



# Small Bites

Food Finds in the Lower Hudson Valley

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## Discover the Fun of Falafel

Posted by: Liz Johnson - Posted in Restaurants on Oct 13, 2010

Freelancer Jerry Elminder has a nice story in today's paper about how falafel is getting more popular. Here's a look:

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Falafel is an easy target.

The word can make you chuckle (it rhymes with waffle). It's popular with the counterculture (such as hippies at Grateful Dead shows). And half the people we've asked aren't even sure exactly what it is (doesn't it come in a pita, like a gyro?).

But once you realize what is in a falafel — it's a fritter, essentially, made from chickpeas or fava beans, or both — and how healthy and delicious it can be, we're betting you'll get a little more serious about falafel. Especially when you realize how popular it's getting.



Kerri Jew, owner of Taim Falafel Shack in Hastings-on-Hudson, with a plate of falafel. (Xavier Mascarenas/TJN)

More, after the jump.

When former New York Mets star and Yankees player Darryl Strawberry opened Strawberry's Sports Grill in Queens this summer, a falafel burger was on the menu along with traditional pub food. Two just-opened local cafes, Open Table Grill in Eastchester and Good Life Gourmet in Scarsdale, have falafel on their menus, and a third — Taim Falafel Shack in Hastings-on-Hudson — can claim falafel as its middle name. The demand, says Taim co-owner Zamir Iosepovici, has been astounding.

"I had no idea we would be cooking more than 300 falafel balls a day," he says.

Michael Skibitcky, a chef-instructor who teaches a Mediterranean class at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, is already pretty serious about falafel, too. In his course, and in a coming cookbook, he shares a recipe he discovered in a small cafe near the entrance to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. He had heard it served a "marvelous" falafel.

"I went to see for myself and had some of the best falafel I ever tasted, made fresh using a small grinder while I waited," he says. "With a little persuasion, the chef who spoke only Arabic gave me his recipe."

Skibitcky says he thinks travelers discovering falafel abroad — and then wanting more at home — are creating a demand. Plus, he says, awareness of its nutritional benefits is growing. Finally — and this is very serious, indeed — falafel just tastes good.

A well-made falafel should be crispy on the outside and tender on the inside. Deep-fried or baked, it is usually eaten with tahini sauce and served in a pita bread. Typical accompaniments are chopped peppers, onions, cucumbers, tomatoes and even French fries. Except for the fries, it's all healthy stuff.

Three falafels by themselves represent only about 140 calories," Skibitcky says. "So even with a small salad and a whole-grain pita bread, a falafel meal has a calorie count of only 250 or 300. If the falafels are baked with olive oil they have less than half a gram of fat — if deep-fried only about two grams. Falafels are tasty if baked so they don't have to be deep fried."

Where falafel came from is a matter of deep dispute. Some historians have traced it back to the early Egyptians but others say it may have originated in India or Pakistan. It is often referred to as the national food of Israel, where it can be bought at street stands, and many Israelis eat it every day.

The recipes used for falafel in Israel and Jordan are similar, Skibitcky says. "In both countries, chickpea is the principal ingredient, though in some other Middle Eastern countries, a 50-percent chickpea/50-percent fava bean combination is common. In Egypt, falafel is made only from fava bean."

Israeli restaurants generally serve 100-percent-chickpea falafel, Skibitcky says, but Israeli grocers commonly sell a chickpea-fava bean combination for take-home, cold-snack eating.

Around here, you'll find all sorts of varieties. At Taim, the falafel are 100 percent chickpea. (The restaurant is co-owned by Iosepovici and his wife, Kerri Jew. Iosepovici is of Israeli decent and the chef, Abu Ghaleb, is Jordanian.) At Lefteris Gyro in Tarrytown and Mount Kisco, chef-owner Chris Grammatas uses half chickpeas and half fava beans. And yes, falafel are flying out the door there, too.

"We have seen a mega interest increase in falafels during the last year or two," he says.

Eric Korn, chef-owner of Good Life Gourmet, says it was only a matter of time before falafel caught on. "I learned how to make falafel from a Kurdish woman a few years ago when I worked in Ohio and I knew once I had my own restaurant I would offer it."

And, we're betting, now you'll order it. And you won't chuckle a bit.

### Falafel

Chef Michael Skibitcky brought this recipe back from a cafe in Jerusalem, where the falafel are ground moments before they're cooked. He warns to avoid recipes that call for bread crumbs or eggs and says to never use canned chickpeas.

- 1 pound dried chickpeas, soaked overnight in the refrigerator
- 4 to 5 cloves garlic, roughly minced
- 1/2 bunch Italian parsley, coarsely chopped
- 1/2 bunch cilantro, coarsely chopped
- 1 to 3 Thai bird chile peppers, depending on how hot you like it
- 2 teaspoons Kosher salt
- 2 teaspoons freshly ground cumin seed (not toasted)
- 2 teaspoons freshly ground coriander seed (not toasted)
- 1/8 teaspoon baking soda

Grind the soaked chickpeas together with all ingredients using a food processor. Form into balls or patties as small as you possibly can — no more than 1/2 inch thick.

To fry: Heat 2 inches of canola or sunflower oil to 350 degrees in a deep, heavy frying pan. Using a slotted spoon or metal spatula, slowly and carefully lower falafel balls into the oil. When the bottom side is brown, about 2 minutes, turn the falafel and cook the other side, about 1 to 2 minutes. Drain on paper towels.

To bake: Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Cover a sheet pan with a silpat, silicone paper or parchment paper and spray or brush with olive oil. Place falafel on the paper, then bake for about 5 minutes.

Serve falafel with garnishes, such as lettuce, tomato, cucumber or sprouts, and spoon tahini sauce on top.

Yield: 18 ounces, approximately 12 portions (36 pieces)

Where you can order falafel

Elia Taverna: Falafel can be ordered as an appetizer or as a three-piece, pita-bread sandwich with onions, lettuce, tomato and a choice of sauces including tahini and sesame. The cost for either the five-piece dish or a sandwich is the same: \$7.95. A platter, including a Greek salad and a choice of side orders, is priced at \$12.95. 502 New Rochelle Road, Bronxville. 914-663-4976.

Ephendi: Falafel is currently available only as an eat-in platter at \$6.50 but a take-out sandwich version is planned by the chef. 191 S. Main St., New City. 845-708-5752

Epstein's Kosher Delicatessen: Serves falafel balls as an appetizer, a falafel sandwich and a \$10.95 platter with an Israeli salad and pita bread. 2574 Central Park Avenue, Yonkers. 914-793-3131.

Epstein's of Hartsdale: Serves falafel balls with tahini sauce for \$7.95. 387 N. Central Ave., Hartsdale. 914-428-5320.

Good-Life Gourmet: Falafel is a special and not on the regular menu. It is served with hummus, feta, red onion and minted tzatziki sauce and made from a Kurdish menu. 13 Spencer Place, Scarsdale. 914-723-3024. Also, opening soon: 108 Main St., Irvington, 914-478-8080.

Lefteris Gyro: Falafel as a sandwich costs \$6.75 or as a platter with Greek salad, pita and fries or rice costs \$12.25; it can come as a side dish at \$1 per ball. 1 N. Broadway, Tarrytown. 914-524-9687; Lefteris Gyro II: 7190 E. Main St., Mount Kisco, 914-242-8965.

Masala Kraft Cafe: Falafel comes with a wheat or white pita (\$7.25 each), or as a platter or a wrap (\$8.25 each). All are served with tahini, hummus, lettuce and hot sauce. 206 E. Hartsdale Ave., Hartsdale. 914-722-4300.

Niko's Greek Taverna: A six-piece falafel appetizer with tahini and tzatziki sauce costs \$8. A sandwich with lettuce, onions, tomatoes and tzatziki, wrapped in pita is priced at \$11. 287 Central Ave., White Plains. 914-686-6456.

Open Table Grill Bar: For \$5.95, five falafel balls can be ordered with Israeli salad in pita. A hummus-falafel combination has five falafel balls on top of a plate of hummus (\$7.95). Not to be outdone, the Middle Eastern Platter has ten falafel balls, hummus, tahini, baba ganoush, Moroccan eggplant salad, two pieces of pita and Israeli salad; it can feed two people (\$10.95). 33 Mill Road, Eastchester. 914-361-1822.

Shiraz: A large falafel salad with hummus is offered for \$10. Although falafel is not on the menu otherwise, it can be prepared on request. 83 E. Main St., Elmsford. 914-345-6111.

Taim Falafel Shack: A \$5 falafel sandwich comes with either white or whole-wheat pita: the \$12 platter includes hummus, Israeli salad and yellow rice or cracked bulgur wheat. A side order of falafel costs \$4 and a "stuffed" falafel stuffed with onions, garlic and spices sells for \$6. The Israeli salad has cucumbers, tomatoes and green onions, chopped and tossed with olives in a lemon vinaigrette. 598 Warburton Ave., Hastings-on-Hudson. 914-478-0006.

Turkish Cuisine Westchester: A five-portion plate with tahini sauce (appetizer-size dish) costs \$6. Falafel also comes stuffed in pita bread or in a wrap with hummus, tomato and tahini sauce at \$7.53. The restaurant is currently under renovation and when this is completed in about two months, a new menu will include a falafel plate with rice and salad priced at \$11.95. 116 Mamaroneck Ave., White Plains. 914-683-6111.

Turkoi's Grille: This restaurant purchases its falafel from a vendor. A plate of falafel costs \$6.50. 308 Saddle River Road, Airmont. 845-371-5800.

Turquoise: The menu includes falafel with vegetable patties and celery (\$6.95) and a hot-meze combination platter of falafel, Sigara Borek (a phyllo dough with feta and parsley), and a spinach and zucchini pancake accompanied by hot sauce (house-made harissa), hummus and tahini sauce for \$24.95. 1895 Palmer Ave., Larchmont. 914-834-9888.

Turkish Meze: A mint-mixture falafel appetizer with tahini is priced at \$6. 409 Mount Pleasant Ave., Mamaroneck. 914-777-3042.

Wedged-in Deli: A falafel deluxe plate costs \$6.95 and includes lettuce, tomato, onions and fries. 605 Old White Plains Road, Tarrytown. 914-366-4212.

Ya Hala Restaurant, Yonkers: Falafel is served as a \$3 sandwich with tahini sauce and it comes in an \$8 platter that also contains hummus, baba ganoush and tabbouleh salad. 326 S. Broadway, Yonkers. 914-476-4200.

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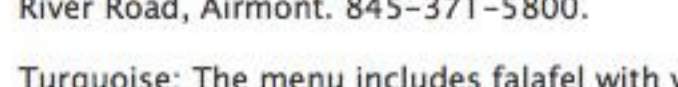


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### Poll

How much do you tip for a Hudson Valley Restaurant Week meal?

- 20 percent — like always
- 15 percent — like always
- 25 percent — sheesh, they're working hard and the price is great
- 10 percent — I'm out for a cheap meal and this makes it even cheaper
- Whatever the wait staff deserves for the service

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- Hudson Valley Restaurant Week 2010: The Recap
  - Hudson Valley Restaurant Week Wrap Party: Guest Bloggers Win Prizes
  - HVRW: Donna Monaco Olsen at Rainwater Grill in Hastings-on-the-Hudson
  - Maria Reina visits Roasted Peppers in Mamaroneck on the last night of HVRW
  - HVRW: Kendra Wales at The Bird and Bottle Inn in Garrison
  - HVRW: Guest Blogger Cara Cea at Marcello's in Suffern
  - HVRW: Donna Monaco Olsen at Tramonto in Hawthorne
  - HVRW: Maria Reina visits Hudson House River Inn in Cold Spring
  - Debra West at Harvest on Hudson
  - Maria Reina visits DiNardo's of Pound Ridge
  - HVRW: Kendra Wales at The Division Street Grill in Peekskill
  - Last Chance for Hudson Valley Restaurant Week 2010: Photos and Reviews of Restaurants in Westchester, Rockland and Putnam
  - HVRW: Debra West at Sentristra Grill in Brewster
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- "Just Opened: Pon Di Riva in Ossining" (8)
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