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Hot List: Restaurants with a View

Enjoy the long-lit evenings of summer with our restaurant picks of the best views in Britain and Ireland

Victoria Murden



EARL OF THOMOND

Dromoland Castle, Newmarket-On-Fergus, Co Clare, Ireland

+353 61 368144 I; www.dromoland.ie

The Earl of Thomond restaurant at Dromoland Castle is fine dining at its best – unobtrusive, elegant and oh-so-refined. From the Waterford crystal glass chandeliers to the sweeping views over the estate's 410 acres of meadow, lake and scenic

countryside, dinner is always an occasion. Family portraits and gilded mirrors line the period wallpapered walls, gold and teal curtains frame the large windows and tables are set with thick Irish linen and Wicklow silver. The whole thing is a carefully choreographed dance between the sommelier (who produces a great tomb of a wine list sourced from the castle's 16th century wine cellar) and waiters, who remove silver chargers with a flourish to reveal each course.

In truth, for the food to live up to such opulent surroundings it would have to be truly outstanding. But while the scallops with crispy pork belly were some of the best I've tasted, I would have liked to see more of a presence of local produce on the menu. The lemon tart with a Bramley apple shot was delicious though, and our Irish coffees were justifiably perfect. And with typical Irish flair, our dinner turned into an event of almost four hours – proving that fine dining can be a regal *and* relaxed affair.



GILGAMESH

Camden View, Camden Stables Market, Chalk Farm Road, London NW1 8AH

020 7482 5757;
www.gilgameshbar.com

The big and bold Babylonian palace-style of Gilgamesh restaurant is bizarre, but set in the heart of weird and wacky Camden, it doesn't seem so strange. Named after an ancient

Babylon king who was two thirds God and one third human, the restaurant is filled with intricate hand carvings, beaten bronze panels and marble pillars inlaid with Lapis and Mother of Pearl. The view here is not of an outdoor panorama (although the outlook through the large windows of the Tea House bar is impressive), but of the space inside. Look up and you'll see an elaborately designed ceiling hanging 40ft from the ground, or if the retractable roof is in operation you'll be treated to an al fresco dining experience. Look around and you'll see woodwork, chairs and tables that tell the story of Gilgamesh, as well as the intricately carved 'Tree of Life', inspired by friezes held at The British Museum. And with a square space of 15,000ft, the effect really is dramatic.

The interior architecture sets the restaurant apart as a showpiece, but the pan-Asian

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cuisine is also some of the best in London. As someone with a borderline-Thai obsession, I'm always slightly dubious of a menu that combines sushi and dim sum with red Thai curry and Chinese crispy duck, but at Gilgamesh, it works. The beef peneang is the star dish – look out for notable head chef Ian Pengelley cooking it in the open kitchen.



THE OXO TOWER RESTAURANT

OXO Tower Wharf, Barge House Street, South Bank SE1 9PH

020 7803 3888;

www.harveynichols.com

The rooftop restaurant of the OXO Tower, owned by Harvey Nichols, is one of those places that other eateries are often compared to – and if you can snag a table, it's easy to

see why. Floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall windows look out onto the Thames; fine wine and fine dining complete the slick package. In fact, the whole thing is very discreet, from the inconspicuous entrance in OXO Tower Wharf to the low lit, high glam décor.

The food isn't cheap (although the brasserie next door has a more pocket-friendly menu) and can be slightly too fussy, but then with impeccable service and in such stylish surroundings, it fits. Highlights include John Dory with Serrano ham and quince barley risotto and the chocolate plate, filled with chocolate-inspired goodies. And they even indulged my love of mashed potato with a side dish (which I'm sure didn't quite go with my lobster and sausage consommé). Vegetarians, be sure to ask for the separate vegan menu which is infinitely more inspiring than the usual veggie fare. Of course, the views from the outdoor terrace – as the sun sets from St Paul's Cathedral to Westminster and the city theatrically lights the Thames – are the restaurant's trump card.



THE OLD SAIL LOFT

Quay Street, East Looe, Cornwall

01503 262131;

www.theoldsailloftrestaurant.com

Walking along Looe's quayside on a dark night, sail boats bobbing silently on the nearby water, I am reminded of the history of the restaurant we are about to visit. Once used for storing contraband from pirates that were rife in the area some 200 to 300 years ago, the Old Sail Loft is one of the

oldest buildings in the seaside town of Looe. With its nooks, crannies, original Cobb walls and roof trusses of old English oak, it's easy to imagine the loft as it once was, and that's testament to owners Michelle and Dominic Sadler. After moving to Cornwall to realise their dream of living next to the sea, they have restored some of the original features while entirely modernising the restaurant. The best seat in the house – a corner table with views that cut a swathe of the sea, hillside Cornish cottages and the quayside lit by low-strung lanterns – is a prime example. A crisp white tablecloth and soft leather chairs sit next to a lead-lined window, underneath dark beams thought to have been salvaged from the timbers of local wrecks.

The food is also a wonderful fusion of old and new. Using local produce (think Looe John Dory, Fowey mussel white wine sauce and Cornish Duck Company breast), head chef Dominic fuses traditional ingredients (Dartmouth oak smoked salmon) with new techniques (wasabi dressing and micro herbs). The quenelle of black pudding and parma ham with a vine tomato, chorizo and three bean feta chilli was a particular hit with my notoriously fussy partner, as was the impeccably friendly Cornish service.



RESTAURANT AT THE RUTLAND

The Rutland Hotel, 1-3 Rutland Street, Edinburgh EH1 2AE

0131 229 3402;

www.therutlandhotel.com

The views from The Rutland Hotel's restaurant are unexpected. Reached through the hotel's bar in an inconspicuous building at the end of Princes Street, the restaurant is a

sumptuous riot of red, black and gold with an oversized glass bubble creation hanging from the ceiling. But its contemporary interior seems rather dark and dimly-lit, until the eyes adjust and alight on the floor-length windows, which provide a panoramic outlook over Edinburgh's historic shopping street. Ask for a corner window at sunset – the view of Edinburgh Castle, perched atop the hill and lit by the dying sun, is simply stunning and although big enough for eight, the table can be requested for an intimate meal for two.

No visit to the Restaurant at The Rutland is complete without sampling the chocolate fondue (with a choice of milk, dark or white melted Valrhona chocolate), complete with homemade doughnuts, profiteroles, Scottish shortbread, cookies, toasted marshmallows and strawberries. The rest of the menu reflects head chef David Haetzman's brasserie-style, mixing Mediterranean cuisine with fresh Scottish produce. A fine example of the exciting food that Edinburgh has to offer, with great views thrown in for good measure.

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