

AUSTRALIAN

GOURMET TRAVELLER

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AUSTRALIAN
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Best Chinese

Sydney's Chinatowns, in Haymarket, Hurstville and Chatswood, are some of the oldest (and most impressive) in the English-speaking world. Tank-fresh seafood and late, late opening hours have kept **Golden Century** (see page 46) the pride of Chinatown in the city, and it has long been a favourite with off-duty chefs alike (a deluxe new branch, at The Star casino in Pyrmont, is due to open as we go to print). Nearby **East Ocean** (page 41) is your Sussex Street go-to for yum cha. Its key dim sum-dealing rivals include **Fisherman's Wharf** (1 Bank St, Pyrmont, 02 9660 9888), which, sitting atop the Sydney Fish Market, breaks with the Cantonese restaurant large-windowless-room tradition to offer views of Blackwattle Bay, **Marigold** (Levels 4 & 5, 683 George St, Haymarket, 02 9281 3388), which, for many, remains the city's benchmark for dumplings, and **The Eight** (Level 3, Market City, 9-13 Hay St, Haymarket, 02 9282 9988), the latest incarnation of the sprawling former Kam Fook site on the top level of the Market City mall. For something a little more upmarket, **Billy Kwong** (page 36) is on song at the moment, its sharply focused Cantonese food buoyed by the unexpected addition of Australian native

ingredients. **Bar H** (page 35) fuses Surry Hills cool and a snappy, interesting drinks list with fresh, mostly Cantonese-inspired cuisine from former Billy Kwong head chef Hamish Ingham. **Spice Temple** (page 64) is Neil Perry's stylish, successful and, yes, spicy exploration of the cuisines beyond Canton. Speaking of moving beyond Cantonese, suburban hero **Chairman Mao** (189 Anzac Pde, Kensington, 02 9697 9189) is all about authentically gutsy eats from Hunan province. If it's Sichuanese you're after, the various branches of **Spicy Sichuan** (our pick is the city branch, 2 Cunningham St, Haymarket, 02 9221 4222) and **Red Chilli** (try the Chinatown original, Shop 3, 51 Dixon St, Haymarket, 02 9211 8122) get the job done, but the less ornate yet still interesting **Spicy Panda** (Level 1, 8 Dixon St, Sydney, 02 9262 7007) might be our favourite, not least for its rabbit dishes. For Taiwanese, meanwhile, **Blue Eye Dragon** (37 Pyrmont St, Pyrmont, 02 9518 9955) is the most polished offering. International Shanghainese soup-bun chain **Din Tai Fung** (we like the World Square original, Level 1, 644 George St, Sydney, 02 9264 6010), has also found fast friends in Sydney with its precise xiao long bao.

Izakaya Fujiyama

JAPANESE

Shop G09, 38-52 Waterloo St, Surry Hills, (02) 9698 2797
www.izakayafujiyama.com

- * Mon-Wed 6pm-10pm, Thu-Sat 6pm-10.30pm
- * No bookings, licensed, bar
- * Shared plates \$5-\$30
- * Cards AE MC V
- * Outdoor dining
- * Wheelchair friendly
- * Chefs Kenji Maenaka & Taketoshi Iwama

Sydneysiders, like the Japanese, work hard, so it's little wonder the after-hours institution of the izakaya – with its social drinking and snack-a-thons – has found a home in Surry Hills. East and West get on famously here. Casually dressed staff are eager to show guests a great time, pointing out gems on the menu and even longer specials list, and delivering expert spiels on the 125 sakes that line the wall behind the bar. From the open kitchen comes a symphony of crackling flames and swashbuckling knife work as chefs tackle Japanese pub food, from Kenji's fried chicken – crisp kara-age with a spicy nod to the Deep South – to finger-lickin' grilled beef ribs, and fried snapper salad pickled in a palate-arousing blend of soy and vinegar. The playful, massive desserts that follow are what made chef Kenji Maenaka such hot property at nearby Bodega. In the modest world of izakayas, Fujiyama's a Godzilla.

MODERN EUROPEAN

Jonah's

69 Bynya Rd, Whale Beach
(02) 9974 5599
jonahs.com.au

- * Lunch daily noon-2.30pm; dinner daily 6.30pm-8.30pm
- * Bookings essential
- * Licensed, bar, outdoor dining
- * E \$28-\$45 M \$45-\$52 D \$18-\$20
- * Cards AE DC MC V EFT
- * Private room
- * Wheelchair friendly
- * Chef Alfonso Alés

King prawns rearing up in a chilled, gazpacho-like salmorejo sauce are our kind of cocktail, their texture played off against confit potatoes, with quail's egg and jamón Ibérico bringing plenty of intensity. Paired with a fino Sherry, perhaps, from a wine list of exceptional depth, this is Jonah's at its best, alluding to both the sunny shores of Whale Beach below, and the slightly retro stylings of the hotel (established in 1929) that houses it. Some nights, the service can feel a bit lacklustre, the space a bit like a function centre, the food a bit fiddly, and those hefty prices start to grate. Get the right day, though, and the wit on the floor sparkles like snow crab with lobster jelly, Russian salad and caviar, and slipping into a plate of snapper with roast baby onions, hazelnuts and romesco sauce seems about the best possible way to spend the afternoon.

Ju Ge Mu & Shimbashi

JAPANESE

246 Military Rd, Neutral Bay, (02) 9904 3011

- * Lunch Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat noon-2pm; dinner Tue-Sun 6pm-9pm; private room
- * Bookings recommended
- * Licensed & BYO (Tue-Thu & Sun)
- * E \$6-\$18 M \$18-\$34 D \$6-\$15
- * Cards MC V EFT
- * Wheelchair friendly
- * Chefs Masahiko Tojo & Noriyuki Hasumi

You're after Japanese, but bright and lively, or slightly more Zen? Handily, this place is both. Bold black-and-red Ju Ge Mu whips up teppanyaki and okonomiyaki, while the adjoining Shimbashi – all ochre walls, soft lighting and shoji panels – does noodles. Either way, you can order across the two, with sweet staff eager to help. The sushi displays exemplary freshness – try lightly seared aburi sushi of eel, scampi, kingfish and smoky beef. House-made soba arrive in a deeply savoury yet faintly sweet broth so satisfying you'll slurp it to the last drop. For some rustic fun, try the okonomiyaki – thick potato pancakes topped with cheese, wagyu, seafood or more. There's a smallish list of mostly Australian and Kiwi wines, a few beers and a wider choice of sakes, and desserts such as plum wine affogato or berry-centred ice-cream in tempura-battered choux puffs to round things off nicely.

Longrain

THAI

85 Commonwealth St, Surry Hills, (02) 9280 2888
longrain.com

- * Lunch Fri noon-2.30pm; dinner daily 6pm-11pm
- * Bookings Fri lunch, and dinner for tables of 6 or more only
- * Licensed, bar, private room
- * E \$5-\$17 M \$32-\$50 D \$5-\$18
- * Cards AE DC MC V
- * Wheelchair friendly
- * Chef Martin Boetz

Modern Asian food has got to be one of the most abused genres in the world of restaurants. And yet at Longrain, perhaps the mightiest Modern Asian diner of them all, the hot scene, cool drinks and pumping tunes aren't there to make up for the kind of kitchen shortfalls that are so often a given in this sort of atmosphere. Instead, you get crisp-fried river trout paired with twice-cooked pork belly in dry red curry, a surf 'n' turf combo that's as authentic as it is delicious, or a lon of prawn and pork simmered in coconut cream with crisp rice cakes and cucumber for dipping. Longrain's 2011 expansion, which extended to installing booths upstairs and moving the bar downstairs alongside its casual Shortgrain canteen, seems to have given the place extra fire in the belly, with both the food and service hitting their marks to impressive effect. A beacon of good times.