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DIM SUM: A LITTLE SOMETHING TO TOUCH YOUR HEART

Experience a Fresh New Way to Brunch at Chinatown's Dim Sum Restaurants

NEW YORK, NY – May 10, 2004 –Chinatown New York City is like no other place in New York because visitors can try hundreds of different kinds of dim sum: bite-sized delights that tantalize the palate. Meaning “a little bit of heart” in Chinese, dim sum restaurants are abundant in Chinatown and cannot be found anywhere else in the city. They are excellent venues to try a wide variety of unique Chinese dishes, enjoy a never-ending stream of tea, and engage in lively conversation.

History and Origin of Dim Sum

A charming tradition that began in Cantonese tea houses, dim sum displays an incredible variety of Cantonese cuisine including dumplings, steamed dishes, rice rolls, and sweet tarts. Harmoniously linked to the Chinese tradition of *yum cha* or tea drinking, weary travelers on the Silk Road needed places to wind down and rest, so tea houses were built to accommodate them. Farmers from nearby rural communities also flocked to the tea houses after a hard day's work to sip on tea. Once people learned that tea aided in digestion, their popularity grew, and tea houses soon began serving small food dishes to complement drinking tea. Thus, the tradition of dim sum began.

Dim Sum and its Traditions

For the Chinese, dim sum is considered a breakfast, brunch or lunch meal and is an ideal activity for family gatherings. In most dim sum restaurants in Chinatown, trolleys filled with four or five different types of freshly made dim sum are constantly wheeled out from the kitchen to the table. Customers choose the dishes they want when the trolley passes their table, and the waiter will place the food on the table and mark down its price (depending on whether it is a small, medium, or large dish) on a piece of paper already provided. Other restaurants allow customers to pre-order the dishes from a printed menu.

Dim sum is usually prepared by steaming and frying, among other methods. The size of the dim sum are generally quite small, with three to four pieces to a dish. It is an affordable meal: for five people expect to spend around \$40-\$50. Usually loud and vivacious, dim sum restaurants are good places to chat with friends and relatives while enjoying a good meal. The best way to enjoy dim sum is in a large group, so there is the opportunity to sample several different varieties and tastes of small dishes instead of filling up on a few items.

Types of Dim Sum

Dim sum restaurants usually serve a wide range of dim sum, and ingredients include beef, chicken, shrimp, pork, and vegetables. Although most traditional dim sum contains meat, vegetarian options are commonly offered in restaurants as well. As a culinary art form, dim sum is aesthetically pleasing and equally tasty. Because most dim sum is rather complex to make and requires much “heart”, skill, and time, most Chinese families prefer to go out to restaurants for their dim sum. However, our fast paced lifestyle has impacted this tradition and there are a number of “fast food” dim sum places offering quick meals or bags of dim sum to bring home.

Shrimp Dumplings (har gow) – shrimp filling, wrapped in translucent rice-flour skin in a half-moon shape; dim sum connoisseurs often judge a restaurant’s dim sum by the quality of their *har gow*

Steamed Barbeque Pork Buns (char siu bau) – soft, fluffy and white, these buns are a favorite among frequent dim sum goers

Lotus Leaf Rice (law mai gai) – glutinous sticky rice that contains egg yolk, chicken, mushrooms and Chinese sausage wrapped in a fragrant lotus leaf and steamed

Spring Rolls (chun guen) – rolled inside a delicate flour skin and fried, they contain ingredients such as carrots, pork, shrimp, and Chinese mushrooms and are eaten with soy sauce

Rice Noodle Rolls (cheung fun) – can be steamed or fried, they can be filled with either roast pork, beef, shrimp or are available plain, and are eaten with soy sauce or peanut sauce

Pork and Shrimp Dumplings (siu mai) – a dim sum staple, these round steamed dumplings contain a shrimp and pork filling that peek out on top through a thin yellow rice-flour wrapper

Custard Egg Tarts (dan tot) – sweet treats made with egg custard baked in a flaky crust, they are the most popular dessert dim sum

Thousand Layer Sweet Cake (chien chang go) – this delightful dessert is made with several thin layers of sweet egg cake

Dim Sum Restaurants to Try in Chinatown

Dim Sum Go Go – 5 East Broadway, Tel: 212-732-0796
Golden Unicorn Restaurant – 18 East Broadway, Tel: 212-941-0911
Grand Harmony Place – 98 Mott Street, Tel: 212-226-6603
Hop Shing Restaurant – 9 Chatham Square, Tel: 212-267-0220
HSF Restaurant – 46 Bowery Street, Tel: 212-374-1319
Mandarin Court Restaurant – 61 Mott Street, Tel: 212-608-3838
Pacifica – 138 Lafayette Street (Holiday Inn), Tel: 212-334-9003
Sunrise 27 – 27 Division Street, Tel: 212-219-8055
Vegetarian Dim Sum House – 24 Pell Street, Tel: 212-577-7176

Dim Sum-to-Go Restaurants in Chinatown

Dumpling Hut - 52 Bowery Street, Tel: 212-619-1999
Tasty Dumpling - 54 Mulberry Street, Tel: 212-349-0070
Sun Dou Dumpling Shop - 214-216 Grand Street, Tel: 212-965-9663

Dim Sum Recipes

Below are the recipes for two of the most popular types of dim sum found in Chinatown dim sum restaurants in New York, barbeque pork buns (*char siu bao*) and shrimp dumplings (*har gow*).

Barbeque Pork Buns (char siu bao):

Ingredients:

1/3 cup warm water
1/2 tbsp. sugar
1 pack dry yeast
2 1/2 cup flour
2 1/2 cup cake flour
4 tbsp. sugar
1/2 tbsp. salt
2 tbsp. shortening
1 1/4 cup low fat milk
16 pieces white wax paper two inches square

Filling:

6 oz. Chinese BBQ pork, diced
1 tbsp. oil
1 tbsp. water
1/2 tbsp. salt
1/2 tbsp. sugar
1/2 tbsp. thin soy sauce

-more-

1 tbsp. oyster sauce
 1 tbsp. hoisin sauce
 2 tbsp. cornstarch
 4 tbsp. cold water (for thickening)

Preparations:

Mix together the warm water, 1/2 tbsp. sugar and yeast in an 8 oz. measuring cup. Let stand until it rises to the 8 oz. level (about 20 minutes). Sift flour, cake flour, sugar and salt into a large mixing bowl. Add shortening, yeast mixture and milk. Knead mixture for five minutes to form dough. Cover with a damp cloth and set dough in a warm place. Allow the dough to rise for three hours. Heat wok, add oil and stir-fry pork for two minutes. Add two tablespoons water, salt, sugar, soy sauce, oyster sauce and hoisin sauce. Bring it to a boil. Prepare thickening by mixing the cornstarch and four tablespoons cold water. Stir into the mixture and cook for one minute. Let cool before using. After three hours, when the dough has risen, shape into rolls about two inches in diameter. Cut each roll into 1-1/2 inch pieces. Shape each piece into a shallow bowl shape. Put one tablespoon filling in the center, close and twist dough to form a bun. Put the bun on a two-inch square of white paper (prevents the bun from becoming soggy while steaming).

Place eight buns in a pie pan and allow them to set and rest for 15 minutes in a warm place. Steam for 25 minutes.

Makes 16 servings.

Shrimp Dumplings (har gow):

Ingredients:

Har Gow Dough:

2 tbsp. potato starch
 1 cup wheat starch
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1/2 cup boiling water, plus 3 tbsp. boiling water
 1 tbsp. lard

Filling:

wheat starch for dusting
 1/2 lb. raw shrimp, peeled and chopped
 1/4 lb. precooked shrimp, chopped
 2 ounces pork fat finely chopped
 1/4 cup bamboo shoots, chopped
 1/4 tbsp. ground white pepper
 1/4 tbsp. grated fresh ginger
 1/2 tbsp. salt
 1/2 tbsp. sesame oil
 1 tbsp. chopped green onion

-more-

1 egg white
1 teaspoon dry sherry
1 teaspoon cornstarch

Preparations:

Place all filling ingredients in a bowl and mix well by hand until the ingredients form a smooth and firm stuffing. This will take about two minutes. Dough: Measure both starches and salt into a small mixing bowl. Quickly pour the boiling water into the starches while stirring with chopsticks until you get a partially cooked dough. Do not overwork the dough. Quickly add the lard in little pinches and then knead until smooth. When the dough is smooth after about two minutes of kneading, cover it with the mixing bowl and allow it to rest for 15 minutes before shaping. To shape the dumplings, pull just a bit more than one tsp. of dough from the ball. Keep the remainder of the dough covered with the bowl. Roll the small amount into a ball and place onto a floured board.

Roll out into a circle about three inches in diameter. Place one teaspoon of the shrimp filling in the center of the circle of dough and fold over into a half-moon. Use a tiny bit of water for sealing the edges. Be sure to gently press out all the air. If you wish, you can form little pleats in the dough for added decoration. Steam in an oiled bamboo steaming rack for 12 minutes.

Makes 24 dumplings.

About Chinatown New York City

Chinatown New York City combines authentic Asian-American culture with the energy and influence of the most exciting city in the world. With over 200 restaurants, numerous Asian bakeries and tea parlors, jewelry shops, arts and antique stores, an active nightlife and dozens of cultural attractions and landmarks, Chinatown stands as a world within a city. Whether dining, shopping, or strolling down the charming, narrow streets, visitors to Chinatown New York City will find virtually limitless the opportunities for new experiences and added insight.

Located on the east side of Lower Manhattan, Chinatown New York City is the largest in the United States. The neighborhood has been growing steadily since the mid-1800s, and today stands as a vibrant community offering the opportunity to enjoy and explore Asian-American culture. New York City's Chinatown is easily accessible via many New York City MTA subways and buses, as well as several convenient area parking garages. For more information, visit www.explorechinatown.com.

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