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# HEAT UP YOUR WINTER WITH SZECHUAN CUISINE

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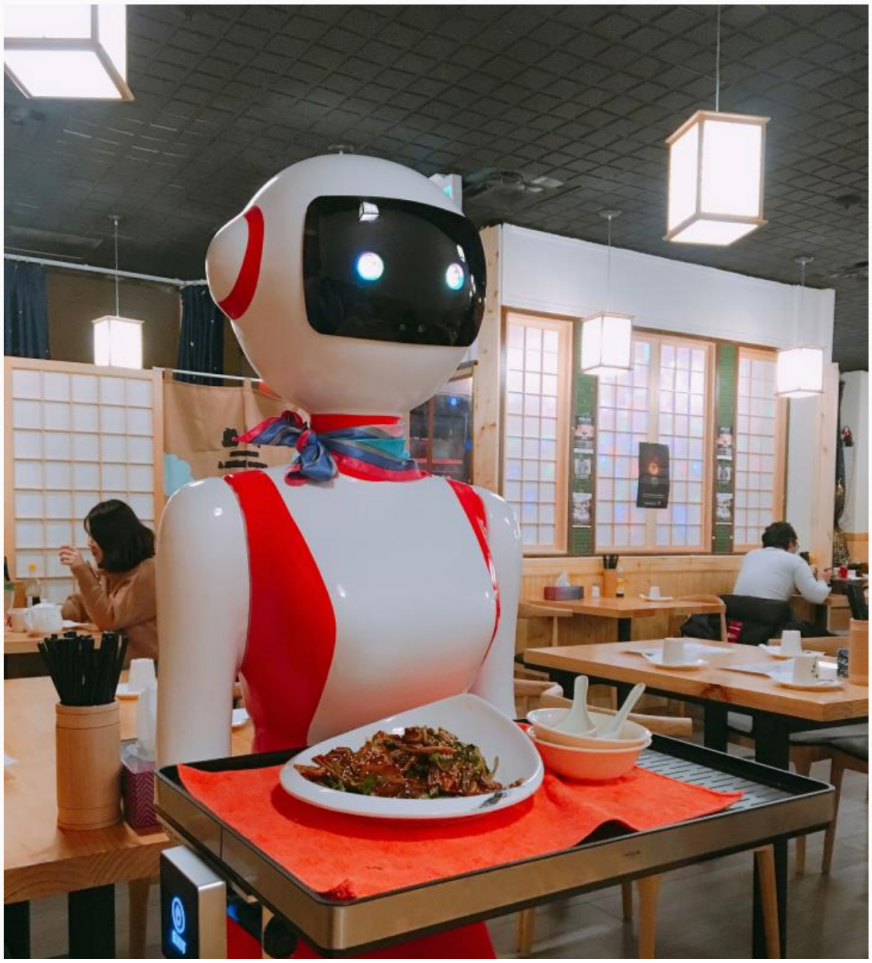
**Categories:** Food & Drink

On winter days when your body craves warmth, eating a meal, especially one with wonderfully spicy notes, can be incredibly enlivening. Szechuan (or Sichuan) cuisine, hailing from a province in the southwest of China, has become synonymous with scorching heat from chili peppers and the distinctive Sichuan pepper, but its flavours have the potential for great subtlety.

Here are some fabulous Szechuan restaurants in Richmond where you'll be reaching for your water while simultaneously being blown away by the complex interplay of the ingredients.

## CHENG DU XIAO CHI

At **Cheng Du Xiao Chi** (#150 - 4160 No. 3 Road), robots (yes, robots!) efficiently bring your dishes tableside and then head back to the kitchen once you've signaled that they can get back to work. Besides the robot draw, the restaurant specializes in the cuisine of Chengdu, named the UNESCO City of Gastronomy in 2010. The dishes are on the fiery side but also have great textural play to make them unique and interesting.



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*One of the robot servers at Cheng Du Xiao Chi. | Photo: Tara Lee*

A plate of spicy marinated pig's ears features extra flavour notes from cilantro and sesame seeds, while *liangfen* or jelly noodles (usually made with a bean starch) in chili oil have a lovely slippery texture. If you want a showstopper dish, go for the boiled fish (*shui zhu yu*) that arrives in a massive bowl filled with broth and tons of chopped red chili peppers. The slices of fish have delicate flavour and a velvety quality from a cornstarch coating. Other dishes worth ordering include *kung pao* chicken, grilled lamb with cumin, and dumplings in chili oil (as part of Richmond's Dumpling Trail).

*Water-boiled fish from Cheng Du Xiao Chi. | Photo: Tara Lee*

## SICHUAN KUNGFU FISH

There are many other Richmond restaurants, such as **Sichuan Kungfu Fish** (**Aberdeen Centre**, #2788 - 4151 Hazelbridge Way), that offer takes on the classic water-boiled fish. This modern space allows you to pick your broth (such as sauerkraut, Sichuan peppercorn, or fisherman's soup), your seafood (such as tilapia or halibut steaks) and then various add-in ingredients, like udon, kelp, and squid rings. The dish is ideal for sharing among a few people, or you can go at lunchtime for an individual-sized portion. The restaurant, a Richmond location of a Chinese chain, serves many other standout dishes like fried chili geoduck, spicy hot pot tofu, and pork belly strips with garlic dip.

*Customize your lunch at Sichuan Kungfu Fish. | Photo: Tara Lee*

You can also visit **Too Two Sauerkraut Fish** (#101 - 4940 No. 3 Road), which specializes in water-boiled fish—in this case with pickled mustard greens for a lip smacking hot-and-sour taste experience. Most of the other Szechuan restaurants in Richmond have a version of water-boiled fish on their menus, so you can try all of them and compare.

## SZECHUAN HOUSE

This seemingly modest food court stand in **Aberdeen Centre** is not one to be overlooked. A family operation, **Szechuan House** (#3080 - 4151 Hazelbridge Way) clearly puts love and authentic culinary knowledge into their cooking. The menu features 15 options, including Szechuan cold noodles, mapo tofu, and cold spicy chicken. Szechuan House is part of Richmond's **Dumpling Trail** for good reason.

*Dumplings from Szechuan House. | Photo: Tara Lee*

Not only do they cook delicious spicy wontons and wonton soup, but their Chengdu spicy dumplings filled with chives and pork are excellent. Ask for the sauce on the side if you want to control the heat with a modest drizzle. You can't go wrong with the *dan dan* noodles, which come with a generous portion of noodles topped with rich ground pork. The dish hits you with flavours of garlic, Sichuan peppercorn, and chili, as well as a vinegary tang that cuts the spicy notes.

*Dan dan noodles from Szechuan House. | Photo: Tara Lee*

## HAIDILAO AND MANY MORE HOT POT RESTAURANTS

There is no shortage of Szechuan hot pot restaurants in Richmond, many that are Canadian locations of successful Chinese restaurant empires that span the globe. Some of them originate from Chongqing, which although technically no longer a part of Sichuan province (it ceased to be in 1997), boasts cuisine that still forms a subset of Sichuan cooking and shares many of its flavour profiles.

The most elevated Szechuan hot pot restaurant is **HaiDiLao** (#200 - 5890 No. 3 Road), which provides entertainment like dancing and board games, an impressively large sauce bar, and premium ingredients like hand pulled noodles and an assorted seafood platter. Other hot pot places include **Liuyishou Hot Pot** (#150 - 4731 Garden City Road), **Yuan's Chuan Chuan Xiang** (Aberdeen Centre, 4151 Hazelbridge Way) that specializes in skewered raw ingredients that make for easy cooking, and **Xiaolongkan Chinese Fondue** (8320 Alexandra Road). Each of these hot pot restaurants gives you the option of ordering their spicy soup base, which can clear the sinuses and warm the belly on a wintry evening.

*Enjoy hot pot at Yuan's Chuan Chuan Xiang. | Photo: Tara Lee*

## MISS FU IN CHENG DU

This popular Chinese chain recently launched their first Canadian location in Richmond (#2130 - 8391 Alexandra Road), and word has quickly spread. Unless you want to wait for an hour or two, plan to visit **Miss Fu in Cheng Du** on a weekday night when the restaurant is quieter. Order a winter melon tea or plum juice, and then get set to feast on copious pre-cooked skewers that arrive in a spicy soup (the mild would be just right for heat newbies but you can dial it up to medium or hot, if you wish). Skewers are only 69 cents each, so you can go to town ordering a bunch, such as wood ear mushrooms, spicy pork belly, spiced beef,

potato, cauliflower, and quail eggs. Break up your gorging on skewers with bites from side dishes like spicy clams, chicken feet, and spicy pork ribs.

*Skewers and spicy soup at Miss Fu in Cheng Du. | Photo: Tara Lee*

## SZECHUAN DELICIOUS

Now at a new location, **Szechuan Delicious** (#125 - 8291 Alexandra Road) features their familiar and extensive menu of spicy dishes in an elegant room with gold brocade covered chairs. Cold dishes include beef tripe in special hot sauce, a cucumber salad, as well as shredded potato salad with green onion and red chili peppers. And the Szechuan sliced beef comes sizzling from the wok, with bean sprouts, green onions, celery, and plenty of chili oil. It's perfect eaten with a bowl of rice to neutralize its blistering heat. Other dishes that might tempt on the menu include stir-fried cabbage with chili peppers, *kung pao* shrimp with peanuts, and Szechuan-style cold noodles.

*Sliced beef from Szechuan Delicious. | Photo: Tara Lee*

## CHENGDU SPICY RESTAURANT

The red design accents of this small restaurant should tell you right away that your tongue will be burning after eating many of their items. The menu at **Chengdu Spicy Restaurant** (8391 Alexandra Road) features Chengdu specialties, like *maocai*, a type of ready-made hot pot that gives you a choice of broth (spicy or green chili) and a selection of add-ins, like squid balls, fatty beef slices, and dried bamboo shoots. They also have plenty of dumpling selections, like *tan tan* wonton with peanut sauce, as well as comforting noodle dishes, such as twice-cooked pork noodles and hot and sour vermicelli. *Guo kui*, a flatbread filled with ingredients, like spicy pork with potato, is a satisfying handheld snack.

*Warm up with spicy noodle soup at Chengdu Spicy. | Photo: Tara Lee*

There's no shortage of Szechuan restaurants in Richmond that can help make a cold day flaming hot. And because they all have their own takes on classic dishes, each restaurant offers a unique eating adventure!

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