

FOR THE VERY FEW

Hong Kong's private dining rooms and chef's tables offer the ultimate in exclusivity, personalisation and discretion – for a price.

STORY VICKI WILLIAMS

Hong Kong is an epicure's paradise, with an abundant selection of restaurants offering excellent meals and fine wines. Yet sometimes this is not enough. There are times when something unique, exclusive, and that caters to your every whim is needed. But where does one find it?

Options include a chef's table experience, including the world's highest, a gastronomic degustation menu in a hidden restaurant prepared by one of the city's most talented chefs, and a private dining room at a Michelin-starred restaurant. Yes, Hong Kong gourmands may be spoiled for choice, but *The Peak* can offer a guide to the best private tables in town, ideal for entertaining that top CEO candidate, that elusive potential business partner, or that trophy board-member-to-be.

COURTESY RITZ-CARLTON HONG KONG



01

OPENING

The chef's table at The Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong is perched 420 metres above sea level on the 102nd floor of ICC in West Kowloon.

01 Scallops and citrus fruit ceviche with black truffle and beets from The Ritz-Carlton's chef's table

02 Just beyond the main dining room at The Peninsula Hong Kong's Gaddi's restaurant is a super-exclusive chef's table for four.



THE RITZ-CARLTON'S HIGH TABLE

Located at an altitude of 420 metres and featuring an interactive dining experience, with a bird's eye view of Hong Kong, and chefs in action, is the world's highest chef's table at The Ritz-Carlton, Hong Kong. Seating a maximum of eight guests, The Chef's Table on Level 102 of the International Commercial Centre in West Kowloon appeals to diners who want an insider's culinary pass as they watch and interact with the hotel's executive chef, Peter Find, and three other chefs, who attend the table exclusively throughout the evening.

A customised wine-paired menu is served and this can include a variety of cuisines based on the talents and experience of the team of chefs. "Our guests look for seasonal ingredients and they tend to love classic dishes, but with a twist," says Find.

Themed menus are often requested. For example, a guest once requested a porcine dinner and Find and his team crafted a unique 12 course nose-to-tail menu.

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- Peter Find, The Ritz-Carlton Hong Kong

COURTESY RITZ-CARLTON HONG KONG (LEFT PAGE) / THE PENINSULA HONG KONG (RIGHT PAGE)

"IT IS VERY PERSONALISED WITH GUESTS TALKING TO ME DIRECTLY ... ELEVATING THE BESPOKE AND EXCLUSIVE CULINARY EXPERIENCE TO A NEW LEVEL"

- Rémi van Peteghem, Gaddi's

BEST OF THE SEASON AT THE PENSINSULA

Also offering a tailor-made chef's table experience, with a menu prepared and introduced by the executive chef, is French fine-dining restaurant Gaddi's at The Peninsula Hong Kong. Seating a maximum of four, the table is located in a cosy part of the vast hotel kitchen directly opposite the Gaddi's section.

"The concept of the Chef's Table is to showcase the best daily products flown in from Europe and other parts of the world, so guests who prefer dining here expect to sample seasonal dishes tailor-made to their taste preferences," says chef Rémi van Peteghem.

So how does the Chef's Table at Gaddi's keep its edge amid the tough competition in this food-mad city? "It is very personalised with guests talking to me directly, and it is the only chef's table (in HK) located inside the kitchen, elevating the bespoke and exclusive culinary experience to a new level," van Peteghem says.



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ULTIMATE PRIVACY AT THE FOUR SEASONS

One of the most difficult private dining rooms (PDRs) for securing a booking is at three-Michelin-starred Lung King Heen at the Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong; it requires reservations to be made months in advance for weekend dining. The harbour-view room seats a maximum of 14 diners and the menu is designed personally by the executive Chinese chef, Chan Yan-tak, with a sommelier to customise the wine pairing.

“The PDR offers highly personalised service with a high staff-to-guest ratio. Should guests wish to have the ultimate in privacy, all staff can leave the room and guests can ask for assistance with a pager,” explains restaurant manager Simpson Yeung.

Guests often ask for traditional dishes featuring high-end ingredients such as sea cucumber and Yoshihama abalone, but some ask for a theme to run through the courses, such as wild mushrooms or black truffles, providing the chef with an opportunity to showcase his creative talents.

One common factor expected by PDR guests is what Yeung terms recognition. “We train staff to have an eye for detail, and we record each guest’s likes and dislikes. For example, if a guest is left-handed, we will arrange the appropriate table setting before the guest arrives. They also expect personalised service, which is non-invasive at the same time. And, of course, consistent quality and sublime dishes are keys to keeping repeat guests happy.”



Chef Chan Yan-tak



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“SHOULD GUESTS WISH TO HAVE THE ULTIMATE IN PRIVACY, ALL STAFF CAN LEAVE THE ROOM AND GUESTS CAN ASK FOR ASSISTANCE WITH A PAGER”

- Simpson Yeung, Lung King Heen

COURTESY FOUR SEASONS HOTEL HONG KONG

COURTESY MANDARIN ORIENTAL, HONG KONG

A HIDDEN GEM AT MANDARIN ORIENTAL

Another über-elite option is The Krug Room, a restaurant with one table only, seating a maximum of 12. Unsurprisingly, it has a lengthy wait list. Created by Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong, and The House of Krug, it is often described as a hidden gem. Guests are met at The Chinnery and escorted to this unique restaurant through a candle-lit corridor to an inconspicuous doorway in the heart of the kitchen area. Behind the door is The Krug Room with a direct view of chefs at work.

Guests only need to make one choice – allow the hotel’s highly creative executive chef, Uwe Opocensky, to have free rein to create dishes according to his inspiration and seasonal produce, or have him create a bespoke menu based on preferences. Both provide a unique dining experience as Opocensky’s cutting-edge progressive gastronomy displays superb inventiveness and artistry, and is a multi-sensory, epicurean experience that is hard to match in Hong Kong.

The culinary creations are not the only draw; the restaurant has the largest collection of Krug champagnes in Asia, and one of the top three outside of France.



“PEOPLE WITH A HIGH PROFILE GENERALLY DON’T HAVE SPECIAL REQUESTS. THEY ARE JUST HAPPY TO ENJOY DINNER WITH FRIENDS”

- Uwe Opocensky, The Krug Room



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03 Lung King Heen’s private dining room at the Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong offers the ultimate in privacy, with waiting staff only appearing after being paged, if the guests so prefer.

04 The Krug Room, a “hidden” private dining room behind The Chinnery at the Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong, has the largest collection of Krug champagnes in Asia.

MAXIMUM DISCRETION AT ISLAND SHANGRI-LA

The two PDRs at Michelin-starred fine-dining French restaurant Petrus at Island Shangri-La Hong Kong is another option, with both rooms featuring opulent French decor and dramatic harbour views. The Burgundy Room can accommodate a maximum of 18 guests and offers the most privacy as guests do not need to go through the main dining room, while the Alsace Room can seat up to 42.

Island Shangri-La's executive chef, Ruediger Lurz, says that diners who choose the Petrus PDRs look for privacy, excellence and elegance, with maximum discretion.

"They expect the best without any mistakes and unfortunate surprises. In terms of service, we aim at being seen but not heard, and responding to their needs by anticipating them," Lurz says.

Unique tailor-made menus are provided based on guest history, background information, culture, occasion and preferences, he adds.

HOW TO FEED THE ELITE

Each of these dining establishments attracts high-profile but very discreet clientele. Interestingly, it seems many of those at the top prefer low-key dinners, although in the eyes of the chef, all diners are VIPs.

"I would serve the same menu to everyone, even if a president or prime minister, because we treat everyone the same," Opocensky says. "There is no difference in the food or service that guests will receive from us, unless they request special menus or arrangements. From my experience, people with a high profile generally don't have special requests. They are just happy to enjoy dinner with friends."

This view is echoed by van Peteghem at Gaddi's: "We treat all guests equally and haven't had any requests for special treatment in the past, even when they were VVIPs, as dining at the Chef's Table is already a special experience itself."

Lurz at Petrus says he manages to successfully work family recipes into menus for high-profile guests. "I would make a simpler dish but with outstanding quality and taste. For example, I would use a Wagyu beef that is perfect in taste, texture and flavour, complimented by mashed potato using my grandmother's recipe, served with seasonal vegetables, such as chanterelle, and a sauce that enhanced the flavour of the ingredients."

He adds that many high-profile guests dine in only the best restaurants around the world, but he notes that simplicity can create an even bigger impact. "It is important to find the right balance for the menu composition, and sometimes going back to basics is the best thing to do. It is our passion and mission to create memorable experiences with our creations," Lurz says.

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- Ruediger Lurz, Petrus



"We have had celebrities and royal families dine here in the past," says Find at The Ritz-Carlton. Asked what he would serve to such guests, he says that scallop in papillote with leek and truffle has "an incredible aroma" that enraptures guests as they unwrap their culinary parcel.

CUSTOMISED EXTRAVAGANCE

Ultimately, the extravagance of a dining experience depends on the diner and the requests they make.

Find says that one of the most expensive dinners he prepared included Russian caviar served in two ways: one in an authentic, traditional way with various condiments, while the other was served with scallop roll and gold leaf. The dish came at a cost of HK\$9,600 for the table.

For Yeung at Lung King Heen, an impressive dish is the braised 16-head abalone at over HK\$7,000 per person. He says one of the most memorable PDR experiences he has witnessed was a menu created to pair with a range of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti



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05 Fine-dining French restaurant Petrus at Island Shangri-La Hong Kong offers two private dining rooms – Burgundy (above) and Alsace.

wines, costing the host over HK\$450,000.

Extravagance is a matter of personal taste in the eyes of Opocensky, noting that The Krug Room's most expensive dinner was due to the use of Alba white truffles. "When creating a bespoke menu, some people like to impress their guests with ingredients like caviar, lobster and truffle. For us, we prefer creating fun and exciting dishes that are delicious and have a story behind them," he says.

As with the other chefs, Lurz says using the finest seasonal produce is a given. He says that the best of the season right now are langoustine from Brittany and veal from Correz.

Whether it's entertaining a head of state or the head of the board of directors, a royal family or your own family, these five gourmet establishments promise a bespoke dining experience that will be remembered long after the cognac and cigars. ☺

Note: All prices are subject to service charge

THE BOTTOM LINE

CHEF'S TABLE

The Ritz-Carlton

Minimum spend HK\$16,000 for dinner only

Gaddi's

Fixed priced at HK\$798 for a three-course lunch, and HK\$1,888 for a five-course dinner or HK\$2,588 for 10 courses

PRIVATE DINING ROOMS

Lung King Heen

Minimum spend HK\$8,000 for lunch and HK\$18,000 for dinner, for an average of six courses

Restaurant Petrus

Minimum spend HK\$10,000 for lunch and HK\$20,000 for dinner for the Burgundy Room, and HK\$20,000 for lunch and HK\$40,000 for dinner at the Alsace Room for 20 guests

The Krug Room

Entire table minimum HK\$15,000 for dinner only