (409) 765-8000.** Billed as the "World's Greatest Hamburger" and known for its large-sized hamburgers, sandwiches, salads and more, Fuddruckers, located at 23rd and Harborside, is one of Galveston's family favorites. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

★ **RAINFOREST CAFE — GALVESTON, 5310 Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77551; (409) 744-6000.** Discover the most realistic indoor rainforest ever created, complete with cascading waterfalls, lush vegetation, tropical rainstorms, beautiful aquariums, trumpeting elephants and entertaining gorillas. The menu features pastas, seafood, salads, signature entrées, sandwiches, and delectable desserts. Get swept away on the Rainforest River Adventure Ride!

SEAFOOD

★ **FISHERMAN'S WHARF, Harborside Dr. at Pier 22, Galveston, TX 77551; (409) 765-5708.** Ideally situated next to the Historic Strand District, you can enjoy famous shrimp kisses, fresh red snapper, seafood combination platters, savory chicken dishes, pastas and Certified Angus steaks in one of the many dining rooms all of which boast splendid views of the bay. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

★ **FISH TALES, 2502 Seawall Blvd. (at 25th St.), Galveston, TX 77551; (409) 762-8545.** Break away from the beach and enjoy the wholesome fare of Mama Rosie's Fried Shrimp or Flounder with Crabmeat Stuffing on the most popular beachfront balcony on the Seawall. Afterwards, indulge in our large assortment of ice cream and desserts. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

★ **LANDRY'S SEAFOOD HOUSE, 1502 Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77550; (409) 762-4261; and 5310 Seawall Blvd. at The San Luis, Galveston, TX; (409) 744-1010.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. & (22G)

★ **WILLIE G'S, 2100 Water St. at Pier 21, Galveston, TX 77550; (409) 762-3030.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. & (23F)

STEAKS

★ **SALTGRASS STEAKHOUSE, 1502 Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77550; (409) 762-4261.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com.

★ **THE STEAKHOUSE (at The San Luis Resort), 53rd & Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77551 (409) 744-1500.** Featuring USDA Prime Midwest grain-fed beef and live Maine lobster served amid hand-crafted mahogany woodwork, leather furnishings and luxurious amenities. Live entertainment Tuesday through Saturday by resort favorite pianist-vocalist Angelo Tolentino. Recipient of AAA Four Diamond Award and selected No. 2 on the "Texas' Top Ten" by Tom Horan. www.sanluisresort.com. ■