

Drink Your Buckwheat!

Russian cuisine done right at the pub

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"Traditional with a twist" is a familiar enough concept. Even the name, Russian Pub, suggests that aim — unexpected incongruity. So, what should you expect if you decide to visit?

The spot calls itself a gastropub, but it's really a step up from that. For starters, its inventive cocktails are worthy of an upscale bar (try the Russian Kashan, their *kasha*-inspired spin on the Moscow Mule); their food is just as impressive. As for ambiance, the industrial chic joint sits on the calm but central Tverskoi Bulvar, with candlelit windows overlooking city streets.

For our TMT events group, dinner came with a live show. We didn't expect to see the chef in action, but Alexei Semenov (who also runs the kitchen at the popular Reka restaurant) was proud to do some showing off. Our bearded chef cut salmon sashimi into delicate slices, sandwiching it momentarily between Himalayan salt blocks before laying it across crispy *grenki*. He later returned to toss raw *muksun* (regional whitefish) in a lemony

concoction until it turned opaque — Siberian ceviche, a revelation. Afterward, he joined us again to chat and pose for novelty shots in furs. Often the chef alone can make a restaurant truly memorable.

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Much of Russian Pub's menu is, as promised, based on traditional cuisine, but it has a certain quality that makes it just ... better. The *butterbrodi*, a kind of Russian bruschetta, are slices of crusty brown bread that everyone in our group raved about, topped with fragrant grilled vegetables; there is also miraculously un-fishy herring and spiced, thinly shaved prime beef carpaccio. Other standout appetizers include beet salad, with magenta dressing that is as beautiful as it is delicious, and wasabi shrimp, a creamy, comforting dish that continues to come up in conversation.

By the time mains rolled around, we'd already been spoiled with delicious food. But we saved room for the stewed lamb and vegetables that arrive in a personal-sized cast iron skillet, and the dreamy pomegranate-glazed grilled salmon. For the vegetarians there was buckwheat with vegetables, which was comparatively underwhelming. Nevertheless, the general feeling was one of reverence. And, stuffed as we were, there was no resisting dessert: syrupy plum baba and cloud-like pavlova. All in all, the pub unveils its homeland's cuisine anew: contemporary, balanced, and scrumptious.

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