

《Local hawker center claims Michelin Star》

Michelin-starred meals are often associated with a candle-lit environment, up scale ingredients and an expensive bill. But in the recently-launched Singapore Michelin Guide, food enthusiasts can enjoy the world's cheapest one-star meal at a local hawker center. Prices are as low as 2 Singapore dollars.



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Chan Hon Meng has been cooking up his soya sauce chicken for more than 20 years. He has nailed the recipe that he learned from a Hong Kong chef and perfected it over the years. He knew that the Michelin Star standard is the ultimate recognition a restaurant or chef can achieve, but he never thought that one day the star would be bestowed on his restaurant.

"No I never thought of Michelin. All I think of is how to run my business, to have more customers and better business. How to expand the market. That's as far as my imagination could reach," said Chan.

More customers and better business—these are the guarantees for a shop that has won a Michelin Star. Chan used to sell a 100 chickens a day, now he sells 180. He does not have the means to expand the shop yet, so he has to

work longer hours in order to turn away fewer customers.

In its first edition for Singapore, Michelin embraced the local hawker scene. Praising it as a national icon that plays a central role in the daily lives of so many Singaporeans, Michelin awarded two stars to two local hawker stalls; it also included a selection of hawker centres in its 2016 Singapore guide.

Local food blogger Leslie Tay has spent almost a decade roaming around Singapore in search of the best hawker food, and he is thrilled that Michelin has put Singapore hawker food on the map of global gastronomy.

“His stall is definitely one of the many stalls in Singapore that where the hawker is really passionate about cooking and very passionate about producing a dish that is of superb quality. So they only found two, I think next year in the 2017 edition of the Michelin guide we hope to see more,” Tay said.

Chan now has the pressure of retaining the Michelin star. But he says he will always put customers first, because at the end of the day, the anonymous Michelin inspectors can well be in line waiting to be served.

“Michelin is a customer. They come and try your food. If they think your food is getting better, then I think you can keep the star,” said Chan.

Being a hawker is tough work, it involves long hours in unbearable heat, and often with little profit margins. But chefs like Chan have been doing that for decades or even generations. Winning a Michelin star might be a total surprise for Chan, but doing his very best to satisfy his customers has always been his dream.

