

Char Koay Teow, Tanjung Bungah?

By Caleb Yeoh

Please know that, as a born-and-bred Penang Island Boy, divulging these Char Koay Teow secrets is a greater torment than any jam from Batu Feringghi to Georgetown on a four-day weekend.

Coincidentally, it's because of this bane to island life that these whispers, shared amongst locals from 11200, are being made known to you today. Penangites don't gate-keep, especially when it comes to food and like all Malaysians on the island for cuti-cuti Malaysia, we know that a 4-hour jam to Georgetown is no way to spend the day.

So, what do you do when you're up in the north of the island, and have a hankering for a plate of Char Koay Teow, kissed by smoke and flame?

1. Astaka Hillside Tanjung Bungah - Aunty Mary Char Koay Teow

You head to Astaka Hillside Tanjung Bungah and make a beeline for *Aunty Mary's Char Koay Teow*. Fresh from winning a local CKT competition, identified by his red snapback, the chef here, not named Mary, checks all the boxes for a top Char Koay Teow.

Smear in duck egg, for only RM9.00, the flat rice noodles, seasoned with a harmonious mix of chilli boh, light, dark soya sauces and lard, were wok-kissed, giving a smoky, deep-taste of umami in every bite. The dish is topped off with three huge prawns, classic cockles and Chinese sausage.

For those looking to pimp up their plate, they provide luxury addons such as squid, crab meat, mantis prawns and oysters!

2. Ah Soon Char Koay Teow

Alternatively, you could hit up a family-run establishment that's been in business since 1983. Serving Tanjung Bungah residents for over 40 years, Ah Soon doesn't have regular customers. They have regular families. Many who eat here have done so for generations, and the taste has remained exactly the same.

Now, if you know your CKT, you'd know that there are variants. And Ah Soon more than delivers with his 'wet' style of Char Koay Teow. Giving you a different mouthfeel where each bite is moist with strong hits of smoky char. If you've only had the classic and have never had wet CKT, take this as your sign to expand your hawker fare horizons at Ah Soon.

Pro tip here: Supplement your meal with a hearty bowl of home-made fish-ball soup and their soft-boiled eggs with Bangali-roti set. Unheard of, but try this assortment and thank me later.

3. Dharma Relax Cafe - Ah Leong Fried Rice and Char Koay Teow

Picture this. You've spent the day at Escape Theme Park in Batu Feringghi, took in the sunset at Rasa Sayang Beach and even had dinner at Umi, Batu's premier Nasi Campur. The moon now risen, your stomach pangs yearn for something sinful and savoury. Unfortunately, you're on your way down the Batu Feringghi winding road, knowing that by the time you're back in town, your go-to CKT would be closed.

What can be done?

On that same road, turn right after the floating mosque and head down 250 metres until you see a timber-roofed roadside kopitiam with no visible signage (its "*Dharma Relax Cafe*" on Maps). You take the risk and venture into what seems to be a locals-only hole-in-the-wall eatery and head to the stall marked *Ah Leong Fried Rice and Char Koay Teow*.

Ah Leong opens late and was once an infamous dive serving up smouldering plates of stir-fried goodness to night owls heading home after a boozy night out.

Likely the only CKT that features sausage slices instead of Chinese sausage, Ah Leong's rendition has a noticeably richer soya sauce flavour and is the best Char Koay Teow you'll find open at 2am.

Adding a runny egg on top for this dish is not optional; it's essential. Take your first bite only after you've mixed the yolk into the koay teow to understand the true meaning of a culinary match made in heaven.