

## Uzbekistan comes to Bnei Brak

Restaurant Review

By Debbie Lampert/eLuna.com



Oshpalo, the classic Bukharan dish, consisting of rice, meat, and chickpeas.

**"I'LL HAVE** what he's having."

In fact, everyone is having what he's having.

Oshpalo is the signature dish and the primary meal at the restaurant of the same name. This hot and heavy slow-cooked Bukharan stew is Uzbekistan's national dish, and it's what brings most of the diners to this restaurant.

Oshpalao Bar Restaurant is a slice of Uzbekistan in a corner of Bnei Brak. The restaurant offers a mix of classic Bukharan dishes and Israeli-style grilled meats. This unique ethnic menu is couched in a young, fun, charming, and colorful atmosphere, bringing to the table a modern version of an ancient culture. The restaurant is located in a sleek, modern office building in Bnei Brak's business district, across from the Ramat Gan Stadium and the Azrieli Ayalon Mall.

Oshpalao is about to celebrate its second year at this location. We took our seats with the early lunch crowd in the lovely sun-drenched front room with a full glass wall facing the wide main boulevard. I wondered what took us so long to find this restaurant; but for a chance meeting in one of the offices in the building, we never would have known about it.

Owner Dean Pozaylov and his partner Alon Pozaylov are professional restaurateurs with a concept. Oshpalao is a colorful restaurant, with decorative tableware that features ethnic designs and shimmering gold-tone cutlery. Uzbek gnome figurines are scattered about. The food is prepared at

ALEX DEUTSCH



a large open bar in the center of the inner room by an army of uniformed staff. The waiters are especially friendly and welcoming, making me wonder what they put in that oshpalo after all.

Bukharan foods are primarily slow-cooked stews, and pastries that are either savory or sweet, fried or baked. These elaborate pastries are all made in-house, with some baked in the restaurant's taboon oven. Savory pastries include cheburski (three pieces for NIS 64) filled with minced meat, dill, and onion; and mantu (five pieces for NIS 70), steamed dumplings filled with beef, lamb fat, and onion.

In addition to the ethnic dishes, the menu offers Israeli-style grilled meats, ranging in price from spring chicken skewers (NIS 42) to goose liver skewers (NIS 128), and a meat platter for two (NIS 200).

THE RESTAURANT opens at 6 a.m., when a 30-kilo pot of meaty oshpalo is put up on a low fire to slow cook throughout the day. Another pot is put up without meat for vegetarian clients. By lunchtime, when the restaurant opens to customers, the oshpalo is ready to go. Generous portions are spooned out to diners throughout the day.

While we waited in anticipation for our oshpalo, we munched on a bowlful of pickled vegetables. This was a nice introduction to the flavors ahead of us. The meal began with the traditional Bukharan



Chebureki, a large triangular pastry, thin and crispy, filled with meat, and a piquant red sauce on the side.

bickak (NIS 19), a large triangular pastry filled with a savory mix of pumpkin and root vegetables. This is a delicacy of the Bukharan kitchen, traditionally served on Rosh Hashanah and other festivals.

We went on to enjoy a coarsely cut Uzbek salad (NIS 42), heavy on the tomatoes and cucumbers, and served with a pleasant dressing.

Then came the main course that we had been waiting for: the oshpalo (meat/vegetarian NIS 65/NIS 50). A huge and attractive bowl of stew was placed before us. The base of the bowl is layered with rice. Chunks of soft melt-in-your-mouth meat is layered on top of the rice, and then thin slices of carrots, onion, and chickpeas. The flavors blend together for an authentic taste of the Caucasus.

The portions were overly generous and could easily be shared, if you can agree with your partner on the version. My companion chose the meat version, and I went with the vegetarian dish.

They save the best for the last at Oshpalao. We often skip dessert after a big meal like this. At this restaurant, it would be a mistake, as the menu offers authentic, homemade Uzbek sweets. A full platter with a selection of these sweets is NIS 80,

but it is money well spent.

We lingered over a pot of tea, beautifully served in bowls, with navat – Uzbek rock candy – and cubes of green pistachio halva from the dessert menu. This is a real treat, not to be missed.

The restaurant livens up in the evening, so for the full Uzbek experience visit after 8 p.m. when you can enjoy the menu, a full bar, and plenty of street parking. On Tuesday and Thursday evenings, there is live toe-tapping Uzbek music from 8:30 p.m. ■

## Oshpalao

4 Derech Sheshet Hayamim

Bnei Brak

Tel: 077-980-0448

Hours: Weekdays, 11 a.m. to midnight. Friday to 3 p.m. and after Shabbat.

Business lunch: Weekdays from noon to 4 p.m.

The restaurant offers a 10% discount throughout the day with an eLuna coupon (not including the business lunch).

Kashrut: Bnei Brak Rabbinate

The writer was a guest of the restaurant. She is the founder and CEO of eLuna.com, a website in English featuring kosher restaurants in Israel.



Israeli-style grilled meats.