

FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD
BY KANISKA CHAKRABORTY



CHOWZTER MAGIC-I

I am a proud Chowzter - a great group of passionate food bloggers who scout their home cities in search of the good and the authentic. Chowzter is not about fine dining. Chowzter is all about the connection between the place and its people.

I am also proud to be Chief Chowzter of Calcutta, my home town. Every Chowzter does what they do for the passion of it and not for money. And every year, Chowzter awards the stellar finds in different regions.

This year, the Asian awards were held in Singapore, itself a great food city.

Representatives from places as far-flung as Tokyo, Melbourne, Shanghai, Mumbai, Macau, Kolkata, Bangkok, Seoul, Ho Chi Minh City, Adelaide, Perth, Melbourne, Kuala Lumpur, Manila and Singapore were there.

Despite being a diverse group of people what bonded us together is the common passion for food and good food. We had three days of insanely good food, a great time and stimulating discussions.

Fun began the first evening with us gallivanting off to a modern Japanese place called Izy. A narrow entrance into a dim lit cavern like place with wooden tables. Outside it is a bar, inside, a trendy eatery. Nothing prepared us for what was about to happen next.

cious. But the scallops were something else.

Lightly blowtorched just to make them curl at the edges, they were so fresh that I felt they were swimming in the sea about an hour before we ate them.

It simply blew our minds.

Next in the parade was a swordfish grilled with seaweed sauce. I will not even venture to describe the sauce. Suffice to say, it sang a very soft and very sophisticated tune.

What followed was I am told the best chicken in town. Karrage chicken with balsamic mayo. Rich, comforting, exotic. All in one.

Karrage is a Japanese frying technique where the meat is coated in potato starch and then deep-fried. I am not the greatest fan of chicken, but this bird was something special.

Up next was the famed wagyu beef. Miyazaki wagyu with black truffle shavings.

What can I say about a meat that is revered the world over? It was every bit as delicious as it is meant to be. And

the black truffle shaving added an earthy overtone that was as different as was possible from the briny goodness of the first few dishes. But just as good, if not better. But for me the real surprise packet was soft cooked egg that was hiding beneath the tumble of truffle shavings. To break into that and have it mixed with simple steamed rice was one of the pure joys of life.

The meal ended with a lovely strawberry chilli sorbet. Sweet and spicy. It hit the spot for me.

A magical dinner. A magical evening. Making new friends, eating well, chatting, exchanging ideas, getting wowed together. Everything one could ask for.

As far as I am concerned, I got to have sea urchin, wagyu and black truffle for the first time. This was only the first night. There were two more such nights of brilliant eating. Those stories later.

Chowzter magic - II

Day two of Chowzter convention began with a trip to the great Tian Tian

Chicken Rice.

Delectable chicken, brilliantly cooked fragrant rice, crisp stir-fried veggies.

The works.

Many have talked about it, including such venerable names like Anthony Bourdain and Gordon Ramsay.

Let me not bore you with another version.

The next stop was a laksa place which I will talk about later.

Part of a packed morning was this brilliant place that blew our minds.

In Golden Mile hawker centre, there is this little stall called Fishball Story - the brainchild of the very affable, ever smiling Douglas Ng. He has taken on the responsibility of keeping his grandmother's tradition of making fishball soup alive. And for him, that means getting up very early, picking up fish, processing the fish to create the balls, cooking the broth and then setting up the shop.

A bowl of broth with around four fishballs, egg noodles and some veggies are served to each customer. The fishballs are golf ball sized, deliciously dense and gloriously chewy. Fish and nothing else adds to the delicate nature.

Inspiring to say the least, specially con-

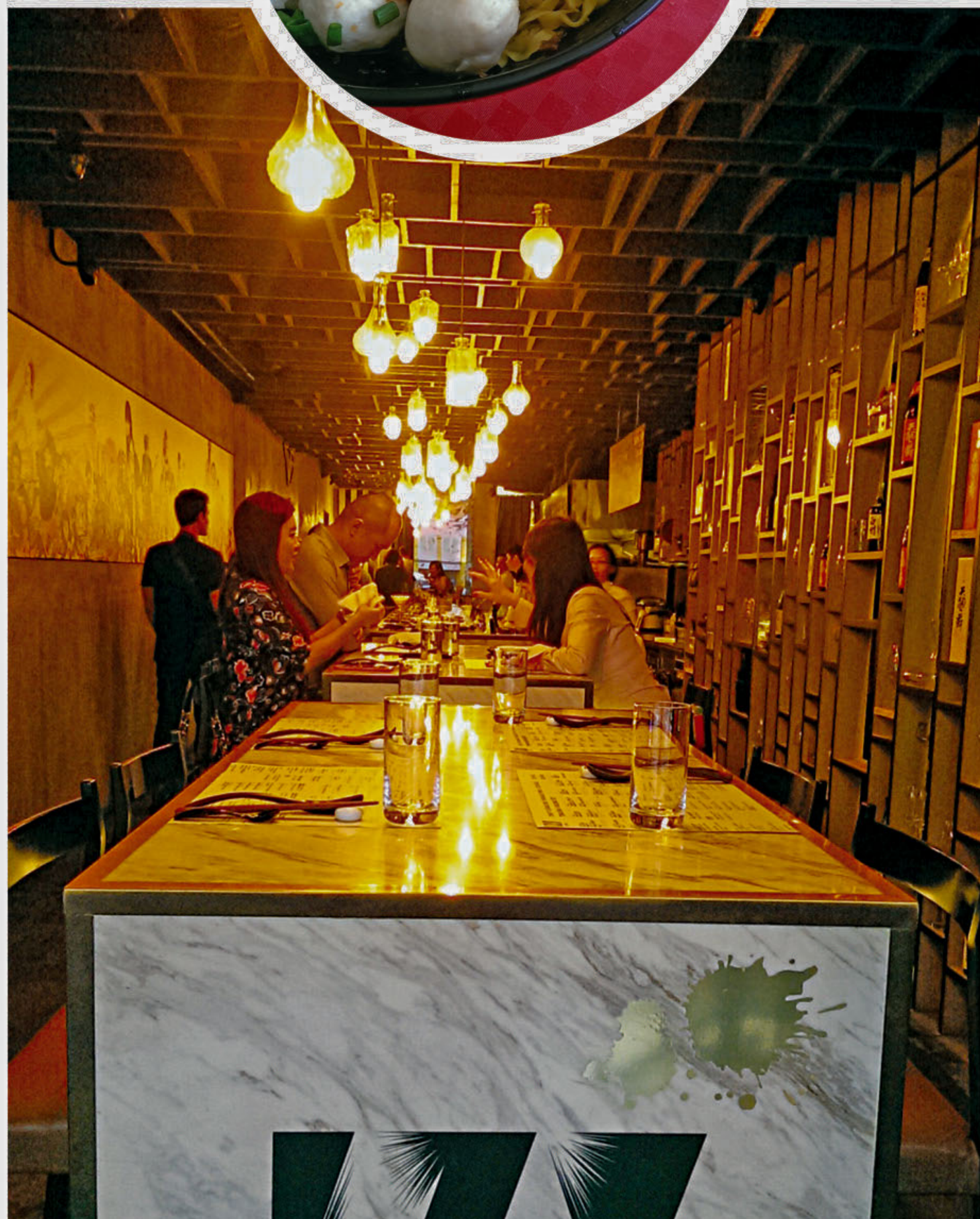


Being in a Japanese place, I guess all of us were ready for some fresh seafood. What actually followed was a highly orchestrated opera of cuisine. Each course taking the palette to another level than the last one.

The meal started with an appetizer of sea urchin, sesame tofu and wasabi. It came in a martini glass. Slices of silk soft tofu, redolent of nutty sesame floating in a briny liquid, topped with coral sea urchin. A dot of wasabi, like crowning glory sat snug on top.

It was nothing less than a symphony in a glass. The briny sea urchin, the pungent wasabi and the silky tofu. That was a m nag  a trois if there ever has been one.

To up the ante, next came a sashimi platter. Ocean trout, tuna and scallops. The trout was decadently fatty. The tuna, lus-



sidering the fact that he is one of the few young entrepreneurs to have dived in the street food business.

A bright young person, who left a career in national service to get into what can best be described as really, really hard work, day in and day out, still flashing a disarming smile, personally greeting every customer, and all the time maintaining a very high standard with food.

If the does not inspire young people to chase their passion, I don't know what will.

This is the magic of Chowzter.

Finding such gems and trying to bring them to limelight.

This is why I believe in the Chowzter movement.

Photo: Kaniska Chakraborty