



With a back-to-the-roots concept, Hakkaiza serves hearty sharing platters from around the Asian continent that are fiercely true to the food's origin.

Bringing Asian food back to its roots in the heart of Oslo

Within a year of opening its doors, Hakkaiza has already established itself as a breath of fresh air on the Norwegian capital's dining scene. Serving up hearty dishes from all over Asia – with a twist, but still fiercely true to its origin – the Asian eating house is the perfect place to kick back and share good food and drinks with friends, while enjoying the stunning views of the Oslofjord.

By Linn Skjei Bjørnsen | Photos: Hakkaiza

Tucked away at the tip of the picturesque harbour of Sørenga in Oslo, just steps away from one of Europe's top ten seawater swimming pools (according to *the Guardian*), you will find Hakkaiza – an Asian eating house that is a little different from the rest.

True to origin

Drawing on his multicultural background, travels around Asia, and childhood memories of food, owner and general manager Hung Duong wanted to create a restaurant where the dishes are as authentic and true to their roots as those you would get served in a

street restaurant in Vietnam, a Chinese dumpling parlour in Beijing or a traditional Japanese izakaya in Tokyo. "A lot of the Asian food served in the west is very Americanised. Ingredients are often swapped or omitted, leaving the dish unrecognisable compared to the original recipe. The Asian kitchen is so varied, so it's a shame to see most Asian restaurants serving up the exact same dishes. This is where we aim to be different. We want to bring it back to the roots while also showing diversity," Duong explains.

With a seasonal menu that changes frequently, Hakkaiza brings back ingredi-

ents and ways of cooking that have been largely forgotten. Its rib-eye wok, for example, uses breadsticks as one of the main ingredients, while chicken schmaltz is added for flavour to the menu's small plate broccolini. All the food is made fresh and from scratch in the restaurant daily, using local and seasonal ingredients whenever possible.

Duong grew up in a food-loving family, with a Chinese father and a mother of Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian descent, and most of his childhood memories are connected to food. "I remember the first time I ever cooked. I was about two or three years old, making rice with my grandfather in Vietnam. As a child, I was exposed to foods from all over the world. My mother loved the Indian culture, Bollywood movies and Indian cuisine. It is these memories that sparked the desire to create a restaurant that showcases all the diverse flavours

of the continent,” says Duong. Over the past few years he has travelled all over Asia, from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan to Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, to discover new flavours.

No limitations

Hakkaiza takes its name from the two words ‘Hakka’, which refers to the Hakka-Chinese people, and ‘izakaya’, a type of informal Japanese gastro pub serving drinks and food to share. The choice of name is hardly a coincidence: “The name is inspired by my background. My family is Hakka-Chinese, while our concept is based around a traditional izakaya. Originally, an izakaya was mainly a place to drink, but the concept has evolved over the years and today there are no rules or limitations. It is a social dining place that doesn’t constrain itself to a geographical area or one type of cuisine, but instead

serves everything from sushi to western-inspired food,” Duong explains.

Walking into the 90-seat restaurant in one of Oslo’s most booming areas, you immediately get the feeling of being transported to a backyard restaurant in a bustling Asian metropolis. With exposed industrial ceilings, an open floorplan and a six-and-a-half-metre-long open kitchen similar to those you can find in Asian street restaurants, there is little doubt that Hakkaiza puts a great deal of effort into not only its food, but also its visual representation. This has paid off: the acclaimed *Luxury Travel Guide* recently crowned the one-year-old eatery Chinese Restaurant of The Year.

Creating and sharing experiences

Despite being in the restaurant business for years, Duong never really thought

about starting his own restaurant and Hakkaiza was in many ways born by chance. At a time when the oil crisis hit the Norwegian economy hard and finding work was a challenge, Duong realised that many people were probably in the same situation as him. “I thought, why not work for myself? Why not try and create work opportunities instead of applying to be employed by someone else?” he says, adding: “I didn’t start my own business thinking I’m going to make a lot of money; instead, my motivation has always been to create something not only for myself, but also for others. Because that’s what food is truly about – sharing it with others. I want to share my experiences with others, both guests and employees.”

Web: www.hakkaiza.no



Left: Located at the tip of Sørenga Harbour, one of Oslo’s most booming areas, Hakkaiza offers stunning views of the fjord. **Right:** The 90-seat restaurant space is inspired by Asian backyard restaurants and offers an informal setting to enjoy good food and drink. **Bottom right:** Hakkaiza was recently named Chinese Restaurant of The Year by the *Luxury Travel Guide*.