



Chew on it



Simon Kurs
The Ink travel editor finds a remedy for restaurant fatigue

Is it just me, or is anyone else suffering from restaurant fatigue? Not a day goes by in London without a new launch taking place, where the same buzzwords are inevitably rolled out: localvore, farm-to-table and so on. But most of these end up pretty much the same: similar trendy menus, similar trendy decor, similar forgettable experience.

So what's the solution? Well, Nuno Mendes might just have the answer. The Portuguese chef – who brought Michelin-starred cooking to east London and then turned the Chiltern Firehouse into the city's celeb-magnet juggernaut – is behind a new project that certainly counteracted my eating-out ennui.

As soon as you arrive at the smart townhouse on Redchurch Street where Mãos is housed, it's clear it's not going to be a normal restaurant experience. You're led to a first-floor kitchen where a small brigade is busy at work. First, Mãos's head chef, Edoardo Pellicano, comes over and asks about your day. Then the maître d' joins in the conversation, proffering a drink. Before you know it, you're all chatting like old friends. It's a disarming starting point for sure.

Mãos is more like a supper club than a restaurant, but to call it that really doesn't do it justice. Guests sit around a

single table and are entreated to consider the place their home – even to the point that they're welcome to eat a course or two in the kitchen if they like.

Yes, you do have to speak to strangers. But by structuring the evening like a dinner party – albeit one where there's a fabulous sommelier and maître d' on hand to keep the wine and conversation flowing – there's a relaxed informality that's truly liberating.

Then, of course, there's the food. I'd say of the 14 courses there were three that were only good, as opposed to really, really good, accenting the modern European cooking that Mendes is known for with Japanese flavours like *dashi*. And, because the kitchen is only cooking for 16 people at most, it brings an attention to detail that you won't find in most Michelin-starred establishments.

Will this novel way of dining catch on? It would be hard for most restaurateurs to pull off, but there are certainly lessons to be learned. Mãos takes the homely setting of supper clubs and combines with it the attributes of fine dining – impeccable service, professional kitchen – to create a truly memorable experience. Most importantly, it keeps you guessing. Now, isn't that something all restaurants should strive for?



The Takeaway
Restaurants looking to stand out amid the saturated dining scene should consider emulating Mãos's recipe: informal vibe, impeccable service



Seeing stars



Delle Chan
The Atlas deputy editor on three stellar stargazing tours



1. Death Valley Adventure

What A six-night expedition through Death Valley – the largest Dark Sky National Park in the US.

Tell me more It's essentially a long-distance hike, but the varying terrain – from saltwater flats to dramatic canyons – keeps things interesting. Each evening concludes with a stargazing sesh; the park's remote location makes for some celestial skies.

Fly to Los Angeles, then drive to Las Vegas.

When 24 February – 1 March; 10–15 March.

Who Black Sheep Adventures.

Info blacksheepadventures.com



2. Night at the Summit

What An overnight stay on Pic du Midi, a 2,877m mountain in the French Pyrénées famed for its summit observatory.

Tell me more After dinner, guests head to the Charvin Dome to observe the twinkling firmament through a 400mm Smith-Cassegrain telescope. Sunrise over the Pyrenees mountains is no less phenomenal, if you can stay awake.

Fly to Barcelona, then drive to La Mongie.

When Year round.

Who Official tourism board Tourisme Hautes-Pyrénées.

Info picdumidi.com



3. Arabian Sands Eclipse

What A culture-nature-adventure mash-up in Oman, timed to coincide with an annular partial solar eclipse.

Tell me more It's the best of Oman, cherry-picked: admire the Grand Mosque in Muscat; explore the 17th-century Jabreen Castle in Bahla; witness said eclipse in the Wahiba Sands; and bed down under star-studded skies in the wilderness of Wadi Tiwi.

Fly to Muscat.

When 21–29 December 2019

Who UK-based adventure travel operators Explore.

Info explore.co.uk