



## Taku

Taku (35 Elgin Street, Soho, Central, 2545 9966) is one of the latest openings in the trendy Soho area. It is instantly recognizable as Japanese with its ceramic roof tiles, white lanterns and hanging curtains at the entrance. Taku means "home" in Japanese and the wooden booths inside are cozy while vintage kimonos hang above the stairway. But it's not just the traditional design that sets Taku apart – tofu is at the forefront of the restaurant's menu as a defining trademark. Homemade fresh tofu is prepared from scratch every morning in the most natural way, using only soybeans, spring water and nigari, a natural ingredient containing minerals found in seawater. This can then be served au naturel as "farm-house" tofu (\$55) or chilled silken tofu (\$50-\$60) flavoured with toppings such as salmon roe, ginger shoots and seaweed. The natural sweetness of the tofu is palpable, and its texture smooth and light, making a perfect summer dish that's refreshing and healthy. Glazed tofu (\$40 for two sticks) is available from the grill. It is ingeniously prepared so that the crispy golden skin doesn't compromise the soft white interior. Seafood is imported from Japan and freshly prepared at the counter, guaranteeing quality sushi and sashimi. But perhaps the most novel thing about Taku is its soy sauce. Each table comes with a paintbrush soaking in a pot of light soy sauce, which customers use to lightly brush over their food. With repeated use, the subtle flavours of various fish are incorporated into the pot, enhancing the soy sauce. This method of "painting the fish" can be found in the oldest sushi establishments in Japan, and its debut in Hong Kong confirms the Taku's authenticity.

26

## Shanghai Dream

With a spacious red and brown interior and the quiet music of guzheng and erhu playing in the background, Shanghai Dream (G/F, Harbourfront Horizon, All Suite Hotel Number 8, Hung Luen Road, Hung Hom Bay, Kowloon, 2269 7888) provides a stylish and relaxed atmosphere to share a meal. The current DayDay Brunch is an extension of the popular weekend brunch into a daily promotion. For \$88, you can help yourself to an appetizer and dessert buffet, plus



order from a selection of hot dishes and dim sum freshly cooked in the kitchen. The quintessential dim sum known as siu long bao (steamed minced pork dumplings) is succulent and filled with juices, while the wok-fried Shanghainese noodles with bak choy are thick and chewy. An all-round favourite with locals, foreigners and kids is the deep-fried pork ribs in sweet and sour sauce. Unlike a Canton-style preparation which uses ketchup, Shanghai Dream's dish is made all the more flavourful with the restaurant's own homemade sugar vinegar. Those who prefer something more on the salty side should try the sautéed sliced pork with chili, green peppers and cabbage, as well as the minced pork dumplings in spicy oil, which have a gentle kick that anyone could handle. The traditionally thin and layered onion cake is given a twist – quite literally – by being presented as mini deep-fried coils with a soft, sweet smelling inclusion of spring onions. Don't forget to satisfy your sweet tooth with some cool sago soup or a bowl of glutinous balls with black sesame filling.

## IR 1968

August 17 is Indonesia's Independence Day, and it's probably the perfect date to reserve a spot at IR 1968 (28 Leighton Road, Causeway Bay, 2577 9981). As its name proudly claims, the restaurant has been serving Indonesian cuisine for 40 years and is fiercely dedicated to authenticity and originality. Low-hung lamps



evoke an intimate atmosphere, and spacious booths are adorned with colourful cushions. One of the must-try dishes is the famous satay chicken, pork and beef (\$68 for six sticks) prepared on a charcoal grill to bring out an especially tender and juicy texture. The home-made peanut sauce, which is spicy-sweet as well as thick and chunky, is unique – it's no wonder the recipe is secret. If you have a taste for the more exotic, give the ox tongue (\$78) a go. The soft, thick slabs of meat are slathered in home-made semur sauce – a salty sweet mixture of crushed garlic, onions and sweet soy sauce. All dishes, including something as ordinary as white rice, which comes cone shaped and wrapped in a palm leaf, are beautifully presented. Pair all the rich-tasting food with a cold Indonesian herbal tea (\$26) – a sweet and refreshing drink, essential for local Indonesians. The es cendol (\$28) is another popular local drink, made with coconut milk and brown sugar with noodles of green grass jelly at the bottom.

## Big Bite

The Big Bite's (560 King's Road, North Point, 2155 1066) name doesn't lie – you're going to have to open up that jaw to take a piece out of their burgers. Following the tradition of Canadian "homeburgers", patties are 100% ground beef, grilled and accompanied by generous amounts of condiments including mayonnaise – something not found in American counterparts. The crispy bacon cheeseburger (\$49) is a popular choice and the barbecue chicken burger (\$42) is also hefty but if you're really up to the challenge (or just really hungry), the fat bastard (\$78) is a double burger with double cheese and bacon. Calorie-conscious folks