

# Zhang Mama



**THE CLOSURE OF TRIED** and true hutong stalwart Zhang Mama this summer was a huge loss for the longing, grumbling stomachs of Sichuan food fans in Beijing. Fortunately, though, the team from that branch have bounced back and re-emerged at this relatively cavernous new spot, just north of the Guloudajie subway stop.

Admittedly, it was never to everyone's taste, but the romance in the chaos of its cramped old joint (the queuing, table-sharing, shouting staff and scribbled orders) has largely made way at this new feasting arena, complete with a mammoth dining hall, private rooms, an in-house toilet, orders made via QR code and a generally more sterile environment. Human interaction has been slashed, and service remains a little aloof – not that it was ever



**WHAT IS IT...**  
An old hutong favourite reincarnated.

**WHY GO...**  
It's (still) Beijing's best value Sichuan meal.

→ 100 Ande Lu, Dongcheng district (137 1785 0992). Open 11am-10.30pm daily.

expected to be silver-grade – but the efficiency with which the food hits the table means any grievances fade into irrelevance.

And on that table, it looks to have been a seamless transition. Now served from a kitchen that is at least six or seven times the size of its predecessor, the food still hits the fantastic heights of yore – they must have brought the unwashed woks with years of flavour locked in – and, unlike the menu at its ritzier Sanlitun

outlet, stands firm at the same exceptional price point.

The *hui guo rou* (28RMB; pictured) twice-cooked pork, still steals the show, its delightful mix of fatty meat, scallions and fried crisp *baocui*, making it the star centrepiece. Elsewhere, the electric kung pao chicken (18RMB), *yuxiang* eggplant (15RMB) and spicy pork dumplings (10RMB) remain highlights, as does the cold *mala* lotus root (15RMB), smothered in spicy oil. And when lips inevitably vibrate, it simply has to be the trusted antidote of a peanut milk (4RMB) to cool off.

In the new post-hutong era we're edging towards, it's easy to get lost in a sort of selfish nostalgia for the bygone Zhang Mama. But truthfully, we shouldn't begrudge seeing a thriving neighbourhood diner all grown up in more sizeable – and, quite importantly, stable – surroundings. We're just thankful to see it back. In the words of the quite aptly named Spice Girls: Mama, we love you.

■ Patrick Moore

**Dinner for two 80RMB**



## Coming in soft

Two new Latin American eateries are spicing up Beijing's F&B scene – just don't get too attached to their menus yet



### EL BARRIO

Seven-storey Sanlitun hub Nali Patio gets a new addition to its already extensive ranks with the opening of El Barrio, a sprawling new Mexican joint from the Italian stallions behind Bottega. Despite having a menu that's yet to be finalised – with their new authentically Mexican head chef José Sanchez on his way over to shape the new roster – like a lot of its Mexican counterparts in Beijing (Taco Bar, Q Mex and even Palms LA), El Barrio focuses on serving up a mix of South American and Tex-Mex favourites. Soft opening saw highlights including a fried chicken *chicharron*, fajitas, stewed lamb *birria* and ceviche. Its two – two! – outdoor terraces make for the perfect environs to sip on margaritas, but with winter's arrival imminent, you might soon be clamouring to sit indoors.

→ Second floor, Nali Patio, 81 Sanlitun Bei Lu, Chaoyang district (6416 1716).

Open 10.30am-11pm daily.

### PACHAPAPI

Formerly known as Pachakutiq, Beijing's premier purveyor of Peruvian cuisine has risen from the ashes in the form of Pachapapi, one of the latest (and greatest) in a long line of eateries to set up shop in Xinyuanli's ever-expanding epicentre. Owner and native Peruvian Francisco Chía makes the bold claim that his countrymen make the best ceviche in Latin America, and having tasted Pachapapi's, we may be true believers yet. Specialising in Nikkei fare – Peruvian-Japanese fusion cuisine that's sweeping the globe – Pachapapi is currently dishing up favourites such as *acevichado* sushi rolls and sashimi-like *tiradito*, as well as Peruvian classics like *aji de gallina* stews. They're still working out the kinks with their dessert menu, but we'll be back for seconds, for sure. ■ LW

→ Jinshang, 20 Xinyuanli Xi, Xindong Lu, Chaoyang district (6561 8968).

Open 5pm-midnight Mon-Thu; 5pm-2am Fri-Sun.