

Sample yummy Brum and lose yourself in the Balti Triangle

Food Miles

By **Andy Lynes**

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Star chamber: Take a tour of the menu at Purnell's

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This month, Birmingham celebrates its emergence as a genuinely exciting gourmet destination with the city's first annual Food Fest, from 14 to 23 October (birminghamfoodfest.com).

It is home to the most Michelin-starred restaurants in a single city outside London, and while Glyn Purnell might be one of the most original and inventive Michelin-starred chefs in the UK, he's no prima donna. The eight-course "tour" menu at the stylish yet relaxed Purnell's at 55 Cornwall Street (0121-212 9799; purnellsrestaurant.com) is full of delicious and witty creations such as poached egg yolk with smoked haddock milk foam, and masala-spiced monkfish with red lentils.

Stay city centre in the trendy Staying Cool apartments at The Rotunda, 150 New Street (0121-285 1250; stayingcool.com) and you can take advantage of the well-equipped kitchen to prepare produce bought at the nearby Indoor Bullring Market (indoorbullringmarket.co.uk) or New Street Farmers Market.

There's fierce debate about who cooks the original and best balti in Birmingham's famous Balti Triangle. It is home to more than 50 restaurants, but Imran's, 262-266 Ladypool Road (0121-449 1370; imrans.com), is a strong contender. The quick-cooked tomato, chilli and garlic-based curry is fragrant with freshly ground spices, packed with chunks of chicken and served with a duvet-sized family naan bread.

Pushkar, 245 Broad Street (0121-643 7978; pushkardining.com), takes Punjabi and northern Indian cuisine upmarket with elegant and luxurious surroundings, top-notch service and inventive cooking. Masala crab cakes get an aromatic kick from ginger, chilli, lime and coriander, and Punjabi nalli gosht is a meltingly tender shank of lamb braised in a rich and spicy gravy.

Try a tutored gin and spirit masterclass at the Gin Palace, The Jekyll and Hyde, 28 Steelhouse Lane (0121-236 0345; thejekyllandhyde.co.uk), where you can taste some of the extensive collection of global gins including Aviation gin and Old Raj. Learn how to

mix your own classic and contemporary drinks, which might include a Negroni Snr made with Seagrams Distiller's Reserve, Aperol, Carpano Antica vermouth and kumquat mist.

Run by husband-and-wife team Steve and Claire, Loves Restaurant at The Glasshouse, Canal Square (0121-454 5151; loves-restaurant.co.uk), puts a modern twist on fine dining, with dishes including braised pig's head with crispy pig's ear, apple, pickled mussels and Iberico ham, and Herefordshire rib-eye in carrot ash, crispy tongue, ox cheek, celeriac choucroute and smoked potato mash. The prix fixe menu offers particularly good value.