

HK's dining scene shows resilience to change

Once-thriving traditional eateries are closing amid rising costs and shifting habits, but innovation and new players are reshaping the city's food culture. **Gang Wen** reports.

On a humid weekday morning, Zoe Au-yeung, a Hong Kong resident in her 30s, joined a long, winding line on Tsuen Wan's Hoi Pa Street, eager to try the HK\$15 (\$1.91) pancake burger — a signature offering of Tai Hing Bakery.

The air was thick with the aroma of freshly baked pastries, delighting the waiting crowd and enticing passersby. Tai Hing's pancake burgers and HK\$1 mini egg tarts have generated a social media buzz — an astute move for the bakery, which has been serving the community since 1976, helping it stand out among thousands of local small shops.

"I come here almost every week for the pancake burger," said Au-yeung. "It smells so good — hot and fresh out of the oven. You usually have to queue, but it's worth it."

Tai Hing and its loyal patrons have found a recipe for survival during a challenging period for Hong Kong's food-and-beverage sector, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises rooted in local tradition.

Roughly 200 restaurants have closed across Hong Kong in the first half of 2025, including established names such as Taipan Bread & Cakes, and Ocean Empire Food Shop.

For many locals, the wave of closures signifies more than just the loss of eateries; it threatens a piece of the city's cultural fabric. "These old diners and bakeries are part of our collective memory," said Liang Muyan, a dim sum enthusiast in her 20s. "I hope the industry doesn't blindly follow trends, but preserves the emotional value and tradition of Hong Kong food."

Simon Wong Ka-wo, president of the Hong Kong Federation of Restaurants and Related Trades, cited soaring rents, severe labor shortages, and a shrinking local consumer base for the reasons behind the closures.

"Without urgent support and innovation, we risk losing not just businesses, but a vital part of Hong Kong's culinary heritage," he warned.

Multifaceted challenges

According to the Hong Kong Small and Medium Enterprises Association, operating costs now consume 68 percent of SMEs' revenues, 15 percent higher than pre-pandemic levels.

Even iconic brands like Tsui Wah — a staple of Hong Kong's *cha chaan teng* culture — are feeling the pinch.

The chain, which went public in 2012 and operates 31 outlets across the city, reported a 5 percent drop in annual revenue to HK\$906 million as of March.

Chinese mainland revenues fared even worse, declining 14 percent to HK\$371 million, following the closure of four outlets, leaving 32 remaining.

Ho TY, marketing and public relations officer of Tsui Wah Group, highlighted the challenges the company faces due to high rents and labor costs, adding that the company has implemented strict cost-control measures and focused on operational efficiency.

"Expanding delivery services, introducing self-service options, and boosting electronic payment systems all help increase sales per visit and offset fixed costs," Ho said.

He said the company will evaluate whether to further adjust numbers

of its outlets in response to market conditions.

Hong Kong's F&B sector also faces setbacks from a slower-than-expected recovery in tourism and shifting consumer patterns. In 2024, Hong Kong recorded 45 million visitor trips, showing steady post-pandemic growth, but still lagging behind the 65 million trips in 2018. The forecast for 2025 is around 49 million.

Last year, 34 million trips, or about three-quarters of all visits, were made by mainland tourists, whose per capita spending has decreased by around 30 percent compared with 2018.

Meanwhile, the sector is losing ground with local diners. In 2024, Hong Kong residents made 81.91 million trips to the mainland — an increase of over 50 percent from 2023. It is estimated that Hong Kong residents spent in total HK\$55.7 billion (\$7 billion) on the mainland, with an average expenditure of HK\$680 per trip, excluding cross-border transportation costs.

In response to these emerging challenges, the special administrative region government rolled out special loans under the SME Financing Guarantee Scheme, and funding for branding and marketing, but the effects have waned amid renewed difficulties. "Loan guarantees help with cash flow, but they don't address fundamental issues like high rents or the digital skills gap," said Algeron Yau Ying-wah, secretary for commerce and economic development.

"Hong Kong lags behind in digitalization, especially in the F&B sector. Many traditional brands lack strong online marketing capabilities



Left: Tai Hing Bakery promotes its signature pancake burger on social media. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Right: Residents read the closure announcement posted in the Taipan Bread & Cakes branch in North Point on June 24. The bakery chain has closed all its stores after more than four decades in the business, citing "unforeseeable and irresistible" forces. ADAM LAM / CHINA DAILY

ties or innovative sales channels like livestreaming, which are common on the mainland."

Against the tide

Local brands are experimenting with various survival strategies, including automation, digitalization, and new menu concepts aimed at attracting targeted groups, such as younger diners and the growing elderly population.

On July 22, some outlets of food giant Maxim's began offering Gentlemeal, a new product line designed for people with swallowing difficulties. Developed to replace traditional liquid diets, Gentlemeal features both Chinese and Western dishes, aiming to enrich nutritional options for the elderly and patients, and ultimately, improve their quality of life.

"Senior consumers have strong spending power, but few restaurants cater to their needs," said Yau, pointing to opportunities within the "silver economy".

Wong agrees, saying, "The indus-

try's survival depends on its ability to adapt, embrace new technology, and preserve what makes Hong Kong unique."

Amid the turbulence, many new industry players continue to open in Hong Kong, reflecting their optimism about the city's dining scene, and leveraging the city's role as a gateway to the international market.

Although 847 shops in Hong Kong have closed in the past six months, 786 new ones have opened, indicating continuous market vitality, according to a research report by real estate agent Midland.

Mainland restaurant chains are among those seizing the opportunities. Laomaque, a Hunan cuisine restaurant brand, launched its first restaurant outside the mainland in Hong Kong's Wan Chai district on May 13, marking a strategic expansion.

"Establishing in Hong Kong aligns with our core strategy to root deeply in the Greater Bay Area," said Laomaque CEO Dai Yong, highlighting

the city's role as a testing ground for the brand's regional ambitions. "The move came in response to repeated requests from Hong Kong visitors, a clear sign that cross-border demand is fueling mainland brands' localization efforts."

Guangzhou's Fung Yuen Cantonese-style chicken pot brand, with over 20 branches in major mainland cities, opened its first Hong Kong branch last month, aiming to use the city as a base for Southeast Asia expansion.

"Hong Kong's open market and international standards make it the ideal springboard for many mainland brands to promote Chinese cuisine to the world," said Xie Tian, chairman of Hong Kong Fung Yuen Yezhen Catering Management Co Ltd.

"We want to bring innovative Cantonese flavors and dining experiences to local consumers, and leverage Hong Kong's strategic location to reach global markets," he said.

Huang Yawen contributed to the story.

GBA Briefs

Hong Kong

Vehicles to ditch advanced bookings for midweek trips

Effective Sept 1, vehicles registered under the Northbound Travel for Hong Kong Vehicles program can cross into Guangdong without prior reservation every Tuesday and Wednesday, except during specified peak travel periods, such as on public holidays and the days prior, in Hong Kong and on the Chinese mainland, as well as on toll-free days on the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge.

Hong Kong's Transport Department said it'll soon post a six-month schedule of confirmed bookings-free Tuesdays and Wednesdays on its official website, with updates to be made on the first calendar day of each month.

Macao

Passenger trips at border port surpass 100 million

Less than four years since its September 2021 opening, the Qingmao Port linking the Macao Special Administrative Region with Zhuhai has logged over 100 million inbound and outbound passenger trips, according to official data released on Aug 4.

Cementing its role as the second-busiest checkpoint between Macao and Guangdong province after Gongbei Port, Qingmao — a pedestrian-only land crossing — handled 16.3 percent of all passenger traffic between Zhuhai and the SAR last year. More than 20.78 million crossings were made in the first seven months of this year — an average of 98,000 trips daily and a 1.8 percent increase year-on-year.

Guangzhou

Smart connected vehicles industry makes progress

Guangzhou is pushing ahead as the nation's regional hub for smart connected vehicles — automobiles equipped with advanced technology that allows them to communicate with other cars, the internet, and external devices, enabling autonomous driving. The latest municipal figures showed that 17 companies in the Guangdong provincial capital have conducted autonomous driving tests covering a total of 1.3

million hours and 24.4 million kilometers.

Reflecting on the province's strategic push to develop automotive-grade sensors and enhance synergy between smart city infrastructure and intelligent connected vehicles, Guangzhou has doubled down by unveiling its 2025 autonomous driving action plan to facilitate policy formulation, project implementation, and scaled application.

Shenzhen

Boomtown's appeal to foreign investors grows

Shenzhen saw robust growth in foreign investment in the first half of this year, solidifying its position as one of China's top destinations for global capital.

The southern boomtown and technological hub recorded 5,581 newly established foreign-invested enterprises, representing 18.6 percent of the nation's total, and marking a 51.5 percent year-on-year increase. Notably, the number of new foreign enterprises in the medical and telecommunications sectors rose 85.2 percent and 60 percent respectively, with 113 and 635 new firms established in each sector.

Zhuhai

City launches long-distance logistics route for drones

The first long-distance drone logistics route in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area was launched in Zhuhai on July 30.

A drone carrying fresh seafood completed an 82.9-kilometer inter-city flight from Zhuhai's Tangjia Port to Suigang Terminal in Guangzhou, marking the inauguration of the Guangzhou-Zhuhai low-altitude corridor.

The unmanned aircraft traversed three cities — Zhuhai, Zhongshan and Guangzhou — in about 55 minutes, cutting delivery time by 60 percent, compared with traditional land transportation.

Foshan

World-class investment environment in the making

Foshan has launched the country's first prefecture-level investment promotion measures that are

set to take effect on Sept 1.

The measures systematically outline strategies for attracting, facilitating and providing safeguards for investments, with the aim of creating a world-class business environment through legal frameworks to boost investor confidence and drive high-quality development.

In the first half of this year, the city signed agreements for 391 projects that are each valued at over 100 million yuan (\$13.91 million), with a total investment of 199.118 billion yuan — a year-on-year increase of 5.24 percent.

Huizhou

City ranks fourth in nation's HI air quality rankings

Huizhou came in fourth in the national air quality rankings of 168 major cities conducted by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment from January to June.

In the first half of this year, the proportion of days with good air quality in Huizhou reached 96.1 percent, according to Huizhou's ecology and environment bureau.

The bureau said it will take further measures to curb ozone pollution and enhance dust control.

Dongguan

Integrated metro links to cut residents' commute time

Dongguan and Shenzhen are to fast-track regional integration with a trio of cross-city metro projects that could significantly shrink commuting time.

The project involves seamless rail links between Shenzhen and key areas in Dongguan, including Fenggang, Songshan Lake and Binhaiwan New District, cutting transfers via direct links, with Shenzhen's metro lines 10 and 11 to be linked with Dongguan's Line 3, and Line 6's spur line in Shenzhen to be connected with Dongguan's Line 1.

Zhongshan

Port records tourist boom in peak summer season

Since the start of the summer holidays last month, traffic at Zhongshan Passenger Port has gone up.

The port recorded more than 50,400 inbound and outbound trips in July alone — a 15 percent month-on-month growth, compris-

ing about 26,500 outbound journeys and 23,900 inbound visits.

As a vital maritime transport hub linking Guangdong province, Hong Kong and Macao, the port is one of the most convenient and busiest on the western shore of the Pearl River Estuary. It handles an average of over 1,600 passenger trips daily during the summer vacation — mostly tourists, those on study tours and family visits, and shoppers.

Jiangmen

Economy remains stable in first half, GDP up 2.7%

Jiangmen's economy remained generally stable in the first half of 2025, with its GDP reaching 194.26 billion yuan (\$27.04 billion), representing a year-on-year increase of 2.7 percent.

The added value of the city's tertiary industry amounted to 96.74 billion yuan, growing 3.6 percent and leading in overall growth. However, fixed-asset investment fell 27.4 percent year-on-year, with manufacturing investment down 36 percent.

Total retail sales of consumer goods hit 63.85 billion yuan — up 3 percent, indicating continued recovery in consumption, although the Consumer Price Index fell 0.6 percent year-on-year.

Zhaoqing

City leads province in foreign trade growth

Zhaoqing recorded Guangdong province's fastest foreign trade growth in the first half of this year, according to the latest customs data.

The city's total import and export value hit 20.83 billion yuan (\$2.89 billion) during the period — a robust 16.7 percent year-on-year increase. Exports rose 10.5 percent to 15.01 billion yuan, while imports surged 36.4 percent to 5.82 billion yuan.

In the first six months, Zhaoqing's trade with economies involved in the Belt and Road Initiative jumped 32.6 percent, surpassing 9.13 billion yuan and accounting for 43.8 percent of the city's total imports and exports, while trade with member states of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership climbed 30 percent to 7.57 billion yuan.



GBA makes strides in fostering green buildings

Green buildings is a term that refers to structures whose design, construction, operation, maintenance, renovation and demolition are all conducted in an environmentally responsible and resource-efficient manner throughout their entire life cycle. This approach has gained significant momentum in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, which aims to become a greener and more livable region.

Development of green buildings in Guangdong

Accumulated floor area of green buildings has doubled

Unit: square meters

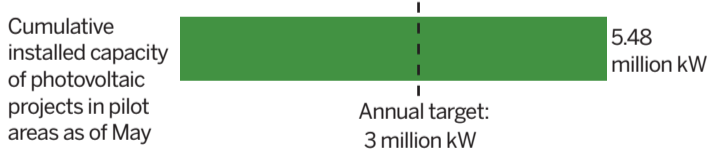


Green buildings accounted for over **95%** of newly constructed buildings in 2024.

'Photovoltaic + Building' pilot project

Launched in August 2024, the project integrates photovoltaic solar energy systems directly into buildings, covering roofs, facades, and other building surfaces.

25 counties, districts were selected as pilot areas.



Green-building initiatives in Hong Kong, Macao

In Hong Kong, as of December 2024, BEAM Plus* has seen

- Over **2,700** projects registered
- More than **8,700** buildings involved
- Over **92 million sq m** floor area covered

*HK's leading initiative that offers independent assessment of buildings' sustainability performance, with the aim to make them more efficient and emit less carbon.



Green Building Industry Alliance in Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

was established in August 2020 to advance the healthy development of the green-building sector in the region.