

The Time Off InfoFax Guide to Business Entertaining Part 4: The City of London

A L'ECU D'ILFORD

21 Dog Street EC1

The "If", as it's popularly known by its devotees, brings a breath of East London to the high-pressure world of the City. Patronized heavily by aggressive Eurobond dealers from Romford, the "If" specialises in such local delicacies as Pie 'n' Eels, Eels 'n' Mash, Pie, Mash 'n' Eels and, for the connoisseur, Mash, Mash, Eels 'n' Pie. About £2.79 for two, including tea (twice).

AREOPAGITICA

125 Bell Alley, EC4

A tiny, charming restaurant in the diamond district of London, Areopagitica specialises in genuine 16th Century English food. It's always crammed with prosperous-looking diamond dealers tucking into dishes like Lamb Stuffed With Fresh Crab, Baked Oyster Pudding and Lobster Tart. Drink Sack or Porter with your meal for that authentic taste. About £40 for two.

BIG BANG BURGER BAR

32 Back Street EC2

The Big Bang was named, not after the deregulation of the financial industry in 1986, but after a fictional restaurant in *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* which was to be found at the very moment of creation. Some may say the hamburgers here are prehistoric and the atmosphere is certainly heavy on methane, but a loyal clientele of currency dealers meet here every lunchtime to drink, shout and boast. If conspicuous consumption is your scene, this is your place. £15 for two.

CHEZ DEMETRIOU

99a Topsider Villas SE18

Though this restaurant is way beyond the City boundaries - in deeply unfashionable Woolwich, in fact - it is considered one of the finest in London, and patronized by City grandees. Demetriou himself, a

large and invariably foul-tempered Cypriot, presides over a rigid and inflexible regime. Though the food is undeniably good, Demetriou has been known to beat customers to a pulp for requesting salt or pepper, and appears to believe that the word "host" is derived from the word "hostility". If you can face his contempt, expect to pay around £120 for two, including wine (which he chooses for you).

ETON MESS

1 Wilmshurst Street EC2

Something novel here: based on the popular restaurants with waitresses dressed in schoolgirl uniforms serving school food, the Mess however has waiters dressed as schoolboys. The food is merely passable but attracts a loyal and distinct following of female personnel managers and plump elderly gentlemen in the shipping business. If you don't eat your pudding - the famous strawberry "Eton Mess" is the best - the Head Waiter canes you mercilessly in front of the diners. The personnel managers always eat their pudding. The elderly gentlemen hardly ever do. £25 a head, or 10,000 lines if you left your wallet at home.

FLANAGAN'S BISTRO

27 Jamaica Wharf EC1

It's hard to say whether Flanagan or Demetriou is the nastiest restaurateur in London; certainly they have been fighting for the title tooth, claw and ladle for the last fifteen years. So far, Demetriou is rudest, but Flanagan is less predictable and his behaviour is more gross. His restaurant, however, is excellent: large, crowded and noisy (even when the live pianist takes a break) it has a menu to satisfy all tastes. If you feel a pain in the ankles while dining, don't worry: Flanagan, after a few magnums of champagne, likes to crawl around the floor and bite the clientele. £60 for two.

I 16 Baron Steps, EC4

The names of London's Oriental restaurants have been getting shorter and shorter; I must be the shortest of all. The proprietor/chef says it means (roughly translated) "May the fragrant dragonfly alight upon the electric shadows of your golden dreams." Be that as it may, the food is exquisite, with a special *sushi* featuring wafer-thin slices of raw Korean water-snake, marinated for three days in beetle vinegar, as the house speciality. The *Tep-panyaki* is superb, too. Drink *sake* with your meal, although the Japanese bankers drink huge quantities of whisky or Coca-Cola (which, in Chinese, apparently means "Bite the wax tadpole"). Not cheap; allow £55-65 for two with *sake*; cheaper if you bite the wax tadpole; more if you drink "Scottish Wine".

LA POCHE DU JARDINIER 77 Ormskirk Square EC2

The only restaurant in what is otherwise a gastronomic desert in a square entirely occupied by seemingly-insolvent manufacturers of surgical corsets, cork-importers, pearl-re-stringers and budgerigar accessories, the *Jardiniere* nevertheless manages a thriving lunchtime business by attracting bibulous ne'er-do-wells from the French Munitions Agency around the corner. These gentlemen, with their bulging pockets, can be seen snarfing up the *Tripes a la Mode du Caen* and the *Raie au Beurre Noir* with evident enjoyment, and we have to agree that the food is rather good. The service, on the other hand, is appalling, the proprietor a psychopath, and the chef apparently would rather be a rock singer, to judge from the noises issuing from the kitchen. Worth a visit, though, at £30 for two.

LE MONACO 22 London Road EC1

A classic French restaurant which, years ago, enjoyed a rather shady reputation on account of its private rooms (which, alas, no longer exist). The extravagantly Gallic *maitre d'hotel* could be seen either as a liability of the restaurant's greatest asset, but he certainly knows how

to make his loyal customers feel both special and comfortable, a rare art these days. The atmosphere is intimate and romantic rather than strictly businesslike, but Le Monaco nevertheless attracts its fair share of successful stockbrokers and financial types. Food is reliable if unimaginative, but Le Monaco has a splendid butcher who cuts meat in the French style, so the dishes like Chateaubriand are authentic, as well as huge - a vegetarian's nightmare, in fact. Allow around £40 for two, with wine from the excellent and reasonably-priced cellars.

McGILLICUDDIE'S 232 Chimney Court, EC3

McGillicuddie's is run by a Glaswegian ex-wrestler who still gives the impression that he could deal with any trouble-makers. Not that there are any in this functional, sawdust-and-scrubbed-oak restaurant specialising in Scottish traditional food. The menu is extensive but beware of the small, ginger-haired waiter, who is inclined to explain in detail the composition of the food. Few people could happily eat a Haggis knowing what it was, though if you retain your innocence, it's delicious, especially washed down with a ball or two of Monster's Choice, the famous Inverness whisky. McGillicuddie's is the only restaurant we know which does High Tea, a vast and ruminative feast lasting from 4:00 pm until bedtime. Around £25 for two.

MANNY'S DINER 18 Venice Lane EC3

Manny's is a London institution, a kosher restaurant with the best salt beef in town. The pastrami is incredible, the *gefилte* fish just like mother used to try to make but couldn't, and the *latkes* need a health warning, they're so addictive. No drinks licence, so bring your own. Manny's operates an interesting system: the waiters buy the food from the kitchen and resell it to you, taking the profit themselves. So? So negotiate. What have you got to lose? Would we lie? Around £20 for two. A bargain. You should live so long.