

The Fast and the Curious: 9 Lenten Menus to Savor

Our guide to dining out in Moscow during the 40 days of Lent

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Like the rest of the chef's creations at Mushrooms, the focus is on making fungi a key element of the Lenten menu. **MUSHROOMS**

Having gorged themselves on pancakes during Maslenitsa, Russians now embark on the "Veliky Post" (Great Fast or Lent). From Feb 27 to April 15, those observing the fast traditionally abstain from meat, fish, eggs and dairy products.

As usual, most restaurants and cafes around the city are putting on a vegan-based Lenten menu to make the 40-day fast leading up to Easter a little more appetizing. Here are a few of The Moscow Times' top picks:

Burger & Pizzetta

Fast food can be healthy too!

This Art Deco-styled restaurant may be centered around a 3-meter brass rhinoceros, but the only big game on the Lenten menu is working out which of the mouth-watering options to choose.

Pick from either a falafel burger with mint sauce for 330 rubles (\$6.80), a mushroom burger (330-460 rubles), or a tofu burger with almond breadcrumbs (420-550 rubles).

Then, if you're feeling like something super-nutritious, choose from the selection of "Healthy Drinks," including an aloe vera detox smoothie with chia seeds, an 11-ingredient Vitamix, or just a simple pineapple and basil smoothie.

Mushrooms

...but are fungi sentient beings?

A member of Moscow's famous White Rabbit family, this restaurant's Lenten offerings won't disappoint — but there's a catch.

Start with the wild mushroom aspic with pickled cranberries for 420 rubles (\$7.20), followed by the Jerusalem artichoke, fennel, and radish with truffle cream (580 rubles). For dessert, experiment with the carrot and pineapple cake with coconut ice cream (340 rubles).

So what's the catch? Well, according to Mushrooms, fungi are unique life forms that have genes, a digestive system, genitals and even a memory! So, as mouthwateringly delicious as the Lenten menu sounds, if you're being super strict then you'll have to give it a miss!

Kazbek

Meatless Caucasian food becomes a reality

This Maison Dello's Georgian favorite is typically heavy on meat dishes, but during the Great Fast they're providing a scrumptious Lenten menu. The pancakes made from zucchini, green apple and carrot for 460 rubles (\$8) are a highlight — try following them with cherry jelly and crispy breadsticks (185 rubles) for dessert.

Too Much

Small is beautiful

Too Much is currently in the running for a Time Out award for best beer restaurant of 2016, which should be proof enough that it's worth stopping by — there's a fantastic selection of wine and beer available here.

But even if you're cutting out the booze and following a strict fast until Easter, Too Much is in a great location and perfect for a light meal. The Lenten menu here eschews any particular regional focus, instead placing the emphasis firmly on fresh seasonal produce and bold combinations.

The portion sizes may be on the petite side, but the food gets top marks. Try the salad with white mushrooms, tomatoes and asparagus for 480 rubles (\$8.25) or the bruschetta with hummus and baked eggplant (300 rubles). For dessert, the coconut panna cotta (460 rubles) is to die for!

Café Didu

Refuel on risotto — then party all night

The Lenten menu at the colorful Café Didu provides simple and hearty dishes such as vegetable risotto for 238 rubles (\$4) or potato pancakes with vegetable shashlik and pesto sauce (288 rubles). If you've got the energy, then stick around and enjoy the lively techno music that lasts till six in the morning every day!

Shinok

Lenten food with a southern accent

The ever-popular Shinok has been serving up "south Russian" cuisine since 1997, so has had plenty of practice in designing Lenten menus. This year is no exception: Start by ordering green caviar with nettle for 320 rubles (\$5.50), then move on to lentil soup (400 rubles) and opt for baked eggplant with spicy adzhika sauce (510 rubles) as a main course.

Kvartira 44

Slow down while you fast

Inhabiting a lamp-lit multi-story apartment, Kwartira 44 incorporates modern European ingredients into Russian village fare at a knockdown price. If you're dining here during Lent, add a dollop of soy sour cream to your sauerkraut soup for 160 rubles (\$2.75), pair a plate of potato wedges with onion sauce (180 rubles), or relish a green radish and apple salad (200 rubles).

For such reasonable prices, be sure to save room for the chocolate cake with raspberry sauce (180 rubles). While the decor calls up the old-world intelligentsia, the musical schedule (Friday and Saturday at 9 p.m.) often features jazz and world music.

Zhizn Pi

Exotic options from the subcontinent

The Lenten menu at this Indian restaurant specializes in spicy vegetarian options containing a unique blend of herbs and other exotic flavors.

Try the ginger and garlic-infused Aloo Gobi for 370 rubles (\$6.40) or the cashew Palak salad with spinach leaves (520 rubles).

Make sure you leave room for the flavorsome desserts on offer such as the fried lychee with caramel and passion fruit sorbet (390 rubles).

Rybny Bazar

'Fish market' goes vegan

Built in 1908 and located in a quiet lane just off Patriarch's Ponds, this elegant upmarket restaurant offers exotic seafood and impeccable service.

For 40 days there's a range of high-class Lenten dishes to choose from, including a classic artichoke soup for 350 rubles (\$6) and a caramelized pumpkin salad (550 rubles). The tranquil décor creates the perfect atmosphere to accompany the top-quality food.

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