



Cheap Eats Dining Review: Street Food Trucks

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There's no denying it: the gourmet food truck revolution has arrived. Those rolling purveyors of high-end street food have popped up in cities from coast to coast. They're the stars of reality TV shows -- hello, "Great Food Truck Race" -- and entire festivals have sprung up to showcase the glories of gourmet tacos-on-the-go.

With several fests coming up -- Oakland's Eat Real runs Sept. 23-25 at Jack London Square, Pleasanton's Gourmet Food Truck Fest is Oct. 15 at the Alameda County Fairgrounds, and Off the Grid arrives in Berkeley's Gourmet Ghetto every Wednesday evening -- we embarked on a reconnaissance mission to discover the tastiest fare.

Hapa SF

Cuisine: Filipino

Prices: \$5 for lumpia, \$6 for sisig tacos

Details: Find menus and information at <http://hapasf.com>, follow the truck on Twitter @HapaSF.

Hapa SF is the brainchild of chef William Pilz, who traded in his Citizen Cake toque for an organic Filipino food truck last year. The truck does the Off the Grid rounds -- you'll find it Wednesday evenings in Berkeley's Gourmet Ghetto -- as well as Eat Real and similar events. Pilz's specialty is mixing sustainably raised, local ingredients from farmers markets and ranches with Filipino inspirations, so the Lumpia "Shanghai" (\$5 for seven) are filled with Beelor Ranch ground

pork, water chestnuts and shredded carrots and served with a sweet-and-sour sauce, and the Sisig Tacos (\$6 for two) feature lime and soy-braised pork with avocado, radishes and cabbage salad. The lumpia are piping hot, little, deep-fried bundles,

with just the barest trace of grease. We'd have liked a little more flavor in the filling, but they were tasty, especially when dunked in the tangy sauce. There are banh mi, rice plates and vegetarian options, as well.

Kasa Indian Eatery

Cuisine: Indian

Prices: \$5 for a Kati roll, \$7.50 for a rice plate

Details: Get details at www.kasaindian.com, or follow the truck on Twitter @KasaIndian.

This hot pink truck evokes all the color -- and flavor -- of the best Bollywood flicks. It's based out of a San Francisco restaurant on 18th Street and the new truck, which launched in July and appears at San Francisco's Proxy Pop-Up and Off the Grid, as well as at Eat Real, serves up street food in two versions, over rice with daal, or in a Kati Roll. And we loved the back story: the restaurant and catering business are run by Anamika Khanna, a Brit-born lawyer, London School of Economics alum and passionate home cook-turned-chef, and her business partner, Tim Volkema, a former brand manager at Kraft Foods, who took one bite of Khanna's food and was smitten.

The Kati Roll (\$5) would be a great grab-and-go lunch anytime, but it's especially perfect for a street food fest like Off the Grid, where you'll sample a great many things. We split an order of the buttery, handmade flat bread, rolled round succulent

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chicken tikka, grilled onions and a generous dollop of spicy mint-cilantro chutney. Order it in its spicy iteration and you'll definitely want that little tub of raita to cool things down. There's an aloo jeera -- cumin-spiked potatoes -- version, too.

Little Green Cyclo

Cuisine: Vietnamese

Prices: \$5 for banh mi

Details: www.littlegreencyclo.com, @lilgreencyclo.

This vivid green truck boasts some of the freshest, tastiest fare around. We ran across them at a recent Off the Grid fest at Berkeley's Golden Gate Fields, but the trio who run this affair -- chef Quynh Nguyen, Monica Wong and Susie Pham -- pop up at Off the Grids from San Mateo to San Francisco. They'll be at Eat Real this weekend too.

There's no question as to why everything tastes so fresh. The ingredients are from local and organic farms, the flavors hail from Vietnam, and the portions, whether they're destined for omnivorous or vegetarian diners, are generous and utterly delicious. We loved the lemon grass grilled pork banh mi (\$5), a crisp baguette brimming with tender meat and tangy, pickled vegetables. And the sweet potato tater tots (\$3) -- marble-sized, deep-fried balls of utter deliciousness, served with a mango-mint mayonnaise -- are wildly, insanely addictive.

NomNom

Cuisine: Vietnamese

Prices: \$2.50 for tacos, \$6.50 banh mi.

Details: <http://nomnomtruck.com/sf/>, @nomnomsf.

If you caught even a moment of "The Great Food Truck Race" last season, you must have spotted Jennifer Green and Misa Chien and NomNom, the bright green banh mi and Vietnamese taco truck that won the competition week after week, and ultimately took second place. This summer, the Los Angeles-based duo expanded their popular venture to the Bay Area with a NomNomSF truck -- bright green with the signature Nomster on the side. NomNom served up its signature banh mi and Vietnamese tacos at Pleasanton's Gourmet Food Truck Fest

earlier this month, and makes frequent appearances at Off the Grid.

The banh mi (\$6.50) feature grilled pork, lemon grass chicken or tofu, with the same filling options for the tasty little tacos (\$2.50 each). The lemon grass chicken tacos were certainly good, but we're awarding the Vietnamese taco win to Little Green Cyclo.

Rib Whip

Cuisine: Barbecue.

Prices: \$8 for a third of a rack, \$22 for a full slab.

Details: www.theribwhip.com, @theribwhip.

Billing itself as the Bay Area's first gourmet Midwestern-style barbecue food truck, Rib Whip draws a crowd almost instantly. It's the aroma, most likely. Well, that and the ecstatic moaning from the diners that surround the crimson truck. They're chowing down on St. Louis native Ryan Gessel's smoky ribs, pulled pork sandwiches (\$8), Baked Beans with Burnt Ends (\$3) and Crackin' Mac and Cheese (\$4, now made, we're told, "with 100 percent organic crack").

It's not just the mac and cheese that's crack-level addictive. The ribs, available in full racks for \$22 or a third of a rack for \$8, are fall-off-the-bone tender and enveloped in a smoky, sweet sauce that elicits, well, ecstatic moaning. The baked beans redefine that particular concept. They're covered in the same

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sauce and tidbits of meat, the "burnt ends" that fall off the ribs, are sprinkled throughout. Vegetarians will want to steer clear of the truck, lest they get trampled by stampeding carnivores.

Señor Sisig

Cuisine: Filipino.

Prices: \$3 for two tacos.

Details: www.senorsisig.com, @senorsisig.

Some say that it was Kogi, the famous Los Angeles-based Korean-Mexican taco truck, that started it all -- the Asian fusion tacos, Twitter-tracking and street food popularity. We're tempted to agree. But what William Pilz did with HapaSF and Evan Kidera and Gil Payumo, a California Culinary Academy alum, have done here is to take that taco concept and add a Filipino touch, via sisig (pronounced see-sig). It's a traditional Filipino dish of diced meat, sauteed with onions, jalapeños, soy sauce, vinegar and citrus.

The results include delicious little tacos (\$3 for two), the savory meat mixed with a crisp, colorful slaw and folded into tiny tortillas, as well as burritos and other Filipino-Mexican mixtures. Señor Sisig makes the Off the Grid rounds, including regular appearances at the North Berkeley OTG, as well as Eat Real, where the stern pig with the crossed cleavers should be easy to spot among the more than 60 food trucks scheduled to appear this weekend.



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