

Hone Your Chopstick Skills: A Guide to Chinese Restaurants in San Francisco

by Maria Cristina Lalonde



As the legend goes, the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius advocated the use of chopsticks at the dinner table, believing that knives and forks bore resemblance to weapons. Confucius's influence looms large in San Francisco, where hundreds of Chinese restaurants favor chopsticks as their tableware of choice (though many provide fork and knife alternatives for their less chopstick-savvy western guests). Chinese eateries pack the city's world-renown Chinatown and spill out into neighborhoods across the city, sending the aroma of steaming dumplings, sizzling mu shu meats, and tangy fried rice out into the fog.

Yank Sing (Multiple Locations)

It was 1958 when Alice Chan first fired up stovetops in the kitchen of her dim sum restaurant, where she and her son would steam up the original batch of the restaurant's renowned Shanghai dumplings. Today, tourists and locals alike flock to this iconic spot, eager to sample the James Beard Award-winning dumplings and Chinese specialties.

Mission Chinese Food (Mission)

Lung Shan looks like your typical old-school Chinese joint, with Christmas lights and posters of communist leaders on the walls. But the no-frills eatery shares a space with Mission Street Chinese Food— a pop-up restaurant where guest chefs whip up innovative Sichuan-inspired dishes to accommodate a ceaseless stream of diners.

The Chairman Bao Food Truck (Mission)

The oncoming sight of the brilliant red Chairman Bao food truck is followed soon after by the equally vivid aroma of sizzling pork belly and chicken. Inside, cooks layer steamed rice flour and baked wheat buns with meats and pickled veggies to craft gua bao, a traditional Taiwanese street food.

Lucky Creation (Chinatown)

Though present-day Chinatown abounds with vegetarian restaurants, Lucky Creation was one of the first. Many of its cheerful staff members have worked at the restaurant for years, doling out vegan takes on Chinese favorites, such as imitation sweet and sour pork, vegetable pot stickers, and mushroom chow mein.

The R&R Lounge (Chinatown)

The R&R Lounge was featured on Anthony Bourdain's No Reservations, when the celebrity chef cracked open claws of their salt and pepper Dungeness crab while sipping on lychee martinis. Other diners venture to the eatery for Cantonese classics like Peking duck and seafood specialties picked live from dining room aquariums.

San Tung (Inner Sunset)

The sweet and tangy dry-fried wings at San Tung have attracted a dedicated cult following, often making it a challenge to get a table. Once you do, servers will treat you to a complimentary dish of kimchee before bringing out your orders of chicken and handmade shrimp and pork dumplings.

House of Nanking (Chinatown)

Since the Chronicle's glowing review of House of Nanking in 1989, the eatery has drawn round-the-block lines of diners and visits from celebrity chefs like Jamie Oliver and Rachel Ray. Chef Peter Fang continues to captain the dining room, brusquely informing customers of which of the Shanghai-style dishes they ought to order.

Ton Kiang (Outer Richmond)

Trolleys meander through forests of white-clothed tabletops at Ton Kiang, bearing bamboo baskets of pork buns, steamed dumplings, and shrimp balls. Though celebrated for its dim sum, the eatery also distinguishes itself with a menu of authentic Hakka cuisine, featuring lesser-known dishes such as salt-baked chicken and seafood clay pots.

Tommy Toy's Cuisine (Financial District)

Modeled after the 19th-century sitting room of the Empress Dowager, Tommy Toy's dining room has played host to prestigious diners like Frank Sinatra and Mikhail Gorbachev. Centuries-old tapestries and hand-silvered mirrors speckle the walls, while candles illuminate plates of the French-Chinese fusion, such as coconut seafood bisque and peppercorn lobster over angel hair.

Hunan Home's Restaurant (Chinatown)

Hunan Home chefs abide by Hunan culinary techniques, seasoning many of their dishes with fiery chili peppers. Spicier items— such as the hot and sour soup and the sizzling mu shu platters— are indicated on the menu, which also features milder selections like pork dumplings and sweet and sour chicken.