

DINING GUIDE / OCTOBER 2007

MIAMI

Brickell / Downtown

Acqua

1435 Brickell Ave.

Four Seasons Hotel

305-381-3190

Originally an Italian/Mediterranean restaurant, this comfortably elegant, upscale spot switched chefs in 2006 (to Patrick Duff, formerly at the Sukhothai in Bangkok), resulting in a complete menu renovation. Thailand's famed sense of culinary balance is now evident throughout the global (though primarily Asian or Latin American-inspired) menu, in dishes like yuzu/white soya-dressed salad of shrimp tempura (with watercress, Vidalia onion, avocado, pomegranate), a tender pork shank glazed with spicy Szechuan citrus sauce (accompanied by a chorizo-flecked plantain mash), or lunchtime's rare tuna burger with lively wasabi aioli and wakame salad. For dessert few chocoholics can resist a buttery-crust tart filled with sinfully rich warm chocolate custard. \$\$\$\$

Azul

500 Brickell Key Dr.

305-913-8254

Floor-to-ceiling picture windows showcase Biscayne Bay. But diners are more likely to focus on the sparkling raw bar and open kitchen, where chef Clay Conley crafts imaginative global creations – many of them combinations, to satisfy those who want it all. One offering, “A Study in Tuna,” includes tuna sashimi, Maine crab, avocado tempura, and caviar, with several Asian sauces. Moroccan lamb is three preparations (grilled chop, harissa-marinated loin, and bastilla, the famed savory-sweet Middle Eastern pastry, stuffed with braised shank), plus feta and smoked eggplant. Finish with a vanilla soufflé your way, a choice of toppings: chocolate, raspberry, or crème anglaise. \$\$\$\$

Café Sambal

500 Brickell Key Dr.

305-913-8358

www.mandarinoriental.com/miami/

Though the Mandarin Oriental Hotel describes this space as its “casual hotel restaurant,” many consider it a more spectacular dining setting than the

upscale Azul, upstairs, owing to the option of dining outdoors on a covered terrace directly on the waterfront. The food is Asian-inspired, with a few Latin and Mediterranean accents (sushi, plus creative fusion dishes like tangerine-anise spiced short ribs with scallion pancake, or a tempura-battered snapper sandwich with lemon aioli). For the health-conscious, the menu includes low-cal choices. For hedonists there's a big selection of artisan sakes. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Caribbean Delight

236 NE 1st Ave.

305-381-9254

Originally from Jamaica, proprietor Miss Pat has been serving her traditional homemade island specialties to downtown office workers and college students since the early 1990s. Most popular item here might be the weekday lunch special of jerk chicken with festival (sweet-fried cornmeal bread patties), but even vegetarians are well served with dishes like a tofu, carrot, and chayote curry. All entrées come with rice and peas, fried plantains, and salad, so no one leaves hungry – doubly true thanks to the home-baked Jamaican desserts. \$

Fresco California Bistro

1744 SW 3rd Ave.

305-858-0608

This festively decorated indoor/outdoor bistro packs a lot of party spirit into a small space, a large variety of food onto its menu, and a very large amount of informal retro California-style fusion food onto its plates. To the familiar Latin American/Italian equation, the owners add a touch of Cal-Mex (like Tex-Mex but more health conscious). Menu offerings range from designer pizzas and pastas to custardy tamales, but the bistro's especially known for imaginative meal-size salads, like one featuring mandarin oranges, avocado, apple, blue cheese, raisins, candied pecans, and chicken on a mesclun bed. \$\$

Garcia's Seafood Grille and Fish Market

398 NW N. River Dr.

305-375-0765

Run by a fishing family for a couple of generations, this venerable Florida fish shack is the real thing. No worries about the seafood's freshness; on their way to the rustic outside dining deck overlooking the Miami River,

diners can view the retail fish market to see what looks freshest. Best preparations, as always when fish is this fresh, are the simplest. When stone crabs are in season, Garcia's claws are as good as Joe's but considerably cheaper. The local fish sandwich is most popular – grouper, yellowtail snapper, or mahi mahi, fried, grilled, or blackened. The place is also famous for its zesty smoked-fish dip and its sides of hushpuppies. \$-\$\$

Indochine

638 S. Miami Ave.

305-379-1525

www.indochinebistro.com

Indochine has succeeded by morphing from mere restaurant into hip hangout. Copious special events (art openings, happy hours with DJs, classic movie or karaoke nights, wine or sake tastings) draw everyone from downtown business types to the counterculture crowd. Not that there's anything "mere" about the range of food served from three Asian nations. Light eaters can snack on Vietnamese summer rolls or Japanese sushi rolls, including an imaginative masago-coated model with mango, spicy tuna, and cilantro. For bigger appetites, there are Thai curries and Vietnamese specialties like pho, richly flavored beef soup with meatballs, steak slices, rice noodles, and add-in Asian herbs and sprouts. \$\$-\$\$\$

La Loggia Ristorante and Lounge

68 W. Flagler St.

305-373-4800

www.laloggia.org

This luxuriantly neo-classical yet warm-feeling Italian restaurant was unquestionably a pioneer in revitalizing downtown; when it first opened, eating options in the courthouse area were basically a variety of hot dog wagons. With alternatives like amaretto-tinged pumpkin agnolotti in sage butter sauce, cilantro-spiced white bean/vegetable salad dressed with truffle oil, and soufflé di granchi (crabmeat soufflé atop arugula dressed with honey-mustard vinaigrette), proprietors Jennifer Porciello and Horatio Oliveira continue to draw a lunch crowd that returns for dinner, or perhaps just stays on through the afternoon, fueled by the Lawyer's Liquid Lunch, a vodka martini spiked with sweetened espresso. \$\$\$

Novecento

1414 Brickell Ave.

305-403-0900

www.bistronovecento.com

For those who think “Argentine cuisine” is a synonym for “beef and more beef,” this popular eatery’s wide range of more cosmopolitan contemporary Argentine fare will be a revelation. Classic parrilla-grilled steaks are here for traditionalists, but the menu is dominated by creative Nuevo Latino items like a new-style ceviche de chernia (lightly lime-marinated grouper with jalapeños, basil, and the refreshing sweet counterpoint of watermelon), or crab ravioli with creamy saffron sauce. Especially notable are entrée salads like the signature Ensalada Novecento: skirt steak slices (cooked to order) atop mixed greens coated in rich mustard vinaigrette with a side of housemade fries. \$\$-\$\$\$

Provence Grill

1001 S. Miami Ave.

305-373-1940

The cozy, terracotta-tiled dining room (and even more charming outdoor dining terrace) indeed evoke the south of France. But the menu of French bistro classics covers all regions, a Greatest Hits of French comfort food: country-style pâté maison with onion jam, roasted peppers and cornichons; steak/frites (grilled rib-eye with peppercorn cream sauce, fries, and salad); four preparations of mussels; a tarte tatin (French apple tart with roasted walnuts, served à la mode). Deal alert: An early-bird prix-fixe menu (5:30-7:30 p.m.) offers soup or salad, entrée, dessert, and a carafe of wine for \$44 per couple. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Oceanaire Seafood Room

900 S. Miami Ave.

305-372-8862

www.theoceanaire.com

With a dozen branches nationwide, Oceanaire may seem more All-American seafood empire than Florida fish shack. But while many dishes (including popular sides like bacon-enriched hash browns and fried green tomatoes) are identical at all Oceanaires, menus vary significantly according to regional tastes and fish. Here in Miami, chef Sean Bernal (formerly at Merrick Park’s Pescado) supplements signature starters like lump crab cakes with his own lightly marinated, Peruvian-style grouper ceviche. The daily-changing, 15-20 specimen seafood selection includes local fish seldom seen on local menus: pompano, parrot fish, amberjack. But even flown-in fish (and the raw bar’s cold-water oysters) are ultra-fresh. \$\$\$

Pasha's
1414 Brickell Ave.
305-416-5116

The original branch on Miami Beach's Lincoln Road was instantly popular, and the same healthy Middle Eastern fast food – made with no trans fats or other nutritional nasties – is served at the three newer outlets. The prices are low enough that one might suspect Pasha's was conceived as a tax write-off rather than a Harvard Business School project, which it was by founders Antonio Ellek and Nicolas Cortes. Dishes range from common classics like falafel and gyros to more unusual items like muhammara (tangy walnut spread), silky labneh yogurt cheese, and chicken adana kebabs with grilled veggies and aioli sauce. Everything from pitas to lemonade is made fresh, from scratch, daily. \$-\$\$

Peoples Bar-B-Que
360 NW 8th St.
305-373-8080
www.peoplesbarbque.com

Oak-smoked, falling-off-the-bone tender barbecued ribs (enhanced with a secret sauce whose recipe goes back several generations) are the main draw at this Overtown institution. But the chicken is also a winner, plus there's a full menu of soul food entrées, including what many aficionados consider our town's tastiest souse. Sides include collards, yams, and soft mac and cheese. And it would be unthinkable to call it quits without homemade sweet potato pie or banana pudding, plus a bracing flop – half iced tea, half lemonade. \$-\$\$

Perricone's
15 SE 10th St.
305-374-9449
www.perricones.com

Housed in a Revolutionary-era barn (moved from Vermont), this market/café was one of the Brickell area's first gentrified amenities. At lunch chicken salad (with pignolias, raisins, apples, and basil) is a favorite; dinner's strong suit is the pasta list, ranging from Grandma Jennie's old-fashioned lasagna to chichi fiocchi purses filled with fresh pear and gorgonzola. And Sunday's \$15.95 brunch buffet (\$9.95 for kids) – featuring an omelet station, waffles, smoked salmon and bagels, salads, and more – remains one of our town's most civilized all-you-can-eat deals. \$\$

The River Oyster Bar

650 S. Miami Ave.

305-530-1915

www.therivermiami.com

This casually cool Miami River-area jewel is a full-service seafood spot, as evidenced by tempting menu selections like soft-shell crabs with grilled vegetables, corn relish, and remoulade. There are even a few dishes to please meat-and-potatoes diners, like short ribs with macaroni and cheese. But oyster fans will still find it difficult to resist stuffing themselves silly on the unusually large selection of bivalves (often ten varieties per night), especially since oysters are served both raw and cooked – fire-roasted with sofrito butter, chorizo, and manchego. To accompany these delights, there's a thoughtful wine list and numerous artisan beers on tap. \$\$\$

Soya & Pomodoro

120 NE 1st St.

305-381-9511

Life is complicated. Food should be simple. That's owner Armando Alfano's philosophy, which is stated above the entry to his atmospheric downtown eatery. And since it's also the formula for the truest traditional Italian food (Alfano hails from Pompeii), it's fitting that the menu is dominated by authentically straightforward yet sophisticated Italian entrées such as spinach- and ricotta-stuffed crêpes with béchamel and tomato sauces. There are salads and sandwiches, too, including one soy burger to justify the other half of the place's name. The most enjoyable place to dine is the secret, open-air courtyard, completely hidden from the street. Alfano serves dinner on Thursdays only to accompany his "Thursday Night Live" events featuring local musicians and artists. \$-\$\$

Tobacco Road

626 S. Miami Ave.

305-374-1198

www.tobacco-road.com

Prohibition-era speakeasy (reputedly a fave of Al Capone), gay bar, strip club. Previously all these, this gritty spot has been best known since 1982 as a venue for live music, primarily blues. But it also offers food from lunchtime to late night (on weekends till 4:00 a.m.). The kitchen is especially known for its chili, budget-priced steaks, and burgers, including the mega-mega burger, a trucker-style monster topped with said chili plus cheddar, mushrooms, bacon, and a fried egg. There's also surprisingly

elegant fare, though, like a Norwegian salmon club with lemon aioli. A meat-smoker in back turns out tasty ribs, perfect accompaniment to the blues. \$\$

Midtown / Design District

Adelita's Café

2699 Biscayne Blvd.

305-576-1262 - OK

From the street (which is actually NE 26th, not Biscayne) this Honduran restaurant seems unpromising, but inside it's bigger, better, and busier than it looks. Unlike many Latin American eateries, which serve a multinational mélange, this one sticks close to the source and proves a crowd-pleaser. On weekends especially, the two casual dining rooms are packed with families enjoying authentic fare like baleadas (thick corn tacos), tajadas (Honduras's take on tostones), rich meal-in-a-bowl soups packed with seafood or meat and veggies, and more. To spend ten bucks on a meal here, one would have to be a sumo wrestler. \$

Bin No. 18

1800 Biscayne Blvd.

786-235-7575

At this wine bar/café, located on the ground floor of one of midtown's new mixed-use condo buildings, the décor is a stylish mix of contemporary cool (high loft ceilings) and Old World warmth (tables made from old wine barrels). Cuisine is similarly geared to the area's new smart, upscale residents: creative sandwiches and salads at lunch, tapas and larger internationally themed Spanish, Italian, or French charcuterie platters at night. Though the place is small and family-run friendly, Venezuelan-born chef Alfredo Patino's former executive chef gigs at Bizcaya (at the Ritz-Carlton Coconut Grove) and other high-profile venues are evident in sophisticated snacks like the figciutto, a salad of arugula, gorgonzola dolce, caramelized onions, pine nuts, fresh figs, and prosciutto. Free parking in a fenced lot behind the building. \$\$

Charcuterie

3612 NE 2nd Ave.

305-576-7877

This Design District old-timer has hung on for close to 20 years as the District has gone through its mood swings. But it's no worse for the wear. The upstairs/downstairs space looks good as new, and is still almost

impossibly cute. The menu, chalked daily on a blackboard, still features well more than a dozen typical French bistro specials like chicken Dijonaise or almond-crusted trout in creamy, lemony beurre blanc. And the salads, soups, and sandwiches are still, invariably, evocative. Rough-cut pâté de campagne, topped with cornichons on a crusty buttered baguette is an instant trip to Paris. Though weekend nighttime hours were instituted several years ago, dinner is an on-again, off-again thing, so call first. \$\$-\$\$\$

The Daily Creative Food Co.
2001 Biscayne Blvd.
305-573-4535

While the food formula of this contemporary café is familiar – sandwiches, salads, soups, breakfast food, and pastries, plus coffee and fruit drinks – a creative concept differentiates the place. Signature sandwiches are named after national and local newspapers (like the Biscayne Times: tuna salad with hummus, cucumber, roasted peppers, arugula, and sprouts on multigrain bread), giving diners something to chat about. For those who'd rather Have It Their Own Way, both sandwiches and salads can be do-it-yourself projects, with an unusually wide choice of main ingredients, garnishes, breads, and condiments for the creatively minded. \$

Elements
3930 NE 2nd Ave.
305-573-0444

To the relief of lunchers who loved chef Lorena Garcia's former Design District restaurant, Food Café (which lost its lease around the time of Hurricane Wilma), this new venture is only about a block away and, despite the new name, serves many old favorites. These include the signature, slightly rechristened Food Elements Salad: baby greens with Granny Smith apples, seasonal berries, gorgonzola, and addictive candied walnuts, dressed with a raspberry vinaigrette. But there are new dishes too, such as a panko-crusted fish burger with spicy remoulade sauce. \$\$

Grass
28 NE 40th St.
305-573-3355

After a couple of years in hiatus, this Design District restolounge has reopened in the same outdoor courtyard space. What's new: "MeditAsian" chef Michael Jacobs and a menu that travels beyond pan-Asian and Mediterranean influences into the Americas. Entrées range from lowbrow

comfort food (cunningly reinvented mini pot pies) to high-status extravagance (stone-seared, authentic Kobe steak). For healthy grazers, raw-bar selections include ceviches and a large seafood platter (lobster, shrimp, and lump crab with housemade dipping sauces). There's also a snack menu (pristine coldwater oysters, a crab salad timbale, parmesan-truffle shoestring fries, mini-Kobe burgers) served till the wee hours, providing a welcome alternative to the Boulevard's fast food chains. \$\$-\$\$\$\$

Karu & Y

71 NW 14th St.

305-403-7850

www.karu-y.com

When this \$20 million entertainment complex opened, the aim of its restaurant, Karu, according to press releases, was to be deliberately atypical of South Florida – and indeed many Miamians couldn't make heads or tails of the experimental New Spanish food. Since then, though, dramatic menu changes have introduced new dishes utilizing seasonal ingredients, like Florida stone crabs highlighted in an aioli soup with lemon chive ice, cilantro micro greens, and aji Amarillo pepper caviar. And while much of the fare remains cutting edge, there's now also a steak menu (ranging from a dry-aged cowboy steak to a Wagyu skirt cut, with à la carte sides like creamy rice with Idiazábal cheese). Closed Aug. 28 -Sept. 17. \$\$\$\$\$

Latin Café 2000

2501 Biscayne Blvd.

305-576-3838

www.latincafe2000.com

The menu is similar to that at many of our town's Latin cafés, largely classic Cuban entrées and sandwiches, with a smattering of touches from elsewhere in Latin America, such as a Peruvian jalea mixta (marinated mixed seafood), or paella Valenciana from Spain, which many Miami eateries consider a Latin country. What justifies the new millennium moniker is the more modern, yuppified/yucafied ambiance, encouraged by an expansive, rustic wooden deck. Delivery is now available. \$\$

Lost & Found Saloon

185 NW 36th St.

305-576-1008

www.thelostandfoundsaloon-miami.com

There's an artsy/alternative feel to this casual and friendly Wynwood eatery, which, since opening as a weekday-only breakfast and lunch joint in 2005, has grown with its neighborhood. It's now open for dinner six nights a week, serving Southwestern-style fare at rock-bottom prices. Dishes like piñon and pepita-crusting salmon, chipotle-drizzled endive stuffed with lump crab, or customizable tacos average \$5-\$8. Also available: big breakfasts and salads, hearty soups, housemade pastries like lemon-crusting wild berry pie, and a hip beer and wine list. \$

Michael's Genuine Food and Drink

130 NE 40th St.

305-573-5550

Long-awaited and an instant smash hit, this truly neighborhood-oriented restaurant from Michael Schwartz, founding chef of Nemo's in South Beach, offers down-to-earth fun food in a comfortable, casually stylish indoor/outdoor setting. Fresh, organic ingredients are emphasized, but dishes range from cutting-edge (crispy beef cheeks with whipped celeriac, celery salad, and chocolate reduction) to simple comfort food: deviled eggs, homemade potato chips with pan-fried onion dip, or a whole wood-roasted chicken. There's also a broad range of prices and portion sizes (\$4-\$8 for snacks and small plates to \$24-\$39 for extra-large plates) to encourage frequent visits from light-bite as well as pig-out diners. Michael's Genuine also features an eclectic and affordable wine list, and a full bar, with cut-rate weekday happy hour cocktails. \$\$-\$\$\$

Mike's at Venetia

555 NE 15th St., 9th floor

305-374-5731

www.mikesvenetia.com

There's no sign out front, but this family-owned Irish pub, on the pool deck of a waterfront condo building across from the Miami Herald, for more than 15 years has been a popular lunch and dinner hang-out for local journalists – and others who appreciate honest cheap eats and drinks (not to mention a billiard table and 17 TV screens). Regulars know daily specials are the way to go. Depending on the day, fish, churrasco, or roast turkey with all the trimmings are all prepared fresh. Big burgers and steak dinners are always good, and happy hour appetizers (like meaty Buffalo wings) are always half-price. Additionally, a limited late-night menu provides pizza, wings, ribs, and salad till 3:00 a.m. \$-\$\$

Orange Café + Art

2 NE 40th St.

305-571-4070

The paintings hanging in this tiny, glass-enclosed café are for sale. And for those who don't have thousands of dollars to shell out for the local art on the walls, less than ten bucks will get you art on a plate, including a Picasso: chorizo, prosciutto, manchego cheese, baby spinach, and basil on a crusty baguette. Other artfully named and crafted edibles include salads, daily soups, several pastas (like the Matisse, flocchi pouches filled with pears and cheese), and house-baked pastries. \$

Out of the Blue Café

2426 NE 2nd Ave.

305-573-3800

www.outofthebluecafe.net

Forget impersonal chain coffeehouses. This artist-friendly, independent neighborhood café serves a full selection of coffee drinks made with the award-winning beans of Intelligentsia, a roasting company that works directly with artisan growers to encourage sustainable agriculture – and one helluva good cup of java. Also served: breakfast and lunch sandwiches, imaginative salads, soups, homemade pastries (including a “cupcake of the month”), and creamy fresh-fruit smoothies. With tables, sofas, and lounge chairs inside an old Midtown house (and on a protected outdoor patio), plus free wireless Internet access, the space is also just a pleasant place to hang out. Owner Carmen Miranda (real name) says beer and wine will soon be available. \$

Pasha's

3801 N. Miami Ave.

305-573-0201

(See Brickell/Downtown listing)

The Secret Sandwich Co.

3918 N. Miami Ave.

305-571-9990

The spy theme applies to menu items (the Mata Hari, Double Agent, French Connection, Bay of Pig), but it could also refer to the hard-to-spot storefront housing this take-out (and delivery) lunch spot, which, for its small size, offers a big selection of hot and cold sandwiches, varying from char-grilled burgers to more exotic specialty items like grilled or blackened mahi mahi

with mixed greens, tomato, and creamy garlic dressing. There are also daily soups, and salads with “secret vinaigrette.” But the best-kept secret is the rich, smooth, homemade flan, hidden in the chilled display case. \$

Sheba

4029 N. Miami Ave.

305-573-1819

www.shebamiami.com

Combining contemporary Design District chic with traditional African craft (from its adjacent art gallery), Sheba’s spacious setting is a soothing place to discover the exotic offerings of Miami’s only Ethiopian eatery. Once diners adjust to eating with their hands (using *inerja*, the sourdough crepes accompanying entrées, as a utensil), the food is quite accessible. Both *wats* (meat and poultry stews) and *tibs* (sautéed dishes incorporating the familiar multicultural “holy trinity” of onions, tomatoes, and peppers) tend, like Cuban cuisine, to be spiced with complexity, not fire. A Best of the Best platter for two enables diners to sample most of the menu. \$\$\$

S & S Diner

1757 NE 2nd Ave.

305-373-4291

Some things never change, or so it seems at this diner, which is so classic it verges on cliché. Open since 1938, it’s still popular enough that people line up on Saturday morning, waiting for a seat at the horseshoe-shaped counter (there are no tables) and enormous breakfasts: corned beef hash or crab cakes and eggs with grits; fluffy pancakes; homemade biscuits with gravy and Georgia sausage – everything from oatmeal to eggs Benedict, all in mountainous portions. The lunch menu is a roll call of the usual suspects, but most regulars ignore the menu and go for the daily blackboard specials. \$-\$\$

Tony Chan’s Water Club

1717 N. Bayshore Dr.

305-374-8888

The décor at this upscale place, located in the Grand, a huge bayside condo/resort hotel, looks far too glitzy to serve anything but politely Americanized Chinese food. The presentation is indeed elegant, but the American dumbing-down is minimal. Many dishes are far more authentic and skillfully prepared than those found elsewhere in Miami, like delicate but flavorful *yu pan quail* (minced with mushrooms in lettuce cups). Moist

sea bass fillet has a beautifully balanced topping of scallion, ginger, cilantro, and subtly sweet/salty sauce. And Peking duck is served as three traditional courses: crêpe-wrapped crispy skin, meat sautéed with crisp veggies, savory soup to finish. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

W Wine Bistro

3622 NE 2nd Ave.

305-576-7775

Both bistro and retail wine shop, this Design District spot is run by Florent Blanchet, an energetic young Frenchman who was previously a wine distributor. His former gig led to connections that mean if wine lovers don't find the bottle they want in W's selection of roughly 200-labels (which emphasizes boutique and organic growers), Blanchet can probably get it within 24 hours. Food is sophisticated light bites like a shrimp club sandwich with pancetta and sun-dried tomato aioli; smoked duck salad with goat cheese croutons and a poached egg; and chocolate fondant. At night there are tapas. \$-\$\$

Zuperpollo Biztro Reztocafe

3050 Biscayne Blvd.

305-573-8485

www.zuperpollo.com - OK

Occasionally there's a sign out front of the office building housing this bistro, indicating that a branch of the popular Uruguayan eatery Zuperpollo (on Coral Way, since 1986) is within. Otherwise, since the restaurant opened in 2006, locals have basically had to intuit its presence – way in back, past a guard desk and an elevator bank, behind an unmarked door. Once there, diners discover an extensive pan-Latin menu of breakfast food, salads, substantial meat and fish entrées, homemade pastas and soups, desserts, and sandwiches, including Uruguay's famed chivito, sometimes called “a heart attack on a bun”: beef, bacon, ham, eggs, mozzarella, plus sautéed mushrooms and red peppers. And naturally, from the rotisserie, there's the zignature zuper chicken. \$-\$\$

Upper Eastside

Amate Tea Lounge

811 NE 79th St.

305-759-8777

“Tea” (as a nickname for marijuana) was always widely available in this neighborhood, but who'd have guessed the area would become tea-central

for the more genteel, drinkable, with-scones kind? Barely a mile from Pineapple Blossom Tea Room (and barely a year younger), this New Age oasis, which opened in spring 2007, offers normal Ceylon teas plus exotica like coconut truffle; locally made pastries (including cupcakes from Sticky Fingers Cupcakes, located upstairs); poetry readings, full-moon drumming, and meditation gatherings in the enclosed back patio; informal matchmaking (the owner has a date book for singles); and a free parking lot. \$

Andiamo

5600 Biscayne Blvd.

305-762-5751

www.andiamopizza.com

Sharing a building with a long-established Morningside car wash, Andiamo is also part of Mark Soyka's 55th Street Station – which means ditching the car (in the complex's free lot across the road on NE 4th Court) is no problem even if you're not getting your vehicle cleaned while consuming the brick-oven pies (from a flaming open oven) that are this popular pizzeria's specialty. Choices range from the simple namesake Andiamo (actually a Margherita) to the Godfather, a major meat monster. Extra toppings like arugula and goat cheese enable diners to create their own designer pies. Also available are salads and panini plus reasonably priced wines and beers (including a few unusually sophisticated selections like Belgium's Hoegaarden). \$\$

Café Le Glacier

7295 Biscayne Blvd.

305-754-6551

For anyone who can't get over thinking of French food as intimidating or pretentious, this cute café with a warm welcome, and family-friendly French home cooking, is the antidote. No fancy food (or fancy prices) here, just classic comfort food like onion soup, boeuf bourguignon (think Ultimate Pot Roast), moist, tender chicken Dijonaise, Nicoise salad, quiche, and homemade crème brûlée. And the kids can get hot dogs or grilled cheese. Top price for grown-up entrées is about \$12. \$-\$\$

Canela

5132 Biscayne Blvd.

305-756-3930

When this atmospheric little neighborhood oasis opened, the formula was Cuban cooking at lunch, Catalan tapas at night. The menu is now more

uniform: contemporary Spanish and pan-Latin tapas, sandwiches, salads, sides, and entrées at all hours, just a far more elaborate selection at night. The tapas list is especially impressive, with all the usual Hispanic meat and cheese favorites but also an unusually large selection of seafood and vegetarian items such as espinaca à la catalaña (spinach sautéed with pine nuts and raisins). Must-not-miss items include ultra-creamy croquetas (ham, cheese, chicken, spinach, or bacalao), grilled asparagus with aioli, and habit-forming Brazilian cheese bread. \$-\$\$\$

Captain Crab's Take-Away

1100 NE 79th St.

305-754-2722

The drive-through window says “fast food,” and so do this long-lived seafood shack's low prices. And indeed there are three Captain Crab's Take-Aways (the others are in Carol City and Fort Lauderdale), all related to the sit-down Crab House restaurants. But there the resemblance to McFauxFood ends. For about the price of a bucket of the Colonel's chicken you can get a bucket of the Captain's savory garlic crabs. The King's burger meal or the Captain's similarly priced fried (or garlic boiled or New Orleans-spiced) shrimp meal? No contest. Also popular: crab cakes and conch (fried or in fritters and chowder). For fish haters, spicy or garlic chicken wings are an option; for kids, cut-price “first mate” meals. \$-\$\$

Casa Toscana

7001 Biscayne Blvd.

305-758-3353

www.casatoscanamiami.com

Tuscan-born chef/owner Sandra Stefani cooked at Norman's (and briefly ran the Indian Creek Hotel's restaurant) before opening this Upper Eastside neighborhood jewel, a wine market/eatery whose 30 original seats have been supplemented by a wine room/garden for tasting events and private dining. Stefani travels regularly to Italy to find exciting, limited-production wines and inspiration for truly Tuscan-tasting daily special dishes with honest, authentic flavors, such as grilled wild boar sausages with lentil croquettes. Favorites that show up often on the menu include pear and ricotta raviolini with sage butter sauce, grilled eggplant slices rolled around herbed goat cheese and sun-dried tomatoes, and a light ricotta tart with lemon and rosemary. \$\$\$

Che Sopranos

7251 Biscayne Blvd.
305-754-8282

This branch of a Miami Beach Italian/Argentine pizzeria, housed in a charming bungalow and featuring a breezy patio, covers multicultural bases. If the Old World Rucola pizza (a classic Margherita topped with arugula, prosciutto, and shredded parmesan) doesn't do the trick, the New World Especial (a Latin pie with hearts of palm and boiled eggs) just might. Also available are pastas, salads, sandwiches, dinner entrées (eggplant parmigiana with spaghetti, lomito steak with Argentinean potato salad), and desserts (tiramisu or flan). \$

Chef Creole
200 NW 54th St.
305-754-2223

Sparkling fresh Creole-style food is the star at chef/owner Wilkinson Sejour's two tiny but wildly popular establishments. While some meatier Haitian classics like griot (fried pork chunks) and oxtail stew are also available – and a \$3.99 roast chicken special is a hard deal to resist – the glistening fish display that greets diners as they walk in makes it clear that seafood is the specialty here: crevette en sauce (steamed shrimp with Creole butter sauce), lambi fri (a mountain of perfectly tenderized fried conch), poisson gros sel (local snapper in a spicy butter sauce), garlic or Creole crabs. Note for ambiance-seekers: The Miami branch has outdoor tiki-hut dining; North Miami's outlet, a former Carvel, has the same food but lacks the tropical charm. \$-\$\$

Chez Rosie
5961 NW 2nd Ave.
305-756-9881 - OK

In its former Biscayne Boulevard location, Chez Rosie (named after the mom of Haitian-born, Johnson & Wales-trained chef Ernest Martial) was beloved by knowledgeable locals as the source of the Boulevard's biggest bargain lunch. In its new location, the Creole spot still serves astonishingly hefty specials (which change daily) for four bucks or less. Few regular dishes break double digits. As in French cooking, spicing is subtly balanced in this chef's rendition of Haitian dishes like juicy griot (fried marinated pork chunks), batterless fried chicken, stuffing-topped breaded butterflied shrimp, and accra (fluffy fritters made from black-eyed peas and malanga). An especially nice touch: All condiments, from salad dressings to fiery pikliz slaw, even tartar sauce, are housemade. \$

Dogma Grill

7030 Biscayne Blvd.

305-759-3433

www.dogmagrill.com

What could induce downtown businessmen to drive to the Upper Eastside to eat at a few outdoor-only tables just feet from the busy Boulevard? From the day it opened, people have been lining up, even in summer's sweltering heat, for this stand's sauce-garnished, all-beef, soy veggie, turkey, and chicken hot dogs. The 22 varieties range from simple (the Classic, with ketchup, relish, and chopped onion) to the elaborate (the Athens, topped with a Greek salad, including extra-virgin olive oil dressing) to near-unbelievable combinations like the VIP, which includes parmesan cheese and crushed pineapple. \$

East Side Pizza

731 NE 79th St.

305-758-5351

Minestrone, sure. But a pizzeria menu with carrot ginger soup? Similarly many Italian-American pizzerias offer entrées like spaghetti and meatballs, but East Side also has pumpkin ravioli in brown butter/sage sauce, wild mushroom ravioli, and other surprisingly upscale choices. The East Side Salad includes goat cheese, walnuts, and cranberries; quaffs include imported Peroni beer. As for the pizza, they are classic pies, available whole or by the slice, made with fresh plum tomato sauce and Grande mozzarella (considered the top American pizza cheese). Best seating for eating is at the sheltered outdoor picnic tables. \$

Fidele Seafood Restaurant

7232 Biscayne Blvd.

305-756-8886 – NO ANSWER

The day of the famed \$3.99 lunch special has passed (though its sign out front remains). Prices at this veteran Haitian eatery now hover around ten dollars if you go for the namesake seafood – dishes like steamed conch, shrimp, or crab Creole. But you can still score stew chicken, griot (fried pork chunks), or cow foot for five or six bucks, and plates still overflow with sides like salad, rice, fried plantains, and the fiery cabbage slaw piklis. Most customers at this cash-only spot opt for take-out, but a small dining room is available. \$

Garden of Eatin'
136 NW 62nd St.
305-754-8050

Low profile would be an understatement for this place. Housed in a yellow building that's tucked in back of a parking lot behind a small grocery store, it's nearly invisible from the street. Inside, though, it has the comfortable feel of a beach bar, and generous servings of inexpensive Afro-Caribbean vegan food. Rastafari owner Immanuel Tafari cooks up meat and dairy-free specials, like Jamaican pumpkin/chayote stew in coconut milk, that depend on what looks good at that morning's produce market. Large or small plates, with salad and fried sweet plantains (plus free soup for eat-in lunchers), are served for five or seven bucks. Also available are snacks like vegetarian blue corn tacos, desserts like sweet potato pie, and a breakfast menu featuring organic blueberry waffles with soy sausage patties. \$

Hiro's Sushi Express
5140 Biscayne Blvd.
305-759-0914
(See North Miami Beach listing)

Jimmy's East Side Diner
7201 Biscayne Blvd.
305-754-3692

Open for more than 30 years, Jimmy's respects the most important American diner tradition: Breakfast at any hour. Admittedly the place closes at 4:00 p.m., but still. There are blueberry hot cakes and pecan waffles for sweet-tooth eaters; eggs any style, including omelets and open-face frittatas for those preferring savories; and a full range of sides: biscuits and sausage gravy, grits, hash, hash browns, even hot oatmeal. Also available are traditional diner entrées (meat loaf, roast turkey, liver and onions), plus burgers, salad platters, and homemade chicken soup. \$-\$\$

Karma
7010 Biscayne Blvd.
305-759-1392

A real car wash with meticulous detailing takes time. But killing an hour is a pleasure at this stylish car wash/tapas bar, where the elegant light fare occasionally even outshines the hand-washed automobiles. Vegetarians do especially well, with crusty baguette sandwich combos like brie, walnuts, and honey, or another featuring grilled artichokes and buttery St. Andre

cheese. Lower carb items range from an imported olive assortment to an antipasto platter with Spanish Cantimpalo chorizo, manchego cheese, and garbanzos. There are breakfast and dessert pastries too. Beverages include organic coffee and soy chai lattes, as well as wines and an extensive beer list featuring Belgian brewskis. On Thursday nights the car wash transforms into a chic lounge until 2:00 a.m. \$-\$\$

Kingdom

6708 Biscayne Blvd.

305-757-0074

This newly renovated, indoor/outdoor sports bar serves low-priced but high-quality steaks, plus more typical bar food that's actually far from the usual premade, processed stuff. Philly cheese steak sandwiches, big enough for two, are made from hand-sliced rib eye; sides include fries and beer-battered onion rings, but also lightly lemony sautéed spinach. And the burgers rule, particularly the Doomsday, a cheese/ bacon/mushroom-topped two-pound monster that turns dinner into a competitive sport. But even the smallest Queenburger (a half-pounder that's no sissy) is a perfectly seasoned contender. No hard liquor, but the beer list makes up for it. \$\$

Luna Café

4770 Biscayne Blvd.

305-573-5862

www.lunacafemidtown.com

The ground floor of the Wachovia Bank building may not seem a particularly evocative locale for an Italian eatery, but once inside, the charming décor and the staff's ebullient welcome indeed are reminiscent of a café in Italy. The kitchen's outstanding feature is a brick oven, which turns out designer pizzas (greater in variety, lesser in cost on the lunch menu, in effect till 4:30 p.m.) and crisp-skinned roast chickens. Otherwise the menu holds few surprises – except the prices, surprisingly low for such a stylish place. No dish exceeds \$22. \$\$-\$\$\$

The Lunch Room

7957 NE 2nd Ave.

305-722-0759 – OK

Hidden in Little Haiti, this Thai/Japanese spot, which opened in 2005, remains one of the Upper Eastside's best-kept secrets. But chef Michelle Bernstein (of Michy's) and other knowledgeable diners wander over from the Boulevard for simple but perfect pad Thai, chili grouper (lightly battered

fillets in a mouthwatering tangy/sweet/hot sauce), silky Asian eggplant slices in Thai basil sauce, and other remarkably low-priced specialties of Matilda Apirukpinyo, who operated a critically acclaimed South Beach Thai eatery in the 1990s. Though the casually cute indoor/outdoor place is only open for weekday lunches, “cantina” dinners can be ordered and picked up after hours. \$

Mario the Baker
2590 Biscayne Blvd.
305-438-0228
(See North Miami listing)

Michy’s
6927 Biscayne Blvd.
305-759-2001

Don’t even ask why Michele Bernstein, with a résumé that includes top-chef gigs at upscale eateries like Azul, not to mention regular Food Network appearances, opened a homey restaurant in an emerging (but far from fully gentrified) neighborhood. Just be glad she did, as you dine on white almond gazpacho or impossibly creamy ham and blue cheese croquetas. Though most full entrées also come in half-size portions (at almost halved prices), the tab can add up fast. Table-to-table conversations about the food are common, something that only happens at exciting, if not flawless, restaurants. And at this one, the star herself is usually in the kitchen. Parking in the rear off 69th Street. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

One Ninety
26 NE 54th St.
305-758-7085
www.oneninetyrestaurant.com

When the original One Ninety, a hip Nuevo Hippie hangout in residential Buena Vista, closed because of rent increases in 2004, loyal patrons from all walks of life mourned the loss. In its new Little Haiti location, the space is much smaller but the loose vibe is the same, as are the eclectic live bands and some old food favorites: bacalao cake with onion, cuke, and tomato salad with lemony aioli sauce; ricotta-walnut agnolotti with butter and sage; and chef Alan Hughes’s unique black-pepper-spiked white chocolate mousse (now presented as one of a five-item chocolate medley). \$\$-\$\$\$

Pineapple Blossom

Tea Room

8214 Biscayne Blvd.

305-754-8328

www.pineappleblossom.com

The interior of this pineapple-yellow building is a soothing oasis offering traditional full English tea service – or a more zingy tropical fruit-flavored Caribbean variation. Whether your chosen brew is steaming Earl Grey or pineapple-mint iced tea, the scones (with thick cream and jam), tea cakes, cookies, and desserts, are hometown treats. Owner Frances Brown is a pastry chef. There's more substantial fare, too. Innovative wraps like Caribbean shrimp salad with tropical fruit salsa; salads such as warm goat cheese with fresh greens, tomatoes, dried cranberries, and candied cashews. Also offered are tempting take-out baskets like the Tea for Two (with tea, jam, scones, and cookies), great for gifts or for at-home teas. \$-\$\$

Royal Bavarian Schnitzel Haus

1085 NE 79th St.

305-754-8002 - OK

With Christmas lights perpetually twinkling and party noises emanating from a new outdoor biergarten, this German restaurant is owner Alex Richter's one-man gentrification project, transforming a formerly uninviting stretch of 79th Street one pils at a time. The fare includes housemade sausages (mild veal bratwurst, hearty mixed beef/pork bauernwurst, spicy garlicwurst) with homemade mustard and catsup; savory yet near-greaseless potato pancakes; and, naturally, schnitzels, a choice of delicate pounded pork, chicken, or veal patties served with a half-dozen different sauces. \$\$-\$\$\$

Soyka

5556 NE 4th Court

305-759-3117

www.soykarestaurant.com

This expansive, contemporary hangout was often credited with almost single-handedly sparking the revitalization of the Biscayne Corridor's Upper Eastside. Now that the hype has calmed down, Soyka remains a solid neighborhood restaurant that, like restaurateur Mark Soyka's previous ventures (notably Ocean Drive's pioneering News Café and the Van Dyke on Lincoln Road) is a perfect fit for its area. Comfortably priced yuppie comfort food like meatloaf with mashed potatoes, crab cakes with spicy-sweet slaw, a wild mushroom/smoked mozzarella pizza, or a Cobb salad

may not be revolutionary fare, but Soyka continues to thrive while more ambitious, nationally publicized restaurants like OLA have come and gone. \$\$-\$\$\$

Sushi Siam

5582 NE 4th Court

305-751-7818

On the fairly standard menu of sushi bar specialties plus a small selection of Thai and Japanese cooked dishes there are a few surprises, such as a unique lobster maki that's admittedly huge in price (\$25.95), but also in size: six ounces of crisp-fried lobster chunks, plus asparagus, avocado, lettuce, tobiko (flying fish), masago (smelt) roes, and special sauces. Also popular are red and orange dragon rolls, similarly sauced makis of fried shrimp plus veggies topped with, respectively, raw tuna and salmon. Thai dishes are served with a choice of more than a dozen sauces, ranging from traditional red or green curries to the inventive, such as an unconventional honey sauce. \$\$\$

Sushi Square

7244 Biscayne Blvd.

305-754-3100

At this tiny, trendy place, you won't find a menu dominated by the kinds of makis offered by most Miami sushi houses: Americanized, cream-cheese-stuffed, tempura-flake-covered. Instead numerous sushi rolls are filled with Japanese ingredients: the gobo shiso (Japanese mountain burdock root and shiso leaf); the shitake maki (sweet soy-simmered shitake mushroom). And many others are uniquely imaginative, like the Key West (key lime-marinated salmon, chives, cilantro pesto, and pear). There are equally unusual soups, salads, and starters, too. But if nothing appeals, the chef enjoys a challenge. Tell him, as Diaghilev instructed Sartre, to astonish you. \$\$-\$\$\$

Uva 69

6900 Biscayne Blvd.

305-754-9022

Owned by Sinuhé and Michael Vega of the bakery Cane á Sucre – now defunct but one of the Biscayne Corridor's first cool, contemporary cafés in the Midtown area – this outdoor/indoor wine bar serves the same purpose on the Upper Eastside, helping to transform a ragged portion of the Boulevard into a hip place to hang out. As for the food served, there are Cane's fresh-baked breakfast pastries, as well as more substantial lunch and dinner fare: a

salad of tempura-battered rock shrimp atop chayote slaw, elegant sandwiches like the Franco-Cuban Le Habanero (pulled pork, imported French ham, pepper jack, cornichons, and Dijon mustard on a housemade baguette), and a nighttime tapas menu. \$\$-\$\$\$

Ver-Daddys Taco Shop
7501 Biscayne Blvd.
Miami
305-303-9755

At this soulful new taco shop, the menu descriptions are in common English (“cinnamon puffs” drizzled with honey and lime, not “buñuelos”). But taco fillings range from the commonplace (ground beef, shredded chicken) to more unusual pork in chili verde, fried potato, or Baja battered fish (authentically garnished with Mexican crema and cilantro-spiked cabbage). And all offerings can be loaded with other garnishes from the kitchen (refried beans, cheese, crema) or less perishable offerings from a salsa bar. For the health-minded, oils are nonhydrogenated, and sauces/seasonings are all housemade and free of preservatives. \$

NORTH BAY VILLAGE
Barchetta on the Bay
1601 79th St. Causeway
305-861-2228

Location, location, location. The truth of the old real estate cliché could not be better illustrated than at this reasonably priced Italian restaurant. While pastas like lobster ravioli in tomato/cream vodka sauce are under \$20, and no meat or seafood entrée exceeds \$30, the spectacular setting on Biscayne Bay is priceless. Floor to ceiling picture windows serve as the expansive indoor dining space’s rear wall, but the primo seats are outdoors, in sheltered banquettes and patio tables where the water view, and carefree tropical party feel, is unimpeded. \$\$-\$\$\$

Japanese Market and Sushi Deli
1412 79th St. Causeway
305-861-0143

Inside a small market that is, nevertheless, widely considered Miami’s premier source of Japanese foodstuffs, the “Sushi Deli” restaurant component is nothing more than a lunch counter to the left of the entrance. But chef Michio Kushi, who worked for years at the Sushin, Miami’s first full-service Japanese restaurant, serves up some sushi found nowhere else in

town. Example: traditional Osaka-style sushi – layers of rice, seasoned seaweed, more rice, and marinated fresh mackerel, pressed into a square box, then cut into lovely one-bite sandwich squares. While raw fish is always impeccable here, some unusual vegetarian sushi creations also tempt, as do daily entrées, like curried beef stew, that typify Japanese home cooking. \$

Oggi Caffè

1666 79th St. Causeway

305-866-1238

www.oggicaffe.com

This cozy, romantic spot started back in 1989 as a pasta factory (supplying numerous high-profile restaurants) as well as a neighborhood eatery. And the wide range of budget-friendly, homemade pastas, made daily, remains the main draw for its large and loyal clientele. Choices range from homey, meaty lasagna to luxuriant crab ravioli with creamy lobster sauce, with occasional forays into creative exotica such as seaweed spaghetti (with sea scallops, shitakes, and fresh tomatoes). For those tempted by too much, ultra-accommodating servers have been known to allow half orders of two pastas. \$\$-\$\$\$

Shuckers Bar & Grill

1819 79th St. Causeway

305-866-1570

“Cheap eats and a million-dollar view” is the sound bite manager Philip Conklin uses to describe this outdoor beach bar, hidden in back of a bayfront motel. The joint dates from South Beach’s late 1980s revival, but the kick-off-your-shoes vibe – not to mention the pool tables and jukebox – couldn’t be farther from SoBe glitz. The food ranges from classic bar favorites (char-grilled wings, conch fritters, raw or steamed shellfish) to full dinners featuring steak, homemade pasta, or fresh, not frozen, fish. And since about half of the establishment is sheltered, the bites and bay view rock even when the weather sucks. \$-\$\$

Sushi Siam

1524 NE 79th St. Causeway

305-864-7638

(See Miami listing)

MIAMI SHORES

Village Café
9540 NE 2nd Ave.
Miami Shores
305-757-6453

www.villagecaferestaurant.com

There's an official Village Hall a few blocks up the road, but a popular vote would probably proclaim Village Café the community center of Miami Shores. Few residents can resist starting the workday with unique breakfast treats like a pressed panini of ham, Brie, and caramelized apples. Later locals gather over a balsamic-dressed cranberry blue chicken salad (a grilled breast on romaine with gorgonzola, walnuts, and dried cranberries), pan-fried blue crab cakes with beurre blanc and crisp cayenne-fried onions, wonton-topped salmon Oriental, or homemade pasta. As for dessert, the pastry case speaks for village residents: Let them eat (fresh-baked) cake! \$-\$\$

NORTH MIAMI

Los Antojos
11099 Biscayne Blvd.
305-892-1411 - OK

If it's Sunday, it must be sancocho de gallina, Colombia's national dish. If it's Saturday, it must be ajiaco. Both are thick chicken soups, full meals in a bowl. But veggies and garnishes vary, and this modest Colombian eatery is a handy spot to comparison-test such typical stews. Adventuresome eaters may want to try another Saturday special, mondongo (tripe soup, similar to Mexico's menudo). For Colombian-cuisine novices, a Bandeja Paisa (sampler including rice, beans, carne asada, chicharron, eggs, sautéed sweet plantains, and an arepa corn cake) is available every day, as are antojitos – “little whims,” smaller snacks like chorizo con arepa (a corn cake with Colombian sausage). And for noncarnivores there are several hefty seafood platters, made to order. \$\$

Bagels & Co.
11064 Biscayne Blvd.
305-892-2435

While this place is often referred to as Guns & Bagels, one can't actually buy a gun here. The nickname refers to its location next to a firearms shop. But there's a lot of other stuff aside from bagels here, including a full range of sandwiches and wraps. Breakfast time is busy time, with banana-walnut pancakes especially popular. But what's most important is that this is one of

the area's few sources of the real, New York-style water bagel: crunchy outside, challengingly chewy inside. Those puffy half-donuts most places pass off as bagels aren't even contenders. \$

Bamboche

13408 Biscayne Blvd.

305-947-6339 - OK

Buried in a strip mall perpendicular to the Boulevard, Bamboche is worth the hunt on one of those head-splitting Saturdays, for a Haitian specialty not found in many area restaurants: bouillon tet cabrit, a soup packed with greens (like spinach, cabbage, cress, string beans) and root veggies that is reputed to be a miraculous hangover remedy. Along with bouillon, weekend specials include more unusual dishes like fritay, fried street snacks. Haitian standards (griot, tassot) are available daily, as are fresh-squeezed juices, lattes, and almost two dozen desserts. \$

Canton Café

12749 Biscayne Blvd.

305-892-2882 – OK

Easily overlooked, this strip-mall spot serves mostly Cantonese-based dishes, ranging from all the old Chinese-American classics (chop suey, moo goo gai pan, pu pu platters) through newer Americanized fusion favorites like honey garlic chicken, teriyaki beef, and crab Rangoon. But there are also about two dozen spicier, Szechuan-style standards like kung po shrimp, ma po tofu, and General Tso's chicken. And there are a few imaginative new items, like the intriguingly christened "Shrimp Lost in the Forest," Singapore curried rice noodles, crispy shrimp with honey-glazed walnuts, and Mongolian beef (with raw chilis and fresh Oriental basil). Delivery is available for both lunch and dinner. \$\$

Captain Jim's Seafood

12950 W. Dixie Hwy.

305-892-2812

This market/restaurant was garnering critical acclaim even when eat-in dining was confined to a few Formica tables in front of the fish counter, owing to the freshness of its seafood (much of it from Capt. Jim Hanson's own fishing boats, which supply many of Miami's most upscale eateries). Now there's a casual but pleasantly nautical side dining room with booths, and more recently added, a sushi bar stocked largely with flown-in Japanese fish just as pristine as the local catch. Whether it's garlicky scampi (made

with sweet Key West shrimp), housemade smoked fish dip, grilled yellowtail (or some more exotic local snapper, like hog or mutton), perfectly tenderized cracked conch, or conch fritters (with just enough batter to bind the big chunks of Bahamian shellfish), everything is deftly prepared and bargain-priced. \$\$

Ceviche House

RESTAURANT NAME IS ACHA MAMA PERUVIAN RESTAURANT –
CEVICHE HOUSE IS NOT IN OPERATION ANY MORE

13448 Biscayne Blvd.

305-947-0304

Not surprisingly a full assortment of fish and shellfish ceviches is available here, including a few types not found in every Peruvian eatery, like ceviche al Callao (in the style of Peru's largest port, Callao, renowned for its raw-fish dishes). And the rest of the menu reads like a list of traditional Peruvian greatest hits: papa or yucca a la huancaína (potato or yucca in rich cheese sauce), jalea mixta (a huge mound of fried fish and shellfish with onions, peppers, and lime), Afro-Peruvian tacu tacu (a fried tamale of mashed canary beans and rice, spiced with aji Amarillo peppers), cau cau (an Incan tripe and potato stew), Chinese immigrant-inspired lomo saltado, and much more. \$\$

Chéen-huyae

15400 Biscayne Blvd.

305-956-2808

Diners can get some of the usual Tex-Mex dishes at this cute spot, if they must. But the specialty is Mayan-rooted Yucatan cuisine. So why blow bucks on burritos when one can sample Caribbean Mexico's most typical dish: cochinita pibil? It's currently LA's trendiest taco filling (and morning-after hangover remedy). But that city couldn't have a more authentically succulent version of the pickle-onion-topped marinated pork dish than Chéen's – earthily aromatic from achiote, tangy from bitter oranges, meltingly tender from slow cooking in a banana leaf wrap. To accompany, try a lime/soy/chili-spiced michelada, also authentically Mexican, and possibly the best thing that ever happened to dark beer. \$\$-\$\$\$

Chef Creole

13105 W. Dixie Hwy.

305-893-4246

(See Miami listing)

D.J.'s Diner

12210 Biscayne Blvd.

305-893-5250 - OK

Located in a Best Western motel, this place, run by a Chinese-American family, serves mostly basic American diner fare – burgers, sandwiches, about a dozen dinner entrées, fresh-baked apple pie, and, oddly, a whole section of Caesar salad variations. But it's also a secret source for Chinese food, mostly chow mien/chop suey-type dishes, but also a few dishes such as eggplant with garlic sauce and ma po tofu that are a step up in authenticity.

\$-\$\$

Hanna's Gourmet Diner

13951 Biscayne Blvd.

305-947-2255

When Sia and Nicole Hemmati bought the Gourmet Diner from retiring original owner Jean-Pierre Lejeune in the late 1990s, they added "Hanna's" to the name, but changed little else about this retro-looking French/American diner, a north Miami-Dade institution since 1983. Customers can get a cheeseburger or garlicky escargots, meatloaf in tomato sauce or boeuf bourguignon in red wine sauce, iceberg lettuce and tomatoes, or a mushroom and squid salad with garlic dressing. For oysters Rockefeller/tuna-melt couples from Venus and Mars, it remains the ideal dinner date destination.

\$\$-\$\$\$

Le Griot de Madame John

975 NE 125th St.

305-892-9333 - OK

When Madame moved her base of operations from her Little Haiti home to a real restaurant (though a very informal one, and still mostly take-out), she began offering numerous traditional Haitian dishes, including jerked beef or goat tassot and an impressive poisson gros sel (a whole fish rubbed with salt before poaching with various veggies and spices). But the dish that still packs the place is the griot: marinated pork chunks simmered and then fried till they're moistly tender inside, crisp and intensely flavored outside. \$

Here Comes the Sun

2188 NE 123rd St.

305-893-5711

At this friendly natural foods establishment, one of Miami's first, there's a full stock of vitamins and nutritional supplements. But the place's hearty soups, large variety of entrées (including fresh fish and chicken as well as vegetarian selections), lighter bites like miso burgers with secret "sun sauce" (which would probably make old sneakers taste good), and daily specials are a tastier way to get healthy. An under-ten-buck early-bird dinner is popular with the former long-hair, now blue-hair, crowd. Frozen yogurt, fresh juices, and smoothies complete the menu. \$-\$\$

Ichi

13488 Biscayne Blvd.

305-944-9334

Half sushi/sashimi, half cooked Japanese dishes, the menu is relatively small but covers most of the traditional favorites and a few surprises. Popular makis include the Dream (shrimp tempura, avocado, Japanese mayo, and masago), the vegetarian Popeye spicy spinach roll, and the deep-fried Crispy, a riceless salmon and veggie roll. Among cooked items, there's a large list of teriyakis, and a few dishes prepared with a different twist – panko-breaded pork or chicken katsu cutlets, for instance, that eschew the standard sweet sauce for curry. \$\$

Jerusalem Market and Deli

16275 Biscayne Blvd.

305-948-9080

Specialties like shawarma, spinach pies, kebabs, hummus, and kibbeh (a savory mix of ground lamb and bulgur, arguably the world's most interesting meatball) are native to many Middle East countries, but when a Lebanese chef/owner, like this eatery's Sam Elzoor, is at the helm, you can expect extraordinary refinement. There are elaborate daily specials here, like lemon chicken or stuffed cabbage with a variety of sides, but even a common falafel sandwich is special when the pita is also stuffed with housemade cabbage and onion salads, plus unusually rich and tart tahina. For home cooks, there's also a limited selection of imported spices and staples. \$-\$\$

Kingston Bar & Grill

12108 Biscayne Blvd.

305-899-0074 – OK

Making a quick run for photocopy toner can lead to a pleasant surprise if your destination is the Office Depot next door to this humble eatery. The

storefront looks more like a derelict Laundromat than a source for authentic Jamaican fare (plus a few Haitian specialties). But the changing \$3.99 lunch specials, and even cheaper Tuesday and Thursday chicken special (curry, brown jerk, fried, or stew chicken for an unbelievable \$2.50), can't be beat on the Boulevard. Breakfast, served 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., includes specialties like ackee and salt fish, callaloo, and fried or boiled dumplings. On Fridays look for goat-head soup. \$

Lime Fresh Mexican Grill

14831 Biscayne Blvd.

305-949-8800

Like its South Beach predecessor, this Lime was an instant hit, as much for being a hip hangout as for its carefully crafted Tex-Mex food. Though Lime is now franchising, the chain's concept is "fast casual" rather than fast food – meaning nice enough for a night out. It also means ingredients aren't canned-type crapola. Seafood tacos are about as exotic as the standard menu gets, but the mahi mahi for fish tacos comes fresh, never frozen, from a local supplier, and salsas are housemade daily. Niceties include low-carb tortillas for dieters and many Mexican beers for partiers. \$

Little Havana

12727 Biscayne Blvd.

305-899-9069

www.littlehavanarestaurant.com

In addition to white-tablecloth ambiance that's several steps up in elegance from the majority of neighborhood eateries, this place features live Latin entertainment and dancing, making it a good choice when diners want a night out, not just a meal. It's also a good choice for diners who don't speak Spanish, but don't worry about authenticity. Classic Cuban home-style dishes like mojo-marinated lechon asado, topped with onions, and juicy ropa vieja are translated on the menu, not the plate, and fancier creations like pork filet in tangy tamarind sauce seem universal crowd-pleasers. \$\$\$

Louie's Brick Oven

15979 Biscayne Blvd.

305-948-3330

www.louiesbrickoven.com

A pocket flashlight isn't a bad idea if you want to read the menu in this mood-lit room. But who needs to read it? There's a coal-fired brick oven, so order pizza, which comes out of the ultra-hot enclosure with a perfect crust –

beautifully blistered, crisp outside, chewy inside. Appealing toppings include the Calabrese (Italian sausage, caramelized onions, kalamata olives, mozzarella, tomato sauce) and a more modern mix of mozzarella, tomato sauce, onion, thin-sliced prosciutto, and arugula drizzled with olive oil. For those craving more crunch than the latter pie's arugula salad, there are flavorful veggies from a hardwood-fired grill. Wings from the brick oven (spiced with roasted garlic and Italian herbs, topped with grilled onions) are a smokin' starter. \$\$-\$\$\$

Mama Jennie's
11720 NE 2nd Ave.
305-757-3627

For more than 35 years this beloved red-sauce joint has been drawing students and other starvation-budget diners with prodigious portions of lasagna, spaghetti and meatballs (the latter savory yet light-textured), veal marsala topped with a mountain of mushrooms, and other Italian-American belly-busters. All pasta or meat entrées come with oil-drenched garlic rolls and either soup (hearty minestrone) or a salad (mixed greens, tomatoes, cukes, brined olives, and pickled peppers) that's a dinner in itself. Rustic roadhouse ambiance, notably the red leatherette booths, add to Mama's charm. \$-\$\$

Mario the Baker
13695 W. Dixie Hwy.
305-891-7641
www.mariothebakerpizza.com

At this North Miami institution (opened in 1969) food is Italian-American, not Italian-Italian: spaghetti and meatballs, lasagna, eggplant parmigiana, and hot or cold subs. No imported buffalo, arugula, or other chichi stuff on the New York-style medium-thin-crust pizzas; the top topping here is the savory housemade sausage. And no one leaves without garlic rolls, awash in warm parsley oil and smashed garlic (\$4 a dozen, \$3 per half-dozen, which won't even last the ride home). A new branch is now open in Miami's Midtown neighborhood. \$

The Melting Pot
15700 Biscayne Blvd.
305-947-2228
www.meltingpot.com

For 1950s and 1960s college students, fondue pots were standard dorm accessories. These days, however, branches of this chain (originating in Maitland, Florida, in 1975) are generally the only places to go for this blast-from-the-past eating experience. Fondues are available à la carte or as full dip-it-yourself meals. Start with a wine-enriched four-cheese fondue; proceed to an entrée with choice of meat or seafood, plus choice of cooking potion – herbed wine, bouillon, or oil; finish with fruits and cakes dipped in your favorite melted chocolate. Fondue etiquette dictates that diners who drop a skewer in the pot must kiss all other table companions, so go with those you love. \$\$\$

Michele Caffè

16121 Biscayne Blvd.

305-948-0224

www.michelecaffè.com

Inspired by Europe's classic cafés, which are so relaxed they're practically second homes, rather than places to eat and run, this café is also a bakery, gelateria, gourmet mini-grocery, informal gallery of local artwork, occasional live jazz club, and at night a full Italian restaurant. Since the Venezuelan-born chef/owner trained and worked in Italy as a pastry chef, it's not surprising that the place's strong suit is baked goods, such as the elegant pastry shells encasing Milan Scrambled Eggs (with ham, cheese, and spinach); ultra-thin-crust designer pizzas; the crisp crostini accompanying a sweet miso-dressed ahi tuna salad; or a tart of crisp apple slices atop a slightly nutty cheesecake-style filling, enclosed by tender crust. \$-\$\$\$

North One 10

11052 Biscayne Blvd.

305-893-4211

www.northone10.com

For most chefs a Miami-to-Manhattan move is generally considered one of those offers you can't refuse. But after helming several NYC restaurants for China Grill Management, the homegrown married team of chef Dewey and sommelier Dale LoSasso returned to do their own thing in their own neighborhood. The menu is "creative comfort food": a shrimp waffle with basil butter; "steak and eggs" (a grilled NY strip with truffled goat cheese frittata, herb demiglace, and hash browns); a stone crab hot dog the chef invented for a Super Bowl party. The award-winning wine list inspires playfully themed pairing events like an Italian food/wine "Godfather"

dinner. But it's not South Beach, so prices are reasonable, and parking is free. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Nuvo Kafe

13152 W. Dixie Hwy.

305-892-1441

Though the neighborhood is decidedly ungentrified, the interior of this café is an oasis of cultivated Caribbean cool and subtly sophisticated global fare. Haitian-born, Montreal-schooled chef Ivan Dorval formerly cooked at the Oasis Café in Miami Beach, as well as the Delano, and the varied background is reflected in cuisine that's chiefly creative Caribbean but with influences from the Middle East, Asia, Greece, and Italy. Homemade, health-oriented dishes include velvety ginger pumpkin bisque, unusually refined conch fritters (light batter, monster chunks of conch), West Indies crab cakes with citrus aioli, and a signature lavish, but only slightly sinful, Citadel Raw Fruit Pie. \$\$-\$\$\$

Oishi Thai

14841 Biscayne Blvd.

305-947-4338

www.oishithai.com – OK

At this stylish, dramatically minimalist Thai/sushi spot, the regular Thai and Japanese dishes are as good as anywhere in town. But the way to go is the menu of specials, many of which clearly reflect the young chef's fanatic devotion to fresh fish, as well as the time he spent in the kitchen of Knob: broiled miso-marinated black cod; rock shrimp tempura with creamy sauce; even Nobu Matsuhisa's "new style sashimi" (slightly surface-seared by drizzles of hot olive and sesame oil). Formerly all Japanese-influenced, the specials menu now includes some Thai-inspired creations, too, such as veal massaman curry, Chilean sea bass curry, and sizzling filet mignon with basil sauce. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

La Paloma

10999 Biscayne Blvd.

305-891-0505

Step into La Paloma and you'll be stepping back in time, circa 1957. Adorned with antiques (some even real) and chandeliers, the over-the-top plush décor was the American fine-dining ideal – half a century ago (though actually the place only dates from the 1970s). Cuisine is similarly retro-luxe: old-fashioned upscale steaks, chops, and lobster, plus fancier Continental

fare. If you have a yen for chateaubriand, duck à l'orange, oysters Rockefeller, French onion soup, trout almondine, wiener schnitzel, and peach Melba, it's the only place in town that can deliver them all. A huge wine list fuels the fantasy. \$\$\$\$

Paquito's
16265 Biscayne Blvd.
305-947-5027

From the outside, this strip-mall Mexican eatery couldn't be easier to overlook. Inside, however, its festivity is impossible to resist. Every inch of wall space seems to be covered with South of the Border knickknacks. And if the kitschy décor alone doesn't cheer you, the quickly arriving basket of fresh (not packaged) taco chips, or the mariachi band, or the knockout margaritas will. Food ranges from Tex-Mex burritos and a party-size fajita platter to authentic Mexican moles and harder-to-find traditional preparations like albóndigas – spicy, ultra-savory meatballs. \$\$-\$\$\$

Pasha's
14871 Biscayne Blvd.
786-923-2323
www.pashas.com
(See Miami: Brickell / Downtown listing)

Paul Bakery Café
14861 Biscayne Blvd.
305-940-4443
www.paulusa.com

From one rural shop in 1889, the French bakery known simply as Paul has grown to a worldwide chain, which fortunately chose to open its first U.S. outlet in our town. One bite of the crusty peasant loaf, the olive-studded fougasse, or another of the signature artisan breads transports you right back to France. As authentic as the boulangerie breads are, the patisserie items like flan normande (a buttery-cruste, almond-topped apple-and-custard tart) are just as evocative. For eat-in diners, quite continental soups, salads, and sandwiches are equally and dependably French. \$\$

Plein Sud
12409 Biscayne Blvd.
305-891-2355 –MACHINE ANSWERED WITH RESTAURANT INFO

The Boulevard may not be the Champs-Élysées, but diners could be fooled once inside this evocative French bistro. The ambiance is Old World, and the menu is solid and well executed. Starters range from country comfort (Lyonnais sausage with warm, vinegary potato salad; a charcuterie platter with homemade pâté) to urban sophistication (Maine lobster tail with celery remoulade). Entrées include long-stewed, creamy blanquette de veau, or a precision-cooked steak-frites (rib eye with crisp shoestring fries). For dessert there is the ubiquitous tarte tatin, caramelized apples atop puff-pastry crust. \$\$-\$\$\$

Sara's

2214 NE 123rd St.

305-891-3312

www.saraskosherpizza.com – NO ANSWER BUT PRETTY SURE

THEY'RE OPEN

While this mainly vegetarian kosher place is best known for its pizza (New York-style medium crust or thick-crust Sicilian, topped with veggies and/or “meat buster” imitation meats), it's also offers a full range of breakfast/lunch/dinner vegetarian cuisine of all nations, with many dairy and seafood items too. Admittedly the cutesie names of many items – baygels, bergerrbite, Cezarrrr salad, hammm, meat-a-ball, schmopperrr – may cause queasiness. But the schmopperrr itself is one helluva high-octane veggie burger. \$-\$\$

Scorch Grillhouse and Wine Bar

13750 Biscayne Blvd.

305-949-5588

www.scorchgrillhouse.com

Though some food folks were initially exasperated when yet another Latin-influenced grill replaced one of our area's few Vietnamese restaurants, it's hard to bear a grudge at a friendly, casual neighborhood place that offers monster ten-ounce char-grilled burgers, with potatoes or salad, for \$8.50; steaks, plus a side and a sauce or veg topper, for nine bucks at lunch, \$15 to \$18.75 (the menu's top price) at night; and three-dollar glasses of decent house wine. Many other grilled meat and seafood items are also offered, plus pastas, salads, gooey desserts, and specials (events as well as food). \$-\$\$

Steve's Pizza

12101 Biscayne Blvd.

305-891-0202

At the end of a debauched night of excess, some paper-thin designer pizza with wisps of smoked salmon (or similar fluff) doesn't do the trick. Open till 3:00 or 4:00 a.m., Steve's has, since 1974, been serving the kind of comforting, retro pizzas people crave at that hour. As in Brooklyn, tomato sauce is sweet, with strong oregano flavor. Mozzarella is applied with abandon. Toppings are stuff that give strength: pepperoni, sausage, meatballs, onions, and peppers. \$

Sun City Café

15400 Biscayne Blvd.

305-940-6955 – OK

Super-stuffed crêpes, made to order from scratch, are the main specialty here – some sweet (the Banana Split: fresh strawberries, sliced bananas, candied walnuts, ice cream, and Nutella or dulce de leche), some savory (the Sun City Steak: beef, mushrooms, onions, red peppers, Swiss cheese, and A1 sauce). But there's also a smaller selection of custom-crafted wraps, salads, sandwiches, and sides, plus smoothies, coffee drinks, even beer or wine. Free Wi-Fi encourages long, lingering lunches. \$

Sushi House

15911 Biscayne Blvd.

305-947-6002 – ANSWERING MACHINE WITH RESTAURANT INFO

In terms of décor drama, this sushi spot seems to have taken its cue from Philippe Starck: Delano-like sheer floor-to-ceiling drapes, for starters. The sushi list, too, is over the top, featuring monster makis: the Cubbie Comfort (spicy tuna, soft-shell crab, shrimp and eel tempura, plus avocado, jalapeños, and cilantro, topped with not one but three sauces: wasabi, teriyaki, and spicy mayo); the Volcano, topped with a mountain of tempura flakes; the spicy/sweet sauce-drenched Hawaiian King Crab, containing unprecedented ingredients like tomatoes, green peppers, and pineapple. To drink there are boutique wines, artisan sakes, and cocktails as exotic as the cuisine. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Tokyo Bowl

12295 Biscayne Blvd.

305-892-9400

This fast-food drive-thru (unexpectedly serene inside) is named for its feature item, big budget-priced bowls of rice or noodles topped with cooked Japanese-style items like teriyaki fish (fresh fish sautéed with vegetables), curried chicken and veggies, spicy shrimp, or gyoza dumplings in tangy

sauce. There's also an all-you-can-eat deal – sushi (individual nigiri or maki rolls) plus tempura, teriyaki, and other cooked items for \$14; three bucks more for sashimi instead of sushi. \$-\$\$

Venezia Pizza and Café

13452 Biscayne Blvd.

305-940-1808 – OK

No frozen pizza crusts or watery mozzarella here. No imported designer ingredients either. The pies are New York-style, but the dough is made fresh daily, and the cheese is Grande (from Wisconsin, considered America's finest pizza topper). Also on the menu are Italian-American pastas, a large selection of hot and cold subs, simple salads, and a few new protein adds – grilled chicken breast, fried fish, or a steak. \$-\$\$

Wong's Chinese Restaurant

12420 Biscayne Blvd.

305-891-4313 - OK

This old-timer's menu reads like a textbook on how to please everyone, with food ranging from traditional Chinese to Chinese-American to just plain American. Appetizers include honey garlic chicken wings or Buffalo wings. A crab-claw starter comes with choice of pork fried rice or French fries. Seafood lovers can get shrimp chop suey, or salty pepper shrimp (authentically shell-on). And snowbirds will be pleased to find a number of dishes that are mainstays of Manhattan Szechuan menus but not common in Miami: cold sesame noodles, Hunan chicken, twice-cooked pork, Lake Tung Ting shrimp, and peppery kung po squid. \$\$

Woody's Famous Steak Sandwich

13105 Biscayne Blvd.

305-891-1451

The griddle has been fired up since 1954 at this indie fast-food joint, and new owners have done little to change the time-tested formula except to stretch operating hours into the night and expand its classic griddled-or-fried-things menu to include a few health-conscious touches like Caesar salad, plus a note proclaiming their oils are free of trans fats. Otherwise the famous steak sandwich is still a traditional Philly – thin-sliced beef, cheese, and onions on a buttered Italian roll (with tasty housemade sour cream/horseradish sauce served on the side so as not to offend purists). Extras like mushrooms are possible, not imposed. Drippin' good burgers,

too. And unlike MacChain addicts, patrons here can order a cold beer with the good grease. \$-\$\$

Zipang

14316 Biscayne Blvd.

305-919-8844 – OK

It's appropriate that the name of this small strip-mall sushi spot refers to Japan's first and only sparkling sake – something most Americans have never heard of, making the reference pretty much an insider's joke. Since opening several years ago, the restaurant itself has been one of our town's best-kept secrets. But the perfectionist chef/owner's concentration on quality and freshness of ingredients has made Zipang the pick of sushi cognoscenti like Loews's executive chef Marc Ehrler, who has named the unpretentious place his favorite Miami eatery, while admitting the obvious: "Nobody knows it." \$\$-\$\$\$

NORTH MIAMI BEACH

Bamboo Garden

1232 NE 163rd St.

305-945-1722

Big enough for a banquet (up to 300 guests), this veteran is many diners' favorite on the 163rd/167th Street "Chinatown" strip because of its superior décor. But the menu also offers well-prepared, authentic dishes like peppery black bean clams, sautéed mustard greens, and steamed whole fish with ginger and scallions, plus Chinese-American egg foo young. Default spicing is mild even in Szechuan dishes marked with red-chili icons, but don't worry; realizing some like it hot, the chefs will customize spiciness to heroic heat levels upon request. \$\$

China Restaurant

178 NE 167th St.

305-947-6549 – OK

When you have a yen for the Americanized Chinese fusion dishes you grew up with, all the purist regional Chinese cuisine in the world won't scratch the itch. So the menu here, containing every authentically inauthentic Chinese-American classic you could name, is just the ticket when nostalgia strikes – from simple egg rolls to pressed almond duck (majorly breaded boneless chunks, with comfortingly thick gravy). \$-\$\$

Christine's Roti Shop

16721 NE 6th Ave.
305-770-0434

Wraps are for wimps. At this small shop run by Christine Gouvela, originally from British Guyana, the wrapper is a far more substantial and tasty roti, a Caribbean mega-crepe made from chickpea flour. Most popular filling for the flatbread is probably jerk chicken, bone-in pieces in a spiced stew of potatoes, cabbage, carrots, onions, and more chickpeas. But there are about a dozen other curries to choose from, including beef, goat, conch, shrimp, trout, and duck. Take-out packages of plain roti are also available; they transform myriad leftovers into tasty, portable lunches. \$

Hiro Japanese Restaurant
3007 NE 163rd St.
305-948-3687

One of Miami's first sushi restaurants, Hiro retains an amusing retro-glam feel, an extensive menu of both sushi and cooked Japanese food, and late hours that make it a perennially popular snack stop after a hard night at the area's movie multiplexes (or strip clubs). The sushi menu has few surprises, but quality is reliable. Most exceptional are the nicely priced yakitori, skewers of succulently soy-glazed and grilled meat, fish, and vegetables; the unusually large variety available of the last makes this place a good choice for vegetarians. \$\$

Hiro's Sushi Express
17048 W. Dixie Hwy.
305-949-0776

Tiny, true, but there's more than just sushi at this mostly take-out spin-off of the pioneering Hiro. Makis are the mainstay (standard stuff like California rolls, more complex creations like multi-veg futomaki, and a few unexpected treats like a spicy Crunch & Caliente maki), available à la carte or in value-priced individual and party combo platters. But there are also bento boxes featuring tempura, yakitori skewers, teriyaki, stir-fried veggies, and udon noodles. Another branch is now open in Miami's Upper Eastside. \$

Hiro's Yakko-San
17040 W. Dixie Hwy.
305-947-0064

After sushi chefs close up their own restaurants for the night, many come here for a bite of something different. The specialty is Japanese home cooking, served in grazing portions so diners can enjoy a wide variety of the

unusual dishes offered. Standard sushi isn't missed when glistening-fresh strips of raw tuna can be had in maguro neta – mixed with scallions and dressed with habit-forming honey-miso mustard sauce. Dishes depend on the market, but other favorites include goma ae (wilted spinach, chilled and dressed in sesame sauce), garlic stem and beef (mild young shoots flash-fried with tender steak bits), or perhaps just-caught grouper with hot/sweet/tangy chili sauce. Open till around 3:00 a.m. \$\$

Heelsha

1550 NE 164th St.

305-919-8393

www.heelsha.com - OK

If unusual Bangladeshi dishes like fiery pumpkin patey (cooked with onion, green pepper, and pickled mango) or Heelsha curry (succulently spiced hilsa, Bangladesh's sweet-fleshed national fish) seem familiar, it's because chef/owner Bithi Begum and her husband Tipu Raman once served such fare at the critically acclaimed Renaisa. Their new menu's mix-and-match option also allows diners to pair their choice of meat, poultry, fish, or vegetable with more than a dozen regional sauces, from familiar Indian styles to exotica like satkara, flavored with a Bangladeshi citrus reminiscent of sour orange. Early-bird dinners (5:00 to 6:30 p.m.) are a bargain, as some dishes are almost half-price. Lunch is served weekends only except by reservation, so call ahead. \$\$-\$\$\$

Jumbo Chinese Restaurant

1242 NE 163rd St.

305-956-5677

Jumbo's regular menu offers a large percentage of hard-to-find traditional Chinese home-cooking specialties (many using fresh and preserved Asian vegetables): pork with bitter melon, beef with sour cabbage, chicken with mustard green, cellophane noodle with mixed-vegetable casserole. Still, most diners come for dim sum, a huge selection served at all hours. These small plates include chewy rice noodle rolls filled with shrimp or beef, leek dumplings, crisp-fried stuffed taro balls, savory pork-studded turnip cake, pork/peanut congee, custard croissants, and for the brave, steamed chicken feet. \$\$

Kola Nut Café

250 NE 183rd St.

305-249-3097 – MACHINE ANSWERED WITH RESTAURANT INFO

www.kolanutcafe.com

The fare is creative Caribbean, mainly Jamaican, but served in a setting more upscale than the average jerk joint – more like a casual island nightclub. Live jazz, comedy, or poetry readings enhance the hip ambiance on some nights. At all times there's food ranging from classic jerks (chicken, beef, or shrimp) to fancier dishes like curried crab cakes served on avocado/pineapple/pico de gallo salad, or calabaza soup topped with nutmeg cream and toasted pepitas. Sides include pickled star fruit and bammy fries (grated yucca/coconut milk). A children's menu encourages young ethnic gourmets, but best keep them out of the rum-drenched Jamaican black cake. \$\$-\$\$\$

Kyung Ju

400 NE 167th St.

305-947-3838 – OK

Star of the show at this long-lived Korean restaurant (one of only a handful in Miami-Dade County) is bulgogi. The name translates as “fire meat,” but isn't a reference to Koreans' love of hot chilis. Rather it refers to Korean-style barbecue, which is really not barbecued but quickly grilled after long marination in a mix of soy sauce, sesame, sugar, garlic, and more. Lovers of fiery food can customize with dipping sauces, or the eatery's many little banchan (included side dishes, some mild, others mouth-searing). Pa jun, a crispy egg/scallion-based pancake, is a crowd-pleasing starter. And if the unfamiliarity seems too scary altogether, there's a selection of Chinese food. \$\$-\$\$\$

Kebab Indian Restaurant

514 NE 167th St.

305-940-6309 - OK

Since the 1980s this restaurant, located in an unatmospheric mini strip mall but surprisingly romantic inside (especially if you grab one of the exotically draped booths) has been a popular destination for reasonably priced north Indian fare. Kormas are properly soothing and vindaloos are satisfactorily searing, but the kitchen will adjust seasonings upon request. They aim to please. Food arrives unusually fast for an Indian eatery, too. \$\$

King Buffet

316 NE 167th St.

305-940-8668 – OK

In this restaurant's parking lot, midday on Sundays, the colorful display of vivid pinks, greens, and blues worn by myriad families arriving for dinner in matching going-to-church outfits is equaled only by the eye-poppingly dyed shrimp chips and desserts displayed inside on the buffet table. Though there's an à la carte menu, the draw here is the 100-item (according to advertisements) all-you-can-eat spread of dishes that are mostly Chinese, with some American input. It's steam-table stuff, but the price is right and then some: \$6-\$7 for lunch, \$9-\$11 for dinner. \$-\$\$

King Palace

330 NE 167th St.

305-949-2339 – NO ANSWER

The specialties here are authentic Chinatown-style barbecue (whole ducks, roast pork strips, and more, displayed in a glass case by the door), and fresh seafood dishes, the best made with the live fish swimming in two tanks by the dining room entrance. There's also a better-than-average selection of seasonal Chinese veggies. The menu is extensive, but the best ordering strategy, since the place is usually packed with Asians, is to see what looks good on nearby tables, and point. Servers will also steer you to the good stuff, once you convince them you're not a chop suey kinda person. \$\$

Laurenzo's Market Café

16385 W. Dixie Hwy.

305-945-6381

www.laurenzosmarket.com

It's just a small area blocked off by grocery shelves, buried between the wines and the fridge counters – no potted palms, and next-to-no service in this cafeteria-style snack space. But when negotiating this international gourmet market's packed shelves and crowds has depleted your energies, it's a handy place to refuel with eggplant parmesan and similar Italian-American classics, steam-tabled but housemade from old family recipes. Just a few spoonfuls of Wednesday's hearty pasta fagiole, one of the daily soup specials, could keep a person shopping for hours. \$-\$\$

Little Saigon

16752 N. Miami Ave.

305-653-3377 – OK

This is Miami's oldest traditional Vietnamese restaurant, but it's still packed most weekend nights. So even the place's biggest negative – its hole-in-the-wall atmosphere, not encouraging of lingering visits – becomes a plus since

it ensures fast turnover. Chef/owner Lily Tao is typically in the kitchen, crafting green papaya salad, flavorful beef noodle pho (served with greens, herbs, and condiments that make it not just a soup but a whole ceremony), and many other Vietnamese classics. The menu is humongous. \$-\$\$

Mary Ann Bakery
1284 NE 163rd St.
305-945-0333 – ok

Don't be unduly alarmed by the American birthday cakes in the window. At this small Chinese bakery the real finds are the Chinatown-style baked buns and other savory pastries, filled with roast pork, bean sauce, and curried ground beef. Prices are under a buck, making them an exotic alternative to fast-food dollar meals. There's one table for eat-in snackers. \$

Matador Argentinean Steakhouse
3207 NE 163rd St.
305-944-6001 - OK

With Latin parilla places spreading here as fast as kudzu, it's hard to get excited about yet another all-you-can-eat meat spread. But Matador offers far more for the money than most. One dinner price (\$24.95, \$27.95 weekends) includes a salad bar of more than 30 items, unlimited grilled proteins (many cuts of beef, sausages, chicken, pork, assorted veggies, and even fish upon request), crunchy steak fries, a dessert (typically charged extra elsewhere), and even more fun, a bottle of quite quaffable wine per person. \$\$\$

Panya Thai
520 NE 167th St.
305-945-8566– OK

Unlike authentic Chinese cuisine, there's no shortage of genuine Thai food in and around Miami. But Panya's chef/owner, a Bangkok native, offers numerous regional and/or rare dishes not found elsewhere. Plus he doesn't automatically curtail the heat or sweetness levels to please Americans. Among the most intriguing: moo khem phad wan (chewy deep-fried seasoned pork strips with fiery tamarind dip, accompanied by crisp green papaya salad, a study in sour/sweet/savory balance); broad rice noodles stir-fried with eye-opening chili/garlic sauce and fresh Thai basil; and chili-topped Diamond Duck in tangy tamarind sauce. \$\$-\$\$\$

PK Oriental Mart

255 NE 167th St.
305-654-9646

While there are three other sizable Asian markets on this strip between I-95 and Biscayne Boulevard, PK has the only prepared-food counter, serving authentic Chinatown barbecue, with appropriate dipping sauces included. Weekends bring the biggest selection, including barbecued ribs and pa pei duck (roasted, then deep-fried till extra crisp and nearly free of subcutaneous fat). Available every day are juicy, soy-marinated roast chickens, roast pork strips, crispy pork, and whole roast ducks – hanging, as tradition dictates, beaks and all. But no worries; a counterperson will chop your purchase into bite-size, beakless pieces. \$

Sang's Chinese Restaurant

1925 NE 163rd St.
305-947-7076– OK

Open late (1:30 a.m. most nights) since 1990, Sang's has an owner who previously cooked in NYC's Chinatown, and three menus. The pink menu is Americanized Chinese food, from chop suey to honey garlic chicken. The white menu permits the chef to show off his authentic Chinese fare: salt and pepper prawns, rich beef/turnip casserole, tender salt-baked chicken, even esoterica like abalone with sea cucumber. The extensive third menu offers dim sum, served until 4:00 p.m. A limited live tank allows seasonal seafood dishes like lobster with ginger and scallion. More recently installed: a Chinese barbecue case, displaying savory items like crispy pork with crackling attached. \$\$\$

Siam Square
54 NE 167th St.
305-944-9697

Open until 1:00 a.m. every day except Sunday (when it closes at midnight), this relatively new addition to North Miami Beach's "Chinatown" strip has become a popular late-night gathering spot for chefs from other Asian restaurants. And why not? The food is fresh, nicely presented, and reasonably priced. The kitchen staff is willing to customize dishes upon request, and the serving staff is reliably fast. Perhaps most important, karaoke equipment is in place when the mood strikes. \$-\$\$

Tatay's
237 NE 167th St.
305-654-9494 - OK

Since food historians estimate that 80 percent of Philippine cuisine is rooted in Spain, it's strange that Miami has so few Filipino eateries. But the islands' typical long-cooked, highly-spiced (but not spicy) stews are authentically represented at this diminutive, mostly take-out restaurant/bakery/market. Specialties include piquant, vinegar-marinated chicken adobo, beef kare-kare in a subtle Thai-type thin peanut sauce, and crispy pata, tender pork hock chunks with garlicky mojo. The menu rotates regularly, so pick up one to track which entrées are available each day, in individual orders or on combo plates of two dishes plus rice or pancit (sautéed rice noodles and veggies). \$

Tuna's Garden Grille
17850 W. Dixie Hwy.
305-945-2567

When Tuna's moved in 2006 from the marina space it had occupied for almost two decades, it lost its waterfront location, its old-fashioned fish-house ambiance, and its outdoor deck. But it has gained a garden setting, and retained its menu of fresh (and sometimes locally caught) seafood – some fancified, some simple (the wiser choice). Also continuing are Tuna's signature seasonal specials, like a Maine lobster dinner for a bargain \$15. Open daily till 2:00 a.m., the place can sometimes feel like a singles bar during the two post-midnight happy hours, but since the kitchen is open till closing, it draws a serious late-night dining crowd, too. \$\$

AVENTURA
Bella Luna
19575 Biscayne Blvd. Aventura Mall
305-792-9330
www.bellalunaaventura.com

If the menu here looks familiar, it should. It's identical to that at the Upper Eastside's Luna Café and, with minor variations, at all the rest of Tom Billante's eateries (Rosalia, Villaggio, Carpaccio), right down to the typeface. But no argument from here. In a mall – a setting more accustomed to food court, steam-tabled stuff – dishes like carpaccio al salmone (crudo, with portobellos, capers, parmesan slices, and lemon/tomato dressing) and linguine carbonara (in creamy sauce with pancetta and shallots) are a breath of fresh, albeit familiar, air. \$\$-\$\$\$

Chef Allen's
19088 NE 29th Ave.

305-935-2900

www.chefallens.com

After 20 years of success in the same location, many chefs would coast on their backlog of tried-and-true dishes. And it's doubtful that kindly Allen Susser would freak out his many regulars by eliminating from the menu the Bahamian lobster and crab cakes (with tropical fruit chutney and vanilla beurre blanc). But lobster-lovers will find that the 20th anniversary menus also offer new excitements like tandoori-spiced rock lobster, along with what might be the ultimate mac'n'cheese: lobster crab macaroni in a Fris vodka sauce with mushrooms, scallions, and parmesan. The famous dessert soufflé's flavor changes daily, but it always did. \$\$\$\$\$

Fish Joint

2570 NE Miami Gardens Dr.

305-936-8333

Unless one's mind is already made up before getting here – and stuck on steak, pasta, or some other land-based dish – loyal repeat customers know to ignore the small printed menu and wait for the tableside presentation of about ten catches-of-the-day, arrayed on a tray. Servers identify each fish, explain how it's to be prepared, and take your order. Whether it's a simple sautéed fillet or a slightly more complex preparation like shrimp/crab-crusted grouper, the kitchen's veterans know precisely how to cook fish. All entrées come with suitable starch and green-type vegetable, plus various other complementary freebies, so starters, salads, and sides aren't necessary. \$\$\$

Il Migliore

2576 NE Miami Gardens Dr.

305-792-2902

Reminiscent of an intimate Tuscan villa, chef Neal Cooper's attractive trattoria gets the food right, as well as the ambiance. As in Italy, dishes rely on impeccable ingredients and straightforward recipes that don't overcomplicate, cover up, or otherwise muck about with that perfection. Fresh fettuccine with white truffle oil and mixed wild mushrooms needs nothing else. Neither does the signature Pollo Al Mattone, marinated in herbs and cooked under a brick, require pretentious fancification. And even low-carb dieters happily go to hell in a hand basket when faced with a mound of potatoes alla Toscana, fried herb-sprinkled French fries. Located west of Biscayne Boulevard in the Davis Plaza shopping mall, across from Ojus Elementary School. \$\$-\$\$\$

Pilar

20475 Biscayne Blvd.

305-937-2777

www.pillarrestaurant.com

Chef/owner Scott Fredel previously worked for Norman Van Aken and Mark Militello. He has been executive chef at Rumi, and cooked at NYC's James Beard House. Armed with those impressive credentials, Fredel and his partners launched Pilar (named for Hemingway's boat) aiming to prove that top restaurants can be affordable. Consider it now proven. Floribbean-style seafood is the specialty, dishes like fried Bahamian cracked conch with fresh hearts of palm slaw and Caribbean curry sauce, rock shrimp spring rolls with sweet soy glaze, and yellowtail snapper with tomato-herb vinaigrette and a potato/leek croqueta. Don't let the strip-mall location fool you. The restaurant itself is elegant. \$\$-\$\$\$

The Soup Man

20475 Biscayne Blvd. #G-8

305-466-9033 - OK

The real soup man behind this franchise is Al Yeganeh, an antisocial Manhattan restaurant proprietor made notorious, on a Seinfeld episode, as "the soup Nazi." On the menu: ten different premium soups each day (from a rotating list of about 50). The selection is carefully balanced among meat/poultry-based and vegetarian; clear and creamy (like the eatery's signature shellfish-packed lobster bisque); chilled and hot; familiar (chicken noodle) and exotic (mulligatawny). All soups come with gourmet bread, fruit, and imported chocolate. Also available are salads, sandwiches, and wraps, à la carte or in soup-plus combos. \$-\$\$

Sushi Siam

19575 Biscayne Blvd.

305-932-8955

(See Miami listing)