

China is the homeland of tea and the residents love their tea. They are also particular about the teaware they use for brewing or drinking tea. According to the Chinese, different tea sets affect the tea's flavour. The most popular teapot is Yixing (named after a city in the eastern Chinese province of Jiangsu), made of clay



Unlike most world cuisines, the soup is part of the last course in Chinese cuisine. According to the Chinese, soup helps in better digestion, especially after an entrée of pork or duck



PHOTOS: SANGHITA CHOUDHURY



The Sei Vui Restaurant is symbolic of the Chinese culture and its marriage with Indian ethos. It is frequented by the aficionado of Chinese delicacies

DATE WITH CHINESE KITCHEN

A CHINESE restaurant at Tiretti Bazaar has been satiating gourmets' appetite



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Once upon a time, Blackburn Lane in Tiretti Bazaar was the hub of the Chinese population working in Kolkata. There used to be hundreds of migrants who would come to the city looking to make money and build a life around the quiet bylanes of what is now the busiest hub.

Though there is a sizeable amount of Muslim population living in this part of Kolkata, the Chinese have lived in peace ever since the settlement started coming up in the early 20th century. The Sei Vui Restaurant, which opened in December last year, is

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located in a section of the Black Burn Lane building where there was once a dormitory, run by Voiling Club. The 19 Chinese families who are members of the club paid for the restoration.

Chen Yao Hua, the president of Voiling Club, says, "I hope that the adaptive reuse of the property would help sustain it and save it from being razed, a fate that has befallen many an old building in the city." Chen says that if people come

out in numbers to dine at Sei Vu, "it will help us generate more revenue and that will in turn help us maintain the property well."

The dormitory was meant for men who would come to the city for jobs leaving their families behind in China. Over the years, the demand for lodging at the dormitory dipped in keeping with the decline in Kolkata's Chinese population.

Over the past three decades, the dormitory hardly had any visitor. Dominic Lee of Pou Chong, which manufactures sauce and noodles, said there were over 10,000 Chinese in Tiretti Bazaar when he was a kid around 40 years ago. "Today, there are less than 1,000," he rues.

The rapid decline in the community's population has led many to fear about the fate of the few remaining Chinese structures in Tiretti Bazaar.

Chen of Voiling Club says a visit to the restaurant could be preceded by trips to the several Chinese churches in the area, on both sides of the New CIT Road. Yune Leong Futh Church, located in the same building as Sei Vui Restaurant, remains open between 8 am and noon. Yune and Leong are the two deities worshipped in the church and Futh means God in Chinese.

The church is in the western corner of the building and the restaurant in the eastern corner. Between the two, is a large hall with a centre table and chairs



around it — the office-cum-meeting place for members of Voiling Club.

A large charcoal portrait of Sun Yat-sen — "Chinese Mahatma", says Chen — adorns the eastern wall of the room. A community member says there are several Chinese clubs in Tiretti Bazaar. The building where Sei Vui Restaurant is located, houses another Chinese club — Hupeh Association.

Their head chef was with the famous Big Boss Restaurant and Asia House and is now rustling up Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese dishes here. If you drop in, then, don't forget to start with the Vietnamese salad (Rs 180 for vegetarian and Rs 200 for chicken). It's like a flavour bomb made with Thai sweet chilli sauce, basil, coriander and kafir lime leaves.

For the main course, try the Hokein noodles which is James' fave, a fusion

of hakka and Cantonese noodles. The Chinese like their noodles to be thick, long and slurpy and this ticks all those boxes. They have the usual dishes like *lat me kei chicken*, and those lemon and garlic gravy-based Chinese dishes which are popular with most Kolkatans.

No, don't think they are highly-priced. These are all very affordable in the Rs 180 to Rs 280 range. But we suggest you get a bit adventurous and try the unusual stuff here. Like the excellent range of squid dishes. If you like lamb, do try the *neua kae gra tiem* (Rs 180), which has strong flavours of black pepper and dark soy sauce with basil and fresh red chillies. They do a range of desserts including toffee banana with ice-cream (Rs 100) and the orange basil daarsan with vanilla ice cream (Rs 120).