



Hong Kong at night

IN THE BELLY OF THE DRAGON

Not only does Hong Kong keep some of the world's most wonderfully exclusive wine-and-dine secrets, but most of its populace don't know where they exist.

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Entrance to Ronin Restaurant



The busy streets of Lan Kwai Fong

Finding a bit of space in Hong Kong isn't easy. As the most populated city in the world, you're constantly surrounded by crowds; streets are packed with people, your office swarming with staff, after-work bars heaving with patrons, and restaurants that're forever overbooked. But there are rumours – whispers, really – that deep within the hollows of the city, beyond places most ordinary people know, there exist hidden escapes.

A completely unremarkable door, an exact knock, a few quick words with the doorman and maybe you'll gain entrance. Maybe. On three consecutive nights, we scoured the city for Hong Kong's secret spots. From bars hidden within restaurants and eateries concealed behind shopfronts, to speakeasies that require the right spoken word and hidden hotel hideaways that just don't want to be found, it's a secretive world of late-night wining and dining pleasures. Here, we pull back the curtain.

The high-priced streets of Central make up Hong Kong's main artery in a teeming district where the city's wealthiest and most beautiful congregate. It's here where it begins, through a word-round-the-campfire tip that above the area's renowned Cantonese restaurants, there's a style of the country's cuisine you'd never expect to see: Western-influenced Chinese food, heavy on soy sauce and loaded with MSG.

It isn't easy securing a reservation at Fu Lu Shou though, and it's even harder attempting to pry out of them the building's door code. But after much badgering and a couple of favours called in, we finally make our way to the top floor of a non-descript building. It's a swift, welcome shift from a stiflingly cramped stairwell into an airy skyline terrace, where chinoiserie graffiti sits comfortably alongside Scandinavian-styled furniture.

If all you remember is cheap Chinese takeaway after a late-night boozing session in London, Fu Lu Shou will shock you. This is quality cuisine, featuring skilful modern updates of greasy classics. We sampled all the nostalgic favourites – prawn toast, sweet-and-sour pork, the eloquently named 'big arsed dim sum' – and as confirmed fans of classic Cantonese, we were impressed. It left us in need of a drink to consider things, and we obliged with our first hidden bar, located conveniently down the road.

From the outside, Street Meat looks like the kind of hipster restaurant so prevalent in our modern society. New York City subway-inspired signage, a smoky cooking station,

and the classic no-reservations policy. But a quick push through the hungry crowds and you're standing in front of what looks like a service door in the back.

It's not; it's the concealed entrance to the drinking hole-in-the-wall High Line, a secret bar where ambient murky lighting and retro neon signs combine to create the ideal ice-cool escape from the thronging masses. It's all about craft cocktail pairings here – think smelling the scent of a luxury perfume, before drinking its sister concoction, and you'll get the idea. The bar is a highly original breath of fresh air in a city where vodka-tonics have long been the height of creativity.

After a heavy hangover of scouring stairwells and barging in on backrooms, the next night we ditch Central, knowing full well we'll be back tomorrow. Instead, we take our chances on the more secretive outer districts. First stop, Sheung Wan, the up-and-coming expat favourite that currently holds the city's chicest new spots – if you can find them.

We were tipped off about Mrs. Pound by an acquaintance, and must've walked up and down its Pound Lane location at least a dozen times without luck. And then we saw it: an unremarkable Chinese stamp store, where a tiny lit-up window holds a single stamp sitting in a crevice. One little push

on it, and like something out of a retro-spy show, the hidden door magically opens.

This is truly hush-hush, as if you've stumbled upon a wonderfully ornate opium den, with a colonial red-and-green colour scheme and tables cramped together in classic Hong Kong style. That description's not far off though, as Mrs. Pound's Asian-inspired cuisine is about as close to a legal high as you can get. Rendang poutine, sriracha sweet corn, mac-n-cheese chili crab – all very moreish and absolutely delicious, representing the ideal blend of east-west flavours.

Feeling satiated and much in need of a drink, we hop a cab and head to the other side of the city to Ship Street in Wan Chai. Here, star British chef Jason Atherton lends his celebrity to Spanish restaurant Ham & Sherry, and crowds regularly camp outside to sample its traditional tapas. But let the hordes have it, we say: we'll be laughing at them through the two-way mirror that makes up the restaurant's back wall.

Down a discreet alley just to the restaurant's right is Back Bar, the restaurant's sister watering hole. Like a cocktail-infused version of *Through the Looking Glass*, this is another world, a low-lit affair that takes culinary strides with its drinks. The tipples are based on countries, and each takes into



Mrs. Pound Restaurant



Mrs. Pound Restaurant's vibrant interiors



Mrs. Pound's famous Avocado Fries



Unigue interior design of Stockton Bar



Fried Quail with orange zest and sansho pepper at Ronin Restaurant



Ham and Sherry's Pineapple Espresso Cocktail

consideration the nation's unique flavours, from smooth *karakuchi sake in Japan's drink to biting chicken stock in Mexico's.*

Stumbling out of our round-the-world journey, we hail a taxi and head home, knowing that our finger is firmly on the pulse of the city. But there's creeping fear of tomorrow night, and the thought that there possibly lies our biggest hide-and-seek yet.

We start our final adventure back in Central, where Ronin, high on the top of our list, serves up Japanese *izakaya* with the main focus on seafood. Housed inside a dimly lit space that screams understated sophistication, it's the ideal place for an intimate meal with some of the freshest Shigoku oysters and unagi chirashi (eel sushi) in town.

We move on to the very last place you'd expect in Central: the Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong's most prestigious and familiar hotel. There's long been a rumour that the hotel hides an ultra-exclusive chef's table – and luckily, we had an in with the PR director, who secured us a spot at Krug Room. But even entering when invited isn't easy.

You have to stride past the old China hands sitting at age-old pub The Chinnery, through dim corridors in the back, and then past the hectic kitchen. But as with everything Mandarin, it's an absolutely gorgeous affair, featuring tastefully chic décor and a wonderful blend of classic and modern cuisine from chef Uwe Opeckensky. The menu is ever-changing, and lest we create any reader envy, we won't repeat

our stunning serving – save to say that no doubt yours will be just as delightful.

Finally, after a meal to rival most, we attempted our greatest find. During the day, Central's Graham Street market is a frenzied affair, with venerable vendors peddling fish and vegetables to those looking for the freshest. At night though, it's a little scary: dark, grimy and full of stray cats, but also the supposed location of Hong Kong's most hidden bar, 001.

We found the unassuming black door and pushed the tiny silent doorbell. We waited. And waited. And finally, a man with an uncanny resemblance to Lurch out of *The Addams Family* appeared, whispering 'how many?', before shooing us in. This was the speakeasy that nobody speaks about, a bar so secretive that we saw someone forcibly removed after attempting a sneaky photo.

If you keep yourself to yourself, 001 is an incredibly relaxed affair, the kind of thing straight out of the Prohibition Era, with jazz on the soundtrack, bow-tied waiters and wonderfully classic cocktails. The drinks are done just right, too: ultra-smooth old-fashioned, razor-sharp martinis and of course, a wide selection of whiskeys.

And while this was no doubt a highlight of our veiled adventure, the kind of place that comes mind when you think of a 'hidden spot', we sat back with our drink and took greater comfort in the fact that most of its population don't know where Hong Kong's hidden gems are – that is, if they even know of their existence. Cheers to that.



ตามรอย ร้านอร่อยที่ ฮ่องกง

ฮ่องกง ขึ้นชื่อเรื่องอาหารรสเลิศมาช้านาน แต่ยังมีร้านอาหารสุดเก๋อีกหลายร้านที่คุณอาจยังไม่รู้จัก ซ่อนตัวอยู่แทบทุกมุมเมือง

แปลและเรียบเรียงโดย ประเมษฐ์ ชุ่มยิ้ม



ค็อกเทลรสชาติ-บุบะโบ ที่ Back Bar

เมื่อคุณไปเยือนฮ่องกง อาจเป็นการยากที่จะหลีกเลี่ยงท้องถนนที่คดเคี้ยวไปด้วยผู้คน บาร์ที่หาที่นั่งแทบไม่ได้ หรือร้านอาหารที่ถูกจองเต็มทุกโต๊ะ อย่างไรก็ตาม ยังมีบางมุมของฮ่องกง ที่ยังมีร้านอาหารเก๋ๆ และบาร์สุดชิปที่อาจยังไม่เป็นที่รู้จักมากนัก รอให้คุณได้ไปเยี่ยมเยือน

ในย่านเซ็นทรัล มีร้านอาหารจีนที่ต้องไปลองสักครั้งชื่อ Fu Lu Shou ซึ่งเสิร์ฟขนมปังหน้ากุ้ง หมูผัดเปรี้ยวหวาน รวมถึงติ่มซำชื่อดัง จากนั้นเมื่อคุณเดินลัดเลาะไปตามถนนจะเจอกับร้านอาหารสุดชิปชื่อ Street Meet ซึ่งภายในร้านมีบาร์เล็กๆ ชื่อ High Line เสิร์ฟค็อกเทลและเครื่องดื่มหลากหลายชนิด ในบรรยากาศที่อบอุ่นไปด้วยกลิ่นอายสไตล์เรโทร

ในย่านเสี้ยววาน (Sheung Wan) ให้มองหาร้าน Mrs. Pound เพื่อเข้าไปลิ้มรสอาหารที่ผสมผสานวัฒนธรรมตะวันตกกับตะวันออกเข้าด้วยกันอย่างลงตัว เมนูขึ้นชื่อคือ Rendang Poutine (เฟรนช์ฟรายราดแกงเนื้อแบบอินโดนีเซีย) ข้าวโพดหวานปิ้ง ราวซอส และมักกะโรนีซอสปูอบชีส

บนถนน Ship Street ในย่านหว่านไจ้ (Wan Chai) มีเซฟชื่อดังจากอังกฤษ Jason Atherton ประจำอยู่ที่ร้านอาหารสเปนชื่อ Ham & Sherry ซึ่งเสิร์ฟเมนูทาสต์แบบดั้งเดิมรสชาติกลมกล่อม และอย่าลืมปิดท้ายด้วยค็อกเทลรสชาติละมุนละไมที่ Back Bar

ในตลาดเกเรย์แอมสตรัม มีบาร์เก๋ไก๋ชื่อ 001 ที่เปิดเพลงแจ๊ส ให้คุณนั่งฟังสบายๆ พลังดื่มด่ำไปกับเครื่องดื่มเย็นๆ ค็อกเทลแบบคลาสสิกรสนุ่ม หรือวิสกี้หลากหลายชนิด

และหากมีโอกาสสักครั้ง อย่าลืมไปลิ้มลองอาหารสุดพิเศษจากฝีมือเซฟชื่อดัง Uwe Opecensky ที่ห้องอาหาร The Krug Room ในโรงแรมแมนดาริน โอเรียนเต็ล ซึ่งรับรองว่าจะเป็นประสบการณ์ที่ไม่อาจลืมเลือน



ทางเข้าห้อง Ham & Sherry IIa- Back Bar Uunuu Ship Street



Mr. Ming's Negroni ค็อกเทลชื่อดังของร้าน Mrs. Pound



การตกแต่งอันเป็นเอกลักษณ์ภายในร้าน Mrs. Pound