



David Freedenberg

Web Contributor • New York City

May 4, 2006

If there is one thing that clearly bridges the East-West gap between Middle Easterners and Americans, it is shawarma. Americans love shawarma. We adore it. All over Europe, lines full of homesick Americans studying abroad stretch from Middle Eastern shawarma stands. And here in New York, shawarma joints abound, packed with immigrants and natives alike. Something about the huge, meaty, messy sandwich agrees with the American taste bud, not to mention the American way of life. So in these troubled times, rather than highlighting our differences, let us focus on something that brings us closer together: shaved meat.

Mamoun's

119 MacDougal St • 212-674-8685



Photo: David Freedenberg

At four bucks a sandwich, Mamoun's shawarma is amongst the cheapest in the city. A favorite haunt of both NYU students and Jamaican pushers, the tiny store is rarely without a line out the door from lunchtime straight through until four in the morning. The meat is obviously high quality, and the fast-working pros

who do the shaving often serve up bits that are crispy yet still juicy. The falafel there is actually their forte, but the shawarma benefits from the ultra fresh lettuce and tomatoes on hand. One of the great New York eating traditions, akin to downing a Nathan's hot dog on the Coney Island boardwalk or a Guss pickle on a Lower East Side sidewalk, is to take a Mamoun's falafel or shawarma to eat in Washington Square.

Zaytoons

472 Myrtle Ave • 718-623-5522
282 Smith St • 718-875-1880



Photo: David Freedenberg

Zaytoons shawarma is, in one humble guidebook writer's opinion, the tastiest in New York City. Closing at eleven or midnight makes Zaytoons the early bird of this list, but it's worth getting hungry for this shawarma early. The friendly Palestinians at Zaytoons make their own pita before your

eyes in the front window, so every sandwich is served in bread so fresh it's almost as hot as the meat. And rather than stuff the shawarma in a pocket of pita, they wrap it in a large, flat piece like a burrito. Zaytoons offers the usual meat and lamb options along with an equally delicious chicken alternative. The meat is sliced thick off the spit, making it the Katz Delicatessen cut of the New York shawarma world. And the pickles they put inside are yet another similarity between cultures.

Yatagan

104 MacDougal St • 212-677-0952



Photo: David Freedenberg

Because it is across the street from Mamoun's, (this place stays open just as late and never has a line) a lot of people feel like Yatagan is just Mamoun's ugly step-sister. However, it most certainly has its own thing going on. The shawarma, which they refer to as *donner kebab*, is different than Mamoun's. Yatagan's meat is always shaved very thin, golden bronze on the outside, pinkish grey on the inside. It makes a great platter, but the sandwich shouldn't be missed. The stuffed pita is much bigger than Mamoun's, and Yatagan uses the smart technique of loading meat at the bottom, then veggies in the middle, and then more meat on top so that every bite is a meaty, greasy delight. As a result, the price is a dollar higher than Mamoun's, but the curbside window gives you the advantage of watching your car while you wait. Many a shawarma at Mamoun's has ended up costing \$114 thanks to New York's brave meter maids.

Sahara

2337 Coney Island Ave • 718-382-9476



Photo: David Freedenberg

Even though the owners of Sahara are Turks, you have to order your shawarma as a "gyro sandwich." One of the few places near the southern coast of Brooklyn that stays open into the small hours, Sahara's meat is succulent. The cashier is invariably in a bad mood, but the shawarma is well worth the annoyance. Although Sahara does have a convenient parking lot, there is no convenient place to eat their messy concoctions aside from makeshift counters built around trashcans. So it might be worth sitting down to waitress service in Sahara's large dining room.