

Eating out Asian cuisine

Fine China

Love Chinese food? Not sure how to differentiate between greasy, fast fare and the real thing? **Manuela Zoninsein**, former Food & Drink editor at Time Out Beijing, brings you the Holy Land's best Chinese eateries

Mandarin

Among the aged stone facades of Jerusalem's historic city center, it's impossible to miss Mandarin's yellow neon-lit sign with Chinese characters. Surprisingly, the restaurant itself has been around since 1958, making it the oldest continuously running Chinese restaurant in Israel. Following the stairs up to the second floor, past crimson-colored and calligraphy-covered walls, one must knock to gain entry to a room reminiscent of Wong Kar Wai's 1960s vision of Hong Kong. Ming-style dark mahogany tables and chairs are joined by carved wooden partitions; silk lanterns shed a moody red over walls depicting serene mountain scenes.

Mandarin is where Chinese tour groups come to sate homesick hunger, and it is this loyalty to tradition that explains the restaurant's perennial success. The cooking is mainly Cantonese (the area around and including Hong Kong), meaning flavors are light, with simple cooking techniques that elevate the freshness of ingredients – steaming, boiling and quick sautéing instead of deep-frying. The egg drop soup is a straightforward take on the original: eggs cooked in a flavorful broth and garnished with chives. Rice noodles with vegetables carries a light oyster sauce – perfectly sticky/sweet to complement the skinny, chewy noodles.

Paired with a bottomless pot of tea, at Mandarin diners can momentarily imagine themselves as actors from "In the Mood for Love".

2 Shlomziyon HaMalka St, Jerusalem (06-252890). Daily 12:00-15:30, 18:30-24:00

China Court

Those seeking a spicy repast should head to the Szechuan province, which has gained notoriety for its sauces mixing tongue-torturing red peppers and lip-tingling peppercorns. At China Court, the heat is turned down a few notches vis-a-vis the original version, and dishes follow more of the Cantonese prescription – not surprising, since the owner is from Hong Kong. However, the restaurant stays packed throughout the day, no doubt due to generous portions and rich flavors. The result? A boisterous, family-friendly environment typical of the most authentic Szechuan eateries.

Egg rolls, crisp-fried and filled with cabbage and bamboo shoots, go nicely



with the accompanying sweet-and-sour sauce. Better yet, the Szechuan style eggplant demonstrates China's excellence in cooking the purple vegetable: the outside is flash-fried and crispy, while the inside remains soft and supple. The sauce retains a slight kick – just enough to require a bowl of steamed rice to absorb the heat.

For a real deal, come in for the business lunch, served daily 12:00-17:00, which includes soup, an egg roll, main dish (meat or noodles), fried rice and a soft drink.

14 Shalom Aleychem St, Tel Aviv (03-5178454). Daily 11:00-23:00

Pat Qua

Since opening Yin Yang on Tel Aviv's Rothschild Boulevard in 1982, Israel Aharoni has generally been considered the country's emperor of Far Eastern cuisine. At Pat Qua, his 30 years studying Chinese cooking become evident in food that manages to be at once both traditional and modern. The menu spans the spectrum of the Chinese tradition and serves up its highlights, while incorporating local ingredients as well.

Chicken a là Szechuan finds its footing with a fiery kick, and the pepper-

red oil sauce is perfect over a bowl of rice (don't worry about slurping with chopsticks – that's how it's done in China). The duck meat is tender, and a sharp ginger sauce balances its sweetness. Noodles, like the chilled sesame kind, remind well-traveled diners of the simple street food for which the People's Republic is famous.

Reservations are necessary at the hip joint, located in Herzliya Pituach's popular industrial zone, which is always packed.

6 Galgalei HaPlada St, Herzliya Pituach (09-9547478). Daily 12:00-24:00