



Giwa

Simple good Korean food

FULL OF NUTRITION

By: Jami Tryer

Tucked away on Sansom Street in Center City, this hip spot sends Korean food through the roof. Loosely translated, Giwa means, "roofing tile" in Korean. 'Giwa' was a criterion for distinguishing nobles from commoners. They were used to build Yangban houses. Now, while I know shelter is essential, so is great food at a great price. It should translate to 'woahthisisgood'. I'll confess, ever since childhood I've been timid to try new foods. I was the weird kid that didn't want her food to touch an unfamiliar fare and never made it past the 'let-me-think-about it stage'. Even as I got older, foods I couldn't pronounce were still at the way bottom of my list. Call it, "unadventurous", or "childish". Ethnic foods were never a go-to item for me. In my mind, they were too spicy, had some kind of surprise ingredient like eel or squid and, none of it never looked too appetizing to me. Couple that with waiters that could never understand your discontent, and you've got a dinning disaster just waiting to happen.

Abolish everything you know about Korean restaurants. Partners Young Chi and Young Yoo have opened an eatery ahead of its time with great vision and modernism at 1608 Sansom Street (215-557-9830). A very cool menu and an even more fabulous interior has even made me a convert. Inspired by the chic appeal of Republic, a restaurant specializing in Asian-inspired noodle dishes, located in NYC's Union Square, Giwa is vibrant and cranks out tasty "Americanized" dishes. It's way affordable and appeals to a variety of guests, young and old. Most customers were urban and on the young side. Korean food has a long history, rich in both taste and tradition. The chefs at Giwa pride themselves on sharing a selection of food that is delicious, healthy and very inexpensive. I loved the cool music, halogen lighting and big chunky white bowls - very visually enticing without trying too hard. The Marti-Gras colored pallet really made me think twice about the interiors of stereotypical Korean eateries. The bathroom was even designed beautifully for a place that calls you by number. Chi and Yoo definitely focused on the details. You can just tell, right down to the logo and the "to-go" bags.

Kimchi, Bibimbob and Bulgogi are probably the best-known Korean foods. Koreans are proud of their diet, quite varied and full of nutrition. It is richly endowed with fermented foods, vegetables and grains, meats and seafood, soups, teas, liquors, confectionery and soft drinks. I had a peach-flavored Aloe drink that was delicious and had little pulp bits of Aloe in it.

For centuries, Koreans have eaten the products of the sea, the field, and the mountain because of the features of the Korean peninsula and a distinguishing climate that makes these foods more abundant. The most unique feature of Korean food is the spiciness. The basic seasonings are red pepper, green onion, soy sauce, soybean paste (Doenjang), garlic, ginger, sesame, vinegar, and wine. They have been combined in various ways to enhance Korean food.

Kimchi is the most widely known and cherished food in Korean tradition. It is a highly seasoned and fermented vegetable dish that is served with every kind of Korean meal. It is a low-calorie, low-cholesterol, vegetable food, rich in vitamins, minerals, and proteins created by the lactic acid fermentation of cabbage, radish, other vegetables and seafood. *Health Magazine* selected it as one of the healthiest foods in the world. Aside from the obvious health benefits, a regular diet of Kimchi can result in a general rise in appetite, the acceleration your metabolism and less overall fatigue.

Generally, the Korean diet uses a lot of grains and vegetables. Korean foods are moderate in calories and low in fat. Giwa's well-planned menu is divided into easy to understand sections: appetizers/small dishes, soups/stews, rice dishes, special dishes, sides/extras and Giwa's Favorites (a section dedicated to novices who may not have experience with Korean food). There are also many selections for lunch that are served from 11 am - 3 pm

Monday thru Friday. Tiny illustrated chili peppers serve as a key for level of spiciness in certain food entrees.

If you are like me, 'Captain Wuss', then I recommend ordering Bibim Bob - a variety of fresh and cooked veggies (leaf lettuce, bean sprouts, carrots, spinach and more) served with julienne egg over rice with spicy red pepper paste (ON THE SIDE). I enjoyed the combination of hot and cold, although this is definitely a Beeno type dish. You can add beef, chicken or Tofu if desired. No surprises here, just a very colorful and a beautiful array of locally grown produce arranged nicely in a big white modern bowl. It's okay to ask for utensils, I did. I also enjoyed Bulgogi - marinated beef, thinly sliced and sautéed with assorted veggies (mushroom, carrot, onion and more). Both dishes come with a side of Kimchi, which in my opinion is an acquired taste. Feel like sharing? Try Haemul Pa Jun, which is a crispy rice flour pancake with a variety of seafood such as shrimp, crabmeat and more. I enjoyed the Mool Mandu - steamed vegetable and pork dumplings (you get six, a steal for just under five bucks.)

Other standouts include Galbi - grilled, marinated prime beef short ribs with leaf lettuce and a special bean sauce (opt for the brown, multigrain rice.) Also great is the Dak Bulgogi - spicy marinated chicken served with steamed veggies. The flavor really popped and was a welcomed new flavor in my mouth that was both sweet and hot.

There is no table service at Giwa. You simply walk up to the open-air, action-packed kitchen to place your order and wait for your number (grab a stool for quite a show). Seating is a bit limited so be strategic about the time of day that you go. You can call ahead to reserve a table, but this place is not fancy. It's in and out chic and satisfying, and you won't be hungry a half an hour later.

Giwa is open Monday through Friday 11:00 am - 8:30 pm (great grab for a post gym workout) and on Saturday 11:30 am - 7:30 pm. Looking for something different for your next office lunch meeting? Giwa has great party trays (aren't we all tired of sandwiches anyway?). Call a day ahead of time. Your guests will really be amazed and it's only \$12.95 per person.

Whether you eat in or take out, Giwa is definitely worth a try! Appetizers range from \$4.95 to \$8.50 and main dishes average \$9.00 to \$12.00. Low key, but high design, Giwa will most likely be a Philly favorite soon. Chi and Yoo plan on opening other locations around the Greater Philadelphia area, so be among the first to try their fabulous, innovative food.



Jami Tryer is a freelance writer, who grew up in Margate, NJ, but has been a Center City Philly resident since 1991. She is a partner with Munroe Creative Partners, a well-known graphic design firm, where she is a Senior Project Manager and helps to develop new business. She has been freelancing in her spare time for five years for magazines such as Philadelphia Style where she has reported on trends in beauty, fashion, food and culture. For PhillyFIT, Jami has countered the myth that dining out can be frighteningly fattening in her column. Contact JamiTryer@phillyfitmagazine.com.