

Let's go al fresco

Whether you want to know where's best to be seen to eat or just where to chill out – be it pavement style or parkside – Natasha Higgins guides you to your table

Al fresco dining, literally meaning to dine 'in the fresh', is perhaps not a term synonymous with 'the great British outdoors'. Whereas restaurant tables line the crooked pavements of Paris and Naples, British weather struggles to lend itself to this enviable practice. This is not to suggest, however, that eating 'al fresco' is non-existent in this country. Oddly, London is filled with rooftops, gardens and terraces. One must simply be prepared for when sunshine strikes.

Chilling out

Set in the heart of Knightsbridge, is an oasis of calm on the fifth floor of Harvey Nichols (109-125 Knightsbridge, SW1X 7RJ, 020 7823 1839, www.harveynichols.com ££). The Café and roof terrace overlook the rooftops of Knightsbridge giving you a moment to reflect on all you have bought! The Café serves breakfast, lunch and dinner with options such as eggs Florentine for breakfast, organic salmon and smoked-haddock fish cakes for lunch and corn fed

chicken with soft polenta, chestnuts and grilled tomato for dinner.

Where to be seen

The terrace 'of the moment' is undisputedly at the Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park Hotel (66 Knightsbridge, SW1X 7LA, 020 7201 3833, www.dinnerbyheston.com ££££). The much talked about Dinner by Heston Blumenthal lunch menu is now available between 12 and 2.30pm daily. This new terrace is truly breathtaking. Set against a floral backdrop in country like surroundings, guests can enjoy toasted English muffins overlooking the passing household cavalry. Signature dishes on the lunch time menu include spiced pigeon with ale and artichokes and cod in cider inspired by historic British gastronomy.



Another hot venue for outdoor dining this summer, is the OXO Tower Brasserie and Restaurant (Oxo Tower Wharf South Bank, SE1 9PH, 020 7803 3888, www.harveynichols.com/oxo-tower-london ££££). Located on the eighth floor, the airy dining space gives the impression of being up in the sky! The twinkling lights over London and the wonderful sights of the river, give a true holiday feel. Head chef

Deon Jensen has created a menu with a distinct antipodean influence combined with the freshness of the Mediterranean.

"The new terrace is truly breathtaking. Set against a floral backdrop in country like surroundings"

Pavement style

For the ultimate cheap al fresco Italian experience head to London's Charlotte Street for some delicious stone-oven pizza at unbeatable prices! You'll have a tough time finding better value for money than at Icco's (46 Goodge Street, W1T 4LU, 020 7580 9688, www.icco.co.uk £) – a margarita costs a mere



Left & top: Roof Gardens and Babylon Restaurant, 99 Kensington High Street, W8

Right: Harvey Nichols, 109-125 Knightsbridge, SW1X



£3.50! The freshly-squeezed orange juice adds a nice touch too. The hustle and bustle of Fitzrovia makes this an uplifting lunch or dinner spot. If you get a sudden sushi craving, Roka (37 Charlotte Street, W1T 1RR, 020 7580 6464, www.rokarestaurant.com £££££) offers a delicious selection of Japanese specialities in a trendy setting. It attracts a media crowd and has outdoor seating allowing you to soak up the cool vibes of Charlotte Street.

Parkside

When it comes to having a bite in the park, things have come a long way since picnics. With fancy restaurants popping up in parks all over town, why not enjoy a long lunch tucked among the trees, on the edge of the lake overlooking Duck island at St James's Inn the Park (St James's Park, SW1A 2BJ, 020 7451 9999, www.peytonandbyrne.co.uk ££). This unique venue, designed by Hopkins architects, also has an outdoor area with a wooden terrace, which is mainly covered and heated, though the far end is open to the elements. Tasty dishes include the likes of Chargrilled Mount Grace Ribeye Steak with Ratte Potato. Another note-worthy park restaurant is Hyde Park's ever buzzing Serpentine Bar & Kitchen (Serpentine Road, Hyde Park, W2 2UH, 020 7706 8114, www.serpentinebarandkitchen.com ££). This restaurant has gained widespread acclaim and is a popular dining choice for both Londoners and visitors to the city. Tasty pizzas also feature on the menu and are all made in a woodfire with classic toppings such as ham and pineapple or pepperoni.

Cost Guide	
Based on the cost of main courses:	
Up to £10	£
Up to £20	££
Up to £30	£££
Up to £40	££££
Above £50	£££££



Right: OXO Tower Brasserie and Restaurant, Oxo Tower Wharf, South Bank, SE1

Keep it quiet

Round the corner from Green Park, in the very heart of Mayfair lies a little known jewel by the name of Shepherd's Market (www.shepherdmarket.co.uk). It has some fantastically quaint Victorian pubs as well as other restaurants with plenty of outdoor seating. Back in the 1920s, this was a highly sought-after address, and the Victorian feel of this piazza still remains intact. The Al Hamra (31-33 Shepherd Market, W1J 7PT, 020 7493 1954, www.alhamrarestaurant.co.uk £££) Lebanese restaurant offers diners a typically al frescan experience. With an extensive outdoor area seating up to 30, why not enjoy some humous with freshly-baked bread, a Tabouleh Salad or some chargrilled Lebanese bread with minced lamb, onion and pine nuts. Wash this down with fresh orange juice or a glass of homemade lemonade and you'll be feeling revived! This place gets busy so remember to book in advance.

A garden of its own

This feature would not be complete without mentioning the exquisite Roof Gardens and Babylon Restaurant (99 Kensington High Street, W8 5SA, 020 7368 3993, www.roofgardens.virgin.com ££££). On the sixth and seventh floor of this popular London venue are two truly spectacular rooftops. The Babylon Restaurant with its magnificent terrace is located on the seventh floor and overlooks the English woodland garden on the floor below it. On the sixth floor, are three separately themed gardens – a Spanish garden, based on the Alhambra in Grenada, a Tudor garden filled with evergreen shrubs and fragrant lilies and an English woodland garden designed to be at its best in spring time. Every Friday and Saturday throughout summer, a barbecue is held between 7 and 10pm in the Tudor Garden. An array of tasty meat, seafood and vegetarian dishes are available and accompanied by live music.



Left: Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park Hotel, 66 Knightsbridge, SW1X



Right: St James's Inn the Park, St James's Park, SW1A