

An Ethnic **Affair** in Atlanta

Japanese, Mediterranean, and Malay picks for the ardent foodie

Atlanta is in the grips of an unrivaled culinary revival—there's ample evidence in the burgeoning number of restaurants offering a broad array of culinary palates. Pick a cuisine and sure enough, a handful of possible candidates come to the fore to suit any occasion or budget. Combine that with the new food truck revolution the city is witnessing and you've got yourself a celebration of gastronomic proportions. Thanks to the truly diverse communities that call Atlanta home, you can peruse the world when it comes to choosing a meal. With that in mind, we're brining you a look at three of our favorites representing the broad offerings of the Asian continent.

Tucked into Pharr Road in Buckhead is **Taka Sushi {385 Pharr Road Northeast; 404.869.2802}**. Pristine sashimi and sushi offerings aside, Taka has some interesting takes on American staples that you probably won't find anywhere else in Atlanta. For example, the Japanese seafood pancake—*Okonomiyaki!* Or how about a sashimi salad or a salmon ceviche? “The concept here is making traditional food while also playing with the new, like using olive oil, uncommon in Japanese cooking, with a fundamental ingredient like miso sauce,” Chef Taka Moriuchi says. Celebrating a decade in Atlanta next year, Taka Sushi has several interesting options on the Izakaya (tapas-style) menu, as well as key Japanese offerings like the curry rice or even soba (buckwheat) preparations.

Also celebrating their 10th anniversary this year is **Mezza {2751 Lavista Road, Decatur; 404.633.8833}**, the first Lebanese tapas-style bistro and lounge in Atlanta, with a large variety of tapas choices on the menu, including a substantial vegetarian selection. “Imagine sitting by the Mediterranean Sea, having a great time with friends, nibbling an assortment of delicacies—that's where we want to take you,” Owner Jason Bitar says. “My mom is the chef here, and anything she makes that I like is on the menu for you to taste,” he adds with a smile. In-demand dishes here are the Leg of Lamb and the Roasted Garlic Chicken. “We make traditional dishes, using traditional ingredients, and have the largest selection of Lebanese wine,” Bitar says. The lounge area



next door is open Friday and Saturday nights, featuring belly dancers et al.

Meanwhile, closer to Buford Highway, is the legendary **Penang {4897 Buford Highway, Chamblee; 770.220.0308}**—a mainstay of the Atlanta food scene for 13 years, and the go-to destination for everything Malay. You can't escape the mesmerizing flavors of satay (grilled meat on skewers) once inside. Executive Chef Ken Lim is quick to point out that all the spices come straight from the family plantation in Malaysia: “Considering the Indian, Chinese, and Thai influences, cuisine from Penang includes traditional dishes with unique ingredients. Take for instance, the Indian-inspired Roti

Canai, or the Surong Burong from China.” Using exceptional ingredients like sambal (dried shrimp paste), asam fruit, and lemongrass flower, Chef Lim attracts an assorted clientele from executives at CDC to young working professionals from Buckhead. The customer favorite, though, appears to be Nasi Lemak—a platter with a little bit of everything that a newbie here would ideally opt for.

Each of these finds is sure to introduce your tastebuds to a whole new world of food from the expanse of Asia. Indulge and revel in it, Atlanta! It's right at your doorstep.

—Ruksana Hussein

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Lilly Lampe is a food and culture writer based in Atlanta. She's also the co-founder of OutThereAtlanta.com, a weekly podcast covering food, events, and people about town. For this issue

she compiled our listings of some of Atlanta's best pizza, burgers, and breakfasts (page 20).



Ruksana Hussein is a freelance writer and food and travel enthusiast. Born in India and raised in the Middle East, she has traveled through Southeast Asia, parts of Africa, and even several states in the

U.S., discovering and experiencing new cuisines. For this issue, she visits three of her favorite local restaurants offering the best of Asia (page 15).



Atlanta-based photographer **Eric Holder** has been shooting still and moving images for more than 15 years. His favorite subjects range from nature to architecture,

live music to the abstract, and, of course, well-plated dishes. This is Eric's sixth issue shooting for *DiningOut Atlanta*.