

IT'S A WRAP



Popiah, a common street food, is, however, not easy to master. Here are the best rolls in Singapore



PHOTO: LIM WUI LIANG

ROLL MODEL: Doland Quek, owner of Kway Guan Huat popiah stall, serves up popiah that is utterly delicious.

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HERE'S a popiah stall in just about every hawker centre here. But why are there so few good ones? Could it be that the art of making good popiah lies in labor-intensive details?

Turnip and carrot have to be julienned and cooked in meat or seafood stock.

Then it has to be combined with just the right amount of prawns, beansprouts, egg, minced garlic, ground peanut, sweet black sauce and chilli paste.

Final, it has to be wrapped inside thin dough skin that is soft yet resilient – a result possible only if the skin is stored carefully in an air-tight container so it doesn't harden.

The traditional Hokkien version uses plain flour skin, while Peranakan ones use egg yolk skin.

In the past week, I sampled 14 stalls that had been lauded by food guides and Internet food forums, confident that I'd be able to find 10 to recommend. But in the end, only eight passed muster.

In fact the standards of popiah in my final list varied so widely that I was able to rank them in order of merit.

So here's the honour (popiah) roll of the top 8 popiah (in order of merit).

1. Kway Guan Huat
97 Joo Chiat Road
Open: 11am to 8.30pm, closed on Mondays
Price: \$2 each

All hail this undisputed champion for serving the best popiah by far. It has a heavenly balance of all the sweet, salty, crispy and mushy flavours expected of a good popiah.

But the biggest highlight here is that the turnip and carrot strips are infused with an unweatible seafood taste. Its thin, soft yet chewy skin is home-made in the shophouse next door, which also supplies to other popiah stalls.

Founded in 1938 by the Quek family, this restaurant uses a traditional Nonya recipe. You can order individual rolls or a roll-it-yourself claypot of vegetable filling (\$12 per pot) which comes with a free flow of condiments. Utterly delicious.

2. Qi Ji
Seven outlets: 160 Rochor Road, #01-09 Chungi General Hospital, #01-36B Century Square, #04-101 Marina Square, #01-01 Shaw Tower, #02-11 Tyong Bahru Plaza, #01-06 Raffles Link
Open: 10am to 9pm daily
Price: \$1.60 each



This is quite possibly the neatest, most tightly wrapped popiah you can find. And it tastes divine, too.

Watch the stallholder spread sweet black sauce over almost the entire skin, then slap on generous dollops of ingredients. Then, each roll is carefully

rolled into a firm, yummy pillow.

Run by the Lau family, this popular chain started out in 1984 as Hock Heng Food Stall in Fuman Centre's foodcourt. It then moved to Shaw Tower.

Today, under the new name Qi Ji, every ingredient – including the soft yet resilient dough skin – is hand-made in its central kitchen in Kampong Ampat.

3. My Cosy Corner
#02-02 Coronation Shopping Plaza
587 Bukit Timah Road
Open: 10am to 6.30pm daily
Price: \$2 each

Tucked in an obscure corner is this gem of a snack bar. It sells excellent Nonya-style laksa, mee slam, mee rebus and a fabulous popiah. It comes in a big, fat roll, cut into four pieces, and contains a huge batch of crispy bits – made of rice that's sun-dried and then deep-fried.

Owner Leong Swee Meng, 59, uses a recipe from his famous aunt – the late



cookbook author Leong Yee Soo. The skins are lovely and soft, carefully kept in a special air-tight container so they don't lose their moisture. What a find. Note: Popiah is not served on Sundays.

4. Good Chance Popiah Eating House
Block 149 Sital Avenue, #01-58
(Off Jalan Bukit Merah)
Open: 11am to 2.30pm, 6 to 9.30pm; closed on Mondays
Price: From \$12 for six skins



Started in 1977, this family business made its name for roll-it-yourself popiah

in Neil Road, and later in Far East Square. It moved to its current location last October.

There's the Hokkien version that is served in most Hokkien households, says co-owner Patty Hor, 56.

The popiah skin is from Kway Guan Huat, but the filling is prepared in the kitchen and is very consistent in quality.

There's nothing better than biting into a whole uncut roll and having the juices drip down your fingers.

5. Bee Heng
#01-12 Newton Food Centre
Open: 1pm to midnight; closed on Thursdays
Price: \$1.80 each



Say what you will about the lousy food at Newton Food Centre. But this stall gives it a good name.

Set up in 1977 by the Tan family, it offers skin that is always soft and chewy, while the filling is a lovely combination of sweet, salty, spicy and crunchy sensations. Too bad each roll is quite small

and costs a rather expensive \$1.80 each.



6. Glory
139 East Coast Road
Open: 8.30am to 8.30pm, Tuesdays to Fridays; 7.30am to 8.30pm on weekends; closed on Mondays
Price: \$2 each
Fat, thick and packed with loads of ingredients, one roll is almost a

meal in itself.

The turnip and bamboo shoot strips are moist, and there is a strong tang of chilli paste and coriander leaves. The only quibble is that it could be sweeter and more flavourful.

Established about 40 years ago, this Nonya kueh chain has three outlets, but only this one serves popiah.

7. Old Long House Popiah
Block 22 Toa Payoh Lorong 7, #01-03
Open: 6am to 5pm, closed on Mondays
Price: \$1 each

This stall has been around since 1990. The skin, bought from a supplier, is a little dry and papery. But the filling is



very moist and bursts with a strong taste of chilli and coriander leaves. At \$1 a roll, it's a quick and satisfying snack that's affordable to all.

8. Popia Mania
Stall 16 Chomp Chomp Food Centre
Open: 5pm to 1am daily
Price: \$1.50 to \$2 each
Popiah with pork floss or tom yam prawns? Purists will protest, but it's actually not that bad.



Opened just five months ago, this food-stall also offers popiah with chicken floss, fish floss and sambal hae bee (dried shrimp).

The original version tasted a little too bland. But the pork floss one was delicious, as the furry meat bits added a wonderful sweetness that the turnip strips needed.

The tom yam version – which came with some tom yam paste – was too salty and tasted a little odd.