

Brilliant Brunches in London



If you're reading this article, then, of course you are the kind of person who can make time for brunch at the weekend. When my children were young, a quick-ish brunch at our neighbourhood **Giraffe** (many branches throughout London) was what we could manage. Giraffe is great – a varied 'world' menu competently executed (I always had the huevos rancheros), decent coffee and children enjoying the balloons and colouring pencils. It's the kind of place I would never go to again once my kids were old enough to eschew balloons and colouring pencils! Don't get me wrong, the food is good, it's just that now I don't have to eat in restaurants filled with other peoples' babies and buggies, I don't. Plus, once football, fencing and cricket filled our weekends, brunch became a memory.

Now however, I have a great time visiting the fully-fledged brunch scene in London.

The usual brunch suspects, at the expensive end of the market, include brasserie-type all day food establishments like **The Wolseley** on Piccadilly. It used to be the Wolseley car showroom, then became a bank (my workplace used to bank there in the '90s and I remember standing in the queue marvelling at the incredible chandeliers). Beautiful swanky interior, great coffee, Viennoiserie, any kind of eggs, and the service is impeccable. I once took my

“If you haven't been, I highly recommend it for the wow-factor and the food is good too.”

Duck & Waffle

three year-old with visiting grandparents for an impromptu lunch and they provided a colouring page and pencils too without turning a hair. The Wolseley is perfect for a treat and even if you can't do brunch, pop in for a perfect coffee or classic cocktail in the cosy bar at any time of day.

Duck and Waffle is not a brasserie, but the view via its City location in the Heron Tower at Bishopsgate, its glass elevator and 24-hour dining options make it perfect for a special occasion (a friend took her sister there for a sunrise breakfast surprise on her birthday). If you haven't been, I highly recommend it for the wow-factor and the food is good too. The famous duck leg confit with egg, and waffle and syrup is really delicious. They also do all kinds of other eggs, including the currently popular shakshuka style, their take on a fry-up and many other options. They also





“In the UK refills are a novelty that now extends to cocktails for which there is a set price entitling you to a bottomless glass.”
Ask for Janice

“It’s a tiny place, located in the covered Market, with simple wooden furniture and charming, helpful staff.”
Wild Caper

do lighter dishes, fruit salads, yogurts, croissants, something for everyone.

Those of you familiar with US-style brunches will expect your coffee to be re-filled endlessly, but in the UK it’s still a novelty and one that now sometimes extends to cocktails, for which there is a set price entitling you to an bottomless glass.

The bottomless brunch I experienced at **Ask For Janice** across from Smithfield Market on a Saturday morning was charming – my friend and I were the oldest people there (and we’re not old). The staff were friendly and easy-going. The décor is shabby/school-room chic and the food was delicious. Lots of small plates in the current locavore, (locally grown and produced), Mediterranean-influenced style. We tried just about everything on the small menu. Hake, with Norfolk yel-



Jennifer Grigg is from Boston and has lived in the UK for more than 20 years. After working in the arts and as a freelance writer she now runs Green Bottle Press, a small press that publishes poetry collections and pamphlets. Books are available to buy and submission guidelines are at www.greenbottlepress.com

low-pea dahl was a standout. There was also a sort of carrot latke with spiced yoghurt that was delicious. I was driving and my friend was not prepared to drink so much in the morning, so we opted for the bottomless Virgin Mary and the Greyhound (just grapefruit juice and a touch of salt!) and the perfect flat white. Coffee in London has come a long way since I arrived in the 1990s.

Going further afield for me was a great experience on a Thursday in Brixton Market at **Wild Caper**. It’s a tiny place, located in the covered Market, with simple wooden furniture and charming, helpful staff. My friend and I both had perfectly cooked Eggs Florentine on sourdough and again, excellent coffee. This time I went for the low-caf (not decaf) version offered, which was delicious. We also split a little crispy, greasy waffle thing dipped in maple syrup as a dessert. Not my cup of tea but she loved it. You also get the bonus of then doing some browsing in the Market, which is, for anyone who hasn’t been, a must-do in London. Now with some trendy independent shops and artisan wares, the mainstay market stalls are a traditional mix of Afro-Caribbean and British foodstuffs, and stretch on and on. Brixton Market is one of the few true neighbour-

hood food markets in London that rivals those of our European neighbours and hasn’t been done up into street food stalls only for tourists.

My final brunch destination was **The Modern Pantry** in Clerkenwell, which also has a branch in Finsbury Square. Situated in a tastefully converted house, there are three floors of seating. It’s all grey and white, quite light and airy. The service was very efficient and my only complaint is the noise level – the usual conversation of a busy place, but added music on a Saturday morning made it difficult to hear my friend. The menu is extensive and modern British meets Med/Middle Eastern. I had fried eggs with combread and chorizo while my friend had her poached eggs with halloumi. We then split a cocoa, garam masala and banana granola dish with passionfruit because it was the most exotic sounding thing in the ‘Grains’ section. Tasty, as was the excellent coffee.

Though my weekends still often revolve around boys’ sporting schedules and walking the dog, I’m going to try to make time for the occasional brunch - a facet of London life that’s too good to miss.

