

Hairy honeys

'Mitten crabs' and their succulent roe are one seasonal treat that should not be missed, writes Xu Junqian.

It's hairy crab season again, and time for Shanghai locals to revel in the juicy meat and treasured female roe of the gray-green crab that is characterized by its hairy mittens. There is a general consensus among Shanghai's chefs that the most flavorful crabs come from Yangcheng Lake in neighboring Jiangsu province, but you don't need to board a train to feast on this local delicacy. Shanghai boasts numerous restaurants that import the crab and know how to cook it to perfection. Below are a few top picks.

Shanghai. Chinese ladies in traditional costume play Chinese instruments in the main hall to keep diners entertained.

Address: 216 Jiujiang Road
Tel: 021-6321-2010
Opening hours: 11 am - 2 pm, 5 pm - 11 pm
Transport: Metro Line 2

5. Yao Yao Restaurant

This decades-old restaurant specializes in crab dishes and is reputed to be the cheapest place to gorge on crab in the city. Diners can feast here for less than 200 yuan a head. The decorations are plain and the space is limited, but once the steaming, pink crustaceans arrive, their rich taste will bring you to as heavenly a place as Yao Yao's more expensive competitors. Ask for a bottle of Shaoxing-style yellow wine and take a sip to clear your palate. According to Chinese philosophy, the "cold," or "yin," properties of the crab can be counter-balanced by the "warm" wine.

Address: 237 Julu Road
Tel: 021-5386-1522
Opening hours: 5 pm - 3 am
Transport: Metro Line 1

6. Songji

Songji is something of an innovator in terms of crab restaurants, having created its popular spicy crab hot pot several years ago. It used to be one of the most sought-after restaurants in the city, but has since become easier to access. During hairy crab season, its fat crabs spiced with secret Sichuan flavors still rank among the city's favorites.

Address: 898 Tianyaoqiao Road
Tel: 021-6456-7566
Opening hours: 11 am - 3 am
Transport: Metro Line 4

7. Yuanshi

Yuanshi, a Japanese-style restaurant, displays a more exotic flair in terms of its crab dishes. Served with fresh sashimi like salmon and sea urchin, the restaurant features a light and delicate crab fest. To spare its guests the painstaking process of cracking open the shells, the meat has already been removed by the time it reaches the table.

Address: 2882 Yan'an Road W
Telephone: 021-6242-8331
Opening hours: 11 am - 2 pm, 5 pm - 12 am
Transport: Metro Lines 3, 4

8. Tongchuan Road Seafood Market

Last but not the least comes the city's biggest outdoor seafood market, which locals and seafood vendors turn to for a broad selection of hairy crabs. You can also bring home other fresh seafood like oysters, eels and fish. As hairy crabs are not complicated to prepare, you can easily steam them at home and fill your stomach without breaking the bank. Not that this means you shouldn't be prepared to bargain, however.

Address: Tongchuan Road, near Caoyang Road
Opening hours: Around the clock
Transport: no public transport nearby, taxis are suggested

1. Wang Bao He

This century-old restaurant is the "it" place for Shanghai locals to have a crab-fest. During hairy crab season, this cramped eatery can get so crowded that you may struggle for elbowroom, but the food is worth it. Steamed crab tops the menu, especially with its requisite dipping sauce of rice vinegar with ginger. The homemade tofu with crabmeat is also a traditional favorite to wash down several fat crabs, as it offers a light and delicate alternative to tantalize your taste buds.

Address: 603 Fuzhou Road
Tel: 021-6322-3673
Opening hours: 11 am - 1 pm, 5 pm - 8:30 pm
Transport: Metro Lines 1, 2, 8

2. Ling Long Ge

Designed in a quaint Chinese style, with an unpretentious entrance, Ling Long Ge consists of a series of intimate VIP rooms. These serve as a perfect private space for diners to tuck into the season's very green crustaceans without worrying about others commenting on their lack of table manners. Aside from its fresh and tasty crabs, the restaurant is famous for its creative dishes, like frozen crabmeat jelly and crab noodles. For those who find digging the meat out the shells more of a chore than a game, white-gloved waiters are on hand to do the job for you.

Address: 2F, 951 Hongxu Road
Tel: 021-3207-1177
Opening hours: 11 am - 2 pm, 5 pm - 10 pm
Transport: Bus Nos 48, 911, 936

3. Xin Guang Restaurant

Xin Guang is a newcomer to the city's selection of crab restaurants and features an upscale menu. It provides several different set meals, with prices ranging from hundreds to thousands of yuan. More exotic seafood, such as shark's fin and shark's lips, are served with the more expensive set menus. Those on a tighter budget may want to go for the wine-preserved crab and *xiaolongbao*, or dumplings filled with hairy crab meat.

Address: 512 Tianjin Road
Tel: 021-6322-3978
Opening hours: 11 am - 2 pm, 5 pm - 9:30 pm
Transport: Metro Line 2

4. Cheng Long Hang Xie Wang

Despite the high prices, this restaurant remains one of the most popular places for local epicures and travelers to relish Shanghai's foie gras. It serves crabs all year around, importing them from other cities and countries when they are not in season in

