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## Camden's best kept secret

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by Liz Tray

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Being a relative stranger to my own kitchen I set out to an appointment with the express purpose of finding a suitable brunch location between home and my destination, Hampstead. The nearest spot, that's worth visiting, to both is familiar old Camden so the hunt began there. It's one of those places you walk through, shop in, drink in and browse at without ever stopping for food - Camden is hardly known for cuisine and with good reason.



Kebab shops, greasy chicken emporia, cheap Chinese and Thai buffets, well-known fast food and sandwich chains and thoroughly average restaurants, Gligamesh and Hi Sushi Salsa aside, abound. There wasn't even sign of a comforting greasy spoon cafe to be had on my trek through bleak and rainy NW1. But then, as I approached Stables Market, came a light out of the darkness. Inhabitation Coffee Shop is one of those places you walk past a million times and you never think of going into, since, after all, who wants to eat in Camden?

What caught my eye was utterly fortunate; the word "vegetarian" on the chalk board outside. I did walk past a small veggie place by Camden Lock Bridge but the stench of mushroom tartlets (or is it pretentiousness?) loomed large and I passed it by. What I wanted was a vegetarian version of the classic English breakfast, without the grease. I peered through Inhabitation's window, taking in the floor to ceiling West End theatre posters, and sensed this was the place for me. As the waitress greets you with a smile at the sliding front door a warm, friendly atmosphere immediately pervades. It was the start of the most flawless brunch experience I've had in London - and this only a couple of months after the discovery of Islington's The Breakfast Club, previously the best eatery of that type I'd stumbled upon.

The menu is a blend of Mediterranean and English food, generously portioned and served with a smile. Run by a Cypriot family, there's no doubt that care has been taken with every aspect of service presentation - from the petite metal dishes of baked beans to the pots of tea. Just after ordering, temporary amnesia struck and I asked what bubble and squeak was. The genial owner asked where I was from, noticing my northern accent, and before I knew it I was getting a fascinating lesson in post-WW2 London cooking! Never intrusive, it was the kind of personal touch that is lacking from so many London food experiences. My breakfast, which somehow felt light despite its vast size and content, consisted of sausages (often hard to find veggie bangers that don't taste of cardboard but they managed it easily), tomatoes, eggs, a pot of tea, baked beans, toast, mushrooms and the aforementioned bubble and squeak all for £6.90. How have I lived in London for 9½ years (having visited Camden for a further 15 years before that) and never sampled this café before? Lesson learned. I will be returning.

### Summary

Inhabitation demonstrates what is often lacking from London cuisine - high end brunch cafés and drop-in-for-coffee (or a milkshake, which I didn't have but they seem to be famous for) rest stops. Sure, there are endless tea shops/patisseries to visit (the old school charm of Maison Bertaux in Soho for one), thousands of brand name coffee chain stop offs and certainly enough bad fast food places littering the city. But Inhabitation reminds you that lunch can be done without packaged bread and pretentious fillings. The family atmosphere is the icing on the cake. It's the kind of place that creates devotion in people and, like a band you've loved since their first single, you don't want anyone else to know about it.

### Author : Liz Tray

Liz works freelance as a copy writer. A voracious music junkie, Liz has a particular passion for going to gigs and part-time manages an art-rock band.

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