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WEEKEND IN NEW YORK | TASTES OF AFRICA

## Sampling a Continent at Home

By [SETH KUGEL](#)

CAN'T afford to chow down in Addis Ababa or gambol in some South African game park any time soon? Then try this whirlwind tour that has you (kind of) crisscrossing the continent, from an Ethiopian vegetarian's paradise to Mauritanian appetizers to a South African brunch, all in one weekend and for little more than the cost of a trip to New York. O.K., for exactly the same price as a trip to New York, since that's what it is.

### FRIDAY NIGHT

For many Americans, African food begins and ends with Ethiopian cuisine, with its slightly sour flatbread that's used instead of silverware to scoop up stews of meats and vegetables. So it makes sense to start the weekend with an Ethiopian restaurant.

Peter Meehan, a Times food critic, recommended [Meskel](#) last November, saying that the bread, known as injera, "works in incredible harmony with the stewed, simmered and sautéed meats, vegetables and legumes." He called the vegetarian combination plate "the best thing to happen to East Village vegetarians in a long time."

A short cab ride west at [Zinc Bar](#), Friday nights always feature African music. Depending on the weekend, you might find Source with Abdoulaye Diabaté, an interracial New York-based African group, or the African jazz and funk of the African Blue Notes, led by the Cameroonian singer and guitarist Martino Atagana. Sets begin at 10 and 11:30 p.m. and at 1 a.m.; the cover charge is \$7.

If that's not late enough, you could end the evening at [Cain](#), a chic Chelsea nightclub where the décor is inspired by South African game lodges, and the bar is upholstered in zebra skin. Too bad there are no Chelsea consulates around that can grant you a visa for entry in advance; Cain's velvet ropes can be tougher to cross than some African borders.

### SATURDAY

For brunch, take the South African theme a few steps closer toward legitimacy at [Madiba](#), a Brooklyn restaurant that serves what is a rarity in [New York City](#): South African food. It's a warm place modeled after the informal bars known as shebeens, and the menu is full of things that you have probably never heard of, inspired by the mishmash of cultures that make up South African cuisine. On the brunch menu, that can mean anything from scones or toast coated with Marmite yeast extract to burgers in (monkey-

free) monkey gland sauce, or frikkadels, South African meatballs.

The city's [Museum for African Art](#) has no permanent exhibitions these days as it waits for its new building to be built at what will become the northern tip of Museum Mile in 2009. But you can check out African displays at other museums in town, including the [Met](#), which has ancient art from [Mali](#) to [Madagascar](#) in its Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas collection; and the Hall of African Peoples in the [American Museum of Natural History](#).

(If museums aren't for you, you can sneak in a little ersatz [Africa](#) by going to see "The Lion King" on Broadway.)

For dinner, try Les Enfants Terribles, deep in the Lower East Side on the eastern edges of Canal Street (kind of like Manhattan's equivalent of Timbuktu). The masks on the walls inside and tentlike canopy outside give it a game-lodge feel, and those who enjoy pronunciation challenges will enjoy ordering dishes from throughout Africa and the African diaspora (i.e. [Brazil](#)). There's the aumônière mauritanienne, a compote of lamb, dates and prunes; and steak with spices from the [Ivory Coast](#) known as koroghofefemugu.

You could linger at Les Enfants Terribles all night, downing caipirinhas and cocktails made with Senegalese dried bissap flowers, but if you prefer your crowded night spots to be less expensive, less chic and more sweaty, head to [St. Nick's Pub](#), way up north in Harlem. (Take the F train to the B train, and have something substantial to read.)

The little basement joint overflows with energy (and people) for the Saturday night African music jam, which features Abdoulaye Alhassane and a fluid group that changes as the evening goes on. There's no cover, but a \$5 beer and a donation of a few bucks to the band mean you can stay as long as you want. The mesmerizing drumming and singing inspires a few couples to turn bits of the crowded space into tiny individual dance floors.

## SUNDAY

As your African weekend draws to a close, do you sense an elephant in the room? That's North Africa, left out, so far, in its entirety. New York's north-of-the-Sahara spots are way too much to cover in a day, so just sleep in, take it easy, with brunch at [Barbès](#) — an Algerian-Moroccan spot that Frank Bruni gave one star in 2005.

You can have eggs Benedict, if you wish, but there are plenty of North African-inspired dishes, too, like a merguez sausage or lamb brochettes. Uncork a bottle of Algerian Domaine El Bordj with that, and the rest of the afternoon will take care of itself.

## VISITOR INFORMATION

Meskel Ethiopian Restaurant, 199 East Third Street (Avenue B), East Village, (212) 254-2411.

Madiba, 195 DeKalb Avenue, Fort Greene, Brooklyn, (718) 855-9190.

Les Enfants Terribles, 37 Canal Street (Ludlow Street), Lower East Side, (212) 777-7518;  
[www.lesenfantsterriblesnyc.com](http://www.lesenfantsterriblesnyc.com).

Barbès, 21 East 36th Street (between Fifth and Madison Avenues), Murray Hill, (212) 684-0215.

Zinc Bar, 90 West Houston Street (La Guardia Place), Greenwich Village, (212) 477-8337;  
[www.zincbar.com](http://www.zincbar.com).

Cain, 544 West 27th Street (10th and 11th Avenues), Chelsea, (212) 947-8000; [www.cainnyc.com](http://www.cainnyc.com).

St. Nick's Pub, 773 St. Nicholas Avenue (149th Street), Harlem, (212) 283-9728.

For listings of African [music](#) in New York, [www.afropop.org](http://www.afropop.org) lists concerts and events. On Friday, March 30, for example, you can replace a night at the Zinc Bar with a concert at Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall by Toumani Diabaté's Symmetric Orchestra, which the Carnegie Hall Web site says plays "everything from age-old Malian standards to contemporary Cuban-Senegalese salsa."

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