



## **A fine time to dine in Asia's gourmet hub**

To celebrate its gastronomic diversity, Hong Kong has designated 2009 as the “Year of Food and Wine”. This is to showcase the variety of choice in more than 9 000 restaurants, some with award winning chefs, offering signature dishes and authentic cuisine from around the world.

As great food and fine wine go hand-in-hand, Hong Kong eliminated duties on wine imports last year to help establish the city as a centre in Asia for the wine trade, including storage, distribution, branding and wine appreciation.

Since then, popular wines have become more affordable, and at the same time there is a much wider choice on restaurant wine menus across the city.

### **Michelin City**

For the discerning eater, deciding where to dine has also been made easier by the publication of the first Michelin Guide Hong Kong Macau. The first bilingual Michelin Guide, the "little red book" reinforces the city's status as an international gourmet centre recommending more than 200 restaurants and hotels.

Of the 22 Hong Kong establishments awarded coveted Michelin stars, 17 specialise in Chinese cuisine. One of them received the highest three-star rating while four other restaurants received two stars and one star was awarded to another 12 establishments.

### **Success secrets**

Behind the magnificent food are magnificent cooks, according to Hong Kong Chefs Association President Rudy Muller.



"I think everyone knows Hong Kong. There are so many international chefs here and the workforce is super," Mr Muller said. "Hong Kong people are very demanding when it comes to food. It is a vibrant city with some of the top restaurant chains and culinary schools for all types of cuisines."

Last October Mr Muller went to Erfurt, Germany, with a team of Hong Kong chefs to compete in the IKA Culinary Olympics, featuring teams from almost 40 countries. The Hong Kong team won one gold and three silver medals.

### **Chinese cuisine**

Of the various Chinese food styles available in Hong Kong, Cantonese is the city's home favourite. Traditional yum cha and dim sum are an everyday part of life for Hong Kong people who enjoy mouth-watering delights like steamed pork buns and shrimp dumplings served in steamer baskets.

Dishes from Shanghai and Beijing are also widely available. For those who prefer richer flavours, Shanghainese cuisine is the perfect choice featuring preserved vegetables and salted meats. The names of some of the dishes are as distinctive as their tastes such as "drunken chicken", "1,000-year-old eggs" and "hairy crabs".

Although hairy crabs are a seasonal delicacy popular in the autumn, there is no shortage of seafood year round. The floating restaurants in Aberdeen are excellent options serving delicious seafood in a unique surrounding and within easy reach of the city centre.

Alternatively, head to Sai Kung in the New Territories which has grown from a fishing village into a hotspot for tourists in search of outdoor leisure pursuits and some of the freshest seafood anywhere.



If you want to combine your alfresco dining experience with a boat trip to one of the outlying islands, you can take a ferry to Lamma, Cheung Chau or Lantau and take in the sea breeze as you enjoy lobsters and crabs.

### **Vegetarian choice**

Vegetarian visitors need not feel left out either. The Po Lin Monastery on Lantau Island not only provides spectacular views but also serves up healthy vegetarian meals. One way to get there is to take Hong Kong's latest scenic ride - the Ngong Ping 360 cable car - up the Lantau Peak from Tung Chung, and visit the world's biggest outdoor seated bronze statue of Buddha before enjoying your meal at the monastery.

The area is also a favourite for hikers with various mountain trails and the Wisdom Path nearby, so you can easily find a walk that suits your schedule.

If you don't have much time to spare, the Nan Lian Garden in San Po Kong is close to the Diamond Hill MTR station and offers an ideal alternative for vegetarians. There you can enjoy vegetarian food in a tranquil Tang Dynasty style garden, which is adorned with stylish timber structures, bizarre rocks and bonsai trees.

### **Infinite choice**

Apart from the mind boggling variety of Chinese restaurants serving dishes synonymous with different parts of China, visitors will find authentic dining choices from all over the world as they stroll along the streets in areas such as Tsim Sha Tsui and Causeway Bay and the famous Lan Kwai Fong and Soho areas in Central.

Indian food is popular around the world and you do not have to look far in Hong Kong to find a restaurant cooking up authentic Indian dishes.

Hong Kong's location in the heart of East Asia has seen it evolve into a culinary melting pot in the region, where Japanese sushi, Korean



barbecue and Malaysian nasi goreng can be found alongside Indonesian satays, Vietnamese noodles and Filipino adobo.

Western favourites include Italian pizza parlours, French bistros and Spanish tapas restaurants, as well as good old British fish and chip shops.

### **Local favourites**

Hong Kong's cultural blend of east-meets-west is reflected on menus throughout the city, but you do not have to get dressed up and splash out to enjoy the true Hong Kong dining experience. Teahouses and dai pai dong food stalls provide an affordable, cheerful and tasty alternative to fine dining.

Here you can find local favourites such as soup noodles with fish balls or dumplings (won ton), fish or beef congee, fried rice or egg tarts. Popular drinks are hot milk tea, iced lemon tea and yuen yeung, which is a local combination of tea and coffee.

While you will not find dai pai dongs in the Michelin Guide, they are part of the culinary adventure a diner can experience in Hong Kong. The Michelin inspectors and their newest guide have spiced up that adventure and at the same time raised Hong Kong's profile on the international gastronomic map.

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