

#HongKong #Restaurants #PinoyFood

## Emerging eats

**A new vanguard of restaurants is elevating Filipino cuisine from an overlooked staple to the "next big thing" in Hong Kong's ever-evolving dining scene**

Hong Kong is often considered one of the world's great food capitals. But Filipino fare has thus far been underrepresented – a surprising omission given that Pinoy's constitute the largest foreign community in the city. That's all starting to change with a fresh crop of Filipino restaurateurs looking to elevate and integrate their

heritage-inspired flavors into Hong Kong's gastronomic fabric.

In 2009, Junels Restobar opened in Sai Ying Pun, a low-key neighborhood west of Central. A restaurant plus late-night karaoke venue, it expertly combined Filipino food with a lively party atmosphere and is now a local institution, popular with both Hong

Kong's Filipino community and the wider expat community alike.

Restaurants like Cinta-J in Wan Chai and Foodtrip Bedana's in Yau Ma Tei followed, though these spots still stayed casual. In recent years, a new wave of modern Filipino restaurants have become mainstream, offering tasteful interiors and refined interpretations of classic recipes.

Once viewed as "home-cooked" fare, Filipino cuisine has gained newfound prestige since Kasama in Chicago became the world's first Filipino Michelin-starred restaurant. The city's newfound appreciation echoes a global consensus, famously predicted by the late Anthony Bourdain, that Filipino food is set to be the "next big thing".

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## BARKADA

Enviably located beneath the Central Mid-Level escalator in the heart of Soho, Barkada owes much of its creative spark to co-founder Jen Balisi of the popular Instagram food account, Indulgent Eats. Encouraged by the “overwhelmingly positive response” to her Filipino-inspired cookbook, Balisi knew the time was right to reach a larger audience.

“I was excited to create a big, beautiful space in Central where people could feel proud to dine in with their family, colleagues and even their own *barkada* (friend group),” she says. Opened in February, the menu blends traditional recipes with modern techniques, like sous-vide crispy *pata* and the standout adobo chicken popcorn.

@barkada.hk



## DARA

Opened in December 2022, Dara's concept takes inspiration from the Pampanga region and its culinary traditions. Jermaine Bunoan, who helms the independent eatery alongside his mother (the executive chef and founder), family and childhood friends, believes that despite Filipino cuisine's relative underrepresentation in Hong Kong, the city inherently possesses an adventurous palate.

Located near the Sai Ying Pun MTR station in a swanky new tower, the restaurant offers inventive takes on traditional Kapampangan dishes, such as the must-try *lumpiang laing* – a golden fried spring roll filled with classic *laing* (taro leaves cooked in coconut milk with chili).

@dara\_hkg



## HOLY GAW

Launched by Cebu-born Marvin Gaw in 2020, Holy Gaw offers a “modern Filipino fusion” menu. Clean, minimalist interiors serve as backdrop for carefully plated dishes here, and Holy Gaw has become Insta-famous for its ube ice-cream sandwich on pandan-infused *pandesal*.

The compact Swatow Street café, just a three-minute walk from the Wan Chai MTR, is well-known for Gaw's Carbonara, its sauce inspired by *sisig* (minced pork cooked on a sizzling plate).

@holygaw



## Noodle fix

Three tasty takes on the slurpable staple



### Jakarta

The *mee goreng* or *bakmi goreng*, egg noodles stir-fried with vegetables, chicken, shrimp and a sweet-spicy sauce, is a popular snack or quick meal across Indonesia.



### Hanoi

You'll find *pho* – rice noodles, thin slices of beef, bean sprouts, basil and coriander in a clear broth – served at nearly every streetside food stall.



### Fukuoka

The city is considered the home of Hakata-style ramen, which has a *tonkotsu* (pork bone)-based broth that's creamy-white and rich in flavor.