

Time Out New York

Ten seductive streets for you and your summer guests to explore

The obsessive guide to impulsive entertainment
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TOURIST ISSUE

BLOCK PARTIES

In a city with something to see on almost every street, it's hard to know where to begin exploring. So start here, on the strips we most love to stroll.

Photographs by **Todd France**

EAST 1ST STREET

This unassuming strip of East Village turf has become a hotbed of fine dining for the fabulous

Bookended by a well-trafficked Exxon station and a tiny Parks Department playlot, East 1st Street (between First and Second Avenues) seems too humble to be one of the city's most vibrant restaurant rows. But in the past five years, no less than five swish eateries have opened amid this block's converted warehouses, car-repair stations and brownstones. **Chez es Saada** (No. 41), which opened in 1997, was the first. Its sprawling basement dining area is a great spot to stretch out and chow on Moroccan-spiced delectables, and its clientele is still trendy enough for the place to employ a bouncer on weekend nights to keep out the style-challenged. Next to arrive was the **Elephant** (No. 58), which is as noteworthy for its Thai bistro fare and lychee martinis as it is for cool beats and long waits for a table. In the Elephant's wake came **Prune** (No. 54), esteemed for haute-rustic delicacies such as a Pasta Kerchief, filled with French ham, brown butter and a poached egg; and the **Tasting Room** (No. 72), a wee wine bar and café where exquisite dishes don't take a backseat to the edifying, 19-page selection of rare, American vintages. The block became a full-scale culinary destination two months ago with the opening of **Smith** (No. 64), run by Brian McNally of Odeon and 44 fame. This wood-paneled temple of chic doles out warm oyster pie and \$12 chardonnay to the fabulous (Helmut Lang, Robert

De Niro and Ahn Duong were recently spotted there).

Eating, drinking and rubbing Gucci-clad elbows aren't the only things to do on East 1st Street. You can change your self-perception in a matter of seconds at **True Mirror Company** (No. 43), which claims to be the only manufacturer of "nonreversing looking glasses," a cabinet containing two mirrors placed at right angles, to reflect your image as others see it. For a less introspective vanity project, duck into **Maria Del Greco's** namesake atelier-boutique (No. 70) and indulge in her quirky homemade garments, hats and bags. Next-door neighbor **Alpana Bawa** (also No. 70) offers Indian-urban getups in exquisite fabrics and architectural shapes. And **Takamichi Hair** (No. 68), an ultramodern salon sparsely outfitted with three white vinyl chairs and a massive fish tank, is the perfect place to schedule a pre-cocktail-hour cut and color.

For those who feel that the best things in life are free, **First Park** offers an unparalleled front-row seat for viewing the wild mix of cultures and styles that pass by the corner of First and First. The park, which contains far more concrete and tar than greenery, is enclosed by wrought-iron gates and includes a jungle gym, a swingset and two handball courts that are popular with the locals—boys and girls alike. On a sunny day, grab a chai latte or a tropical ice from **Live Juice** (the quirky shack near the block's eastern end), then chill on a park bench and watch the parade go by.—*Zoë Wolff*

Subway: F, V to Lower East Side—Second Ave



SIT, DRINK AND BE MERRY Watch the world go by as you sip a fresh-squeezed beverage at Live Juice on East 1st Street.

For more neighborhood walking tours, check out the *Time Out New York Guide* book (Penguin, \$15.95) or go to www.timeoutny.com/cityguide