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Macau packs a punch

17 April, 2014 Tara Harrison 0 comments

Macau is an undisputed heavy hitter. It's a comparable hub to Hong Kong that more than holds its own in the fashion and food stakes. Travellers needn't pass through Hong Kong borders to reach Macau either, with the Turbo Jet operating straight from an airport terminal and reaching Macau within 50 minutes.

In particular, Macau certainly punches above its weight when it comes to the drawcards of food and shopping, frequently cited reasons of a trip to Hong Kong.

Round one: Shopping

Magnetise your credit cards as Macau is a haven for shopping. All the world renowned designer brands have shop fronts here and better yet the prices are cheaper than Macau's Asian neighbours.

Lower taxes and duties mean that high tech items as well as luxury goods won't hit your wallet as hard. If luxury is what you're after, look no further than the Cotai Strip which has its own attraction in the form of a Venetian canal and gondolas.

If antiques are more your style, the markets on the streets around Senado Square sell art, rugs, homewares and old-fashioned bric-a-brac.

New on the shopping scene is the Macau Tourism and Cultural Activities centre which is inside a traditional Portuguese building. The centre is filled with small stalls that sell handcrafted items and local designs.

For local fashion head to the designer hub of the Three Lamps district where you will find an outfit inspired by Macau - look out for mandarin collars and bright buttons.

Macau has a shopping festival that runs for the entirety of December and last year's theme was "One day shopping, one day touring". The festival aims to highlight the local creative shops that are uniquely Macanese.

Avenida de Almeida Ribeiro, or San Ma Lo, is widely regarded as one of the best places to shop for local delicacies, jewellery, fashion and electronics in boutique shops.

Pawnshops that reached their heyday during the Sino-Japanese War from 1930 are mostly turned into museums now to promote cross-cultural understanding, and are an ideal compromise of history and shopping.

The knockout:

Gold is a big ticket item for visitors to Macau as the jewellery is reasonably priced. Macau is also one of the best places to buy Portuguese wine and it costs a lot less to buy a quality bottle than throughout the rest of China.

Round two: Food

Everyone who visits Macau raves about the food, which is an irresistible fusion informed by Portuguese and Chinese heritage. The range begins with street food and accelerates to Michelin-starred restaurants.

Let's start with traditional Portuguese fare, so good it will make you forget you're in Asia. Antonio restaurant is the legacy of chef Antonio Coelho.

Found down a laneway in Taipa Village, be sure to order the gratinated goat's cheese with olive oil and honey, sautéed garlic clams, codfish cakes, as well as the seafood stew with crab, prawns, scallops and fish. Garlic is the one guarantee you get in traditional Portuguese dishes, and O-Manel restaurant also serves it in large doses, particularly in the clams in lemon sauce.

Also found in the Taipa Village, this is an informal establishment with only six tables and football posters on the wall.

For the unique flavour of Macanese cuisine, make your way to Restaurant Litoral and order the curried shrimp with crabmeat as well as the famous African Chicken.

Mezza9 in the Grand Hyatt also dishes up Macanese fare, with the duck rice a perennial favourite. Even better, there's an option of unlimited wine for less than a quarter of the meal price.

The street food is difficult to walk past, and there are many easy-to-gobble delights such as pork chop buns and egg rolls. Duck rice is also scooped up from large pans. Almond cookies are a crowd pleaser and sweet pork jerky can be found in the Macau tourism and cultural activities centre.

At the other end of the spectrum is Zi Yat Heen, which boasts two Michelin stars and specialises in high-end Chinese cuisine. There's also Wing Lei, a dim sum specialist that has also earned two Michelin stars. To up the opulence, overhead is a dragon made of 90,000 crystals.

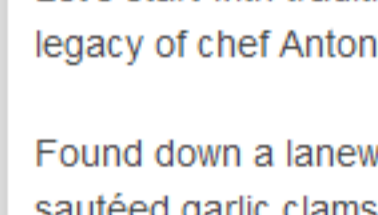
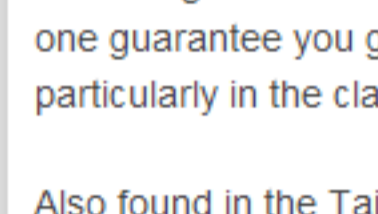
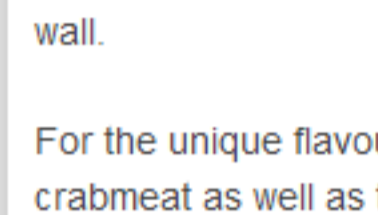
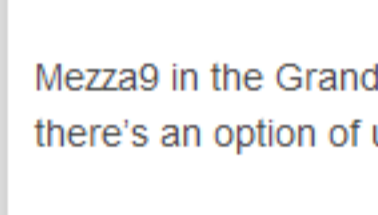
The knockout:

For dessert, head to McPherson's Sweet Shoppe for the black garlic chocolate or ice cream. Even more outlandish is the durian ice cream, a gentle introduction to a taste that can only be described as cheese meeting onion meeting overripe banana.

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