

WOW
\$7.95!

Pho ga
(chicken pho)
Pho 'n' Rice

the city, and none measure up to these. 103 Brighton Ave., Allston, 617-254-8887, jojotaipeiboston.com.

The Helmand

WHAT TO ORDER *Kaddo* (pumpkin with meat sauce), \$7.50 **WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD** By listing this as either vegetarian or nonvegetarian, the menu implies that meat sauce is optional. It is not. These chunks of pumpkin—pan-fried, then baked until ethereally light—don't reach must-eat status until topped with the unctuous Afghan version of Bolognese. 143 First St., Cambridge, 617-492-4646, helmandrestaurantcambridge.com.

Viva Mi Arepa

WHAT TO ORDER Cheese *cachapa*, \$7.50 **WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD** This little diner on the edge of West Roxbury makes the best Venezuelan *arepas* in town, particularly the pork- and chicken-filled varieties. But don't miss the *cachapa*,

made from sweet cornmeal dough studded with fresh corn kernels. Stuffed with *queso de mano* and griddled to a crisp, it's breakfast, lunch, and dessert rolled into one. 5197 Washington St., West Roxbury, 617-323-7844.

Pho 'n' Rice

WHAT TO ORDER *Pho ga* (chicken pho), \$7.95 **WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD** Among the many bowls of pho served around the Hub, the one at Pho 'n' Rice stands out for the intensity of its broth, vibrant with chili and star anise. Add tender rice noodles, moist chicken, and fresh basil, cilantro, onion, and lime, and you've got the ultimate feel-good food. 289 Beacon St., Somerville, 617-864-8888.

Yoma

WHAT TO ORDER *La phet thot* (tea leaf salad), \$8.25 **WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD** A pile of shredded cabbage. Diced tomato. A mélange of garlic chips, sesame

seeds, peanuts, and puffed-up fried peas that looks like a crazy Burmese trail mix. A puddle of canola oil. Minced hot chilies. A pungent mound of fermented pickled tea leaves that resemble brownish pesto. Toss it together and eat it. You'll be hooked. 5 N. Beacon St., Allston, 617-783-1372, yomaboston.com.

S&I Thai

WHAT TO ORDER *Pad ga pow moo krob* (crispy pork with chili sauce and basil leaves), \$8.95 **WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD** We're not going to lie to you: This dish is essentially flash-fried bacon chunks in a spicy-sweet sauce. But if you haven't tried it at least once, then you've missed one of the city's great guilty pleasures. The basil and chili do a little tango in your mouth, cutting through the richness of the meat. To ease the guilt, split your order with a friend; served with a pile of steamed rice, there's plenty for two. 168A Brighton Ave., Allston, 617-254-8488, si-togo.com.

Douzo

WHAT TO ORDER Spicy snow-crab cucumber hand roll, \$9.25 **WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD** While the brasher superstars on Douzo's 266-dish menu practically shout their hotshot ingredients—yuzu! truffle! Kobe!—this understated number bowls us over with a whisper. A carpaccio-thin slice of crunchy cucumber is fashioned into a cone, then filled with fresh, feather-light snow crab that's been tossed with an all-but-imperceptible dollop of delicately spiced mayo. 131 Dartmouth St., Boston, 617-859-8886, douzosushi.com.

Ken's Noodle House

WHAT TO ORDER "The Sapporo" miso ramen, \$9.50 **WHAT MAKES IT SO GOOD** Noodle soups are a bona fide obsession in Japan, and most regions have their signature flavor. In Sapporo, miso-based soups are king (there's even a ramen theme park). Ken's does well by this style, starting with a nutty, buttery broth and adding perfectly chewy noodles, scallions, bean sprouts, sliced pork, seaweed, and half an egg. Slurping is not only



INDIA QUALITY

Crowds pack into this narrow basement-level restaurant for satisfyingly spicy North Indian fare. **ORDER THIS:** Coconut-and-raisin-studded royal naan (\$3.50); creamy *rogan josh* (\$14). 484 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, 617-267-4499, indiaquality.com.

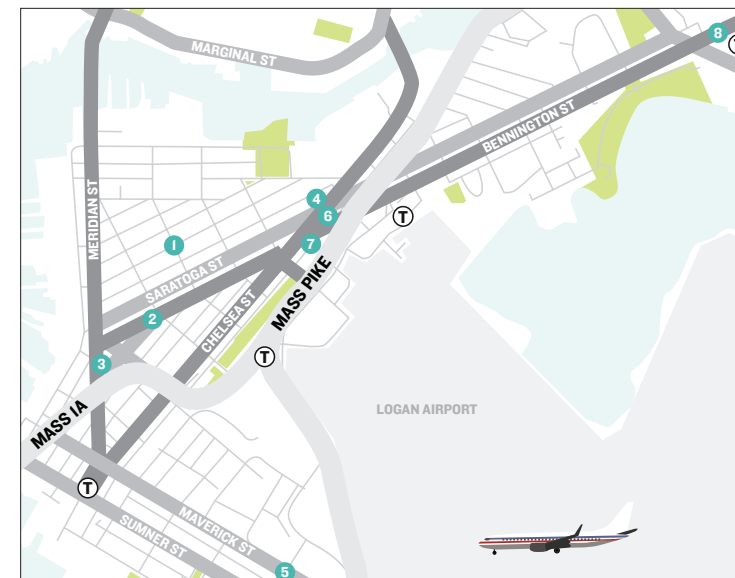
LA VERDAD

Chef-owner Ken Oringer's lively taqueria dials up the flavor on Mexican standbys—oh, and did we mention the margaritas? **ORDER THIS:** Oringer's famed grilled corn, slathered with mayonnaise and cotija cheese (\$5). One Lansdowne St., Boston, 617-421-9595, laverdadtaqueria.com.

THAITATION

Located in the former Brown Sugar space, it serves up an extensive menu of favorites (curries, fried rice) and more-traditional plates. **ORDER THIS:** The spicy-sweet *mhee thai* noodles (\$12). 129 Jersey St., Boston, 617-585-9909, thaitation.com.

CHEAP-EATS MECCA: EAST BOSTON



1. While devotees swear by Poblano specialties like mole and pozole (a white corn soup) at **Angela's Café**, the tacos, tamales, and tostadas are pilgrimage-worthy, too. 2. The namesake dish at Peruvian spot **Pollos a la Brasa Beto's** is rotisserie chicken, which is eaten with a spicy green sauce. 3. **Topacio** serves Salvadoran food—think marinated and grilled carne asada, and chicken in cilantro sauce—including terrific *pupusas* (stuffed flatbreads made with corn). 4. For a taste of traditional Peruvian cuisine, order off the *comidas criollas* menu at **Rincón Limeño**. Wash down your meal with a sweet, strong *pisco* sour. 5. **Pupuseria Mama Blanca** specializes in Salvadoran *pupusas* filled with pork and cheese (*revueltas*), fried pork skins (*chicharrones*), and more. For bigger appetites, the *plato gordito* comes heaped with grilled meat and sides. 6. **Pollos a la Brasa El Chalan**, like Beto's, is rotisserie-chicken central. Here it comes with fried yucca, rice, salad, and sauce. 7. At less than \$2 a pop, **Taqueria Jalisco's** tacos—topped with lime, herbs, and any of three homemade salsas—are a steal. 8. Skip the Americanized dishes and home in on **El Paisa's** Colombian specialties like *mondongo* (tripe) soup and the "typical plates" featuring grilled meat and fried plantains. For contact information, see page 124.