




YOUR EATING
OUT GUIDE



CHAPTER NO7

CHINESE



CHINESE

You're never far from a taste of the Orient in Dubai

China Sea



Old Dubai

China Club



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Don't be misled – there is no need for membership to dine at this 'club'. And for this we should be thankful, as for a high-quality authentic Cantonese meal served in upmarket, classy surroundings, it's hard to do better than China Club. Large red lanterns and traditional elements of the Far East blend seamlessly with white tablecloths, intimate booths and a whiff of European fine dining (check the opulent private dining rooms for large groups). Despite this, the menu is all authentic Chinese, with a strong selection of meat and seafood options served with classic seasonings and familiar styles, which boast a home-cooked quality

lacking from many other five-star competitors in the city. Elsewhere, service is spot on, with the atmosphere tranquil with pleasant classical Chinese music setting the mood. While we couldn't describe a meal here as cheap, it is far more reasonably priced than comparable high-end contemporaries. *Open daily 12.30pm-3pm, 7.30pm-11pm. Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Deira Creek, Deira (04 222 71 71).*

China Sea



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If you've yet to hear of China Sea, we have just one piece of advice: book a table for tonight. This place simply might be the most authentic taste of China that you'll find in Dubai. With a buzz of Beijing and a shake of Shanghai, as anyone who's ever been to China will tell you, stepping

inside China Sea isn't a world away from the Far East itself. Expect to find a whirlwind of activity as families debate loudly at dinner tables, waitresses squeal orders in hasty Mandarin while sizzling sounds and exotic smells waft from the kitchen. With a huge menu of traditional specialities – helpfully annotated with photos – there's something to suit every palate, from the nervous novice to giggling native. What's more, it's all as authentic as it is reasonably priced. It might not be the most relaxing spot to share a quiet moment, but for an authentic experience, long-standing classic China Sea remains a must-do for all.

Cash only. Open daily 11am-2am. Near Clocktower Roundabout, Deira (04 295 9816).

Chinese Treasure



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Hidden up a flight of stairs, above the former Cyclone nightclub, finding this restaurant feels like quite an achievement. The reward is an old-school, tiredly-decorated room that attracts a steady trade, and has all the promise of buried treasure. Sadly, it's not a promise it keeps. There's nothing gleaming or gold about this restaurant. Nor is there much authentic, or enjoyable, about the food it serves. While some of the starters satisfy basic needs, the mains are primarily an unappetising mash of cheap ingredients lathered in gloopy, artificial sauces. And the service fares no better, with staff failing to bring entire orders and ignoring simple requests for cutlery. All in all, dining at Chinese Treasure is about as disappointing as digging up

a heavy pirates' chest, only to finally crack the lock and find the whole chest loaded with lead. *Open daily noon-2.30pm, 7pm-midnight. Al Nasr Leisureland, Oud Metha (04 336 2525).*

Lan Kwai Fong
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If you want to impress a visitor with your knowledge of Dubai, you'd do well to take them to Lan Kwai Fong. An unassuming, out-the-way spot in Oud Metha, it sits amid a row of other restaurants, but is clearly the jewel in this strip's crown. Peek inside and you're likely to see tables of Asian diners feasting among the life-sized Terracotta Warriors. Outside, a neon sign blazes 'Peking Duck' larger than the venue's own name – but don't be misled, there are far more enticing dishes than just that tourist favourite on offer. The tattered menu thankfully features photos of the huge range of authentic and affordable foods available. There's even a fish tank with live crab and fish, while a

window offers you views of the kitchen team's toils. Some of the flavours might overpower or beguile the less experienced diner, but there are few more genuine Chinese dining experiences in the city. *Open daily noon-3.30pm, 6.30pm-11pm. Oud Metha, near Lamcy Plaza (04 335 3680).*

Long Yin



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After a 2012 renovation, we expected old hand Long Yin to come back better, stronger and more modern. The latter of these qualities was adequately snared with the introduction of a sommelier's list presented on an iPad, but otherwise this airport Méridien spot still feels slightly behind the times. With warm service and a twee Chinese pop soundtrack, the small space feels both cosy and classy, while the food menu is overwhelmingly huge, with a mouth-watering selection of dishes on offer. When your food arrives, expect large portions perfect for family-style dining.

While we've eaten nothing here that we didn't enjoy, we have to confess we've never been bowled over either. Coupled with the relatively high prices, we're sorry to say you can probably do better for your buck. But Long Yin has enough going for it that we wouldn't vote against it, and if you're nearby or fancy a change of pace, it's a pleasant enough place to dine.

Open daily 12.30pm-5pm, 6pm-11pm. Le Méridien Dubai, Garhoud (04 217 0000).

New Times

NEW ENTRY



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New Times is a huge, sprawling venue that's inordinately popular with the Chinese expat community – and with good reason too, as it serves some of the best mainland Chinese food you'll find in Dubai. The menu is huge, with glossy pictures of an unfathomable number of specialities, ranging from familiar and affordable favourites to weird, wonderful (and more expensive) oddities such as duck tongue and crocodile soup. The main dining room is a neat, classically decorated space, with booming Chinese sitcoms on the TV and a legion on Mandarin-speaking waitresses. Towards the back of the restaurant there's a wall of fish tanks loaded with enormous lobsters and exotic seafood, and an open kitchen where beguiling specialities are prepared live. Upstairs, meanwhile, is set aside for a dozen huge private rooms, where affluent and discerning diners celebrate big occasions. An absolute gem



Long Yin

that's utterly unlike anything else you'll find in the city.
Open daily 11.30am-3pm, 5.30pm-midnight. Al Maktoum Road, near Concorde Hotel, Deira (04 250 1888).

Xiao Wei Yang

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Xiao Wei Yang is a dining experience with a difference. Essentially, you're presented with a simmering pot of broth, heated on a remote controlled hot plate in the centre of your table, and you throw food – meat, seafood and veg – inside, and then fish it out to eat when you deem it's done. If that sounds exotic, exciting or just plain tasty to you – and trust us, it is all of those things – then this place is most definitely for you. If it sounds like something of an ordeal, then perhaps choose a restaurant with table clothes instead. But either way, this place is one of a kind in Dubai. And it's clearly authentic – because Xiao Wei Yang is invariably pumping with hungry Chinese and Asian expats.
Open daily 11.30am-1am. Banyas Road, Deira, near Radisson Blu Hotel (04 221 5111).

Downtown & Sheikh Zayed

Chopsticks



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There is much that's maddening about Chopsticks restaurant. Top of the list may well be that, despite the name, diners actually have to ask for chopsticks to be brought to their table. Other frustrating factors include the depressingly mall-pop soundtrack, intermediately



drowned out by kitchen noises, with further distraction provided by the huge wall devoted to explanations of the Chinese horoscope, complete with friendship suitability ratings based on animal year. We suppose this might act as welcome fuel to fire conversations, but it's not clear why anyone would bring a new acquaintance here, for one simple reason – the food is an acquired taste. Hailing from Beirut, Chopsticks serves a fast food-style take on Chinese cuisine – a Lebanese PF Chang's, if you will – which sadly tastes cheap and synthetic. Meanwhile, the best thing this restaurant had going for it – a pleasant terrace view overlooking the Dubai Fountain – has unfortunately been wiped out thanks to ongoing construction work to fill in the water and extend Souk Al Bahar.

Open daily 10am-midnight. The Dubai Mall, Downtown Dubai (04 325 3244).

Hakkasan



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While Dubai hosts a number of Japanese names equally renowned as nightlife hot spots as they are eateries, new Chinese openings generally trump for traditionalism and white table cloths over modern bar-restaurant-lounge hybrids. The exception is most definitely Hakkasan (although Atlantis' new arrival Yuan looks to be sneaking into the slipstream). Since its opening in November 2011, Hakkasan has held a steady crowd, and rightly so – it's the emirate's chicest Chinese eatery by far, a believable fusion of old and new, East and West, created with a mix of Oriental furnishings, careful lighting and nightlfe-y house beats. As you'd expect, you'll find the same cultural fusions in the food and presentation, but with more than a decade of menu-tuning behind them, the results are largely satisfying



and never disappointing. For a strictly authentic meal in quiet surroundings look elsewhere, but if you find style just as important as substance, then this is the lounge-restaurant for you. *Open daily noon-3pm, 7pm-1am (bar open until 2am). Jumeirah Emirates Towers, Sheikh Zayed Road, www.hakkasan.com/dubai (04 384 8484).*

Royal China



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The renowned Royal China brand with branches around the world is famous for dim sum, and we've never been disappointed with the restaurant's selection and quality (all dim sum is made fresh on a daily basis). Evening dining is a pleasure, too, although there is room for a little improvement. While we don't object to a menu stacked in favour of both Chinese and more Western classics (think sweet and sour, kung pao et al), some of the sauces are a tad bland or over sweetened. Nevertheless, service is faultless, and the slick, elegant dining space is interesting and atmospheric. The dim sum alone makes Royal China well worth a visit, and anyone familiar with the weight of the brand should not be disappointed.

Open daily 11.30am-11.30pm (bar open until 2am). DIFC, www.royalchinadubai.ae (04 354 5543).

Shang Palace



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In nearly every way, Shang Palace is fantastic. With a relatively tight menu focusing on Cantonese classics, the



Shang Palace

food is of a consistently high standard. Sizzling dishes are the show-stopper, and this place is renowned for dim sum, but everything we've tried, down to the most basic soups and rice, has been authentically prepared and tastes delicious. Staff are always on hand, meaning you're never short of service, and even the furniture appears to have been sourced with some care, with rotating 'lazy Susan' tables for larger groups. The most underwhelming thing about this restaurant is simply its location, sitting on a balcony overlooking the hotel lobby, with live music and chatter drifting over from neighbouring venues and drowning out any chance of intimacy. It's also far from cheap, with several dishes creeping over the three-figure mark. We've no doubt the food is worth every last dirham – but for that kind of buck we'd just hope for a little more atmosphere.

Open daily 12.30pm-3pm, 7pm-midnight. Shangri-La Hotel Dubai, Sheikh Zayed Road (04 405 2703).

Jumeirah & Umm Sugeim

Zheng He's



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Named after a 13th-century explorer who is best known for his role in assisting the overthrow of China's Yongle Emperor, it's perhaps appropriate that Zheng He's offers a clash of cultures. Although it's not the Asian, African and Middle Eastern climes that the traveller explored from which this Madinat joint draws its influence, instead fusing traditional Chinese cuisine with Western sensibilities: dishes are served on flat plates, not in bowls, sauces artfully splashed rather than slathered on mains. The careful presentation extends to the restaurant itself, a tasteful blend of Far Eastern furnishing with a modern twist; rich and bold reds, blacks and oranges, creating an atmosphere that is classy and intimate without being too stuffy or formal. Coupled with a beautiful

canal-side terrace with Burj Al Arab views, it's an ideal date spot, with friendly service that only occasionally borders on intrusive. And the food? While some of the blanket tastes may lack a little of the depth and fire associated with more authentic fare, it's well balanced to meet a globalised palate.
Open daily noon-2.30pm, 7pm-11pm. Mina A'Salam, Madinat Jumeirah, Umm Suqeim (04 366 6730).

New Dubai

Bā Restaurant & Lounge

NEW ENTRY



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That fine and fancy model of the Japanese lounge bar and dining space has been tried, tested and perfected in Dubai. The latest twist on that theme is a Chinese-inspired version, Bā. Wander through its large upper-tier lounge and bar area, down a flight of stairs and you're greeted by a lower-level dining space, beautifully decorated in elegant black and imperial Chinese yellow. Service is unrivalled, and the Chinese staff make fantastic recommendations, using an iPad to display pictures of the food. One of the standout dishes on the menu is also one of the cheapest – the clay pot beef brisket with radishes. Giving off an intense aroma of cinnamon and star anise, the beef is rich and warmly flavoured. For a fine-dining yet 'of the times' Chinese experience, Bā sits high up among the few restaurants in Dubai that pull this cuisine off. *Restaurant open Sat-Wed 7pm-11.30pm, Thu-Fri 7pm-midnight; lounge open Sat-Wed 6pm-1am, Thu-Fri*



Blue Jade

6pm-2am. Fairmont The Palm, Palm Jumeirah (04 457 3388).

Blue Jade

NEW ENTRY



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This recent addition to the Ritz-Carlton JBR boasts an immediate wow-factor with its elegant and distinctly oriental combination of richly dark wood and glittery glass. Outside, you'll also find a pleasant balcony not far from the beach below. Service is unfalteringly polite with the friendly staff even enquiring after first names and using them throughout the meal. The menu is a nicely tight and reasonably short list of dishes, but spanning a good range of Asian cooking. Sadly, some of the dishes are a bit disappointing, such as the orange blossom duck breast, which is sometimes a bit too rare and awkwardly presented. The scallops with ginger and garlic, however, is a delicious creation with tender scallops, doused in sticky and sweet sauce and huge whole cloves of sweetly roasted garlic. There may be the odd hit and miss dish on the menu, but on the whole Blue Jade is

a pleasant place for Asian dining and the service helps to tip the balance towards a very positive experience.

Open daily 6pm-11pm. The Ritz-Carlton Dubai, The Walk, JBR (04 318 6150).

PF Chang's

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Known as the biggest Chinese chain in the US, PF Chang's is undeniably Americanised, meaning portions are big, greasy and far from authentic – which doesn't necessarily mean they're not appealing. For mall food it's still a cut above most of its competitors, but this is certainly not somewhere we'd suggest taking a visiting Chinese friend. The venue itself is pleasant, if a bit generic, with stereotypical Far Eastern knickknacks blended with an urban chic vibe – take a table at the back to escape the hubbub of passing shoppers. On a positive note, there's one Americanism we're glad they've adopted – instead of the incessant drone of plinky-plonky Chinese classical music, there's Western pop piped throughout. *Open daily 11pm-1am.*

Mall of the Emirates, Al Barsha (04 395 1801). Other locations: The Dubai Mall (04 325 3341), Mirdif City Centre (04 231 6660).

Shanghai Chic



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A small, sleek but not entirely memorable space off the lobby of the rather out-the-way Mövenpick Hotel Ibn Battuta Gate, it's perhaps not surprising that more people haven't heard of Shanghai Chic. This might explain the restaurant's about-face since our last visit, side-lining its à la carte options in favour of a Dhs188 package where you can order as much as you please. Rather like an à la carte brunch – without the drinks included, soft or otherwise. The chef has clearly had a field day with the new menu, switching the core ingredients of classic dishes and bringing in Thai and Western tastes. With around 50 options to choose from, it's all a bit hit and miss, but would suit a large group wanting to collectively indulge and experiment. However, the dim lights and lounge tunes make this more of a couples spot, and tables can quickly overflow with half-eaten plates of dishes you've not been able to finish. *Open daily 7pm-11.30pm. Mövenpick Hotel Ibn Battuta Gate, The Gardens (04 444 5613).*

Summer Place



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The concept of style taking precedence over substance must date back to the first formal dining of ancient man, but it's a practice which is just as alive and well today. Sadly there's a prime contender

for this charge to be found in Summer Place. It's visually impressive, with twinkly twilight views from the 25th floor of the Habtoor Grand. Service is attentive, and diners might settle into their seats with a reasonable sense of expectation. And – we want to be clear about this – it's not that the food is bad; it's simply very mediocre, a conservative menu of Chinese classics served with competence but without flair. For this alone we have no problem – aside from one stickler: the prices. When boiled rice starts at Dhs45, and you won't find a seafood main for less than three figures, it's a bit of a thorn in your side. Paying these prices, you simply expect more for your money than atmosphere alone. *Open daily 12.30pm-11.30pm. Habtoor Grand Beach Resort & Spa, Dubai Marina, www.grandjumeirah.habtoorthotels.com (04 399 5000).*

The Peacock Restaurant



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How often do you walk into a restaurant, let out a gush of exhilaration at its beauty, sit down and order in a haze of excitement and expectation, and then leave 90 minutes later somewhat underwhelmed by the food you were served? Well, imagine turning that experience on its head, and you've got a fair measure of The Peacock. Based on a balcony overlooking the hotel lobby, above a distractingly loud international restaurant below, this restaurant isn't much to look at. However, it's likely to serve you some of the best Chinese you'll find in Dubai. At the helm for a decade, Chef Jun Xiao makes exemplary dim

sum. The lack of atmosphere means this might not be the place for an anniversary dinner, but if you enjoy authentic Chinese food, you're unlikely to find a better licensed venue this side of town.

Open Sun-Thu 6.30pm-11.30pm; Fri-Sat noon-3pm, 6.30pm-11.30pm. Sheraton Jumeirah Beach Resort, The Walk, JBR, www.thepeacockdubai.com (04 399 5533).

Yuan

NEW ENTRY



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Upon arrival at Yuan, you'll get an immediate impression of what's to come. An elegantly dressed hostess in black and an elaborately adorned man in brocade silk and face paint – part Beijing opera singer, part mythical deity – welcome diners ahead of a special experience. Inside, the restaurant is not overly large, yet the dimensions feel spacious and lavish, all decorated in ethereal tones of blue, silver and grey. Staff all seem to be Chinese and service is wonderfully faultless with plenty of guidance, recommendations and a few cultural facts offered without prompting. While the menu is definitely a fine-dining take on the cuisine, the dishes have a determinedly Chinese soul to them. The Shanghai-style rose tea smoked chicken, for instance, is perfectly flavoured with a wonderful crispy skin, while the braised wagyu beef is coated in a delicious sweet and sticky marinade.

Open Sat-Wed 7pm-11.30pm, Thu-Fri 7pm-12.30am. Atlantis The Palm, Palm Jumeirah (04 426 2626).