> Backtrack to Collins, cross King, then take the hidden escalator at the back of the Rialto to Flinders Lane. Just beyond the corrugated back wall of Le Meridien Hotel is Sataybar, a nifty little lunch spot where skewered beef, chicken or tofu are set on the grill until smoky, doused in peanut sauce and racked up with vegie crackers and achar salad — just like your west Javanese grandma used to make. Lunch plates are top value, but pace yourself if you intend to complete the tour, and dine by the skewer.

Cheap streets

Cheap Eats editor **Patrick Witton** takes readers on an exotic, gastronomic city tour – the travel costs are minimal and no passport is required.

You know what it's like: a pal has just returned from a Christmas break in February and he's regaling you with tales of leaky boats on the River Phrik and sunsets over the Gobi d'Auchincy. He's reliving gibbon monkey parties and seven-day bus trips, and he's gone for the unforgivably-hoots look. And you're happy for him. Really you are.

"And the food!" he says. "Stalls selling satay and red bean treats … chic cafes and tofu temples … banana pancakes by the buggy load."

But do we have to travel so far for new gastronomic experiences? In Melbourne's CBD, beneath the bristling cranes and within new commuter complexes, is an ever-changing array of splendid cheap eateries.

While researching the 2005 edition of *The Age Cheap Eats* we found that on a walk from one corner of the city to the other, with perhaps a little egg-nogging, you could discover a just-opened tapas bar, noodle house, crafty canteen and much more. So as a taster to the latest edition, we've plotted a trail to 10 of our new *Cheap Eats* favourites within the CBD. Some are just-born enterprises, while others are someone's secret-no-more. You won't need a passport, a fistful of travellers' cheques, or a course of antimalarials, but you will need a stout appetite to complete this gastrotour.

And what better place to start a *Cheap Eats* jaunt than at Spencer Street, where so many backpackers or briefcasers begin their city expeditions. With your back to the cacophonies of what will soon be known as Southern Cross Station, start walking up Collins Street, then vanish from the throng into the city's narrowest laneway. Here the tram-dog-tales, replaced by the hiss of a handwaving coffee machine. This is first stop, Choix Creperie Cafe, a little piece of Paris without the tiresome American college students, where you can watch as lithe 18-dreadlocked-to-cascade-tool-tats, lamb and yoghurt is organised into crepes, and lattes are balanced on homely porcelain chunk-saucers.

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Maybe it's time for a moment's repose, a cleansing cuppa and a meditative moment. So shuffle up to Queen Street and into Fo Guang Yuan Buddhist tea house, a serene spot where cream puh dishes and tofu stews are served, along with countless tea "to refresh the mind". There's also an art gallery that may feature ancient hamsters, tea ceremonies and other soothing subjects and a meditation room if the spirit takes you.

Once refreshed, fetar up Elizabeth Street (via cavities: Hardware Lane) to Chillipadi, a fresh-faced Malaysian place bedecked with cutie girl motifs. As well as trad faves such as bikes operated with mirth, Chillipadi's kitchen folds up artful packages of sticky rice wrapped in banana leaf, and turns out Malaysian street fare such as roti sandwiches with spicy sauce.

South Asian flavours feature at the next destination. Head through Melbourne Central's

You can dribble hot coffee (or soup, or antipasto) on your copy of Soviet Crockery 101 without fear of retribution.

Top left, the fresh-faced Malaysian at Chillipadi with, above, curry on the menu; top right, the E C Pot Cafe is the pick of the bunch at QVB's food court; right, the wall of wine at City Wine Shop.

CHEAP EATS CITY TRAIL