



## Going Out Guide

# We asked ambassadors where they eat when they're homesick. We did not expect Taco Bell and Ikea.

By [Richard Morgan](#)

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In our stateless capital, everyone handles the hunger of homesickness differently. Most of us have our take-me-home go-tos, whether we're transplants from Texas or Thailand, Ohio or Oman. That's true even of diplomats.

We asked dozens of ambassadors based in the District what they eat when they miss home. Some gave us very broad answers — pasta with seafood for Tunisia's [Fayçal Gouia](#), for instance, or a fish dish with an outdoor aperitif for Italy's [Armando Varricchio](#) — while others declined to offer suggestions because of their relative newness to Washington (Ethiopia's [Fitsum Arega](#)). And one (Haiti's [Hervé Denis](#)) told us that he never gets homesick.

But many of them shared with us the dishes and restaurants they turn to when they want to be reminded of home. Their answers have been edited for clarity and length.

**Azerbaijan:** [Elin Suleymanov](#), ambassador since 2011

“For us, tea is almost a religion, an article of faith. But it's hard to find whole leaf, loose leaf tea in D.C. I go to the [Blue Duck Tavern](#) in the Park Hyatt, where the tea is excellent, and I get a kettle. I always bring someone. Even though it's a chain, I like the lentil soup at [Lebanese Taverna](#). They make it with spinach and lemon, exactly like in Azerbaijan. I got the whole embassy into it, and they tell me they love it, which I hope is true and not just because I am the ambassador.”

**Argentina:** [Fernando Oris de Roa](#), ambassador since 2018

“Calf's liver and onions at [La Chaumiere](#). In Argentina we have 2.5 cattle for every person. We eat a lot of beef. When I was a child, people feared polio, and so my mother fed me lots of liver to keep me strong. I know liver is not for everyone, but for me it reminds me of my mother's love.”

**Australia:** [Joe Hockey](#), ambassador since 2016

“Start with a flat white — a real coffee at [Bluestone Lane](#) — with smashed avocado and a poached egg. For dinner, [Joe's Seafood](#) for stone crab, oysters, grilled shrimp and a bottle of Sancerre or a New Zealand sauvignon blanc. I'm from Sydney, so lots of beach and ocean. Joe's is much more relaxed than other D.C. spots. There's a warmth and a generosity of spirit. It's a happy place, a good group of people. I don't get homesick for a smell or a taste, more like a feeling.”

“My staff gives me a hard time about it, but I’m a freak for [Taco Bell](#). I go to the one in Union Station because it’s near the embassy. I chow down. I get Combo #1: a burrito supreme and hard-shell taco with Diet Pepsi and the red packet of salsa — fire, obviously. I went to college at the University of Texas at Austin and began eating Taco Bell there. Now it reminds me of when my life was beginning and everything was new and full of ideas, for days when I have more memories than ideas. I also eat the best beef fajitas in the world at [Cactus Cantina](#) because it reminds me of a place, Jorge’s, from Austin.”

**Bahrain:** [Shaikh Abdullah bin Rashed Al Khalifa](#), ambassador since 2017

“The olives ascolane served at [Assaggi Osteria](#) in McLean. It’s olives stuffed with veal, breaded, then fried to perfection. It reminds me of the finger foods I enjoyed while growing up in Bahrain, and conjures moments in my childhood synonymous with carefree activities and a laid-back life in general. Today, I enjoy the ascolane when I dine with my family as I see the same carefree smiles on my children’s faces when they grab an olive while waiting for their main dishes to arrive.”

**China:** [Cui Tiankai](#), ambassador since 2013

“Although I live and work in Washington, I have maintained my distinctly Chinese stomach. I often enjoy a simple dish: mapo tofu. It is reminiscent of the history of Chinese people. In the past, we had limited resources. Many working people would turn to their bowls of rice stirred with the spicy mapo tofu. Despite the fact that we are better off, mapo tofu has remained a staple on many Chinese tables.”

**Georgia:** [David Bakradze](#), ambassador since 2016

“Eating Saturday brunch with family and friends at [Supra](#) is as close as you’ll get to the experience of a traditional Georgian meal at a restaurant in D.C. When I miss the cooking back home, I order khachapuri, a breaded cheese boat, to share with my kids. It’s delicious and far too difficult to cook at home. And my personal all-time favorite is the appetizer plate of pkhali, which contains a variety of chopped and minced vegetables like eggplant, spinach, green beans and beets mixed with walnut sauce.”

**Dominican Republic:** [José Tomás Pérez](#), ambassador since 2015

“Restaurante [Los Hermanos](#). I love to go there or even order to take home sancocho [Dominican soup made with seven kinds of meats]. I also love to order a dish that we call ‘Dominican flag’ because it is the dish that almost all Dominican people have at their table during lunchtime: rice, beans, and meat. I prefer mine with beef. The dish is accompanied with salad and avocado.”

**El Salvador:** [Claudia Canjura de Centeno](#), ambassador since 2016

“My favorite dishes, of course, are pupusas. There are different varieties but my favorite is refried beans filled with cheese called quesillo. There are many restaurants in the area that serve this dish, most of them managed

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by Salvadorans who maintain the traditional recipe and quality that characterizes our country. It should come with curtido, a spicy cabbage slaw.”

**Ireland:** [Daniel Mulhall](#), ambassador since 2017

“I met my wife, who is Australian, when we both lived in India. So to remember our courtship and those early days of marriage, we go to [Rasika](#). I'll order a chicken dish, prawn for her; we enjoy the cucumber raita and fall in love again. For proper pubs, I'm on S Street, so I like what's in walking distance: [Across the Pond](#) or [James Hoban's](#), named for the Irish architect of the White House. A stroll is a nice appetizer. With a full Irish breakfast, the key word is full, so I only have one maybe seven or eight times a year, during rugby and the Six Nations Championship. In an Irish crowd, you succumb to comfort food. Maybe [Martin's Tavern](#) for boiled bacon and cabbage. I grew up in Waterford, working summers in a sausage factory. So that takes me back. Afterward I'll go to [Kramerbooks](#) and browse. Books are an Irishman's dessert.”

**Ghana:** [Barfuor Adjei-Barwuah](#), ambassador since 2017

“For a taste of home, I like white rice with spinach stew and fried plantains. Growing up, we used to call it Black Stars. It's a dish we didn't joke with. We really enjoyed it. I also enjoy peanut butter soup with goat or mutton and rice balls — try [Bukom Cafe](#) for that. On a relaxing Sunday evening, I prefer black-eyed pea stew with fried ripe plantain. Occasionally I enjoy fufu with light soup with dry fish and goat meat. [Appioo](#) makes it well. Other meals I enjoy are cooked plantain, and yams with garden eggs mixed with egg stew. Or something simple: eto, which is mashed ripe plantain mixed with palm oil.”

**India:** [Harsh Vardhan Shringla](#), ambassador since 2019

“The palak chaat at [Rasika West End](#) is one of my favorites. But I particularly enjoy their Bengali fish curry with rice, which is flavorful yet light. It reminds me of my home state of West Bengal in India. For authentic, inexpensive South Indian cuisine, I like [Woodlands Vegetarian Restaurant](#). At Woodlands, one of my favorites is curd rice, which is cooked rice combined with sour yogurt and seasoned with coriander.”

**Mongolia:** [Otgonbayar Yondon](#), ambassador since 2018

“The Mongolian barbecue you know is not the same in Mongolia. So not that. [Thai Eatery](#), which is owned by Mongolians and has a menu just for Mongolians. It's weird. They have buuz, Mongolian steamed dumplings. We have these at Lunar New Year. They're great especially on rainy days or cold days. But you can eat them anytime in Washington because a cold day in Washington is not that cold for Mongolians.”

**Japan:** [Shinsuke J. Sugiyama](#), ambassador since 2018

“On days when I would like to enjoy personal time with a relaxed atmosphere away from my daily busy life, I ask the embassy's chefs to make simple and classic Japanese meals like onigiri, yakisoba and Japanese beef curry. I feel relieved when I can eat these foods that I have been familiar with since my childhood.” (When

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hosting a reception at his residence, his aides report the ambassador often requests catered sushi from [Sushi Ogawa](#), [Tako Grill](#) or [Yosaku](#).)

**Portugal:** [Domingos Fezas Vital](#), ambassador since 2015

“My wife, Isabel, and I go regularly to a Belgian restaurant, [Et Voila!](#), and order the casserole de moules with pommes frites. We lived in Brussels for 16 years and one of my sons was born there.”

**Mexico:** [Martha Bárcena](#), ambassador since 2018

“I arrived five months ago in D.C., but I’ve already tried different Mexican restaurants, because you always need to know what places you can count on when you feel a bit homesick. [Mi Vida](#) at the Wharf is a fascinating spot because you have a very nice view of the Potomac, and the sight of water is something I always enjoyed since I was born in the coastal town of Veracruz. Fittingly, the dish I have enjoyed the most there is the pescado a la veracruzana. I like how colorful and lively [Oyamel](#) is because it does transport you to some of the typical restaurants that you can find in Mexico. My favorite dish there is the smoked fish sinaloa. Another great discovery there is the frijoles refritos con queso. While this is the staple dish of every Mexican household, [Oyamel](#) has managed to add an enhanced flavor to it. [Urbano 116](#) in Old Town Alexandria is a very special place because the chef is from Mexico City and I’ve also enjoyed a restaurant he owns there, so being there conveys a very special Mexico City vibe. My favorite Urbano dish is definitely the grilled chicken with black mole.”

**The Philippines:** [Jose Manuel “Babe” del Gallego Romualdez](#), ambassador since 2017

“Chicken lumpiang shanghai at [Bistro 1521](#) in Arlington. Lumpiang shanghai is a popular and ubiquitous appetizer in the Philippines, and no social event is complete without it. It is considered party food with pancit [noodles].”

**Sweden:** [Karin Olofsdotter](#), ambassador since 2017

“[Mikko](#) has the shrimp open sandwich or mushroom salad, but that’s very Finnish. Every day in Stockholm for lunch I had sushi, so I eat that a lot. Can I tell you a secret? The sushi at [Safeway](#) and [Whole Foods](#) is very good. I get every fish there, the works. As part of fredagsmys [cozy Fridays] in Sweden, we have tacoskväll [taco night], so I go to [Cactus Cantina](#) often on Fridays even though I get chicken fajitas, not tacos. And do you know about the candy wall at [Ikea](#)? Swedes have lördagsgodis [Saturday candy]; Saturday is for eating candy. In my house, we eat two pounds of candy every Saturday. That’s a normal amount for a family of four. I will say American Swedish Fish are better than in Sweden, but I eat mormors löständer, like gummy jelly teeth. I started eating those in my 30s. Sometimes people say you have to choose candy or healthy foods. This or that. No. I am a both person.”

**South Korea:** [Cho Yoon-je](#), ambassador since 2017

“Naengmyeon. What would summer be without this dish? Chewy noodles in a slushy broth that’s tangy and a little sweet; there’s nothing more refreshing on a hot day, especially when it’s served with a slice of Asian pear.

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And yuk gae jang. It may not be one of Korea's most famous soups, but I used to eat it all the time when I was a student. Shredded beef and vegetables make it as nutritious as it is delicious, and the broth is so spicy you can't stop eating it, lest the heat catch up and overwhelm you. In the summer, Koreans like to say you should 'fight fire with fire,' and there are few soups better suited to that task than yuk gae jang."

**Spain:** [Santiago Cabanas](#), ambassador since 2018

"My country's age-old marine traditions are why I like José Andrés's [Jaleo](#), and [Del Mar](#), because they prepare fish dishes brought from Spain every day, the way we enjoy it back at home. I also like [Taberna del Alabardero](#), the oldest Spanish restaurant in the city, a true institution. They prepare delicious rice dishes and paella, though my personal favorite is their arroz negro."

**Vietnam:** [Ha Kim Ngoc](#), ambassador since 2018

Spring rolls, either fresh (nem cuon) or fried (nem ran). "Many kinds of leaves in the garden may be used to wrap and roll, such as guava leaves, fig leaves, lettuce, etc. These ingredients together make up a unique and interesting dish," wrote Nguyen Thi Phuong Lien, the ambassador's wife, in her recipe for fresh spring rolls that she shared with The Washington Post.

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### Richard Morgan

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