

DESTINATION TAI MEI TUK

Harbour lights

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Tai Mei Tuk is only a short bus ride from bustling Tai Po Market MTR station, but is a long way from its pace. Situated beside Tolo Harbour and not far from the picturesque Plover Cove Reservoir, it is a popular spot for barbecue day-trippers, cyclists, boating enthusiasts and amateur anglers. It is also a culinary relief from the largely gastronomic wasteland of Tai Po proper, with many restaurants situated along the same road. We put five of the best to the test.

Luca

Calling itself a gourmet kitchen restaurant, Luca specialises in pizza, pasta and ribs. The menu is mostly Italian, but is also peppered with offerings such as Greek salad and a selection of Mexican starters, plus international oddities such as Peking duck rolls. There are also jet-fresh oysters, which live up to the billing. And there is a decent selection of pastas, including vegetarian options.

Also worth a try is the Italian classic, osso buco, and steaks grilled over lava rocks. The handmade gourmet pizzas are impressive with a choice of 13 toppings and the option to go half and half – for example, the signature figs, Parma ham and arugula on one side and wild mushrooms and truffle oil on the other. The crust is delightfully thin and not too crispy, and the toppings deliver on flavour. There is plenty of shaded outdoor seating and a long drinks list, including wines by the glass.

G/F, 64A Lung Mei Village, Ting Kok Road, Tai Mei Tuk, Tai Po, tel: 2662 6737

Cafe de Country Art

Established by artist Kinsan Chung, this is also home to the Country Art Museum – a showcase for his work. You can't miss this place as the exterior of the three-storey village house is covered by bright murals. The food is as curiously quirky as the building itself, and the cuisine is best described as an eclectic mix of elevated *cha chaan teng* and European. There are two menus, one that features soups, salads, starters, snacks and desserts, and another for mains. Dishes include minestrone, stuffed chicken wings,



fish and chips, blue mussels in white wine and garlic, something called "honey burn the Dutch pork ribs" and grilled salmon in white wine.

The vanilla garlic baked scallops, were heavy on the garlic and light on the vanilla, while the curiously named Gillette Hiroshima Oysters turned out to be deep-fried. The crème brûlée and coffee were good. The interior is quaint, and the small outdoor area is inspired by French country gardens with eclectic touches everywhere. There is a slightly surreal air to the whole place.

64B Lung Mei Village, Tai Mei Tuk, tel: 2824 1812

Pataya

One of several Thai restaurants in Tai Mei Tuk, Pataya is constantly busy. While not as refined in decor and lacking the authentic ambience of Thai Thai Kitchen, the food is on a par and cheaper. There are a handful of tables outside, but most of the dining is indoors. The fried prawn with chilli and basil was spicy, and had plenty of perfectly cooked prawns and long beans with a good balance of the quintessential sweet, sour, spicy, salty definers of the cuisine. The stir-fried morning glory with fermented soya bean and chilli was another standout. Fish head lovers will enjoy this spot, with



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quite a few dishes featuring salmon head. The drinks list is quite limited and service can be erratic, especially if you're sitting outside when the restaurant is busy. The mistakes on the menu make for a fun read.

G/F, 69A, Plover Cove, Tai Mei Tuk, tel: 2662 5501

Eco Farm Restaurant

The walls of this restaurant abound with photos of the chef and director, Pele Po, with at least two former governors, including David Wilson and Chris Patten, as well as Anson Chan Fang On-sang. And while the venue is reminiscent of the karaoke bars found in Thailand (including the decor) combined with the style of a Chinese restaurant on an outlying island, the food is decidedly Western. The set lunch is value for money, with four courses for HK\$150, including steak and ribs for mains. Dishes on the lengthy à la carte menu run the gamut from French toast and chicken wings to

pasta, baked sole and old-school favourites such as lobster thermidor and filet mignon. A small selection of choices feature organic produce. Servings are substantial, and the service is prompt.

G/F 61A Tai Mei Tuk, tel: 2662 6109

Thai Thai Kitchen

This place has a real sense of Thailand about it. A tuk-tuk is parked outside; traditional wooden statues and carvings adorn the entrance and interior; and many of the staff are Thai. While the other restaurants overlook greenery, Thai Thai Kitchen is opposite the recreational fishing area and is the only one with a sea view.

The extensive menu provides options for any occasion, and features dishes from all the key regions of the kingdom, with snippets of information on Thai cuisine and culture. Dishes include deep-fried shrimp rolls – whole prawns enveloped in a crispy case and cooked to perfection – a fantastic spicy and sour green mango fish salad, a flavourful baked seafood curry that is served in a coconut, and deep-fried pig knuckle with spicy Thai sauce. Fried vegetables arrive with plenty of that intangible *wok hei*.

Evening diners can also enjoy spit-roasted suckling pig, either half or full portion, but an advance order is required.

G/F, 47E Tai Mei Tuk, tel: 2948 2800



The colourful façade of the Country Art Museum behind the Cafe de Country Art (top); Luca's figs with Parma ham and arugula (above) pizza; alfresco dining at Thai Thai Kitchen. Photos: Edward Wong

