



Source: The Temple House

Food & Drinks

The Most Extravagant Menus to Ring in Chinese New Year in the U.S.

Get ready for \$750 truffled Alaskan king crab and chicken soup with Viagra-like fungus.

By [Matthew Kronsberg](#)

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Five hundred lanterns. A mile-plus of twinkling red lights. Thousands and thousands of willow branches. And 1,000 paper pigs adorning the place. [The Temple House](#), a luxury hotel in Chengdu, China, has put in hundreds of hours of labor in advance of the Lunar New Year, an indication of the effort hospitality organizations devote to the holiday—and the returns they stand to gain.

Tuesday, Feb. 5 will kick off the Lunar New Year holiday, marking the transition from the Year of the Dog to the Year of the Pig. Festivities will continue through Feb. 19, when the Lantern Festival brings a close to the celebrations. During the holiday, hotels and restaurants worldwide mark the period with opulent decorations and decadent meals, all laden with symbolism, invariably for health and wealth. The price tag for Chinese consumers last year, including sales at restaurants and shopping malls, [was \\$146 billion](#).

“Chinese New Year is the Temple House’s top performing week of the year,” says Kurt Macher, general manager of the property. “We are expecting to grow these [2018] numbers this year, with an increase of around 8 percent to 10 percent.”

Those numbers exceed overall projections made by Ctrip, China’s largest online travel agency in its Travel Prediction Report for 2019 Chinese New Year. “Chinese people are expected to spend more than \$74.2 billion (around 500 billion yuan) on domestic tourism during the holiday this year,” a slightly greater than 5 percent jump over last year’s \$70.5 billion (475 billion yuan), and an estimate that doesn’t factor in retail sales.



Shoppers purchase Chinese sausages and cured meats at a food market ahead of the Lunar New Year in Shanghai. *Photographer: Qilai Shen/Bloomberg*



At Wing Lei in Las Vegas, \$268 black chicken soup is on offer for the holiday. *Photographer: Jeff Green*

America's hospitality industry is becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of going big for the Lunar New Year as well. Mandarin Oriental properties in Washington, Miami, and Boston have deployed Rolls-Royce's first SUV, the Cullinan, in lucky red for guests to celebrate the holiday. At restaurants, the new year means splurging on special holiday menus and pull-out-the-stops dishes. Each day, Wing Lei at the Wynn Las Vegas goes through around 300 jiao zi dumplings—whose shape is likened to gold ingots, symbolizing prosperity. The restaurant also offers \$268 bowls of double-boiled black chicken soup with cordyceps, a very pricey type of Himalayan fungus that is thought to have Viagra-like virility powers.

At Crustacean in Beverly Hills, the \$198 holiday menu includes an “8-hour massaged suckling pig” with “good luck” sticky red rice, green onion confit, and truffle ponzu. At RedFarm on New York's Upper West Side, dumplings generally average four for \$16. The holiday menu features a \$20 pair of black truffle chicken soup dumplings and—more spectacular—an eight-pound Alaskan king crab with truffled cauliflower sauce for \$750. Nearby, at Atlas Kitchen, a recently opened, art-inspired, modern Chinese restaurant, special dishes include udon noodles with crumbles of golden fried dough and foie gras for \$48. (Numerologically, 48 symbolizes a lifetime of wealth, while the long noodles represent long life.). In Midtown at Hakkasan, the \$128 prix fixe menu boasts such items as wok-fried lobster with spinach and lily bulb. That is, if you can get a table.



Deluxe roast suckling pig, part of the \$198 menu at Crustacean, in Los Angeles. Source: *Crustacean*



At Atlas, udon gets dressed up with foie gras. Source: *Atlas Kitchen*

“In New York, the spike to a regular busy week is 9 percent,” says Gert Kopera, Hakkasan Group’s executive vice president of global restaurants, regarding the relative increase in bookings. “In Las Vegas, it’s a 10 to 12 percent spike. And in San Francisco, it would be 37 percent—although in San Francisco, we are chock-a-block every day. Instead of the first diners coming in at 5 p.m, they come at 3 p.m., so dinner starts at 3 p.m. and ends at midnight.”

Do extra revelers bring prosperity to the restaurant? “That’s easy,” says Koper. “The answer is no. People do spend more because they drink more. But we spend much more. We spend more on uniforms. On decorations. We spend more on the macarons. But we do it for the party.”

Indeed, from a reputation standpoint, a high-end Chinese restaurant such as Hakkasan can’t afford not to participate and can use the opportunity to double-down on its brand. The delicate French cookies that close out a meal in place of fortune cookies are indicative of the flash that helps makes the holiday such a hot ticket. The restaurant group hires notable figures to write fortunes for the cookies at each of its 12 worldwide locations. In New York, this year’s author is *Sex and the City* creator Candace Bushnell (“Every woman needs not just a room with a view, but her own penthouse that she bought with her own money”); London has novelist Will Self (“You are about to come into a considerable sum of money—if, that is, you’re paying by card, and your companions in cash”); and in San Francisco, the restaurant group tapped former Mayor Willie Brown, with a prediction appropriate for a year in which symbolic decor tilts toward flying pigs: “You will live long enough to buy real estate in San Francisco.”



Schmancy macarons replace fortune cookies for Hakkasan’s Lunar New Year, with fortunes penned by celebrity guests. Source: *Hakkasan*