

Multitude of Muslim eateries

The general perception that there is no halal food in Hong Kong is a fallacy.

By DALILAH IBRAHIM
dalilah@thestar.com.my

DESPITE being a shopping paradise, Hong Kong is hardly known to be a Muslim-friendly destination when it comes to halal food.

However, Hong Kong is no stranger to Islam – its Muslim heritage dates back to the late 19th century when Muslim Chinese traders began their settlement on the island.

To date, there are over 80,000 Muslims in Hong Kong and the existence of four mosques and an Islamic centre is an acknowledgement of the fast-growing community.

The general perception that there is no halal food in Hong Kong is a fallacy but one might have problems finding the locations of halal restaurants since there are millions of shops on this former British colony. With its whopping property prices, one could just miss that tiny restaurant (among the rows of shops selling all kinds of branded goods, including Esprit at half price) with a capacity of not more than 20 guests at one sitting and the halal logo displayed on the glass door.

So it was a very refreshing side of Hong Kong that this Muslim saw when she joined the quest of celebrity chef Zamzani Abdul Wahab and his crew to find Muslim-friendly restaurants recently.

Together with the crew of Unomedia Sdn Bhd's director Rahila Ali, assistant director Mohd Razif Kamal, cameramen Mansor Taib and Hamzah Talib, make-up artiste Tona Nordin, Chef Zam (as he is fondly known as) took Hong Kong by storm when he knocked on practically all the doors of restaurants and shops selling halal food.

The trip, which came under the Hong Kong Tourism Board's media familiarisation tour, saw the shooting of three episodes of travel and cooking programme *Serimas... Selera Dunia*. Hosted by Chef Zam, the show is currently airing over RTM2 every Sunday at 5pm.

The group left KLIA contently on a halal note, since the airway sponsor – Cathay Pacific – provides halal food to its passengers via KLIA to any of its destination. On top of that, Cathay Pacific also owns Cathay Pacific Catering Services (CPCS), which is one of the world's largest flight kitchens in Hong Kong specialising in Japanese, halal and kosher cuisines.

The three-hour flight is barely felt, especially with the various in-flight shows to choose from, including box office movies. Cathay Pacific, which now provides e-facilities for online booking at www.cathaypacific.com.my, flies three times a day from KLIA to Hong Kong and daily from Penang to Hong Kong.

During the six-day trip, the crew also got a chance to sample some of its best halal dishes offered in the sky such as *biryani* rice, lamb curry and *naan* bread.

The group arrived on a positive note and checked into Kowloon



Hong Kong star Maria Cordero showing Chef Zam where to look for halal meat in Hong Kong.



Cold noodles with seven sauces, a speciality at the Kung Tak Lam Shanghai Vegetarian Cuisine restaurant on Peking Road in Tsim Sha Tsui.

Hotel in the shopping district of Tsim Sha Tsui.

Perhaps the wisest thing to do for Muslims arriving in Hong Kong for the first time is to visit the Masjid Ammar and Osman Ramju Sadiq Islamic Centre located at Oi Kwan Road in Wan Chai.

Apart from getting information on prayer times, activities relating to the Muslim community and recommendations on the various halal restaurants available, this is the place to be to sample one of the best dim sum in town.

Patrons could also order various types of fried rice and noodles, and this writer strongly recommends

the shrimp fried rice or the ginger beef noodle to fill you up before a day of shopping. The prices are also very reasonable.

If you're in Kowloon area, head on to the Islam Food restaurant located at Lung Kong Road where they serve tasty and authentic Chinese dishes.

Don't forget to sample its beef pockets – ground meat shaped like a small burger cooked in a special sauce and wrapped in a layer of flour like the *murtabak* here. Just be careful because the gravy can be steaming hot when you take that first bite.

For those looking for other types



Dim sum served at the canteen of Masjid Ammar and Osman Ramju Sadiq Islamic Centre at Oi Kwan Road in Wan Chai.



Islam Food restaurant at Lung Kong Road, Kowloon, is famed for its beef pockets.

of cuisines, there are numerous middle-eastern and Indian restaurants, which are halal. Among them is the Ebenezer Kebab and Gaylord Restaurant (Indian), located in Tsim Sha Tsui.

For the show *Serimas... Selera Dunia*, the crew was also taken to Habibi Café (Egyptian-Mediterranean cuisine) to sample the food along with Hong Kong star Maria Cordero.

Cordero, a singer and actress, is also a Muslim and knows her way around Hong Kong, especially the halal spots. She took the crew to the wet market in Wan Chai for halal meat and its food court to sample halal roasted Peking duck – Hong Kong's signature dish.

However, if you miss nasi lemak, head on to Shadowman Cyber Café on Ashley Road in Tsim Sha Tsui where they also serve western and Chinese food. This joint apparently is quite popular among the Malaysian and Singapore airline crew members.

Alternatively, if you're in a place like Ngong Ping village in Lantau Island (where the world's largest seated outdoor bronze Tian Tan

Buddha statue is located), you can opt for a vegetarian restaurant instead.

The vegetarian restaurants are strictly meat-free and although the menu would read as vegetarian chicken or shrimp, they are actually made of gluten, mushroom or other types of vegetables.

The crew was taken to Kung Tak Lam Shanghai Vegetarian Cuisine restaurant and sampled its famous cold noodle with seven sauces, among other dishes.

However, when in doubt, Muslims could always pay a visit to Masjid Ammar. There are three other mosques in Hong Kong – the Shelley Street Mosque, Kowloon Mosque and Islamic Centre in Tsim Sha Tsui and Cape Collinson Mosque in Chai Wan.

For more information on the restaurants recommended by the Hong Kong Tourism Board, you can visit www.discoverhongkong.com/eng/travelneeds/faith/mk_faith_isla.html.

So if you decide to visit Hong Kong, food is already taken care of. Now you can concentrate on your shopping and sightseeing!