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WEEKEND IN NEW YORK | JUICE BARS

Pour Me a Melon: Masters of the Blenders' Art

By [SETH KUGEL](#)

FOR visitors from tropical countries where fresh fruit juice is a given, New York must be confusing. Here, in what is arguably the finance, theater, media and artificial waterfall capital of the world, why aren't there more people willing to put a watermelon through a blender to make a cool drink on a blazing summer day?

Luckily, the oppressive reign of the corn-syrup drinks faces scattered resistance around Manhattan. Sometimes, the best can be hidden away, like at the Michelle Deli & Grocery in East Harlem, the kind of place that looks like a run-of-the-mill Mexican market but (like many others of its type) hides a lunch counter in the back. A menu that ranges from beef tacos to rabbit in creole sauce doesn't mention the \$2 "aguas" (as Mexicans call them). Ask the cook, who will grab watermelon (or cantaloupe, mmm!) from the front and blend it up for you. It's almost like having your mother make it for you, if your mother were a young woman from Guerrero.

If Harlem isn't on your itinerary, you can often find Mexican-style watermelon water in some spots downtown as well, like La Esquina's informal taquería in SoHo and the Pan Latin Cafe in Battery Park City.

But if Harlem is on the itinerary, move on to the Uptown Juice Bar on 125th Street. At first glance, it looks like a narrow, crowded old-school celery-beet-and-ginger mashery, but there are three surprises: an all-[vegetarian](#) steam table, where a plate of any three dishes go for \$6; a hidden space in the back that turns out to be a bright, art-filled dining area; and a menu where juices are named after the ailments they're meant to remedy. There's the PMS, the Indigestion and, perhaps somewhat unfortunately, the Hemorrhoids (just order a carrot-and-spinach juice).

Downtown, the East Village and environs are where some of the most serious juiceries do business. The 12-year-old Liquiteria combines a maniacally clean, brightly colored interior with drinks with cutesy names (Liquid Lozenge, Peaches-N-Dream, Orangasm, all \$5.95). It has the standard, straight fresh-squeezed stuff, of course, and all those supplements that are said to burn fat, bolster the immune system and teach you calculus. But where it really stands out is on the vegetable front. There are concoctions like the Brain Teaser, in which carrot, kale, apple, red cabbage, parsley and ginger combine with things called lecithin and the supplement Mental Master to make a drink that tastes shockingly good.

Also in the East Village is the cheaper Juicy Lucy, a walk-in-closet-size spot on Avenue A, where a 16-ounce juice is only \$3.95; the smoothies are \$4.50; and the Red Bull punch (apparently not 100 percent natural) is \$3. It also is serving up the fashionable Brazilian wonder-berry, açaí (actually the fruit of the assai palm, imported in frozen pulp) in what it calls the Rio Bowl, an imitation of what you might find blended for you at juice stands in [Rio de Janeiro](#). With guaraná, banana and granola, Juicy Lucy has the right recipe, but at least on one recent visit, the drink was too goopy and warm and definitely not worth the \$6.75.

For better açaí, try the smoothie at Jus, the diminutive, plain-Jane stand with the fancy French name attached to that Union Square staple, the Coffee Shop restaurant. Structurally, the place is just a step or two above the neighbor's kids' lemonade stand, but it must have retained a top juice-maker head-hunting firm because the staff makes a watermelon-banana-cantaloupe smoothie that on the refreshment scale competes with jumping in a backyard swimming pool any day.

One neighborhood alternative: if it's Monday, Wednesday, Friday or Saturday and the Greenmarket vendors are out, you can find an unusual bottled cherry-nectar drink at the stand run by Red Jacket Orchards of Geneva, N.Y. It's called Tart Cherry Stomp and will remind you instantly how rare it is to have something that actually tastes like cherries in something labeled "cherry."

Adding local ingredients to exotic açaí is a success at another star of the juice-and-smoothie scene, though this time in the West Village: Elixir. To its açaí with banana smoothie, Elixir adds apple cider and blueberries creating something that bridges the tropical and the local. It's a great drink (though \$5.95 for a small might be a bit steep). Another star of its repertory is the Quick Quencher: watermelon, pineapple, lemon and aloe vera (\$4.60 for a

small; \$5.95 for a large). Nice work.

The Caribbean, Latin and Asian neighborhoods of the other boroughs also know their juices, and there are too many spots to name. One newish spot, Pão de Queijo, which mimics a Brazilian snack shop, is worth a mention, though. It's just a few stops out of Manhattan on the N train in Queens, and its offerings go beyond açaí and into much rarer fruits like the Amazonian cupuaçu (no translation in English) and the cajá (better off without its translation, hog plum). But the most innovative parts of all are the snacks that go with them: fried goodies like the chicken-and-cheese coxinhas and beef bolinhos.

That's another thing we can't seem to keep straight in this otherwise sophisticated world capital: juice doesn't have to be part of a healthy diet, it can be the healthy part of an unhealthy diet.

LET'S DRINK FOR OUR HEALTH

La Esquina, 106 Kenmare Street, at Lafayette Street; (646) 613-7100;
www.laesquinanyc.com

Pan Latin Cafe, 400 Chambers Street, at the Hudson River; (212) 571-3860;
www.panlatincafe.com

Michelle Deli & Grocery, 215 East 116th Street; (212) 828-9097.

Uptown Juice Bar, 54 West 125th Street; (212) 987-2660;
www.uptownjuicebar.com.

Liquiteria, 170 Second Avenue, at 11th Street; (212) 358-0300.

Juicy Lucy, 85 Avenue A, between Fifth and Sixth Streets; (212) 777-5829.

Jus, corner of Union Square West and East 16th Street; no phone.

Elixir, 523 Hudson Street, between Charles and West 10th Streets; (212) 352-9952; www.elixirjuice.com.

Pão de Queijo, 31-90 30th Street, Astoria, Queens; (718) 204-1979;
www.newyorkpaodequeijo.com.

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