

**DINING** • *Nighttime hot spot's daytime diversions*

# Old Town offers lunch break from Loop

With its comedy clubs, Old Town comes to life at night, so dropping in for lunch can be like visiting a resort off season. But the architecture—brick row houses and cobbled mews—shops and diverse lunch spots make it a terrific daytime destination, too. Old Town is just a hop from the Loop (an \$8 cab, or the Brown Line to Sedgwick). Parking lots and valets charge \$8.



**1 Trattoria Roma**  
1535 N. Wells St., (312) 664-7907  
Salads, entrees: \$6-12

My friends and I were the only patrons, but we didn't mind. The food was mostly superb, and we had the place and the waiter with the perfect Italian pronunciation all to ourselves. First, a bruschetta freebie: bread soaked in olive oil and garlic, topped with pale tomatoes. On to salads, which disappointed, despite the freshest ingredients: The mista was too lemony.

The pizza and pasta—enough to feed a platoon—may have been the best any of us have had, ever. Thin-crust pizza was layered with egg, prosciutto, artichoke, mushroom and olives. The rigatoni and sausage in red sauce was so flavorful, we overate.

Don't miss the ricotta cheesecake. And even though it's not on the menu, be sure to order a cafe lungo, a brewed espresso.



**3 Bistrot Margot**  
1437 N. Wells St., (312) 587-3660  
Appetizers, entrees: \$5-\$12

Unimpressed by a dinner here years ago, I headed out grudgingly. What a happy surprise, then, to find the perfect business lunch: excellent service, outstanding food and a sunny table.

Portions and prices are sized for lunch. Share a bowl of moules marinière (mussels simmered in white wine). The assorted pâtés were so tasty, we ate them throughout the meal. Our attentive waiter warned that the crab cake was not the crunchy norm, but we ordered it anyway. (It was okay.) Spinach quiche beside a mound of perfectly dressed salad was the perfect light lunch. Tilapia on a bed of vegetables and linguine with seafood were expertly prepared and flavorful. Only the croque monsieur truly fell short: It was mushy. Crêpes Suzette and

chocolate mousse were pleasing endings.



**4 Kamehachi**  
1400 N. Wells St., (312) 664-3663  
Appetizers, entrees: \$4-\$9

At this spare Japanese restaurant—said to be the city's first sushi bar, opened in 1967—we started with a nicely balanced miso

soup. My friend liked the goma ae, a cold spinach dish, and we devoured the sautéed scallops, even though they were a little greasy. We passed on noodles, tempura and other entrees, heading for the famous sushi instead. The California roll (crab, avocado and cucumber) and negi hamachi (yellowtail) were so fresh, I've now given up grocery store sushi. The Chicago crazy roll was too much of a good thing, with too many ingredients to have a distinctive taste.

The perfect ending is a mug of green tea. Service was gracious and prompt.

ANNE MOORE

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**2 Old Jerusalem**  
1411 N. Wells St., (312) 944-0459  
Appetizers, entrees: \$3-\$9

A longtime favorite for Middle Eastern cuisine served lightning-fast. But it's not just the speed that's remarkable. The hummus (chickpeas and tahini) is so creamy, you'd think it was a dairy product. And the tabbouleh (cracked wheat, scallions, tomatoes and parsley—but mostly parsley) is refreshing.

How fast was it? Two tables turned in less than 20 minutes, while other diners ate at a more leisurely pace. We lingered over the salads, and when our waiter overheard us fretting over which entrees to order, he offered to make a combination platter of musaheb (grilled chicken) and kefta kabob (grilled minced lamb). The lamb was well seasoned and perfectly cooked, but the chicken was a little dry.

Service was great, save for a forgotten drink. It was worth the wait: The freshly squeezed apple juice tasted like nectar. American coffee was watery; go for the rich, sweet Arabic instead.

JOHN R. BOEHM PHOTOS