

Top Ten Toronto Dim Sum Spots

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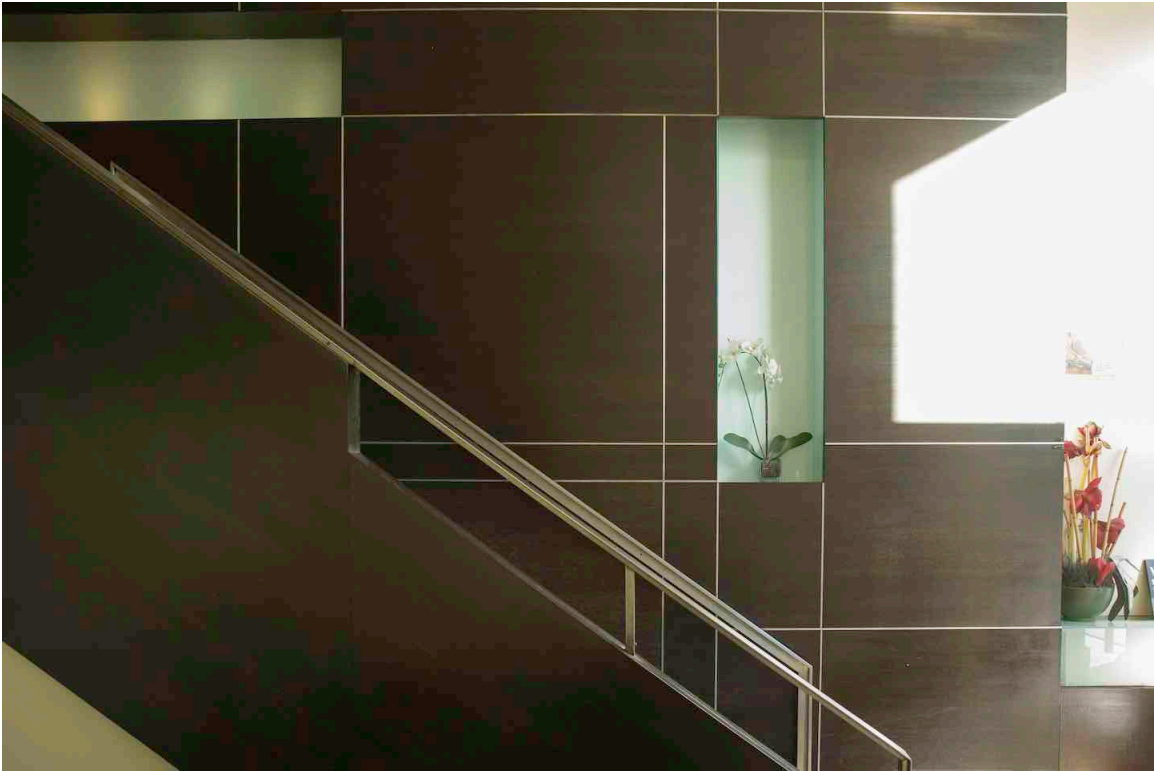


Long gone are the days when dim sum was a privilege for those who had friends that could order for them. And past are the times when you would cross your fingers, point at a random steamer basket in the cart and hope for the best. These days, most places choose “made-to-order” over carts. Plus, both diners and restaurants have made strides towards the Chinese tradition as a far more accessible and mainstream dining option. Below are ten Toronto spots (in alphabetical order) we think are worth a try with any tea of your choice.

Asian Legend, 418 Dundas Street West (among other locations)

www.asianlegend.ca - Pricing: \$1.99 – \$7.99.

Dim sum available: 11am-11pm, Monday-Saturday; 10:30am-11pm, Sunday.



Asian Legend isn't your traditional "yum-cha" (Cantonese for 'drink tea') version of dim sum, as its cuisine is from Northern China. And though there's "Har Gow" (steamed shrimp dumplings) on the menu, the real star is the steamed soup-filled dumpling with ground pork – where actual soup bursts into your mouth as you bite into it. Just make sure you put the whole dumpling in your mouth for safety.



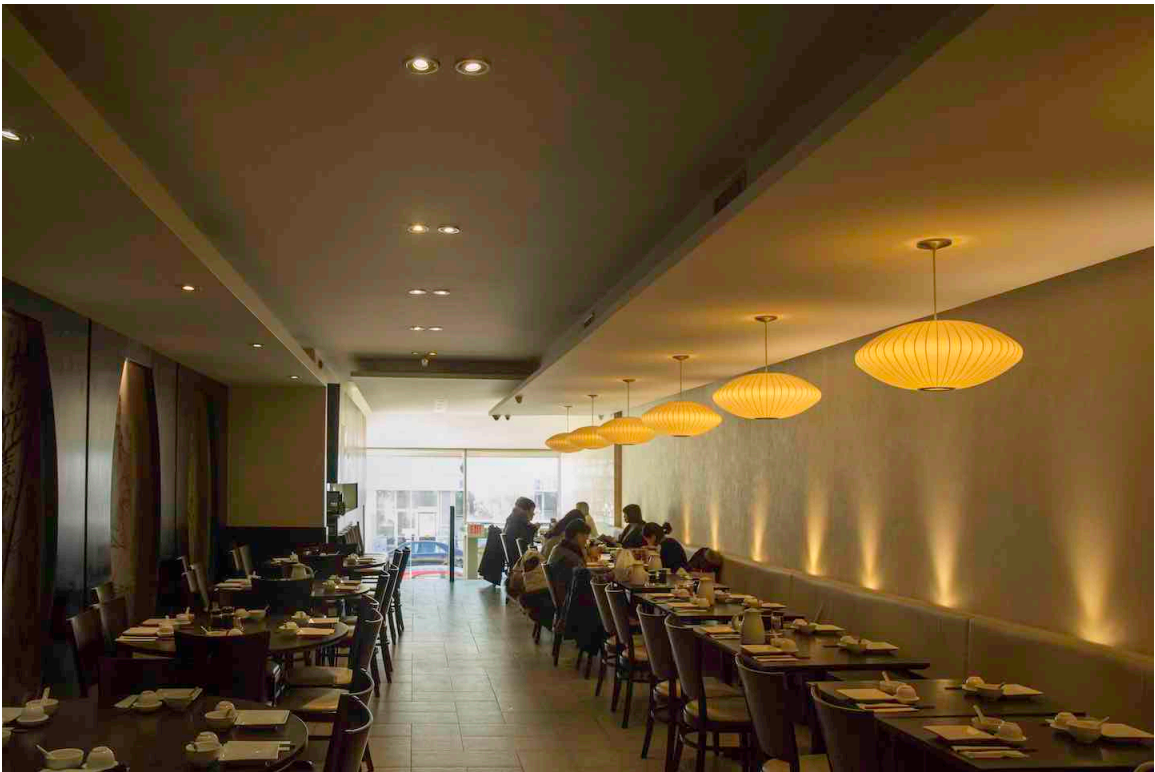
Steamed soup-filled dumplings with ground pork, \$5.99.

The difference is also reflected in the restaurant's modern design and dark brown interiors – suffice to say, you won't find any plastic-sheeted tablecloths here. This particular location came along in 2003, right around the time dim sum starting becoming more popular among non-Chinese diners, and gained some traction with its relatively unique offerings and comfortable environment.

Connie Zhu, who's been with company for well over a decade, says the newest locations (there are now eight in total), in Vaughn and St. Catherines are even more contemporary and modern. The menu, however, seems to have stayed mostly with the tried and true. Just the way the regulars like it.



Chicken potstickers, \$5.50.



Crown Princess Fine Dining, 1033 Bay Street, www.crown-princess.ca

Pricing: (S) \$3.40; (M) \$4.60; (L) \$5.60; (XL) 6.60; (SP) \$8.30; (J) \$11.

Dim sum available: 10am-4pm, weekdays; 9am-4pm, weekends & holidays.



To enter Crown Princess you have to pull a wrought metal door open. It's an apt introduction as once inside, it feels like you've entered a restaurant that used to be a palace belonging to an opulent ruler with a predilection for lush and shiny things. Tufted velvet walls with fake crystals, marble pillars, and chandeliers are all part of the rooms. None of this happened by accident - before moving in, it took a three-month renovation to get everything just right.

The strokes are certainly grand, finishing at ground-level with double-draped tables and imported teapots. That ethos is also evident in elevated dim sum fare and the accompanying Chef's Special menu where you can find items like Thai style prawns and Eel & shrimp fried rice with avocado.

It isn't subtle but nothing fancy is. And if you're going for the princess treatment, you might as well take it all in and embrace it peacefully.



Baked eel puff pastry, \$5.60.



Baked egg yolk custard paste bun, \$4.60.

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Dim Sum King, 421 Dundas Street West, www.dimsumking.ca

Pricing: (S) \$2.80; (M) \$4.00; (L) \$4.50; (XL) \$5.50; (SP) \$8.00.

Discount: weekdays from 9am-4pm (S,M,L) \$2.80; weekends and holidays from 9-11am (S,M,L) \$2.80.

Dim sum available: 9am-10pm, 7 days a week.

Walking by at street level, one wouldn't likely notice Dim Sum King tucked up on the third and second floors of the Beneficial Building at 421 Dundas West. For the most part, however, that doesn't seem to matter, since those in the know are loyal to the King and happy to spread the word.



Pan-fried chives and shrimp cake, \$5.50.

General Manager Kelvin Chung says the clientele isn't just locals, as the restaurant often hosts ambassadors from all over the world in its banquet-sized 400-person dining room or sixteen-person semi-private dining area. Dignitaries even include our photo-friendly Premier, whose smiling face graces the celebrity wall near the entrance. For those seeking proper privacy for their party, the second floor is divided into three different-sized areas – one with built-in karaoke.



Fried green beans with ground pork, \$8.00.

If you like your dim sum old school, cart service is available during peak hours. And if you're on the other side of technology, you can have it carted right to your door with Über Eats.

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Dynasty Chinese Cuisine, 69 Yorkville Avenue, www.dynastyyorkville.com

Pricing: (S) \$3.55; (M) \$5.95; (L) \$6.50; (XL) \$7.50; (XXL) \$8.75; (SP) \$9.95

Dim sum available: 11am-3:45pm, weekdays; 10am-3:45pm, weekends.



When it first opened on Bloor near Bay nineteen years ago, Dynasty likely introduced many a Yorkville crowd to dim sum. That space is now La

Société, but regulars happily followed to the current location, which is now five years old. The 220-person restaurant includes a private VIP room for up to sixteen, plus another 30 seats when patio weather hits.



Steamed scallop dumplings with baby bok choy, \$7.50.

Owner Ivan Lee has over 40 years in the industry, working in all facets from hotels and restaurants to pubs and clubs – even training as a cook in French, Italian, and Chinese cuisines.



Golden fried egg white tofu wrapped with bacon, \$7.50.

To this day, he still designs the majority of his menus and continues to innovate and improve with healthier and unique dishes. An 80-item dim sum menu gets updated every 3-4 months with about 10-15 changes.

Lee also realizes that food quality and presentation are nothing without service and trains his staff personally, ensuring they speak Cantonese, Mandarin, and English to cater to Dynasty's diverse clientele.

Kwan Dim Sum and Chinese Cuisine, 1496 Yonge Street

www.kwandimsum.ca - Pricing: (S) \$3; (M) \$4; (L) \$5; (XL) \$6; (SP) \$8

Dim sum available: 11:30am-4pm, weekdays; 11am-4pm weekends;
limited items 4pm-10pm, 7 days a week.



Tiny bees with almond filling, \$4.

After only two years, Debbie Lui's Kwan has certainly made a mark for itself as a serious dim sum player. But it shouldn't be any surprise; given Lui has about two decades worth of experience in the business – most of it as an owner/operator in Markham. There, she began with a small space, expanded to a larger one to accommodate the crowds, then grew all

the way to an early retirement. But, it took only a few years before she decided to get back in. And this time, she'd do it differently.



Pan fried turnip pudding with preserved meat, \$4.

Finding the right space for Kwan took about a year and half, followed by three and half months of renovation. With the exception of the marble floor, everything was overhauled from the space's previous incarnation of Didier restaurant. Ready to cater to a more refined clientele, Lui needed to paint a clear picture of what the restaurant was about, thus the various teas and vases on classic Asian shelves.

With regard to the food, the aim is for hotel-quality at Chinatown prices while sacrificing higher margins to build a solid base of regulars. It's working. So much, in fact, that Lui says her well-traveled customers often bring back ideas, keeping her on par with what's happening overseas – and ahead of most restaurants south of Bloor.



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Lai Wah Heen, 108 Chestnut Street, 2nd Floor, www.laiwahheen.com

Pricing: \$5.00-\$8.00

Dim sum available: 11:30am-3pm, weekdays; 11:30pm-4pm, weekends;
limited items 6pm-10pm (11pm on Saturdays), 7 days a week.

Lai Wah Heen has been known as the high-end downtown dim sum spot since opening its doors twenty years ago at The Metropolitan Hotel. It's now called the Doubletree Hilton, and previous owner Henry Wu sold the restaurant to long-time food and beverage manager Kenson Tsang. But the standards haven't changed – even as cooks have moved on from this kitchen to flourish at other restaurants such as Kwan and Susur Lee's Luckee.



Given the arrival of such competition - among others - since the mid-nineties, the restaurant has stayed its course, focusing on what it does best: offering unique creations like foie gras tarts, while using quality ingredients like Berkshire pork where others might not bother.



Seared crab claw, shrimp and green chive in wonton, \$7.

Immigrants from Mainland China, along with regular customers after the highest echelon of dim sum still know where the top shelf is. Meanwhile, the authentic, sincere, and knowledgeable service at Lai Wah Heen remains understated and unparalleled.



Open-purse dumpling of minced scallop, shrimp and bok choy, topped with caviar, \$5.

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Luckee Restaurant, 328 Wellington Street West, www.luckrestaurant.com

Pricing: \$5-\$12

Dim sum available: 11am-2:30pm, weekends; limited items 5:30pm-11pm, Tuesday-Sunday.

Susur Lee brings his deft touch to the Soho Metropolitan with a menu that doesn't limit itself to any particular region of China, offering dishes in ways

only he can. Anyone at all familiar with the chef knows his demand for perfection in execution and customization, and you feel it the second you enter with lucky red lanterns dangling above your head.



A unique array of Luckee's dim sum offerings include a Luckee Har Gow whose wrapper is soaked in carrot juice then steamed with tree-ear mushrooms a bit of truffle oil, (\$9 for four pieces), a pear-shaped crispy rice donut filled with shrimp, chicken and mushrooms, (\$8 for two pieces), and Chinese celery and spinach dumpling topped with a special house-made olive oil cabbage preserve (\$8 for three pieces.)



It's certainly not like other dim sum spots. Servers wear Converse. You can order a Luckee Caesar, which uses an Asian chili sauce, olive preserves, and oyster sauce in lieu of the usual Worcestershire and Tabasco. And the Siu Mai is done with chicken (instead of pork) and shrimp then topped with scallop and a freshly shaved truffle.

Previously Senses, the space was entirely gutted and overhauled by Bent Gable Design, the same team behind LEE, LEE Lounge, Bent, and The Thompson Diner. The aesthetic and food both take their cues from the traditional but quickly move beyond that to combine for a hip and modern vibe that caters to an urban set.



Luckee shrimp cheung fun, \$8.

New Treasure Restaurant, 150 Dundas Street West, 416-977-3778

Pricing: (S) \$2.80; (M) \$3.50, (L) \$4, (XL) \$4.99

Dim sum available: 11am-3pm, 7 days a week; limited items 3pm-9pm,
Tuesday-Sunday.



Hidden Treasure would be a far better name for this subterranean dim sum gem. Though it's out of sight and underground, that hasn't deterred hungry hoards from coming back since the doors opened in 1975. It was new then, and surely there are at least a few regulars who can attest to the treasure it was and still is. After all, kids who were brought there are now returning with their own children. Perhaps there's something more intimate and cozier about dining in a basement with your family.

Also a favourite for nearby workers at lunch, this no frills joint focuses on the food quality and value and not much else. Plastic tablecloths are part of that thinking. Using metal steamers instead of bamboo - likely the same reason. Besides, when you're wolfing down the best fried ginger wontons or fried "phoenix" feet around, who cares? (We're told those are two of the restaurants most popular dishes.)



Fried phoenix feet in black bean sauce, \$3.50.

Looking for carts? Catch them from 11:45am-1:30pm daily. And there is one singular – if odd – bonus that some might call a hidden treasure: access to WIFI. It really may be the lone indicator of anything that may have changed in the last 30 years.



Fried pork and leek rolls, \$3.50.

Pearl Harbourfront Chinese Cuisine, 2-207 Queens Quay West,
www.pearlharbourfront.ca

Pricing: (S) \$4; (M) \$6; (L) \$7; \$8.50 (SP)

Dim sum available: 11am-3:30pm, weekdays; 10:30am-3:30pm, weekends;
limited items 5pm-10pm, 7 days a week.



For many, dim sum is purely about the food. But for those who might also be concerned with the view, or what they could do before or after their meal, Pearl Harbourfront may be the ideal locale. Situated along the waterfront right beside the Harbourfront Centre, there's plenty to do and see – especially when it's warm outside. And regardless of weather, you can look onto Lake Ontario and the Toronto Islands.



Fried taro stuffed with scallop and curry ground beef, \$4.



A lovely view and activities may get customers through the door the first time, but certainly not the second, third and beyond in a span of over 30 years. Regulars return for the consistently tasty and traditional fare, of course. And Partner/General Manager Jeffrey Mak (who's been there for over twenty years) notes his clientele is varied – ranging from nearby office workers to tourists and an affluent lot who dine when they're not south in the winter or travelling with their kids in the summer. It's a diverse group indeed – all brought together by a mutual love of Pearl Harboufront's dim sum.



Sesame ball with black sesame filling, \$6.

Rol San Restaurant, 423 Spadina Avenue, 416-977-1128

Pricing: (S) \$2.98; (M) \$3.28; (L) \$4.48; (XL) \$4.78

Dim sum available: 9:30am-2am, weekdays; 9:30am-5am.



Pork dumplings with shrimp (Shiu Mai), \$4.68.

Rol San has been around since the mid-90s but only began serving dim sum at the turn of the millennium. After slowly building some momentum, the restaurant began to offer it all day long a few years ago. The banner draped on the outside of the restaurant is the closest to any advertising that's been done, so it must be the food that's bringing people back

You likely won't be coming for the décor, though the random Chinese posters, scripts and wall decorations do carry an air of charm and authenticity through the two dining rooms. The focus at Rol San has always been on keeping things simple with fresh, quality ingredients, a clean restaurant and great service – and doing so consistently, of course.

Aside from the tasting the dim sum, the best example of the dedication and pride that goes into the restaurant is perhaps hearing head waiter/dishwasher/do-it-all, Ben, talk about their homemade hot sauce and chili oil. The latter contains over ten different ingredients and is likely one of the touches people return for.



(Left) deep fried shrimp and diced pork dumplings, \$2.98; (Top) baked milk tarts, \$2.98; (Bottom) Shrimp rice rolls, \$4.78.