

The Taste of Real China

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Curiously enough my first taste of Chinese food while in China on vacation happened three tedious days after my arrival. It's the Bangali traveller's curse which comes from the blessing of the community. I knew a lot of Bangladeshis in Hong Kong and they spared no expense on my comfort and sightseeing. However, when it came to eating out, suddenly they seemed to be devoting themselves only to McDonalds and KFC while steering clear of any restaurant boasting Chinese delicacies. The truth was inevitable. We have an innate distrust for foreign food and added to that is our firm belief that original Chinese food constitutes stewed frogs and crisp fried insects. It was out of sheer luck that in Shenzhen we met two Bangladeshis who had been living in China for quite some time. They offered to show us around for the day and after that the frogs and insects took a backseat as we made our way through the bustling city of shopping malls, bazaars and, of course, Chinese restaurants.

It is safe to say that the Chinese food available in our country, though fabulous in its own way, is poles apart from the original thing. Generous heaps of tasting salt makes not a Chinese cuisine. Original Chinese food to the Bangladeshi palate may seem too bland or too adventurous. This is quite amusing considering the fact that Bangladeshi cuisine does have a lot in common with that of China- a love for rice, spices and pickles. It is the difference in approach to food which brings about the disparity. In Bangladesh a flavourful dish is attained through marinating it in a blend of innumerable spices and herbs. It is what makes our kitchens so aromatic and curries so rich. In China, however, it is the individuality of every spice and ingredient, which is given more importance. Thus you will come across many dishes where only a few herbs or spices have been used, that too sparingly, so that the senses are not confused and the flavour remains true to the ingredients. It must be kept in mind, however, that this is a gross generalisation since Chinese cuisine is different in different parts of China.

This was quite true for the incredible lunch I had in