

48 hours in BROOKLYN

Kathryn Tomasetti long dreamt of a grand US road trip, stopping for cherry pie in the South, barbecue in the Midwest and raw cuisine in California. But she found there's an easier way: do it all in Brooklyn, the hip borough that has the best of US cuisine



FOOD FEST (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT) Four & Twenty Blackbirds' fruit pie; inside at the Eagle Street Rooftop Farm; Roberta's pizza place; dine in style at the Wythe Hotel; raw cuisine at the Sun In Bloom; The Brooklyn Kitchen's own butcher; Bedford Cheese Shop; Brooklyn Bridge; By Brooklyn sells produce from local heroes



Although I've made Britain and France my home, I was raised in the US of A, and spent summer holidays criss-crossing Manhattan's iconic streets. That part of New York has always been 'in' – but Brooklyn? Not so much. Yet recently this borough has gone from awkward outsider to the East Coast's coolest customer. Green spaces, lower rents and innovative restaurants have helped Brooklyn leap out from Manhattan's shadow. It's the fastest growing New York borough and its new inhabitants include chefs from all over the US, who've turned Brooklyn into an epicentre of seriously good cuisine. Five years ago, my sister Liz moved here too, giving me a great opportunity to eat my way around.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

One of the first places to kick-start Brooklyn's transformation to rising culinary star was **Roberta's** (robertaspizza.com). Since it opened in 2008, this creative pizzeria – formerly a garage – has grown its own vegetable garden, something you'd be hard pushed to find in Manhattan. Out back, its Tiki Bar serves draft artisan beers, such as SingleCut 19-33 Queens Lagrrr.

The studio for foodie radio channel

Heritage Radio is next to Roberta's courtyard. Bag the window table for two – as Liz and I did – and it's like you're dining with the DJs. Over a Pep Rally pizza topped with goat's cheese, Peppadew peppers and spring garlic, Michael Harlan Turkell, host of Heritage Radio's *The Food Seen* programme (and an ex-chef), filled me in on how the local culinary scene developed.

"Brooklyn has come of age," he says. "At first there was an exodus from Manhattan, when ambitious cooks came here to run their own small place. Now, some of those places have grown into multi-use spaces, with incubator kitchens for other chefs from all over." Michael then lists the best new arrivals. I may be halfway through a massive pizza, but I'm already planning my eating strategy.

THE BIG BREAKFAST

First up, the most important meal of the day. American breakfasts – the kind that make the table groan – are world renowned. Brekkie hotspots in Brooklyn include Greenpoint's **Five Leaves** (fiveleavesny.com), brainchild of the late Hollywood star Heath Ledger. The menu is infused with global flavours: mussels with saffron, coconut and chillies, ricotta pancakes with blueberries, and Moroccan >>



hungry traveller.

Food lover's add-ons

By Susan Low, deputy editor (and ex-New Englander) NYC is the big attraction for food-loving travellers, but the nearby New England states have some fine food traditions. For hotels, see ebookers.com

★ New Haven, Connecticut

Less than two hours from Manhattan by Metro-North train, this city on Long Island Sound has fantastic food, including some of the best pizza outside Naples, and is said to be the birthplace of the hamburger. Historian Colin M Caplan of *Taste of New Haven* leads culinary walking tours with plenty of tastings on the way. There's also a Pizza and Pints cycling tour which visits the superb Frank Pepe's Pizzeria Napoletana. *tasteofnewhaven.com*; tours £33 per person plus tax

★ Providence, Rhode Island

Providence, Rhode Island's capital, is less than 3 hours from NYC's Penn Station on Amtrak's Acela express train. To find out how the city eats, *Rhody Food Tours'* Immigrant Cuisines of Providence gives a good introduction. Visitors are taken around the local Japanese, Bolivian, Mexican and Indian restaurants to learn about typical ingredients and cooking methods, sampling the cuisines as they go. *rhodyfoodtours*; £30 per person plus tax

★ Boston, Massachusetts

About 3½ hours northeast on the Acela Express, Boston is New England's largest city. Discover its rich culinary pickings on a *Boston Food Tour* of the North End, also known as Little Italy. Visitors learn about the Italian-American community and their typical dishes and cooking styles, as well as visiting delis and shops selling the best olive oils, cheeses and charcuterie. *bostonfoodtours.com*; tours £33 per person plus tax >>

BROOKLYN'S FINEST (from left) Five Leaves; nobody does Japanese-Mexican food like Takumi Taco; feeding the masses at Smorgasburg food market; whiskey distiller and cocoa treats at Cacao Prieto

chickpea and merguez scramble.

Williamsburg's **Egg Restaurant** (eggrestaurant.com) is the place to dig into modernised classics from the southern US, such as biscuits and gravy, organic stone-ground grits and candied bacon. But it's **Fort Defiance** (fortdefiancebrooklyn.com), Red Hook's neighbourhood home-from-home for locals, that's my favourite brunching spot.

Named after a stronghold built during the War of Independence, the snug café dishes up hearty huevos rancheros (see p122), crispy hash browns and cheddar biscuits with jalapeño jam. Suffering a hazy head? Owner St John Frizell is a talented bartender and there's a generous offering of cocktails, even for brunch. I recommend the aptly named Breuckelen Corpse Reviver.

ALL-AMERICAN DINING

In the melting pot that is the US, there's a huge variety of dishes that fall within the category American cuisine. To track down the spots that stand out, I ask Emily Elsen, who, with her sister Melissa, runs **Four & Twenty Blackbirds** (birdsblack.com) in the Gowanus neighbourhood. She says: "If you're selling something as American as fried chicken – or pie, and opening in a city like New York, it's important to have your own take on it." Emily follows her own advice – her homely shop serves slices of butter-crust

pie, from bestseller salted caramel apple to strawberry balsamic, at communal wooden tables.

Nearby in Cobble Hill, **Brooklyn Farmacy** (brooklynfarmacy.blogspot.fr) offers a fashionably retro approach to an American favourite: the soda fountain. Every afternoon, schoolchildren jostle for space at the wooden bar, spooning up ice cream floats, banana splits and cherry-topped ice cream sundaes. The 1950s-style servers also mix up the borough's best egg creams – a fizzy, milky drink that's been a Brooklyn speciality for a century.

Retro's not the only game in town. The culinary scene here rides a wave of new American dining, too. Aimee Follette's **Sun In Bloom** (suninbloom.wordpress.com), in the Park Slope neighbourhood, specialises in cutting-edge vegan, raw cuisine with foods that promise physical and spiritual cleansing. The menu may be packed with good karma, but it's also downright delicious, as confirmed by my sprouted wheat burrito stuffed with sunflower pâté, avocado and zingy salsa, followed by a slice of raw raspberry vegan cheesecake.

Opened in the spring of 2013, **Nightingale 9** (nightingale9.com) in Carroll Gardens is indicative of a local trend for fusing American ingredients with far-flung flavours. Arkansas-born chef Rob Newton creates contemporary Vietnamese

streetfood using "southern US ingredients you wouldn't find in Vietnam", such as raw collar greens, shredded and served with grated fresh coconut, lime and shallots. The intimate eatery is already a neighbourhood hit: I watch a blissed-out diner at the bar garnish every bite of his breaded catfish with Newton's bespoke neon-orange chilli sauce.

ALONG THE EAST RIVER

The next day is Sunday, so we head for **Smorgasburg** (smorgasburg.com), a sprawling food market with sublime skyline views at Pier 5 under the Brooklyn Bridge. Arriving early (Liz recommended skipping breakfast), we have time to stuff ourselves with buttery soft lobster rolls from **Red Hook Lobster Pound** (redhooklobsterpound.com), then try the inventive Japanese-Mexican street food from **Takumi Taco** (takumitaco.com). With 80-plus vendors at the market, we barely scratched the surface.

Super-satiated, we board the **East River Ferry** (eastriverferry.com), admiring the Manhattan skyline as the boat chugs north under the Brooklyn and Williamsburg Bridges. We disembark at Greenpoint, Brooklyn's northern neighbourhood, made famous by the TV series *Girls*.

Here we ascend to the **Eagle Street Rooftop Farm** (rooftopfarms.org), which cultivates 560 square



MEET THE PRODUCER Daniel Prieto

Set within a former parachute factory in Red Hook, all-organic **Cacao Prieto** (cacaoprieto.com) handcrafts chocolate bars, liqueurs and rums using sugar cane and cocoa beans cultivated on the Prieto family farm in the Dominican Republic. In 2012 Cacao Prieto was also the first New York establishment in 87 years – since the dry depths of American Prohibition – to be awarded a distillery licence.

Owner Daniel Prieto Preston celebrated by creating the whiskey **Widow Jane** (widowjane.com), which is now hugely popular across Brooklyn. This traditional whiskey is distilled and aged on the Cacao Prieto premises using limestone-filtered water sourced from Rosendale Quarry, 140km north of Manhattan. "We sold our first year's sales projection in the first week," Dan confides. After a mouthful of this complex, vanilla and caramel inflected spirit, it's easy to taste why. Pick up a bottle on-site (£36) or book a factory tour (£6 per person, by reservation) to check out the Willy Wonka-esque behind-the-scenes whiskey and chocolate creations.

metres of organic fruit and vegetables three stories up in the air. It's surreal strolling through rows of black cherry tomatoes and corn on the cob, with free-range chickens and humming honeybees, against a panoramic New York backdrop. The produce is sold in a small on-site market (open Sundays from May to October) and to a handful of Brooklyn restaurants.

South of here sits **The Brooklyn Kitchen** (thebrooklynkitchen.com). This foodie wonderland encompasses The Meat Hook, an artisan butcher's shop, as well as two vast floors of

kitchen gadgets, ranging from onion goggles and pickling gear to recipe books and an entire aisle of cookie cutters. The rear of the shop is used for cooking classes (from around £45 per person), held almost every evening. As I peruse the chalkboard calendar, I notice that chef Anthony Falco from Roberta's is leading a pizza-making workshop later in the week. Despite not being hungry, I want to eat my ticket for my flight home now and stay for the fun. *Kathryn Tomasetti flew from London to New York JFK with American Airlines* (americanairlines.co.uk)

PHOTOGRAPHS: THINKSTOCK, KATE LEWIS



hungry traveller.



Try this at home

This wonderful recipe is from **St John Frizell at Fort Defiance, Red Hook, Brooklyn**

Huevos rancheros with pork cheek chilli

SERVES 4-6. HANDS-ON TIME 30 MIN, COOKING TIME 1½ HOURS, PLUS OVERNIGHT MARINATING



Make the chilli up to 2 days in advance and keep, covered, in the fridge.

Or, freeze the chilli for up to 3 months. Defrost completely, then reheat thoroughly to serve.

- 1.25kg free-range British pig cheeks, or fatty cuts from the shoulder, trimmed of excess fat and sinew
- 2 tbsp plain flour
- 1 tbsp sea salt
- 1 tsp each chilli powder, cayenne pepper and smoked paprika
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 onions, roughly chopped
- 8 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 400g tin chopped tomatoes
- 400ml chicken stock or water

NEXT MONTH

Seven great places to eat – then walk it off

- 1 small bunch fresh coriander, leaves roughly chopped

TO SERVE

- Olive oil for frying
- 4 corn tortillas
- 8 medium free-range eggs
- Grated cheddar, sliced spring onions and soured cream

1. Chop the meat into 1cm pieces and put in a large non-metallic bowl with the flour, salt, ground spices and dried oregano. Mix everything together well so the pork is completely coated, cover with cling film and chill overnight.

2. The next day, heat the olive oil in a large heavy-based saucepan over a medium heat. Lightly brown the pork on all sides until the spices smell aromatic, but take care not to burn them. Add the onions and garlic and cook over a low heat for 5-10 minutes until the onions are soft and translucent but not coloured. Add the chopped tomatoes and stock/water, then stir. Bring to a gentle simmer, then cook over a low heat for 1½ hours or until the pork is tender enough to cut with a fork. You may need to top up with stock if the pan looks like it's getting too dry, but you should end up with a sauce thick enough to lightly coat the back of a spoon. Check the seasoning, then stir through the fresh coriander. Keep warm.

3. Heat a frying pan and add a drizzle of olive oil. Fry the tortillas for a couple of minutes on each side until golden and crisp, then keep warm in a low oven. Wipe the pan out, add more oil and fry the eggs until cooked to your liking (you may need to do this in batches). Put one tortilla on each plate, top with some of the chilli and scatter over some grated cheddar. Top each with 1-2 fried eggs, and scatter over more cheese and some spring onions. Serve with soured cream on the side for everyone to help themselves.

PER SERVING (FOR 6) 618kcal, 30.9g fat (9.2g saturated), 53.3g protein, 29.1g carbs (4g sugars), 3.3g salt, 2.8g fibre

AND TO REMEMBER YOUR TRIP...

Visit the **Bedford Cheese Shop** (bedfordcheeseshop.com) for gift boxes with truffle-infused brie from Vermont or cheddar aged in upstate New York. **Stinky Bklyn** (stinkybklyn.com) is a café-deli, packed with meats and cheeses as well as locally made Brooklyn Brine pickles and their own Raw Bklyn Rooftop Honey. **By Brooklyn** (bybrooklyn.com) is a shrine to quality local food – pick up some Empire Bacon Mayonnaise, Spoonable Spicy Chilli Caramel and Kings County Beef Jerky.

WHERE TO STAY

★ **WYTHE HOTEL** (doubles from £200; wythehotel.com) Set just off the Williamsburg waterfront, the industrial-chic Wythe Hotel stretches over a century-old former sugar-barrel factory. Try for a room with a Manhattan skyline view.

★ **BOX HOUSE HOTEL** (apartments from £197, minimum stay three nights; theboxhousehotel.com) These quirky self-catering loft-style apartments – all sleep four adults – feature vintage furniture and contemporary art. Perfect for visiting the nearby farmers' market (Saturdays 8am-3pm), then heading home to cook up a taste of Brooklyn.

