

# hong konggrapevine

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ONE thing Hong Kong is not short of is Japanese restaurants. Sushi, sashimi and sake flow in unstoppable quantities in almost every shopping mall, grand hotel or casual street corner, showing Hong Kongers have a serious and very real obsession with all things Japanese.

**Okra** brings something very different to the table. No nigiri or maki to be found but wildly inventive dishes such as unagi (eel) on triple-cooked sushi grade rice, roasted brussel sprouts with homemade XO sauce, in-house made tofu in black pigeon sauce and surprisingly delicious toast made with goose blood, not to mention dry aged tuna. The man behind the madness is **Max Levy** from New Orleans, who has arrived in Hong Kong from Beijing where he ran the “mothership” restaurant of Okra 1949. Big on bold flavours, beanies and rare bottles of sake, Levy has transformed his little patch of Sai Ying Pun into a seriously good local hangout where minute two-seater tables cram into a small but lively space. It seems to be a prerequisite that all the staff need also be attractive as well as knowledgeable

on the dishes - but don't let that put you off. Try the extremely extensive sake list, including Okra's own brand just in time for Year of the Dog and make sure you save room for the unusual dessert - Cookie Boy's roasted green tea and red bean cookie with smoked cream and lemon salt is just the ticket after all that umami. Okra, G/F, 110 Queen's Rd West, Sai Ying Pun; phone +852 2806 1038, [www.okra.bar](http://www.okra.bar).

Party district Lan Kwai Fong's Wyndham St often evokes a certain wry response from people who feel they've been in Hong Kong long enough to start making scoffing remarks about the area they all flocked to when they first moved here. Yes, Hooters is there, along with bars which advertise gold-flecked vodka shots and other forms of late night expat entertainment, but amid the thumping music and neon shisha pipes stands a man wearing Punjabi regimental uniform (minus the rifle). He is standing guard over the **New Punjab Club**, one of the newer openings from the Blacksheep Restaurant group. It models itself on “post-colonialism” so it has all the trappings you would expect - deep leather



banquettes, elaborate artworks, dim lighting and a very healthy gin selection. Those familiar with London's dining scene will note that chef **Palash Mitra** was head of the Michelin-starred Gymkhana, which still has a devout following in Mayfair. Chicken korma and tikka masala you will not find. Instead, expect hearty appetisers and mains you may never have heard of. Murgh tikka anga - chicken marinated in yoghurt and spices, masalewali chanp - lamb chops with beetroot korma and tandoori, machli - cobia fish with tomato chutney. They are all worth the perhaps steeper-than-expected prices (\$HK200, \$A32 plus for mains). New Punjab Club, World Wide Commercial Building, 34 Wyndham St, Central; phone +852 2368 1223, [www.newpunjabclub.com](http://www.newpunjabclub.com).

After a lull, the well-loved Italian restaurant **Papi** is back in the upmarket location of Causeway Bay's Fashion Walk. **Benjamin Lung** of other Italian outfits Isola, Gaia Ristorante and Va Bene heads it up and previous Papi fans will find comfort in a similar style as before - accessible, affordable and high-quality Italian food. With an emphasis on small plate sharing, a format that popularised the restaurant a few years back, the menu features over 15 Italian small dishes to share, from pan-fried Hokkaido sea scallops with white wine and fregola, to Florentina stewed beef tripe, grilled whole calamari and black truffle and gorgonzola cheese pizza. Set in colourful tones of bright blue and orange, the two-storey location is all about fuss-free, unpretentious dining, celebrating classic and comforting Italian dishes in a family-friendly atmosphere. Hong Kong definitely needs more of this. Papi, G/F, 8 Cleveland, Fashion Walk, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong; phone +852 2808 0820, [www.papi-hk.com](http://www.papi-hk.com).



Top Left: Food from New Punjab Club.  
Top Right: Food from Okra restaurant.  
Bottom: Food from Papi restaurant.