

## DINING OUT

The Boston Globe

## Gulu-Gulu in Salem is hearty, hearty

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### Gulu-Gulu Cafe

247 Essex St., Salem

978-740-8882. [gulu-gulu.com](http://gulu-gulu.com)*Hours: Monday to Wednesday 10 a.m.- 10 p.m.; Thursday and Friday 10 a.m.-1 a.m.; Saturday 9 a.m.-1 a.m.; Sunday 9 a.m.- 10 p.m.**Handicapped accessible**Mastercard and Visa accepted*

When the Gulu-Gulu Café opened in Lynn 2 1/2 years ago, the city celebrated the new Czech-themed restaurant, which offered a safe and friendly nightlife option for locals, Wi-Fi included.

Salem may not have been as starved for a sandwich and beer nightspot as its southern neighbor; it already had its fair share of friendly pubs and cafes when the second Gulu-Gulu opened on Essex Street in July. Still, the Witch City should be thankful it was chosen as Gulu's second home. It makes downtown even more of an attraction, especially after dark.

The latest Gulu-Gulu takes the spot of what was once the Phoenix School. You'll find it next to the new Upper Crust and just behind the Bewitched statue.

It's a place where you can get a hearty meal or a coffee with a friend. Aside from its Eastern European-inspired list of sandwiches, crepes, and appetizers, Gulu also has an impressive list of drinks.

Beer snobs will be happy with the options, which include local brews as well as Czech and Belgian offerings.

My companions and I, who had sampled a cheese plate at a snooty spot on Newbury Street in Boston the night before our Gulu meal, were far happier with the cheese plate at the Salem sandwich spot. Gulu's cheese plate (\$7) had hearty slabs of goat, brie, and Boursin, served with warm slices of bread that we also dipped into a big bowl of fresh hummus (\$7). Both dishes were enough to feed a big group. Still, we were left with room for entrees.

The hearty vegetarian sandwich (\$7), a wrap, was packed with artichoke hearts so thick they looked like green meat. They were coated with more of that tasty Boursin cheese.

Surprisingly, the sandwich was overshadowed by another vegetable dish, the portobello mushroom salad (\$7.50), which was an ample meal thanks to chunks of sun-dried tomatoes and goat cheese that almost overpowered the mixed greens.

We tried two pressed sandwiches, the Palermo and the Die Berliner. While the Berliner (\$7.50) was a mild salami panini made perky with a thick layer of sauerkraut, the Palermo (\$7.50) was a heavier dish of pressed meat for salt lovers. The combination of pepperoncini and the almost smoky Genoa salami reminded us why we're not vegetarians. After every two bites, we needed water.

Taking the edge off the serious sandwiches were the restaurant's no-fat smoothies (\$3.50), which I'm sure became very-fat smoothies once we asked for whipped cream on top. Our waitress recommended a combo of mango and strawberry, but I endorse the banana straight up. The smoothies are more like ice-cream shakes and big enough for two.

We had plenty of options for dessert. Feeling like we should get into the Eastern European spirit of things, we ordered the Czech traditional crepe (\$5), which is best for diners who prefer their final plate to be more hearty than sweet.

Spoiled by the now-common American crepe places that pack pancake-like dough with fruit, sugar, and chocolate, this Czech crepe's filling - tart plum jelly - made our lips pucker. We pretended to love it, but in reality, we predictable locals were much happier with the chocolate mousse cake slice (\$6), which was a light slab of chocolate layers with a taste we were used to.

The only thing more comforting than the cuisine (and the moderate prices) was the restaurant's atmosphere. The brick and bright-colored walls of the Gulu made us forget the wind outside. The place was clean and trendy, but we weren't out of place in jeans.

At a table next to us, a group of twentysomethings played a game of poker and asked us for help with the rules, which made us feel a part of the party. Halfway through our meal, a DJ arrived and played electronic beats that managed to add to our experience instead of ruining it.

On the walls were paintings of cartoon creatures by Bren Bataclan, a Boston artist whose collection is designed to help people smile.

Not that we needed it.

MEREDITH GOLDSTEIN ■