



# TRAVEL

## ADAPTED TRAVEL

### DINING OUT IN THE BIG APPLE

By Mike Cohen

New York City is indeed the place to dine, with an endless array of choices to please your palate. Here are some tips from my latest trip.

#### TAO UPTOWN:

We were elated to get a reservation at TAO Uptown ([www.taogroup.com](http://www.taogroup.com)), an upscale Pan-Asian brand, located at 42 East 58th Street. There is also a TAO Downtown, as well as locations in Las Vegas, Chicago and Los Angeles. They will open at Mohegan Sun casino and entertainment resort in Connecticut this year.

A 16-foot Buddha, which floats above a reflecting pool filled with Japanese carp, presides over the scene at Tao. A favourite destination for celebrities and athletes, this heavenly dining experience specializes in authentic Hong Kong Chinese, Japanese

and Thai cuisines. Tao has three levels of dining including the prized "Skybox," which offers views of this former movie theatre unparalleled in New York. In addition to its 300 seats, Tao includes a sushi bar, lounge and two bars at which to enjoy the food and the show.

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A look at TAO.

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There is a wonderful ambiance here, with trendy music and a charismatic serving staff. The menu is truly designed for sharing. Our waiter Ryan made life so much easier for our party by recommending a series of courses "family style." He was right on the mark with each one.

We started off with some drinks: A signature Tao-tini (Belvedere Mango Passion, Malibu Rum, cranberry and fresh lime), a glass of prosecco and a Bubbles and Ber-

ries (True Premium Vodka, Chandon Brut, St. Germain and fresh strawberries). We then moved to some appetizers: The Peking duck spring rolls with hoisin sauce, the spicy tuna tartare on crispy rice and the salmon sashimi followed by miso glazed Chilean sea bass, grilled 12-ounce imperial waygu ribeye (served with crispy fried onions, and wow, this was beyond amazing!) and lobster and kimchee fried rice.

Ryan promised us a surprise for dessert, and he was not kidding. Out came a very large tray featuring a giant fortune cookie (with white and dark chocolate mousses), flourless mochi cake, sugar dusted donuts, molten chocolate cake and vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup. Let's just say we completely ignored the calorie count.

TAO has a magnificent sushi menu. Let me just state that merely stepping inside TAO is

award-winning burgers have gotten a lot of attention in a short amount of time, milkshakes have always been on the menu, and craft beer is part of their DNA.

Black Tap 35th serves as a core location for global menu testing, and features all new design elements, a private dining room, and more. There are also other locales on 55th Street and Soho as well as spots at Downtown Disney in Anaheim, California and at the Venetian in Las Vegas. Internationally you can find them in Bahrain, Kuwait, Singapore, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates.

I was impressed the moment I walked through the door. Tangible nods to Black Tap's '80s and '90s hip-hop and pop soundtrack can be found throughout the space, including an installation of 5,000 custom-designed cassette tapes and an oversized neon boombox. At the stand-alone Shake Bar—the first in New York—guests can get a glimpse into the magic of making one of Black Tap's famous milkshake creations and be able to interact with shake makers.

New York-based graffiti artists and twin brothers How and Nosh were tapped for Black Tap 35th's signature street art murals. Known for their large-scale installations and unique, complicated compositions, How and Nosh left their mark on the restaurant with their signature style of red-, black- and white-based imagery with colourful pops of pink, yellow, and purple. The brothers drew inspiration from New York City life and the Black Tap brand itself for two custom pieces within the space.

Black Tap is always innovating and has kept the hits coming at Black Tap 35th. There are

always new menu items hitting the tables here as Black Tap tests dishes for potential worldwide launches. All of the classics are here too, from the All-American Burger and the award-winning wagyu beef Greg Norman Burger to the fan-favorite Korean BBQ Wings and addicting Crispy Brussels Sprouts. And it wouldn't be a meal at Black Tap without a CrazyShake. There's something for every sweet tooth from the original Cotton Candy strawberry shake and the best-selling Cookie's 'N Cream Supreme shake, to the newly added Cinnamon Toast cereal-flavored Churro Choco Taco Shake topped with a Choco Taco ice cream treat and churros. Don't forget the beverages. True to its name (a nod to craft beer bar tap handles), Black Tap 35th's beer menu features New York regional specialties like The Bronx Brewery No Resolutions Imperial IPA and Greenport Harbor Beehive Summer Ale.

I started off with the Queso & Chips appetizer – zesty cheese served with warm tortilla chips and a house salad. The Old Fashioned Prime Burger was my main choice, topped with cremini mushrooms, melted swiss cheese, caramelized onions and horse radish with some crispy fries.

I did my best to conserve some appetite for a crazy shake and opted for the Cake Shake. This is a cake batter milkshake with a vanilla frosted rim and rainbow sprinkles, topped with Funfetti cake, whipped cream and a cherry. My server wisely recommended that I gently move the cake portion to a plate, enjoying every morsel. For the shake I used the spoon at the start before switching to the straw. It was worth all of the calories, especially knowing that I had an 11-block walk back to my hotel.



Black Tap.

an experience. This now represents a "must stop" for us. Hopefully next time out we can check out TAO Downtown.

There is easy street-level access by wheelchair. When making your reservation, ask for a table at the main level where there are no stairs. For reservations call 212-888-2288 or do so via Open Table.

#### BLACK TAP:

What fun it was for me to experience a Black Tap ([www.blacktap.com](http://www.blacktap.com)) restaurant for the first time and no less their new flagship 35th Street location (known as Black Tap 35th). Inspired by the old-school luncheonettes we grew up in, Black Tap is touted as the new take on the classic burger joint. Upscale but not fussed-up, their

As Assistant General Manager Amber North showed me, there is a wheelchair access ramp to the left of the front door that goes into the hotel next door, where there is a side entrance door into the restaurant. They have a few different seating places for wheelchair accessibility as well including an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) bar seating area that meets the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. The ADA accessible bathroom is located in the back of the restaurant off from the cassette room that is separate from the regular bathrooms located in a hallway that is off from the middle of the restaurant.

Black Tap 35th is located at 45 West 35th Street and open from 11 am to midnight daily. You can call 646-943-5135.

### A BRAZILIAN DINING EXPERIENCE:

Fogo de Chão (fogo-dee-shown) is a leading Brazilian steakhouse, or churrascaria, specializing in the centuries-old Southern Brazilian cooking technique of churrasco – the art of roasting high-quality cuts of meats over open flame, all of which are carved tableside by Brazilian-trained gaucho chefs. There is Picanha (signature sirloin), Filet Mignon, Ribeye, Fraldinha (Brazilian sirloin) Cordeiro (lamb) and more. In addition to the main dishes, they boast a gourmet market table, authentic Brazilian side dishes, and an award-winning wine list.

Founded in Southern Brazil in 1979, there are currently 56 locations throughout Brazil, the United States, Mexico and the Middle East. I had a chance to experience this restaurant for the very first time at the beautiful West 53rd Street location in

midtown Manhattan, just a short walk from Times Square and steps away from MoMA. Just before Christmas 2013, Fogo opened this 16,000 square foot flagship location. The stunning architectural design includes a 17-foot bas-relief sculpture of Antonio Carangi's, O Laçador, and a historical monument in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The three-level facility features al fresco patio dining and a lounge area that is perfect for gathering with friends. Unquestionably this was a totally new dining experience for me, and I was beyond impressed. For first-timers like me, you will need a little guidance in terms of how to navigate the menu. Manager Ricardo Oliveira and his staff did precisely that. This is a "fun" place to dine for sure.

I opted in favour of the Full Churrasco Experience, which for \$69.95 includes the trained chefs coming to your table. All you need to do is flip this small circular card to the green side and you will receive a visit, getting a chance to select the precise cut of meat you want. Everything was so fresh and delicious, I found it hard not to keep flipping my card over. The beyond impressive market table and feijoada bar is included, featuring seasonal salads, soups, fresh vegetables, imported charcuterie, hearts of palm, giant asparagus, fresh buffalo mozzarella cheese, sun dried tomatoes, fresh cut and steamed broccoli, marinated artichoke bottoms, tabbouleh, smoked salmon, an assortment of fine cheeses and much more. You can also order this for \$34.95, and it can indeed constitute a meal.

Their market table is a fabulous way to get your meal started. The server also brought a basket of cheesy bread to the table and a delicious jumbo shrimp cocktail appetizer in a bowl of ice. Each piece of meat seemed better than the last, cutting like but-

ter. A server came by and offered me some mashed potatoes and vegetables. There was not a moment during this dinner when either a server, chef or manager did not stop by to see if I needed anything else.

As for my beverage, the guarana Antarctica is the national soda of Brazil and contains guarana berries found in the Amazon. The dessert menu fortunately had a calorie count, and I chose the Tres Leches Cake – a rich cake soaked in three types of milk then topped with vanilla mousse and salted caramel de leite. I enjoyed this with a cup of decaf cappuccino.

Next time I dine here, I will definitely try either the mango Chilean sea bass, pan-seared salmon and if dine with my family, the seafood tower.

In addition to the Full Churrasco Experience, Fogo offers its guests multiple ways to enjoy the experience at varying price points, including weekday lunch starting at \$15, weekend Brazilian brunch and a Bar Fogo menu that features smaller, sharable plates, Brazilian-inspired cocktails and happy hour.

The facility is fully wheelchair accessible, with an elevator on each floor. For more information about Fogo de Chão, the new culinary additions or to make dining reservations, visit <http://www.fogo.com>. You can reach the West 53rd location at 212-969-9980.

### A FINE IRISH PUB:

Located just up the block from my hotel, The Algonquin, is O'Donoghue's Restaurant and Pub (<https://odpubnyc.com>) at 156 West 44th Street. I have been walking by the place for several years now, intrigued by the lineups outside. Well, this place indeed exudes Irish warmth. Manager Helen Moran is from Ireland and so was my charming server Sarah. With 24 beers on tap, 10 HD plasma flat screens and traditional Irish and American cuisine, O'Donoghue's is the perfect place to unwind after work (happy hour special drinks), for sporting events (showing all major sports channels) and private parties (party packages available). They are right in the middle of the Theatre

District, so this is the perfect place to stop by for pre/post-theatre meal and drinks, or if you're just shopping around town.

I had tickets for a 7:30 pm musical close by, so I arrived at 6 pm. The service was impeccable, and I enjoyed my meal at a good pace, finishing with more than sufficient time to be sitting in my seat 10 minutes before the curtain went up.

There is a regular menu as well as those for kids, late night, weekend brunch and another just for the bar. They also have daily specials. I started off with some piping hot beef and barley soup, a delicious order of garlic cheesy bread with marinara sauce, and a glass of prosecco wine. For the main course I was debating between their signature burger, one of the sandwiches and the special chicken and mashed potatoes. I opted for the latter. The chicken was cut in neat thin slices, moist and extremely tasty. I made the right choice. Did I have room for dessert? The homemade apple pie with vanilla ice cream sounded like the perfect way to conclude dinner. Along with a fresh cup of decaf coffee I finished every morsel, leaving over just a bit of the ice cream.

There is a great atmosphere in this place. You can call 212-997-2262 for reservations. The restaurant is wheelchair accessible, with a level entrance.

Mike Cohen is the editor of *Inspirations*. He can be reached at [mcohen@inspirationsnews.com](mailto:mcohen@inspirationsnews.com)



Fogo dry age Tomahawk.



O'Donoghue's Restaurant