

# **CASE STUDIES**

## **PART 1**

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# FOOD

## 1. Sadiq Khan's Tooting: a food and drink street tour

Adapted from Isabel Choat, *The Guardian*, 23 Oct 2014



📷 Sadiq Khan enjoying a pint (of lime soda) inside the Wheatsheaf, Tooting. Photograph: Graham Turner for the Guardian

The sweep of gentrification down the Northern line has reached Tooting and there is much talk of a cluster of trendy new restaurants and bars, particularly around Tooting Broadway. The Chicken Shop, run by the Soho House crowd, has generated the most excitement, but the revamped Castle pub, the Little Bar on Mitcham Road, Honest Burgers on the High Street and Tota are also always busy.

So far these newcomers have only added to the character of the area. Tooting is not the new Shoreditch – as some (estate agents?) have optimistically dubbed it. The neighbourhood seems that rare thing: a community that has retained its independent spirit and character. This is no clone town; the High Street is dominated by Indian and Pakistani shops and restaurants that continue to thrive, and tonight the neighbourhood will be abuzz with families celebrating the Hindu festival of Diwali.

Sadiq Khan, the local MP (and, under Gordon Brown, the first Muslim to attend cabinet meetings) will be among the thousands celebrating the festival (he attends most local festivals regardless of the faith). Born and raised in Tooting, he still lives there, and is a regular at many of the Asian eateries.

I should declare an interest at this point – I live in Tooting – but it is one of the best streets in the capital if you want to experience a slice of multicultural London that hasn't been gentrified beyond recognition (hello Northcote Road) and a taste of real street food (none of your over-priced pop-up vans here, thank you). For the first in a new series of features focusing on one street in a city, we asked Khan to take us on a tour of his favourite places between Tooting Bec and Tooting Broadway tube stops.

## The Wheatsheaf

As with all good nights out, ours starts in a pub. The Wheatsheaf was a scruffy, unwelcoming boozier until the Antic group, masters of turning old-man pubs into quirky drinking holes, took it over in 2010, revamping it with shabby-chic touches: taxidermy (what pub doesn't have a stuffed animal these days?), mismatched mirrors and a wall of shoe heels. There are at least five ales on tap, including two local guest ales – this week Twickenham by the [By The Horns brewery](#), and a daily changing menu with mains from £9.50. “When I was growing up, it was an IRA pub and I used to run past it,” says Sadiq. “Now I come here even though I don't drink. There are quizzes on Sunday nights and we hold fundraising events here.” Last year, Sadiq ran a campaign to save the Wheatsheaf from redevelopment, successfully putting a stop to it becoming a Tesco Metro. Sadly, this hasn't stopped the landlord deciding to build a block of luxury flats on the site, though the pub, albeit a smaller one, should remain.

- 2 Upper Tooting Road, [wheatsheaftootingbec.com](http://wheatsheaftootingbec.com)

## Pooja

Another hugely popular sweet emporium, the strictly-vegetarian Pooja, has been open for 18 years and is run by a Muslim and a Hindu. As with many of the traditional outlets on this stretch, it plays a big role in the community, providing food free-of-charge to local charities and mosques during festivals. As well as traditional Pakistani goodies, Pooja's cabinets are filled with Middle Eastern sweets and Turkish delight, while the shelves are heaving with bags of *panipuri*, the semolina shells that are filled with potato and chickpeas. But if you order one thing here, it should be the *chana chaat* (£2-£3) which, according to Sadiq, “is the best in the world”. The Pakistani street food is a mix of chickpeas, potato, chives with garlic and chili and tamarind sauces. Individual sweets cost from 30p, or £4-£5 for half a kilo.

Sadiq recommends: *chana chaat*

- 168-170 Upper Tooting Road, [poojasweets.com](http://poojasweets.com)

## Lahore Karahi

Recently refurbished, the better for fitting in the endless stream of enthusiastic locals, Lahore Karachi is probably the busiest restaurant in Tooting. Opened in 1995 by Zahid Iqbal (a one-time Pakistani MP), it was one of the first Asian restaurants on the high road. Now there are up to 20 on this stretch. For our second meal of the evening Sadiq orders *seekh kebab* (minced lamb with fried onion and capsicum), *chicken methi* (with [fenugreek](#)), a basket of roti and naans, and a round of mango lassis. Lahore is byo too. Sadiq recommends: *chicken methi*, £6.50.

- 1 Tooting High Street, [lahorekarahirestaurant.co.uk](http://lahorekarahirestaurant.co.uk)

## Tota

The only non-Pakistani restaurant on the list, Tota was the first of the new breed of modern bars and restaurants to open in Tooting. It may be named after an Anglo-Saxon chief but it bears all the hallmarks of the 21st-century bistro: bare-brick walls, wooden floor, factory lights. A popular brunch spot – homemade granola, pancakes, huevos rancheros, and Bloody Mary's – it takes pride in well-sourced ingredients (fish is supplied by [Moxon's in Clapham](#)) and is a firm local favourite for “team Sadiq” who had their Christmas dinner here last year. It's the end of the tour so we order pudding – a rich

chocolate tart which finishes me off. Every one of the places on this list is worth a visit, just perhaps not all in the same evening.

Sadiq recommends: pancakes with blueberry compote, £6.50.

- *102 Tooting High Street, [tota-restaurant.co.uk](http://tota-restaurant.co.uk)*

## 2. How Zohran Mamdani Built a Campaign Around Food

Priya Krishna, *The New York Times*, September 30, 2025

The late-night visit to Kabab King was ostensibly for a campaign interview. But the minute the food hit the table, Zohran Mamdani became lost in the chicken biryani in front of him, digging into the plate with gleeful abandon.

After a few minutes, a light dawned. He looked up and apologized for not sharing. “Sorry,” he said sheepishly. “As you can tell, I’m hungry.”

He continued to apologize throughout the meal at Kabab King, a 24-hour restaurant in Jackson Heights, Queens, that he’s been visiting since high school.

The Democratic nominee and front-runner for mayor, Mr. Mamdani is keenly aware how attentive New Yorkers are to how their politicians interact with food, and how judgmental they can be. The former mayor Bill de Blasio was mocked in 2014 for eating a pizza with a fork and knife rather than folded and by hand in the New York style. The current mayor, Eric Adams, faced a similar scolding when he was spotted eating fish after professing to follow a plant-based diet.

But no mayoral candidate’s relationship to food has been more scrutinized or showcased than Mr. Mamdani’s, often by his own choice. A devotee of delis and bodegas who once filmed a music video at Kabab King under the rap moniker “Mr. Cardamom,” he is harnessing food as both campaign tool and policy plank.

Mr. Mamdani — at 33, suddenly one of the most famous faces in American politics — has proposed opening a city-owned grocery store in each of the five boroughs to make ingredients more affordable, and repealing some of the laws and regulations that have curtailed street vending. He has held news conferences at his favorite restaurants, and conducted many press interviews inside them.

And the social-media blitz that has been widely credited for his success often focuses on food. In posts with hundreds of thousands of views, he has framed his central message — making the city more affordable — around specific culinary benchmarks like the rising price of halal chicken and rice, and used Bengali sweets as props to explain ranked-choice voting.

The way Mr. Mamdani references food at “the personal level and the policy level — and his skill in doing it is probably unusual, if not completely new,” said Grant Davis Reeher, a political science professor at Syracuse University.

Others worry that those skills won’t translate to political leadership. “The mechanics of running the city government and the city are far different than the feel-good images you can make on social media,” said Jim Kessler, the executive vice president for policy at Third Way, a think tank run by moderate Democrats. “Governing as an influencer will not work. People need results.”



Mr. Mamdani said that for him, food is less a campaign strategy than it is an instinctual medium for talking to voters. Amir Hamja for The New York Times

But Mr. Mamdani leverages food in a different, more powerful way, said Adam Bozzi, a Washington-based Democratic political strategist who is not involved with any of the mayoral campaigns.

Food is “part of his language to make his politics really accessible,” Mr. Bozzi said. It’s a background character in his videos, meant to make the setting — and him — feel familiar to voters. “Which is different from the actual food being the event, like ‘I am eating fried butter or the cheesesteak.’ That feels a little more contrived.”

Mr. Mamdani’s focus on street foods and inexpensive neighborhood restaurants serves a bigger strategy: portraying himself as a relatable everyman. And while dropping in at restaurants is nothing new for New York politicians, what is different is the way Mr. Mamdani interacts with the owners, said Basil Smikle Jr., a former executive director of the New York State Democratic Party who is now a professor at Columbia’s School of Professional Studies.

“He uses food in the way that an influencer might,” said Dr. Smikle, “versus a Kamala or JD Vance, where it is a little more structured, a little more organized, a little more scripted. He seems more comfortable engaging.”

## **SPORTS**

### 3. Sadiq Khan: why I'm running the London Marathon

Sadiq Khan, *The Guardian*, 12 March 2014



Evening Standard

"Have you got an alibi?" The question I'd asked hundreds of times in my former life as a defence lawyer was now a question for me.

How could I wriggle out of the idea that I should run the London Marathon? I knew I'd need a good alibi. The idea had come from my friend, the journalist David Cohen. And my wife Saadiya was weighing in – I had to do something to balance my passion for Mars bars.

I tried a few lines: I am not a runner. I am not fit. I don't have the right kit. And 26.2 miles is an awful long way! There had been the odd jog around Tooting Common in my constituency in south London, fuelled by guilt about the Mars bars, but that's about it. Saadiya was unmoved and David was full of gentle reassurances.

The clincher was the one that has worked for thousands of London marathon runners past and present – a chance to help a good cause. And there's no doubt that the Dispossessed Fund is a brilliant one. Their work tackling poverty and deprivation across London is inspiring.

So on 2 February, I laced up my trainers and headed out on my first training run for the London Marathon 2014. The longest I can remember running is 10K – and that’s a jog, mind you. Having started pretty late in the day, David has put me on a strict training regime. And on that first rainy morning I found it tough. Really tough. Getting into a steady stride in the drizzle took a while, but after about 5K or so it started to feel better. I relaxed, and running in a rhythm began to feel more natural. Several laps of the Common later I felt pretty pleased with having run a decent 12k – far further than I expected – and headed home for a bath (and, yes, a well-deserved Mars bar).

The smugness didn’t last long – I can’t describe the pain I was in the next day. Hobbling around parliament, trying to hide my limp from other MPs who I hadn’t yet told about my new project. I learned my lesson the hard way: don’t neglect warming down and stretching after a long run.

A few weeks on and, dare I say it, the training is going well. On a Sunday in late February I ran my first ever road race – David and I, along with my good friend and local GP Dr Tom Coffey, took part in the Hampton Court half marathon.

Meanwhile, each run is a little easier, and the stiffness the next day is more manageable. Another lesson I’ve learned: I need music to run to. I’ve found some good tracks, from Jay-Z to Paul Weller. More than once I’ve been caught attempting to sing along while running to an 80s classic.

But then there other times when running gives you a peacefulness and focus of mind that is an amazing escape from the Westminster bustle. My morning runs have become one of the only times I have during the week to reflect and take stock. And there are the obvious benefits. I feel fitter than I have in a very long time. And I am lighter than I have been for a while, too!

Three things have kept me pounding when my legs are screaming to stop. First, the huge number of projects supported by the Dispossessed Fund across London, from law centres to youth clubs, careers training to tackling gang culture. The charity has so far touched the lives of more than 100,000 Londoners, and knowing the money I hope to raise will go to help even more is a real boost to keep going.

Second, I am proud to be running in the same marathon that my Olympic hero Mo Farah will be competing in (and winning – come on Mo!).

And third, I am desperate to beat my good mate Ed Balls, the shadow chancellor, who is running the marathon for the third time in support of Whizz-Kidz and Action for Stammering Children. I’ve told Ed it will be a victory for youth over experience, plus I’ll have the crowd on my side because I’m the home boy. Competitive, moi?

I’ll keep you posted on my progress in the weeks ahead – and any advice or tips would be gratefully received. You can find me on Twitter @SadiqKhan and #YesWeKhan and at [virginmoneygiving.com/SadiqKhan](http://virginmoneygiving.com/SadiqKhan).

- *Rt Hon Sadiq Khan is shadow London minister and the Labour MP for Tooting.*

#### 4. The US love of football is reaching new levels. Just look at Arsenal super-fan Zohran Mamdani

Bryan Armen Graham, *The Guardian*, 1 December 2025



📷 Zohran Mamdani at a football tournament in Brooklyn, New York, 19 October 2025. Photograph: Katie Godowski/MediaPunch/Shutterstock

When Zohran Mamdani made an appearance on *The Adam Friedland Show* last week, the newly elected mayor of New York was expecting the typical nimble rundown of politics, jokes and conversational detours. What he wasn't expecting was Ian Wright suddenly filling a phone screen with a congratulatory video. The former England and Arsenal striker saluted him on "what you've achieved", urged him to channel that "winning energy" into the job ahead before signing off with a nod to the Arsenal manager, Mikel Arteta. Mamdani cheesed guilelessly as it played before finally blurting out: "I love this man."

For a moment, the incoming mayor of the most powerful city in the United States was simply another geeked-out Arsenal obsessive left weak by one of his childhood heroes. And in that moment lies something revealing about how football fandom in the US has changed. This was not a politician deploying a sports reference for relatability; it was a display of genuine allegiance that's planted at the intersection of two different stories about how Americans have come to love the global game.

What Mamdani's reaction captured, in miniature, is the broader moment US soccer now finds itself in. Stateside interest has quietly climbed to unprecedented levels: Premier League audiences have grown for more than a decade; every big club now has thriving US supporters' groups; and football has entered the cultural bloodstream through celebrity-ownership projects such as Ryan Reynolds and Wrexham (and its various rip-offs), through athletes drifting into national politics (Cristiano Ronaldo turning a White House visit into a surreal photo-op) and through the long on-ramp to next summer's big, beautiful World Cup on home soil. The game is no longer niche, no longer coastal, no longer the preserve of immigrant communities or brunch-hour Europhiles.

Mamdani's politics add another note. His petition against Fifa's dynamic pricing for 2026 World Cup tickets – which he called an “affront to the game” on the Guardian's Football Weekly podcast – reflects a view of football as community infrastructure rather than luxury entertainment. It treats the sport as something that belongs to working-class people and immigrant families, not the unfolding late-capitalist hellscape of ticketing algorithms and resale platforms. That stance is both global and deeply local; both socialist and recognisably football-supporter logic.

Mamdani's affinity with Arsenal lands with added weight because it reveals what the sport already means in the US: a cross-class, multi-ethnic, diasporic, online, joyful cultural force. For a couple of decades now, Arsenal in particular have occupied a curiously prominent place in the imaginations of American progressives. During the Arsène Wenger years, the club became a kind of cultural shorthand for the liberal intelligentsia. They played “European” football at a time when the term connoted sophistication: Henry gliding, Pires drifting, Wenger lecturing about diet and psychology. On the east coast, when matches were finally moved from pay-per-view to the broader availability of Fox Soccer channel, 7am kick-offs became ritualised social markers. For many, supporting Arsenal was less a sporting choice than a signal of curated worldliness.

But this is only one strand of the US's football story, and not the one Mamdani comes from. He was born and raised in Kampala and Cape Town before his family relocated when he was seven to Morningside Heights in Upper Manhattan, as the great Wenger teams of the early 00s further informed his sporting consciousness. His Arsenal was the Arsenal of Kanu, Lauren, Kolo Touré, Eboué and Song – a club whose African spine made it beloved across the continent long before it became fashionable in Brooklyn. When he says that Arsenal might be the most popular club in Uganda, he's expressing a deeper truth about the Premier League's longstanding place in African diasporic culture.

And Arsenal itself increasingly leans into this heritage. Last season's alternative kit, designed by the Sierra Leone-born Foday Dumbuya, explicitly honoured its African fanbase. It followed the Jamaica-themed pre-match strip launched at Notting Hill carnival, part of a broader cultural moment that has long intertwined Arsenal with Black British identity and, increasingly, with the US-based Black creative community, where culture-shapers such as Spike Lee and Jay-Z have embraced the club's diaspora-rich sensibility. The Arsenal that influenced Mamdani is the same Arsenal that helped define modern British multiculturalism, which helps explain why his reaction to Wright resonated so widely.

These two versions of fandom – the curated and the inherited – have long existed along parallel tracks in a country of 340 million souls. What feels new is the way these stories are converging. Mamdani's reaction united them perfectly: the diasporic Arsenal of his childhood colliding with the online Arsenal of US millennials and gen Z. The Premier League's rise in the US – via NBC's deft marketing and commercial strategy, social media, Instagram fan accounts and matchday rituals – has flattened the cultural landscape. A Somali teenager in Minneapolis, a Mexican-American kid in Phoenix and a 38-year-old Brooklyn journalist all speak the same meme-literate Gooner dialect now. And a whole lot more of them are wearing Messi's Inter Miami shirt. The effect is a US football culture that is finally shared. No longer the province of any one demographic, but a hybrid of diaspora, youth culture, TikTok, brunch spots and streetwear.