

# Queen of Cuisine

To say Malaysians are obsessed with food would be something of an understatement. With the world shrinking, foods from all over are increasingly being found in every corner but few places have such an integral variety as Malaysia. The plethora of eating options available here is the result of a perfect storm of history, geography and sociology. Almost all Asian cuisines are amply catered for along with a liberal sprinkling of quality western options too. Much has and will be written by many people putting themselves forward as the last word in all things foodie in Malaysia but few have quite the authority of Fay Khoo. Fewer are as obsessed and fewer still have actually put in the leg work of this dynamic gourmand.

Fay recently launched her latest "Best Eats KL" which features around 1,000 different KL eating establishments ranging from the most humble chicken and rice joint right up to top five-star tucker. Fay and her team have scoured the city cataloguing and evaluating every bowl of rice, every bowl of soup and every pizza and steak. Once the initial trawl was complete they went back to the beginning and did it again checking their original findings. The book is exhaustive and should probably be standard issue for all foodies living in KL. It's also mighty handy for those visiting. There's a related Website called [www.theqguides.com](http://www.theqguides.com) which allows folks to book online and receive points, the more times they use this free booking service, the more points they accrue and these points can later be cashed in



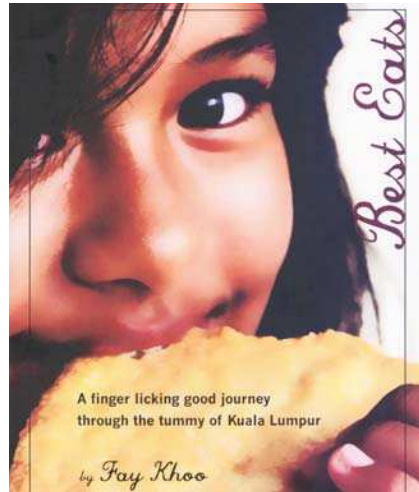
for free meals. "The thing is here in KL you can sit on a stool at the street side and eat a plate of chicken rice with no air con and it'll maybe cost you RM4.5 and take 20 minutes or you can dine in a fine restaurant with a view and you can take three to four hours savouring every minute, it's all here," says Fay who is also a TV presenter, publisher, writer, yachtsperson, kickboxing, piano playing multi-linguist. Fay even produces a range of sauces, Miss Khoo's Asian Deli, that can be found in such respected purveyors of fine food as Harvey Nichols and here in Mercato, Isetan and Jarrod and Rawlins. Her first food guide book was published in the late nineties. Fay describes herself as a "gastronomic chameleon" – meaning she'll eat anything, and as a "universal pig" she loves pork, more on that later.

On returning to KL after studying in Australia, Penangite Fay was delighted to discover that the capital had become a "world class food destination".

"Even the hawker scene had become more vibrant, there was an increased pride in the quality of the hawker food perhaps in part brought about by a mini-boom time that had drawn a lot of people from all over the country with many bringing their own special dishes."

I foolishly put it to Fay that a dish like chicken rice hardly needs much analysis – it's very simple, it could hardly be simpler – but Fay puts me right. "You see the thing with this dish it's like a white shirt, there are white shirts and then there are white shirts. Sometimes it's the simplest things that are the hardest to get just right. The rice, the stock the rice is cooked in, the sauce, the chicken, the chilli, to those who know, it's incredibly hard to get it right and those who do are celebrated."

Being from Penang, Fay is currently working on a Penang guide, she is wont to compare things to her native state. "In Penang food outlets are staunchly price driven and the survival rates for



new starts are pretty low. There are still a lot of 'maw and pop' places in Penang, there's a lot less franchising." This is a good thing, according to Fay. "Often when a place gets something right then it's immediately duplicated and the next thing you see the same places in every mall, it becomes like the English high street when you know exactly what you can expect and that's boring."

The global credit crunch has been a good thing for the F&B scene in KL, according to Fay: "The previous eight years had been comparatively boom years and lots of people had a go at opening a restaurant but many of these were quite laissez faire. The credit crunch has weeded a lot of these out, those with shaky foundations are now gone and only those delivering quality remain which is good for the customer."

So what of Fay's favourite places to eat in KL? Well it comes down to which places do the best pork. Famous Seremban Favourites found in Sunway is hailed as one of her favourites on account of the sublime char siew. Another is Bukit Bintang's Meng Kee where reportedly the best char siew in KL is to be found. "Best Eats" is available at all good book stores.