

Chow Down at Mr. Chow's in Chinatown

By Kristin Vukovic
Columbia Daily Spectator

Mr. Chow's (324 E. 57th St. between 1st & 2nd Avenues, (212) 751-9030) is a blast from the past: the '80s decor is in dire need of an upgrade, starting with the odd-shaped red mobiles hanging from the ceiling. Still, the atmosphere is pleasantly charming—the intimate dining room seats 100 people at full capacity. This is by far the most expensive Chinese restaurant in Manhattan (think Nobu, and then some), but you don't risk being disappointed with the quality of cuisine. The squab with lettuce (\$19.50)—a euphemism for minced chicken with plumb sauce wrapped in lettuce leaves—is delectable, whatever you decide to call it, and you'll definitely be raving about the Mr. Chow Noodles (\$17), a dish of classic hand-made noodles from Beijing, topped with a savory pork sauce. These noodles have a big reputation: Mr. Chow introduced them to the West in 1968 and gave guests the pleasure of watching one of the chefs perform a noodle-kneading spectacle. The house specialty, however, is the gamblers duck (\$36), which is marinated for many hours, steamed, then deep-fried, creating a contrast of tender meat and crispy skin. A typical evening could well be made complete with a glimpse of restaurant regular Sean Penn, as well as a chat with Director M. Night Shyamalan, a Mr. Chow's aficionado. Great food, celebrity sightings... who could ask for more?

Just one tip before you go: asking for the menu is a faux pas. Follow the waiter's recommendations, and you won't go wrong.

6 p.m. to 11:45 p.m. every day
All major credit cards
www.mrchow.com

If you're in the mood for swanky pre-party drinks and delectable dim sum downtown, Jean Georges 66 Lounge (241 Church St. at Leonard Street, (212) 925-0202) is probably your scene. The decor is typically TriBeCa: tasteful, modern, and minimalist. Cocktails here are incredible—admittedly a bit pricey at \$10-\$14 per drink, but worth every penny. Best of all, drinks come with complimentary wasabi peanuts. Recommendations include the wan chai (champagne, passion fruit puree, creme de mure) and fragrant cloud



This Valentine's Day, to woo your beloved, get away from Canal Street and try a new Chinese bistro, like Joe's Shanghai.

(Plymouth gin, elderflower syrup, tonic, candied ginger), as well as the slightly sour kumquat mojito (Bacardi rum, kumquats, mint). Appetizer must-haves are the two-flavored, stir-fried shrimp (\$13) which are coated with a thin rice casing—half are smothered with creamy white sauce, half with spicy red sauce, creating the perfect palate. The spicy pumpkin dumpling dim sum (\$5) is also not to be missed. I wouldn't recommend eating a whole meal here, as full-course dinner dining becomes expensive for a student budget.

Lunch, noon to 3 p.m. daily; dinner, Sun.

through Thurs. 6 p.m. to midnight, Fri. and Sat. 6 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Appetizers, \$4.50 to \$14.50; entrees, \$18 to \$32

All major credit cards
www.jean-georges.com

Reservations recommended for full-dinner dining; not required for the lounge

For authentic Chinatown dining, trek deep downtown to Joe's Shanghai (9 Pell St. between Bowery and Mott Streets, (212) 233-8888). Dining is communal-style with about eight seats to

a table, which provides the opportunity to spark up interesting conversation with an eclectic mix of Chinese food lovers. The atmosphere is casual and the decor Spartan, but Joe's has the best pork soup dumplings (shao long bao) in town. Also worth trying is General Tsao's chicken, consisting of deep-fried chicken morsels doused with a sweet-spicy sauce and garnished with broccoli. Portion sizes are generous, and prices won't break your student budget (appetizers: \$2 to \$6.95; entrees: \$4.25 to \$17). Joe's is cash only, so don't forget to stop by an ATM before getting on the subway. Make sure you go to the Pell Street

location, as the uptown location (24 W. 56th St. between 5th & 6th Avenues) is disappointing due to its inferior dumplings and higher prices (six dumplings for \$8.95, compared to eight dumplings for \$6.95 on Pell Street). Better to get more dumpling for your buck in Chinatown, even if the subway ride is longer—plus, it's always good to break out of the Columbia bubble.

Note: Get there early—Joe's doesn't take reservations.

Hours: 11 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. every day

Directions: N, R, J, M, Z, Q, W, 6 to Canal Street

CASH ONLY

If you've been searching for a unique Upper West Side Chinese food experience, look no further than Shun Lee Café (43 W. 65th St. between Columbus and Central Park West, (212) 769-3888) not to be confused with the pricier Shun Lee Restaurant next door, or the much pricier Shun Lee Palace (155 E. 55th St. between Third & Lexington Avenues), though all of the above-mentioned restaurants are under the same ownership and serve excellent Chinese food. The Café is casual and eclectically decorated in black and white, with a checkerboard floor and Chinese zodiac animal sculptures protruding from the walls and ceiling. Throughout the meal, various dim sum carts circle the dining room. In fact, one can easily make a meal out of the dim sum alone. The sesame seed-coated chicken patties (two per order) and shrimp dumplings are impressive staples, but for daring culinary adventurers, the Szechwan alligator and the Hunan Ostrich Steak are both sumptuous and exotic. For fish-lovers, the red cooked sea bass with scallions is highly recommended: the rock candy and soy sauce combination gives the dish a uniquely salty-sweet flavor. Next time you visit Lincoln Center, swing by Shun Lee Café for dinner—you won't regret it.

Mon. through Fri. noon to midnight; Saturday 11:30 a.m. to midnight; Sun. 11:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.

Dim sum: \$6.50 per order; average entree price: \$14.75

All major credit cards
www.shunleewest.com

Reservations preferred but not required