

In Asia, Michelin-star dining doesn't necessarily come with month-long waiting lists, strict dress codes and degustations served on fine china in equally sumptuous surroundings.

There's no doubting the diversity of cuisine across the region, honed by centuries of cooking methods perfected using flavoursome – and, in some instances, daring – local ingredients.



Image: Joshua Anand / Unsplash

As such, Michelin-star meals in Asia can be found in some seriously unexpected places. From a hawker stand in Singapore to a humble noodle house in Japan and the ground floor of a commercial tower in Macau, here are the more surprising places to go for Michelin-star meals in Asia.

Jay Fai, Bangkok

It's hard to say what really draws the crowds to the tiny street eatery Jay Fai – the flavoursome seafood curries and 'drunken noodles', or chef Jay Fai herself.

Since earning a Michelin star – the first Thai street-stall chef to do so – Jay Fai draws the crowds in seemingly overwhelming numbers, yet insists on preparing each and every meal herself. Equipped with now-iconic goggles to protect her eyes from oil and smoke, the 72-year-old culinary master still uses rather rudimentary charcoal burners to cook one dish at a time, which means waiting times can be long, but well worth it.

Tim Ho Wan, Hong Kong



Image: Tim Ho Wan / Facebook

When a Michelin-starred chef decides to break out on his own, you can safely bet that the accolades will follow. Chef Mak Kwai Pui, formerly of the three-Michelin-starred Lung King Heen restaurant, opened Tim Ho Wan with fellow chef Leung Fai Keung back in 2009. The tiny 20-seat restaurant and its dim sums quickly grew in popularity, so much so that Tim Ho Wan is now a full-blown franchise with some 45 outposts around the world.

While every branch draws the crowds – particularly for the baked BBQ pork buns – if you want the Michelin-star experience, you’ll have to head to Hong Kong’s Sham Shui Po district, home to Tim Ho Wan’s second outpost. There’ll be a line, but you can pass the time by placing your orders on the menu cards and watching the chefs at work through the windows.

King, Macau

The autonomous region of Macau may be small, but it glitters with 19 Michelin stars. It’s also possible to have a top gourmet experience without setting foot into one of Macau’s hotels or behemoth casinos. For example, tucked away on the ground floor of the comparatively average-looking AIA commercial tower, the team at King earned a Michelin star for their Cantonese dishes after just one year of operation. King has retained its star status for the four years since, not least for the restaurant’s signature crispy pigeon and homemade dim sum.

If you've got the room, it's almost obligatory to finish your meal with a Portuguese egg tart. A five-minute walk from King will have you at Margaret's Café e Nata, where the tarts are baked fresh each morning and argued to be among the best in town.

Sobahouse Konjiki Hototogisu, Tokyo



Image: Sobahouse Konjiki Hototogisu / Facebook

Sure, there are plenty of star-spangled sushi joints, but ramen is quickly picking up pace as the gourmet go-to dish in Japan's capital. Tucked away in the alleys of Shinjuku is Sobahouse Konjiki Hototogisu, which is the third ramen restaurant in the world to be awarded a star.

The secret to stellar ramen is in the broth, and crowds flock to Sobahouse for the signature salty ramen with red tai and clams, the broth rich with umami flavours, which pairs excellently with melt-in-the-mouth handmade noodles.

Liao Fan Hong Kong Soya Sauce Chicken Rice & Noodle, Singapore

When it comes to authentic eats in Singapore, follow your nose to one of the country's bustling hawker markets. Two-hour-long lines perpetually snake from the Bib Gourmand Tian Tian Hainanese Chicken and Rice stand in the Maxwell Road hawker centre, but if you've got stars in your eyes, head east and down to the very end of Chinatown's 'Food Street', (Smith Street on the map) where Liao Fan Hong Kong Soya Sauce Chicken Rice & Noodle awaits.

This one-starred place – headed up by Hawker Chan – is where you'll find the eponymous dish, which Chan perfected during his days working as an apprentice chef in Hong Kong. It's also deemed the cheapest Michelin-starred meal in the world at SD\$3. Work off the meal with a browse of the markets in the shadow of the commanding and ornate Buddah Tooth Relic temple.

(Lead image: Abhishek Sanwa Limbu / Unsplash)

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