

Hong Kong's best... Crème brûlée

Few things beat the sensation of cracking through the burnt sugar of a crème brûlée to get to the silky custard beneath. Natasha Bagnell tours the town to round up the best versions of this quintessential French dessert...

Paul Lafayet

Paul Lafayet is no stranger to desserts. Better known for its decadent macarons, these guys also serve up a mean crème brûlée. With its slightly singed caramel top and fragrant egg aroma, this light, textured version leaves a buttermilk taste on your palate long after the last spoonful. \$45. Various locations inc shop 1104B, 1/F, IFC Mall, 8 Finance St, Central, 2543 9800; paullafayet.com.

Passion

This petit French café in Wan Chai is a jewel of a bakery and the perfect spot to indulge your sweet tooth. It serves a wide selection of Danishes, cakes, macarons and more, but the brûlée tops the lot. Here, the dessert is delicate in texture and avoids being overly rich. For a more rustic flavour, Passion also sells a unusual chestnut version that's silky and aromatic. Talk about a sweet surprise! \$43. 74-78 Johnston Rd, Wan Chai, 2529 1311; passionbygd.com.

Le Gouter Bernadaud

Having both full service restaurants and the LGB brand of cafés and kiosks, this eatery serves a full menu loaded with knockout desserts. Bored of regular flavours? LGB have three variations of this classic – ginger and lime, coffee and Grand Marnier – each of which provides a tasty twist. Be adventurous and let your palate try something new. Just be aware you might want to sample all three. \$48. Shop G008-010, 280 Gloucester Rd, Causeway Bay, 2327 8225; legouter.com.

Bouchon Bistro

Bouchon Bistro is a quaint restaurant that stays true to traditional French style. With its variety of wine, main courses, desserts and Parisian chic it feels like you could be dining in the Latin Quarter. Naturally no trip to Paris would be complete without finishing your meal with a crème brûlée. Bouchon's version has a light, airy texture and just the right amount of sweetness, making this a well-balanced dessert. \$78. 49 Elgin St, Soho, 2525 9300; diningconcepts.com/bouchon.

Cocotte

Intimate atmosphere, seasonal ingredients and a quality dessert menu. Cocotte has all the hallmarks of an authentic French restaurant. Not to mention they bake up a vanilla crème brûlée that every Francophile would salivate over. The subtle taste of vanilla pairs perfectly with the egg custard filling, leaving a rich aftertaste that will have you scraping the bowl clean. \$88. 9 Shin Hing St, Central, 2568 8857; cocotte.hk.

Metropolitain Bistro de Paris

Fashioned with elements of a typical Paris Métro station, with an open terrace for people watching, this restaurant is as close to a roadside Parisian café as you can get. So naturally the menu makes room for a fantastic homemade crème brûlée. The light and crispy texture of Metropolitan's rendition is what makes this a city standout. Crack open the crispy layer of sugar and let delectable wafts of egg and custard fill your senses. \$60. 46 High St, Sai Ying Pun, 6271 6102; french-creations.com.

Open table Akrame Benallal



After receiving a Michelin star within a year of Akrame Hong Kong's opening, chef Akrame Benallal is back in town to launch the new spring menu of this eponymous restaurant and to announce the news of a new opening in June...

What is the secret to your success?

My first consideration is my customers' preferences, but after that it's my own style. The whole kitchen's focus has to be on the flavour of the food. There's no hiding what we put on the table. There are people out there who don't like my cuisine and I accept that. At the end of the day I can't please everyone but I believe I strike the right balance between customers' needs and what I want to create.

Your creations are very innovative. Where do you draw your inspirations from?

I started my career at 14 and I've been doing this for almost 20 years. I have a passion for what I do. I'm very curious by nature and all of my salary (as little as it was) when I was an apprentice went to trying new restaurants. Last time I was in Copenhagen I went to try out the steaks. No one invited me, but I was very curious about what the hype was about and by being curious I always find new things.

What's the concept behind your upcoming restaurant opening in early June?

I already have three Atelier Vivanda restaurants in Paris and I'm opening in Zurich, Brussels, London and Hong Kong. It's about good meat – beef – and potatoes. We have potato dauphine, dauphinoise and purée. Not frites. I don't like frites, it only tastes good straight after it's cooked and not after. So my new restaurant is a casual concept and it's simple.

Atelier Vivanda 9A Shp St, Wan Chai; ateliervivanda.com. (Opening in June).



Tools of the trade Gaggenuo Vario cooling system 400 series

Keep your cool this summer with this super high-end – and smart – refrigeration system by Gaggenuo. This fridge is as clever as it can get with cutting edge-technology such as stainless steel interiors, which, in combination with oxygen, helps neutralise odours. Some of the shelves can be motor-adjusted, so you can make room for that tall bottle of wine at the touch of a button. There's also a fresh cooling zone close to zero degrees, which keeps food fresh for twice as long compared to other fridges. The only thing setting you back would be the price, but with so many cool features there's no reason to let that stand in your way. \$28,000. Kitchen Infinity, 19/F, One Island South, 2 Heung Yip Rd, Wong Chuk Hang, 2870 1183; kih.com.hk.