

[Previous Chapter](#) | [Next Chapter](#) | [Table of Contents](#)

[Dongcheng District](#) | [Xicheng District](#) | [Chaoyang District](#) | [Haidian District](#)

Listed alphabetically within neighborhoods.

Updated by Tom O'Malley

Since imperial times, Beijing has drawn citizens from all corners of China, and the country's economic boom has only accelerated the culinary diversity of the capital. These days, diners can find food from the myriad cuisines of far-flung regions of China, as well as just about every kind of international food.

Highlights include rare fungi and flowers from Yunnan, chili-strewn Hunan cooking from Mao's home province, Tibetan yak and *tsampa* (barley flour), mutton kebabs and grilled flatbreads from Xinjiang, numbingly spicy Sichuan cuisine, and chewy noodles from Shaanxi. And then there are ethnic foods from all over, with some—notably Italian, Japanese and Korean—in abundance.

You can spend as little as \$5 per person for a decent meal or \$100 and up on a lavish banquet. The variety of venues is also part of the fun, with five-star hotel dining rooms, holes-in-the-wall, and refurbished courtyard houses all represented. Reservations are always a good idea, especially for higher-end places, so ask your hotel to book you a table.

Beijingers tend to eat dinner around 6 pm, and many local restaurants will have closed their kitchens by 9 pm, though places that stay open until the wee hours aren't hard to find. Tipping is not the custom although some larger, international restaurants will add a 15% service charge to the bill, as do five-star hotel restaurants. Be aware before you go out that small and medium venues only take cash payments or local bank cards; more established restaurants usually accept credit cards.

Yanjing, the local beer, together with the ubiquitous Tsingtao, is available everywhere in Beijing. A growing number of imported beer brands have entered the market, and Beijing has a burgeoning craft beer scene of its own. And now many Chinese restaurants now have extensive wine menus. *Prices are the average cost of a main dish at dinner or, if dinner isn't served, at lunch.*

Chinese Cuisine: What to Eat in Beijing

We use the following regions in our restaurant reviews.

Beijing: As the seat of government for several dynasties, Beijing has evolved a cuisine that melds the culinary traditions of many regions. Specialties include Peking duck, *zhajiang* noodles, flash-boiled tripe with sesame sauce, and a wide variety of sweet snacks.

Cantonese: A diverse cuisine that roasts, fries, braises, and steams. Spices are used in moderation, and flavors are light and delicate. Dishes include wonton soup, steamed fish or scallops, barbecued pork, roasted goose and duck, and dim sum.

Chinese: Catchall term used for restaurants that serve cuisine from multiple regions of China.

Guizhou: The two key condiments in Guizhou's spicy-sour cuisine are *zao lajiao* (pounded dried peppers brined in salt) and fermented tomatoes (the latter used to make the region's hallmark sour fish soup (*suantangyu*)).

Hunan: Chili peppers, ginger, garlic, dried salted black beans, and preserved vegetables are the mainstays of this "dry spicy" cuisine. Signature dishes include "red-braised" pork, steamed fish head with diced salted chilies, and cured pork with smoked bean curd.

Northern Chinese: A catchall category encompassing the hearty stews and stuffed buns of Dongbei, the refined banquet fare of Shandong, Inner Mongolian hotpot, lamb and flat breads of Xinjiang, and the wheat noodles of Shaanxi province.

Shanghainese and Jiangzhe: Cuisine characterized by rich, sweet flavors produced by braising and stewing, and the extensive use of rice wine. Signatures include steamed hairy crabs and "drunken chicken."

Sichuan (central province): Famed for bold flavors and "mala" spiciness created by combining chilies and mouth-numbing Sichuan peppercorns. Dishes include kung pao chicken, mapo doufu (tofu), *dandan* noodles, twice-cooked pork, and tea-smoked duck.

Taiwanese: This diverse cuisine centers on seafood. Specialties include oyster omelets, cuttlefish soup, and "three cups chicken," with a sauce made of soy sauce, rice wine, and sugar.

Tibetan: Cuisine reliant on foodstuffs that can grow at high altitudes, including barley flour, yak meat, milk, butter, and cheese.

Yunnan (southern province): This region is noted for its use of vegetables, fresh herbs, and mushrooms in its spicy preparations. Dishes include "crossing the bridge" rice noodle soup with chicken, pork, and fish; cured Yunnan ham with Bai-style goat cheese; and steamed or grilled fish with lemongrass.

DONGCHENG DISTRICT

Literally "East City," Dongcheng occupies most of the center and east of the old center, from the western wall of the Forbidden City out to just beyond the East Second Ring Road, including Tiananmen Square, the popular hutong district of "Gulou," the Lama Temple, and the Temple of Heaven in the South. This is the district in which to sample Beijing's growing number of traditional courtyard eateries, where you can dine outside in the warmer months. The less-trafficked hutongs that are in and around touristy Nan Luogu Xiang are home to Western and Chinese restaurants, cafés, hip bars, and snack vendors.

Brian McKenna @ The Courtyard.

CONTEMPORARY | With its unique perch overlooking the Forbidden City's moat, the Courtyard made a name for itself as Beijing's most romantic restaurant. Under the recent stewardship of the British chef Brian McKenna, and after a designer makeover from the team behind New York's W Hotel, it has emerged as a destination restaurant for Beijing's jet set. Prix-fixe menus of molecular-inspired cooking woo diners with kitchen tricks inspired by the likes of El Bulli and the Fat Duck. Service and execution can be hit or miss (often depending on whether Chef McKenna is at the helm or not), but some of the dishes, like the chocolate terra-cotta warrior emerging from edible "soil," are really quite special. | Average main: ¥450 | 95 Donghuanmen Dajie, East Gate of Forbidden City, Dongcheng District | 010/6526-8883 | Reservations essential | No lunch.

Café de la Poste

FRENCH | (Yúnyóu yì).

In almost every French village or town there's a Café de la Poste, a humble hangout for a coffee, a beer, or a simple family meal. This haunt is just that: friendly service and a range of good-value bistro fare like steaks (including an excellent steak tartare), appetizers like grilled goat-cheese salad, free baskets of bread, and carafes of French wine. On weekend evenings it packs out with a pre-party expat crowd and leather-clad members of Beijing's affable motorcycle community; dancing on tables is not altogether uncommon. | Average main: ¥100 | 58 Yonghegong Dajie, Dongcheng District | 010/6402-7047 | www.cafedelaposte.net | No credit cards | Station: Yonghegong.

Café Sambal.

MALAYSIAN | Inside a cozy traditional courtyard house, this mainstay of Beijing's international dining scene offers some of the city's best Malaysian and Southeast Asian dishes. Sambal refers to the house-made chili sauce that gives an authentic kick to many of the dishes. Best bets include fiery beef *rendang*, butter prawns, chili crab, and the four-sided beans in cashew nut sauce. The antiques-furnished interior is stylish and intimate, and a chilled-out vibe makes this a great place to linger over a

meal. | Average main: Y100 | 43 Doufuchi Hutong, Jiugulou Dajie, Dongcheng District | 10/6400-4875 | www.cafesambal.com | Station: Guloudajie.

Fodor's Choice | Capital M.

ECLECTIC | This is one of the few restaurants in the capital with both stunning views and food worthy of the divine setting in front of Tiananmen Square. Australian-influenced classics with a Mediterranean twist are the order of the day here, served amid a vibrantly modern, muraled interior. Try the crispy suckling pig or roast leg of lamb, and save room for the famed Pavlova dessert: a cloud of meringue and whipped cream sprinkled with fresh fruit. On weekends, hearty brunches and afternoon high tea are served. | Average main: Y268 | 2 Qianmen Pedestrian Street, Dongcheng District | 010/6702-2727 | www.m-restaurantgroup.com | Reservations essential | Station: Qianmen.

Crescent Moon

ASIAN | (Wānwānde yuèliàng).

Unlike many of the bigger Xinjiang restaurants in town, there's no song and dance performance at this Uygur family-run spot, and none needed, as the solid cooking stands on its own merits. The heaping platters of grilled lamb skewers, *da pan ji* (chicken, potato, and green pepper stew), homemade yogurt, and freshly baked flatbreads are all terrific, as are the light and dark Xinjiang beers available here. The traditional green-and-white Islamic decor, Uygur CDs playing on the stereo, and clouds of hookah smoke lend an authentic Central Asian atmosphere to the dining experience. | Average main: Y60 | 16 Dongsi Liutiao, Dongcheng District | 010/6400-5281 | No credit cards | Station: Zhangzizhonglu.

Crystal Jade Palace

CANTONESE | (Fěicùi huánggōng jiǔjiā).

At Beijing's only outlet of a successful Singaporean restaurant brand, you'll find some of the city's most reliable Cantonese, a cooking style not particularly well represented this far north. Weekdays see wheeler-dealers closing deals over abalone and sea cucumber, while the weekends bustle with families from Hong Kong and Singapore lingering over dim sum and endless pots of tea. Plenty of pricey seafood dishes are on the menu, but you can opt for the less expensive stir-fry dishes and dim sum. | Average main: Y150 | Shin Kong Place, 87 Jianguo Lu, 6th fl., Chaoyang District | 010/6533-1150 | www.crystaljade.com | Station: Dawanglu.

Fodor's Choice | Dali Courtyard

YUNNAN | (Dàlǐ).

Yunnan province's tranquillity and bohemian spirit are captured in this enchanting traditional courtyard house, a ten minute walk from the Drum and Bell towers. On breezy summer nights the best seats are in the central courtyard with its overflowing greenery; these are popular, so reservations are essential. The restaurant offers only set menus for the table, starting at Y150 per person. Expect aromatic grilled fish, stir-fried Yunnan mushrooms, delicious mint-infused salads, and in-season vegetable dishes. | Average main: Y150 | 67 Xiaojingchang Hutong, Gulou Dong Dajie, Dongcheng District | 010/8404-1430 | Station: Guloudajie.

Deyuan Roast Duck

NORTHERN CHINESE | (Dé yuán kǎoyā diàn).

This unsung Peking duck restaurant deserves a wider following. A typically lively dining room packs in locals for its traditional take on the capital's signature quacker, which is roasted over fruit wood, carved tableside, and sold at a price that ought to make the bigger restaurants like Quanjude and Bianyifang blush. Beijing's ruling triumvirate of traditional meat (mutton, duck, donkey) comes in many tasty forms here, and there are a wealth of appealing stir-fries and dry pot dishes that use beef, bacon, shrimp, tofu, and country vegetables. Only about a decade old and with no "time-honored" status to fall back on, Deyuan simply cooks great food at great prices. | Average main: Y80 | 57 Dashilan Xijie, Xicheng District | 010/6308-5371 | Station: Qianmen.

Dong Lai Shun

CHINESE | (Dōnglái shùn fàn).

Founded in 1903, this classic Beijing Hui (Chinese Muslim) restaurant now has branches all over the city. Their specialty is mutton hotpot famous for three attributes: high-quality meat, sliced paper-thin, and served with delicious sesame sauce. Dining here is by dunk and dip, cooking the meat slices (*shuan rou*) and other accompaniments in a cauldron of bubbling soup at the table. The best part is near the end, when the broth reaches a tongue-tingling climax. *Zhima shaobing* (small baked sesame bread) is the perfect accompaniment. | Average main: Y90 | 198 Wangfujing Dajie, Dongcheng District | 010/6513-9661 | Station: Wangfujing.

Hani Geju

YUNNAN | (Hāní gèjiù cāntīng).

A stone's throw from the Bell Tower, this cozy Yunnan restaurant boasts a trimmed down menu of southwest Chinese fare, such as authentic Bai-minority goat cheese with bacon (smoked in-house), fluffy-centered potato balls with an addictively crisp coating, zingy mint salads, and delicate rice noodle dishes. The emphasis here is on organic sourcing, moderate seasoning, and no MSG. Innovative taster platters at lunchtime means you can sample their best dishes in mini, single-serving portions. After your meal, take a stroll through the surrounding warren of hutong alleyways, some of the most atmospheric in the city. | Average main: Y110 | 48 Zhonglouwan Hutong, southeast of Bell Tower, Dongcheng District | 010/6401-3318 | Station: Guloudajie.

Huang Ting

CANTONESE | (Huángtíng).

Beijing's traditional courtyard houses provide an exquisite setting at this elegant hotel restaurant. The walls are constructed from gray hutong bricks reclaimed from centuries-old *siheyuan* that have gone the way of the wrecking ball. Pricey seafood items like abalone and lobster are balanced by affordable and delicious dim sum (especially the dim sum prix-fixe lunch with tea, for RMB 88). The menu is mostly Cantonese, but you can also get a traditional Peking duck. If only the place had a little more atmosphere (and customers), it could be up there with the city's best. | Average main: Y200 | The Peninsula, 8 Jinyu Hutong, Wangfujing, Dongcheng District | 010/6512-8899 | Station: Dongdan.

Jaan

FRENCH | (Jiǎān).

If you're looking for old-world elegance, this is the place. You'll be transported back to the 1920s, complete with antique piano,

graceful French windows, and a wooden dance floor on which Mao Zedong took a turn during the building's brief tenure as the Communist Party's HQ (the Great Hall of the People was still being built). French-influenced dishes include steaks, soups, black cod, and foie gras. The wine list is staggeringly long and befits a place that's been around since 1917. | Average main: Y250 | *Raffles Beijing Hotel, 33 East Chang'an Avenue, Wangfujing, Dongcheng District* | 010/6526-3388 | Station: *Wangfujing*.

Jing

INTERNATIONAL | East-West fusion cuisine is served in an ultramodern setting: there are polished red wooden floors, gauzy curtain dividers, and theatrical open kitchens. For dinner, a concise à la carte menu is available but the main draw is the lavish international buffet, with over a dozen stations serving up lobster, foie gras, prime rib, and delectable desserts. There's also an excellent selection of international wines. | Average main: Y398 | *The Peninsula, 8 Jinyu Hutong, Wangfujing, Dongcheng District* | 010/6510-6714 | Station: *Dongdan*.

Jin Ding Xuan

CANTONESE | (Jīndǐngxuān jiǔlóu).

Clad in red neon after dark, this jovial dim sum restaurant offers four bustling floors of great-value dishes around the clock. Expect to wait in line at busy periods; once inside, keep an eye out for the cold dish and drink carts wheeling by. The menu is extensive and service is regimented—you won't go wrong with an order of shrimp dumplings, fried turnip cake with Cantonese sausage, and tender braised steak served in a clay pot. A recent addition is the "pollution menu"—new dishes that claim to counteract the effects of Beijing's smog. | Average main: Y70 | *77 Hepingli Xijie, Dongcheng District* | 010/6429-6699 | Station: *Yonghegong*.

Ju'er Renjia

CHINESE | (Júér rénjiā).

A convenient pit stop when visiting Nanluoguxiang, this modest little eatery really offers only one option: a set meal of tasty Taiwanese-style *lurou fan*—rice with an aromatic ground pork topping complemented by a flavorful boiled egg, mixed pickled vegetables, and a simple clear soup, for less than \$4. A vegetarian stew and rice set is also available. The home-brewed teas and chilled custard desserts are worth a try, too. | Average main: Y26 | *63 Xiao Ju'er Hutong, Dongcheng District* | 010/6400-8117 | *No credit cards* | Station: *Nanluoguxiang*.

Fodor's Choice | King's Joy

VEGETARIAN | (Jīng zhào yǐn).

The chefs at this elegantly upscale vegetarian restaurant enact miracles with tofu, mushrooms, and wheat gluten. Try the sweet and sour "ribs" made from lotus root, then the rich and earthy basil-braised eggplant, and finish with glutinous rice tarts (*ai wo wo*) filled with sweet red bean paste and crunchy walnuts. The building, designed to resemble Beijing's traditional quadrangle courtyards (*siheyuan*), is enhanced by views of the Lama Temple across the street, as well as the crisp white tablecloths, fresh orchids, and harp performances inside. | Average main: Y250 | *2 Wudaoying Hutong, Yonghegong, Dongcheng District* | 010/8404-9191 | Station: *Yonghegong*.

Kylin Private Kitchen

CHINESE FUSION | (Qílín gé sīfáng cài).

The sky-lit, plant-strewn interior of this small hidden gem is a pleasant spot to linger over the excellent contemporary Chinese food, which often blends various styles and techniques. A highlight of the compact menu is the *zhiguo* ("paper pot") dishes, featuring fragrant shrimp or green beans served in a Japanese-style paper pot over a flame. Most diners order the *zijianguyu*, an aromatic fish stew cooked with chilies, purple ginger, and fresh Sichuan peppercorns: choose from three types of fish and three levels of spiciness. The restaurant is in a narrow alley that once housed imperial midwives during the Ming Dynasty. | Average main: Y100 | *6 Qilin Bei Hutong, Dongcheng District* | 010/6407-3516 | Station: *Nanluoguxiang*.

Lei Garden

CANTONESE | (Lèyuàn).

Bright and bustling on any day of the week, Lei Garden really packs them in on Sunday afternoons for dim sum amid glamorous surroundings. The pan-fried turnip cake is juicy and topped with generous amounts of grated veggies, and the shrimp dumplings are bursting with sweet plump shrimp and crunchy bamboo shoots. A platter of roast pork, with bite-size pieces laced with buttery fat and capped with crisp, crunchy skin, hits the spot. Private dining rooms offer sanctuary from the crowd. | Average main: Y150 | *Jinbao Tower, 89 Jinbao Jie, 3rd fl., Dongcheng District* | 010/8522-1212 | www.leigarden.hk | *Reservations essential* | Station: *Dengshikou*.

Tips for Eating out in Beijing

In China meals are a communal event, so food in a Chinese home or restaurant is always shared. Although cutlery is available in many restaurants, it won't hurt to brush up on your use of chopsticks, the utensil of choice. The standard eating procedure is to hold the bowl close to your mouth and eat the food. Noisily slurping up soup and noodles is also the norm. It's considered bad manners to point or play with your chopsticks, or to place them on top of your rice bowl when you're finished eating (put them horizontally on the table or plate). Avoid leaving your chopsticks standing up in a bowl of rice—this is said to resemble the practice of burning two incense sticks at funerals and is considered disrespectful.

The food in hotel restaurants is usually acceptable but overpriced. Restaurants frequented by locals always serve tastier fare at better prices. Don't shy from trying establishments without an English menu—a good phrase book and lots of pointing can usually get you what you want.

Beijing's most famous dish is Peking duck. The roast duck is served with thin pancakes, in which you wrap pieces of the meat, together with spring onions, vegetables, and plum sauce. Beijing-style eateries offer many little-known but excellent specialties, such as *dalian huoshao* (meat- and vegetable-filled fried dumplings) and *zhajiangmian* (thick noodles with meat sauce). If you're adventurous, sample a hearty bowl of *luzhu* (pork lung and intestines brewed in an aromatic broth mixed with bean curd, baked bread, and chopped cilantro). Hotpot is another local trademark: you order different meats and vegetables, which you cook in a pot of stock boiling on a charcoal burner. *Baozi* (small steamed buns filled with meat or vegetables) are particularly good in Beijing—sold at stalls and in small restaurants everywhere, they make a great snack or breakfast food.

Meals and Mealtimes

Breakfast is not a big deal in China—congee, or rice porridge (*zhou*), is the standard dish. Most mid- and upper-end hotels do big buffet spreads, and Beijing's blooming café chains provide lattes and croissants all over town.

Snacks are a food group in themselves. There's no shortage of steaming street stalls selling *baozi*, spicy kebabs (called *chuan'r*), savoury pancakes (*bing*), hot sweet potatoes, and bowls of noodle soup. Pick a place where lots of locals are eating to be on the safe side.

Lunch and dinner dishes are more or less interchangeable. Meat (especially pork) or poultry tends to form the base of most Beijing dishes, together with wheat products like buns, pancakes, and noodles. Beijing food is often quite oily, with liberal amounts of vinegar; its strong flavors come from garlic, soy sauce, and bean pastes. Food can often be extremely salty and loaded with MSG. If you can manage it, try to have the waitress tell the cooks to cut back. Vegetables—especially winter cabbage and onions—and tofu play a big role in meals. As in all Chinese food, dairy products are scarce. Chinese meals usually involve a variety of dishes, which are always ordered communally in restaurants.

Li Qun Roast Duck Restaurant

CHINESE | (Liqún kāoyādiàn).

Juicy, whole ducks roasting over fragrant pear wood greet you upon entering this simple courtyard restaurant in a ramshackle hutong neighborhood. This family-run affair, far from the crowds and commercialism of Qianjude, offers a more austere setting for Beijing's signature dish, though the place might be a little too rustic for some. It's also a little tricky to find: it's about a five-minute walk east from Qianmen Donglu, and you may have to stop to ask for directions until you start seeing duck graffiti and arrows pointing the way. | Average main: ¥170 | 11 Beixiangfeng Hutong, Zhengyi Lu, Dongcheng District | 010/6705-5578 | *Reservations essential* | *Station: Chongwen*.

Lost Heaven

YUNNAN | (Huā mǎ tiāntáng Yúnnán cāntīng).

The city's finest Yunnan restaurant is in an elegant compound just east of Tiananmen Square that was once used by the former U.S. legation. With impeccable service and a serious wine list, this Shanghai export, named after the vast and little-known "Mountain Mekong" region that straddles Yunnan, Burma, and Laos, is out to impress. Recommended dishes include crisp Dali-style chicken tumbled with green onions and chilies, "Miao" hot-and-sour shrimp, and steamed cod with Yunnan black truffle. Fun fact: the walls on the first and second floor are made of bricks of pu-ehr tea, a kind of fermented tea from Yunnan. | Average main: ¥180 | 23 Qianmen Dongdajie, Dongcheng District | 010/8516-2698 | *Station: Qianmen*.

Fast Food: Beijing's Best Street Food

Part of the fun of exploring Beijing's lively hutong alleyways is the chance to munch on the city's traditional snacks, served by itinerant food sellers.

Where to go

Wangfujing Snack Street and nearby Donghuamen Night Market, both in Dongcheng, are fun for browsing and sampling. The two markets have an extensive lineup of cooked-food stalls, many selling food items designed to shock. Sure, it's extremely touristy, and you'll be elbow-to-elbow with wide-eyed travelers fresh off the tour buses, but they're also incredibly fun and great for photo ops. Cheerful vendors call out to potential customers, their wares glowing under red lanterns.

On the banks of Houhai, near the historical residence of Soong Ching-ling, is the entrance to Xiaoyou Hutong. Down this narrow alley you'll find Jiumen Xiaochi, a traditional courtyard house occupied by a collection of old Beijing eateries forced to relocate due to urban redevelopment. Some of these small eateries have been producing the same specialty dishes for decades. Look out for *lu dagun*, a pastry made of alternate layers of glutinous rice and red bean paste; *dalian huoshao*, northern-style pork pot stickers; and *zha guanchang*, deep-fried slices of mung bean starch dipped in a raw garlic sauce.

What to try

Sweet-potato sellers turn their pedicabs into restaurants on wheels. An oil drum, balanced between the two rear wheels, becomes a makeshift baking unit, with small cakes of coal at the bottom roasting sweet potatoes strung around the top. In fall and winter, sugar-coated delicacies are a popular treat. Crab apples, water chestnuts, strawberries, and yams are placed on skewers, about half a dozen to a stick; the fruit is then bathed in syrup that hardens into a shiny candy coating, providing a sugar rush for those all-day walks.

Kebabs are popular, and it seems as though anything under the sun can be skewered and fried. There are the outlandish skewers of scorpion, silkworm cocoons, and even starfish, all fried to a crisp and covered with spices. There are also the more palatable (and authentic) lamb kebabs flavored with cumin and chili flakes.

Some modern snacks are ubiquitous, such as the *jianbing*, a thin flour crepe topped with an egg and a crispy fried cracker. Briny fermented bean paste and hot chili sauce are spread thick and a sprinkling of cilantro and spring onion is added before it's rolled into a tidy package for munching on the go. Also on the streets: *baozi*, fluffy steamed buns filled with all manner of meat and vegetables, and *xianbing*, wheat flour pockets typically stuffed with chives and eggs.

Cooked to order?

The turnover at vendor carts and street-side stands is rapid, so it's unusual that anything has been sitting around long, but stick to the busier stalls. If you have any doubts, ask the vendor to cook yours to order, rather than accepting the ready-made food on display.

Fodor's Choice | Made In China

NORTHERN CHINESE | (Cháng'ān yīhào).

The glassed-in kitchens at this Grand Hyatt restaurant are like theater for foodies. White-robed chefs twirl floury noodles as beautifully bronzed Peking ducks are hooked on poles out of tall brick ovens. Tradition rules when it comes to Executive Chef Jin's famous duck, and eating it is a three-stage process: skin dipped in sugar, then breast meat with scallions, and finally pancakes stuffed with leg meat, skin, hoisin, cucumber, and minced garlic. The trick, says Jin, is to roll the pancakes small enough to eat in one mouthful. | Average main: Y200 | *Grand Hyatt, 1 Dong Chang An Jie, Dongcheng District* | 010/8518-1234 | *Reservations essential* | *Station: Wangfujing*.

Mercante.

ITALIAN | Bologna-based chef Omar Maseroli and his Chinese partner are the proprietors of Mercante, a slow-food-inspired slice of Italy in a tumble-down hutong alleyway. This minuscule eatery keeps it simple, with rustic dishes like homemade pasta with an earthy ragù of duck or rabbit, plump ravioli, platters of imported cold cuts, and cheese served with fresh-baked focaccia. Rich, boozy tiramisu and a well-priced list of Italian wines makes this a fine place to linger, or you could pop around the corner for a craft-beer nightcap at Great Leap Brewing. Brunch is served on weekends. | Average main: Y170 | *4 Fangzhuanchang Hutong, Dianmen Wai Dajie, Dongcheng District* | 010/8402-5098 | *Reservations essential* | *Station: Shichahai*.

Fodor's Choice | Migas

SPANISH | (Mǐ jiā sī).

The fact that Beijing's hottest rooftop bar and nightclub becomes a sophisticated Spanish restaurant at mealtimes is quite the Houdini act. Most heralded for its terrific three-course lunch deal, which changes weekly, Migas is a whirlwind adventure in Spanish gastronomy, starring slow-roasted suckling pig, chicken grilled on a Josper oven, creamy cod with steamed eggplant, and "liquid bombons" with deliciously sticky fillings. Throw in complimentary baskets of home-baked bread, inventive amuse-bouches, and a funky, casual environment, and you can see why Beijing's young professionals have made this place their own. | Average main: Y150 | *Nali Patio, 81 Sanlitun Lu, 6th fl., Chaoyang District* | 010/5208-6061 | *Station: Tuanjiehu*.

Old Beijing Noodle King

NORTHERN CHINESE | (Lǎo Běijīng zhájiàngmiàn dǎwáng).

This chain of noodle houses serves hand-pulled noodles and traditional local dishes in a lively, old-time atmosphere, with waiters shouting across the room to announce customers arriving. Try the classic *zhajiang* noodle, served in a ground-meat

sauce with accompaniments of celery, bean sprouts, green beans, soybeans, slivers of cucumber, and red radish. | Average main: Y30 | 56 Dong Xinglong Jie, Dongcheng District | 010/6701-9393 | No credit cards | Station: Chongwenmen.

Private Kitchen No. 44

CHINESE | “Farm to table” is the creed at this peaceful Guizhou-style restaurant west of Houhai Lake. Dishes like braised pork ribs and sticky rice wrapped in bamboo, stir-fried “country-style” vegetables rich with the sour-sharp tang of fermented bamboo, and even the house-made ice cream all use ingredients from the owner’s own farms and small holdings on the outskirts of the city. Beyond an admirable commitment to sourcing, it’s the little touches that make this eatery shine, such as complimentary tastings of homemade rice-wine tasters infused with rose petals and organic honey. | Average main: Y100 | 70 Denshengmen Nei Dajie, Xicheng District | 010/6400-1280 | No credit cards.

Qin Tangfu

NORTHERN CHINESE | (Qín tángfǔ).

Pull up a tiny stool for stick-to-your-ribs goodness at this rustic haven for Shaanxi fare. Hearty wheat-based specialties include *roujia mo* (unleavened bread stuffed with tender braised pork, aka “Chinese hamburger”), and chewy hand-pulled noodles flavored with chili oil and dark vinegar. Lending a bit of charm are the framed paper cuts (a form of Chinese folk art in which red paper is cut into animal, flower, or human shapes), traditional handicrafts, and large woven baskets (you can use them to store your purse or bags while you eat). | Average main: Y40 | 69 Chaoyangmennei Nanxiaojie, Dongcheng District | 010/6559-8135 | No credit cards.

Red Capital Club

CHINESE | (Xīnhóngzī jùlèbù).

Occupying a restored courtyard home, and hiding a Cold War-era bomb shelter down below, the Red Capital Club oozes nostalgia for the early days of revolutionary China. Kitschy Cultural Revolution memorabilia and books dating from the Great Leap Forward era adorn every nook of the small bar. It’s worth visiting just to browse the artifacts, having a drink in one of the old leather armchairs (supposedly lifted from the Great Hall of the People), and peek into the bomb shelter. The fancifully written menu still serves old favorites of Communist leaders, though this place fell off the restaurant radar some years ago. | Average main: Y180 | 66 Dongsi Jiutiao, Dongcheng District | 010/6402-7150 | Reservations essential | No lunch.

Saffron

SPANISH | (Cánghónghuā).

An early pioneer in the über-chic Wudaoying Hutong, Saffron is still going strong, with refined Mediterranean food served in a romantic courtyard house with outside terrace. Tapas, paella, sangria, and desserts (displayed in a glass case), served with warmth, provide the makings for a fine evening. If it’s busy, head to a small place opposite called Chi. Sharing the same globe-trotting Chinese owners, it specializes in organic prix-fixe menus of European-inspired contemporary cooking. You won’t go wrong. | Average main: Y120 | 64 Wudaoying Hutong, Dongcheng District | 010/8404-4909 | Station: Yonghegong.

Saveurs de Corée

KOREAN | (Hán xiāng guǎn).

This longstanding Korean restaurant, which has moved with the times, remains the best contemporary option in the vicinity of Nanluogu Xiang. The redesigned central courtyard is a delightful setting in which to sample signature fragrant sliced beef with shiitake mushrooms, “seafood pizza” (a light frittata with kimchi, shrimp, and squid), and the simply divine chicken soup, made with Korean ginseng and a whole organic chicken. An adjoining bar serves Korean-inspired cocktails heavy on soju, a Korean vodka. Carnivores take note: the same owners run a Korean barbecue restaurant at nearby Xiang’er Hutong. | Average main: Y120 | 20 Juer Hutong, off Nanluoguxiang, Dongcheng District | 010/6401-6083 | Station: Nanluoguxiang.

Siji Minfu

NORTHERN CHINESE | (Sìjì mǐn fú kǎoyā diàn).

Here’s a rare thing: a local restaurant chain that insists on seasonality and says no to MSG. Folks line up out the door for the Peking duck, expertly roasted so that the skin shatters while the flesh remains unctuously tender. Also popular is the *zhajiang mian*, Beijing’s austere signature dish of chewy wheat noodles topped with a rich meat sauce and crunchy vegetable accompaniments. A traditional dessert platter includes *wandouhuang*, a dense, sweet cake made from white peas, and *ludagun* (literally “rolling donkey”), a sticky rice cake so named because its dusting of soybean flour resembles a donkey that has rolled on the ground. | Average main: Y90 | Donghua Hotel, 32 Dengshikou Xijie, Wangfujing Dajie, Dongcheng District | 010/6513-5141 | Station: Dengshikou.

The Source

SICHUAN | (Dōujiāngyuán).

The Source dishes up dainty set menus of Sichuan-inspired favorites (RMB 188 or 288 per person) in a romantic, historic courtyard. Dishes change according to seasonality, but you can expect several hot and cold appetizers, meat and seafood dishes, and a few surprise concoctions from the chef, all tweaked for international palates (the waitresses will ask how spicy you like your food). On a peaceful hutong intersecting busy Nanluogu Xiang, the building was once the backyard of a Qing Dynasty general referred to by the imperial court as “The Great Wall of China” for his military exploits. The grounds have been painstakingly restored; an upper level overlooks a small garden shaded by pomegranate and date trees. | Average main: Y188 | 14 Banchang Hutong, Kuanjie, Dongcheng District | 010/6400-3736 | Reservations essential | Station: Nanluoguxiang.

A B O O K W O R M ' S F O O D T O U R

Throughout China's history, there has been a love affair between the literati and food. So try the following plates from these famous books:

Qixiang: a dish of "scented" aubergine strips, as depicted in the classic *Dream of the Red Chamber*, a novel about scholar-gentry life in the 1700s.

Huixiang dou: a bean boiled with star anise, made famous through Lu Xun's short story "Kong Yi Ji," which takes place in a traditional wine house.

Lu Yu zhucha: beef cooked in tea leaves, inspired by Lu Yu, the author of the *Book of Tea*.

Still Thoughts

VEGETARIAN | (Jìngsī sùshí fāng).

Though there's no meat on the menu, carnivores can still sate their hunger on mock Peking "duck," "fish" (made of tofu sheets with scales carved into it), and tasty "lamb" skewers that you'd be hard pressed to claim contain no meat at all. In fact, we'd suggest plumping for the straight-up vegetable dishes here, like stir-fried okra with mushrooms, steamed eggplant with sesame paste, or the stone-pot-braised taro, which eschew novelty for sheer deliciousness. The restaurant is a little hard to find: it's inside the alley just east of the large Wahaha Hotel. | Average main: Y70 | *Longfu Temple Market, 1 Dongsi Xi Dajie, 1st fl., Building A, Dongcheng District* | 010/6405-2433 | No credit cards | Station: Dongsì.

Susu

VIETNAMESE | (Sūsū huì).

Tucked away down a dim alley north of the National Art Museum, this hip hutong eatery has quickly gained a following for Beijing's best Vietnamese food. Choose from various light and fresh summer rolls and salads to start, and be sure to order the succulent barbecued La Vong Fish, served on a bed of vermicelli with herbs, peanuts, crispy rice crackers, and shrimp, which goes well with beer from the local Slow Boat Brewery. The lovingly restored courtyard house has a gorgeous patio and rooftop seating for pleasant weather, but the beautifully furnished interiors aren't too shabby either. | Average main: Y80 | *10 Qianlang Hutong Xixiang, Dongcheng District* | 010/8400-2699 | Station: National Art Museum.

Fodor's Choice | Temple Restaurant Beijing.

MODERN EUROPEAN | Worship at the altar of epicureanism and surround yourself with serenity at the city's best international fine-dining restaurant, nestled in the heart of Old Beijing. TRB (as it's also known) serves high-end European cuisine in a spacious, minimalist dining room within a fabulously restored Ming Dynasty Buddhist temple complex. The four-course tasting menu (Y458) includes dishes such as all-day-braised short rib with burdock chips, and house-cured gravlax served tableside by Ignace, the most charming restaurateur in town. The wine list is excellent, with a deep focus on Champagne, Bordeaux, and Burgundy. | Average main: Y250 | *23 Songzhusi, Shatan Beijie, Dongcheng District* | 010/8400-2232 | www.temple-restaurant.com | Reservations essential | Station: National Art Museum.

Yue Bin

CHINESE | (Yuèbīn fànguǎn).

Yue Bin was the first private restaurant to open in Beijing after the Cultural Revolution era, and its home-style cooking still attracts neighborhood residents, as well as hungry visitors from the nearby National Art Museum. The tiny, no-frills dining room is just big enough for half a dozen tables, where you'll see families chowing down on specialties such as *suanni zhouzi*, garlic-marinated braised pork shoulder; *guota doufuhe*, tofu pockets stuffed with minced pork; and *wusitong*, a spring roll filled with duck and vegetables. | Average main: Y50 | *43 Cuihua Hutong, Dongcheng District* | 010/6524-5322 | No credit cards | Station: National Art Museum.

X I C H E N G D I S T R I C T

Mostly contained within the West Second Ring Road, Xicheng extends west of the Forbidden City, and includes Beihai Park and Houhai. Dive into the hutong alleyways here and seek out local snacks and traditional eateries. Head to Houhai for old-style treats at Jiumen Xiaochi, or light Hangzhou style fare at Kong Yi Ji, complete with lake views. To the south, the district of Dashilan is quietly gentrifying, and is a good destination for hipster cafés and hole-in-the-wall eateries.

Cepe

ITALIAN | The Ritz-Carlton's flagship restaurant stands out from the many other high-end Italian restaurants in the city for its focus on mushrooms. A humidifier is used here to store seasonal mushrooms that can be transformed into various soups, risottos, and pastas. Taking the fungi theme a step further, about 1,000 mushroom-shaped sculptures are suspended from the ceiling, adding a touch of whimsy to the otherwise unaffected interior. | Average main: Y250 | *Ritz-Carlton Beijing, 8 Beijing Financial St., Xicheng District* | 10/6601-6666 | Station: Fuchengmen.

Jing Wei Lou

CHINESE | (Jīngwèilóu).

"House of Beijing Flavors" makes up for its rather isolated location by having one of the widest selections of traditional Beijing fare in town. Dishes range from the austere, such as *ma doufu* (mung-bean pulp cooked in lamb fat), and *zha guanchang* (fried starch chips meant to imitate sausage), to more cultivated offerings, including Peking duck or slow-cooked lamb. The Beijing dessert platter is a tasty introduction to the city's long tradition of sweet snacks. The huge, open-plan dining room is bustling and fun, but can get rather smoky. | Average main: Y78 | *181 A Di'anmen Xidajie, Xicheng District* | 010/6617-6514 | No credit cards | Station: Ping'anli.

Jinyang Fanzhuang.

NORTHERN CHINESE | Reliable, standard Shaanxi fare is the order of the day at this slightly out-of-the-way restaurant—dishes might include the region’s famous aromatic crispy duck, and “cat-ear” noodles (referring to their ovoid shape), stir-fried with meat and vegetables. End your meal with a “sweet happiness” pastry. Jinyang Fangzhuang is attached to the ancient courtyard home of Ji Xiaolan, a Qing Dynasty scholar, the chief compiler of the *Complete Library of the Four Branches of Literature*. You can visit the old residence without an admission fee and see Ji Xiaolan’s study, where he wrote his famous essays. The crab-apple trees and wisteria planted during his lifetime still bloom in the courtyard. | Average main: ¥90 | 241 Zhushikou Xi Dajie, Xicheng District | 010/6303–1669 | No credit cards.

Jiumen Xiaochi

ECLECTIC | A dozen well-known restaurants, some dating back more than a century and threatened by the urban renewal of the old Qianmen business district, have found refuge in this large traditional courtyard house in Xiaoyou Hutong. Some of Beijing’s oldest and most famous eateries have regrouped here under one roof, and it’s become a popular tourist draw. These are our favorites: **Baodu Feng**. This vendor specializes in tripe. The excellent accompanying dipping sauce is a long-guarded family secret. You’ll see upon entering that this stall has the longest line. **Chatang Li**. On offer here is miancha, a flour paste with either sweet or salty toppings. Miancha was created by an imperial chef who ground millet, poured boiling water into it, mixed it into a paste, and added brown sugar and syrup. The imperial family loved it, and it soon became a breakfast staple. **Niangao Qian**. This stall makes sticky rice layered with red-bean paste. It’s the most popular sticky rice snack made by the Hui, or Chinese Muslims. **Yangtou Ma**. Known for thin-sliced meat from boiled lamb’s head, this shop was once located on Ox Street, in the old Muslim quarter. **Doufunao Bai**. These folks sell soft bean curd, recognized for its delicate texture. It’s best topped with braised lamb and mushrooms. **En Yuan Ju**. Sample the chaogeda, which are small, stir-fried noodles with vegetables and meat. **Yue Sheng Zhai**. Line up for excellent jiang niurou (braised beef), shao yangrou (braised lamb), and zasui tang (mutton soup). **Xiaochang Chen**. The main ingredient of this vendor’s dish is intestines, complemented with pork, bean curd, and huoshao (unleavened baked bread). The contents are simmered slowly in an aromatic broth. **Dalian Huoshao**. This stall serves pot stickers in the shape of old-fashioned satchels that the Chinese once wore. These pot stickers were the creation of the Yao family of Shunyi, who set up their small restaurant in the old Dong’an Market in 1876. | Average main: ¥90 | 1 Xiaoyou Hutong, Gulou Xidajie, just off Houhai lake, Xicheng District.

Kong Yi Ji

SHANGHAINESE | (Kǒngyījī).

Named for the down-and-out protagonist of a short story by Lu Xun (one of China’s most famous writers), this elegant restaurant features dishes from Lu’s hometown of Shaoxing, near Shanghai. Expect light, delicate offerings such as *longjing xiaren*—plump, peeled shrimp poached in aromatic green tea until ethereally soft. Also served is a wide selection of the region’s famed *huangjiu* (sweet rice wine); it comes in heated silver pots and you sip from a shallow ceramic cup. The peaceful lakeside location is a perfect launching point for an after-dinner stroll; private rooms on the second floor have balconies with lovely lake views. | Average main: ¥110 | Southwest shore of Houhai, Deshengmennei Dajie, Xicheng District | 010/6618–4915 | Station: Shichahai.

Mei Fu

CHINESE | (Méi fū).

In a plush courtyard on Houhai’s south bank, Mei Fu oozes intimate elegance. The interior is filled with antique furniture and velvet curtains punctuated by pebbled hallways and waterfalls. Black-and-white photos of Mei Lanfang, a famous opera star who performed female roles, hang on the walls. Diners choose from set menus, starting at ¥588 per couple for dinner, which feature typical Jiangsu and Zhejiang cuisine, such as stir-fried shrimp, tender leafy greens, and dates filled with glutinous rice. | Average main: ¥500 | 24 Daxiangfeng Hutong, south bank of Houhai Lake, Xicheng District | 010/6612–6845 | chinameilanfang.onsite.cn | Reservations essential | Station: Shichahai.

Shaguo Ju

CHINESE | (Shāguō jū).

Established in 1741, this time-honored brand serves a long-standing Manchu favorite—*bairou*, or “white-meat” pork casserole, which consists of thin strips of fatty pork concealing bok choy and glass noodles below. *Shaguo* is the Chinese term for a casserole pot, and there are many others on the menu at this perennially busy restaurant. Historically, Shaguo Ju emerged as a result of ceremonies held by imperial officials and wealthy Manchus in the Qing Dynasty, which included sacrificial offerings of whole pigs. The meat offerings were later given away to the city’s night watchmen, who shared the “gifts” with friends and relatives. Such gatherings gradually turned into a small business, and the popularity of “white meat” became more widespread. | Average main: ¥60 | 60 Xisi Nan Dajie, Xicheng District | 010/6602–1126 | No credit cards | Station: Xidan.

CHAOYANG DISTRICT

Vast Chaoyang District extends east from Dongcheng, encompassing Beijing’s Jianguomen diplomatic neighborhood, the Sanlitun bar area, the Central Business District, and several outdoor markets and upscale shopping malls. The large foreign population living and working here has encouraged many international restaurants to open, making this a fine place to sample dishes from around the world. If you’re in Sanlitun, head to the third floor of Taikoo Li Village for the best selection of mid-range and affordable international eats. Home to most of the city’s five-star hotels, Chaoyang is also where Beijing’s nouveau riche flock for ultra-luxe dining.

Alameda.

BRAZILIAN | Serving contemporary European fare with a Brazilian twist, Alameda is housed in a funky outdoor mall behind the hubbub of Sanlitun’s bar street. Though most lauded for its good-value weekday prix-fixe lunch (88 RMB for two courses), which often features filet mignon or codfish, on weekends the restaurant slow cooks a big batch of authentic *feijoada*—Brazil’s national dish—a hearty black-bean stew with pork and rice. The glass walls and ceiling make it a bright, pleasant place, but they do magnify the din of the crowded room. | Average main: ¥120 | Nali Mall, Sanlitun Lu, opposite Page One bookstore, Chaoyang District | 010/6417–8084 | Station: Tuanjiehu.

Aria

INTERNATIONAL | (Ālìyǎ).

Enjoy deluxe hotel dining amid murals and paintings of cheerful Italian Renaissance characters at Aria. Choose from three settings: the posh dining and bar area on the first floor, intimate private rooms upstairs, or alfresco on a terrace, protected from

the din of deconstructed bushes and roses. A decadent meal here would include foie gras and seafood bisque, followed by one of the excellent steaks, with a playful deconstructed cheesecake for dessert. The best deal at this elegant restaurant is the three-course weekday business lunch with coffee or tea for Y188. | Average main: Y300 | *China World Hotel, 1 Jianguomenwai Dajie, Chaoyang District* | 010/6505-2266 | Station: Guomao.

Assaggi

ITALIAN | (Chángshì).

Your mood brightens the minute you walk up the sunny spiral staircase to the rooftop patio, which includes glassed-in and open-air sections and overlooks the wide, tree-lined streets of the surrounding embassy district. It's a fine setting in which to enjoy a few glasses of wine accompanied by parma ham or one of the pastas on offer. Check out the reasonable prix-fixe business lunches for around Y100. | Average main: Y100 | *1 Sanlitun Bei Xiaojie, Chaoyang District* | 010/8454-4508.

Baoyuan Dumpling

NORTHERN CHINESE | (Bǎo yuán jiǎozi wū).

The fillings at this cheerfully homey joint go far beyond the standard pork and cabbage—the photo-filled menu includes dozens of creative filling options, including beef, lamb, seafood, smoked bean curd, noodles, and just about every vegetable you can name, many wrapped in bright skins of purple, green, and orange, thanks to the addition of vegetable juice to the dough. The minimum order for any kind of dumpling is two *liang* (100 grams, or about ten dumplings). There's a separate menu with a solid selection of family-style Chinese dishes—you'll see the popular *mapo doufu* (spoon-soft tofu with ground pork in a mildly spiced sauce) on many tables. | Average main: Y50 | *North of 6 Maizidian Jie, Chaoyang District* | 010/6586-4967 | *No credit cards.*

Barolo

ITALIAN | (Bāluóluò).

Well executed Italian food in plush surroundings makes this luxury hotel restaurant as appropriate for a power lunch as for a romantic dinner. Wine is clearly the inspiration, from the burgundy hues of the decor to the long list of Italian vintages to the use of the restaurant's namesake in dishes such as tagliolini with sea urchin, suckling pig, and *wagyu* beef cheek. | Average main: Y300 | *Ritz Carlton Hotel, 83A Jianguo Lu, China Central Place, Chaoyang District* | 010/5908-8888 | Station: Dawanglu.

Bellagio

TAIWANESE | (Lùgǎng xiǎo zhèn).

This popular chain of glitzy, see-and-be-seen restaurants dishes up Taiwanese favorites to a largely young and upwardly mobile clientele. A delicious choice is the “three-cup chicken” (*sanbeiji*), served in a sizzling pot fragrant with ginger, garlic, and basil, and the wonderful crispy fried mixed mushrooms with XO sauce. Finish your meal with a Taiwan-style mountain of crushed ice topped with condensed milk and beans, mangoes, strawberries, or peanuts. This branch, beside the Workers' Stadium, is open until 4 am, making it a favorite with Beijing's clubbers. The smartly dressed staff—clad in black and white—sport identical short haircuts. | Average main: Y140 | *6 Gongti Xilu, Chaoyang District* | 010/6551-3533.

Biteapitta

MIDDLE EASTERN | (Bātà bǐng).

Located upstairs in a dive behind Sanlitun's bar street, this bright and spacious kosher falafel joint is a breath of fresh air. Biteapitta has been filling Beijing tummies for over a decade with quick and tasty Mediterranean fare such as baba ghanoush, roasted chicken, and pita sandwiches brimming with yogurt, tahini, cucumbers, and tomatoes. The cheerful room encourages diners to linger over a lemonade or mint tea, with plenty of power outlets to help them catch up on emails. | Average main: Y80 | *Tongli Studio, Sanlitun Houjie, 2F, Chaoyang District* | 010/6467-2961.

Café Constance.

GERMAN | Teutonic timbers frame the facade of this two-story restaurant and bakery that serves specialties and all-day brunch fare from southern Germany. Downstairs, find excellent breads, pastries, prepared sandwiches, and an authentic Sacher torte, for take away or eating at one of the café's tables. For more filling fare, head upstairs, where a hearty menu of sausages, schnitzels, and dumplings awaits, along with a selection of imported beers. | Average main: Y90 | *No. 27 Lucky St., Zaoying Lu, Chaoyang District* | 010/5867-0201 | www.germanbakery.com.cn.

Chef Too

DINER | (Měixī xīcāntīng).

Straightforward American grub is served at this restaurant in a cozy, family-friendly cottage near Chaoyang Park. During the day, diner-style breakfasts, huge burgers, and bottomless cups of coffee bring simple and satisfying comfort to homesick Americans. At night, the ambience is slightly more refined, with imported Australian steaks the main draw, and a wine list focused on America's West Coast. Save room for a scoop (or two) of the homemade ice cream. | Average main: Y170 | *Chaoyang Gongyuan Xilu, Opposite the West Gate of Chaoyang Park, Chaoyang District* | 010/6591-8676.

Comptoirs de France Bakery

FRENCH | (Fǎpài).

This small chain of contemporary French-managed patisseries is Beijing's go-to spot for Gallic cakes, pastries, and tarts. A variety of other goodies are on offer, like airy macarons, flaky croissants, sandwiches in crunchy home-baked baguettes, and savory croquettes and quiches. Beside the standard coffee options, Comptoirs has a choice of unusual hot chocolate flavors. Try the Sichuan pepper-infused variety, which has a mouth-tingling kick. | Average main: Y80 | *China Central Place, Building 15, N 102, 89 Jianguo Lu (just northeast of Xiandai Soho), Chaoyang District* | 010/6530-5480 | www.comptoirsdefrance.com | *No credit cards* | Station: Dawanglu.

Fodor's Choice | Da Dong Roast Duck

NORTHERN CHINESE | (Běijīng Dàdōng kǎoyā diàn).

You won't go wrong with the namesake dish at this world-famous eatery. Chef Dadong's version combines crisp, caramel-hued skin over meat less oily than tradition dictates, and is served with crisp sesame pockets in addition to the usual steamed pancakes. But the duck is only half the story. Dadong is an innovative chef and a student of many culinary styles, and his tome-like menu has some of the most original and luxe dishes in the city. Noodles are made from lobster meat, wafer-thin Kobe steaks are blow-torched tableside, and braised thorny sea cucumber is paired with a fresh lemon sorbet. Several locations offer various levels of decor and ambience; this one strikes the best balance between bling and tradition. | Average main: Y180 | 1-2