



# & Sweet & sultry

Next time you're hungry and thirsty after hours in Melbourne, why not take a cross-continental culinary journey, only half the length of the CBD?

## THE GOLDEN MONKEY

The night is hot and sticky and the air feels like soup. I can smell the heat of Thursday rising from the city footpaths. Jan found some excellent parking on Little Lonsdale Street and we're walking down to Hardware Lane. During the day it would have been packed to bursting with the pressed suits, wide smiles and stylish chatter of professionals lunching al fresco and in the beehive of eateries along the lane. Tonight, many are still there, dining late.

The bright orange box of a sign, hanging above a flight of stairs leading below street level, marks the entrance to the Golden Monkey.

Half-way down the stairs we're greeted by Joey, our amiable Hong Kong-born waitress. She takes us past the bar, on the left, and into the main space, partitioned in such a way that almost every section

would feel intimate. She asks us where we'd like to sit and we both cast our eyes over four-seater tables, one particularly private booth and some low, cushioned bench-table-and-chair arrangements along the walls, one of which we choose.

We settle in to the tune of ambient house and jazz, grooving past warmly lit orange lanterns and through lacquered lattice-work. I'm starting to wonder where my opium pipe is when Joey returns with two weighty leather folders.

The menu is an epic journey through South-East Asian and East Asian food and drink, including what may be a unique range of Asian-themed cocktails.

To eat, we go for the Malaysian ikan billis (\$5) – crunchy dried anchovies, the ideal bar snack – served mixed with peanuts, and the Japanese aubergine and chicken mince tempura (\$6), succulent inside and

fried just right. To drink we order a 300ml bottle of Draft Blue sake (\$18), chilled.

The sake and ikan billis arrive first, and Jan starts talking about The Last Samurai, and the likelihood of your enemies plying you with sake to inebriation. I tell him you'd need a lot of the stuff. It's smooth though, almost creamy in the aftertaste, and remarkably clean and easy to drink, so perhaps it's not too far from the truth. Whatever the case, the salty ikan billis and peanuts mesh well with the rice wine, and when the sweet but savoury tempura arrives it rounds out the palate.

Meanwhile, Joey has been quietly refilling our sake cups. I reach for my katana with Tom Cruise's unfortunate fate in mind, but Joey returns, smiles broadly, and asks if we're alright for the moment. And yes, we are, but it's time to leave.

## BAR LOURINHÃ

The fifteen-minute north-easterly walk from the Golden Monkey to Bar Lourinhã takes us though much of the central CBD; moving up toward the politicians and police on Spring Street; transporting us from a steamy Shanghai night to a sultry Iberian supper.

Coming from the south, Bar Lourinhã is little more than a largely obscured shopfront casting a sliver of light toward a gargantuan multi-storey carpark on Little Collins Street. Head-on though, it's a deep, narrow cross-section of inner Melbourne's more stylish and well-dressed bar-goers. The crowd is older than the after-work and after-uni group that arrived at the last place, and there's more focus on conversation. It's also a lot more packed, and it seems we're lucky to find two spots at the L-shaped bar, which runs the length of the room. Our hostess, Elsa, takes us through the menu and specials and offers some informed suggestions on which Spanish reds to sample.

Before long though, we're able to move to a low, round communal table surrounded by stools and couches. Elsa brings us the wines, a glass of the spicy, ripe 2005 J. Palacios 'Petalos' Mencia, Bierzo (\$65/\$13) and another of the earthy 2003 Remondo 'La Montesa', Rioja (\$58/\$11.50).

The small but well put-together menu and specials comprise small tapas-like tastes, as well as dinner-size meals, with emphasis on the gourmet: Wagyu beef, braised rabbit and fresh oysters and mussels, as well as premium cheeses and the like.

I convince Jan that St. Agur triple-blue cheese and honeycomb (\$10) is a good idea, and we also order a serve of Spanish doughnuts – churros and dulce de leche (\$7) – to arrive later.

The cheese comes with long half-pipe crispbread, on which we dutifully spread a decent amount of the stinky stuff and then glaze with a small dollop of the fresh, organic honeycomb. It's a delicious balance of flavour between sharp and sweet, as well as a tussle between rich and richer.

The churros are crisp on the outside and only a bit moist on the inside, well-sugared and served piping hot. Dipped into the milk-and-caramelised-sugar heaven of the dulce de leche they assert themselves as possibly the best I've had outside of Spain. And despite the absence of Catalan conversation in the room, the heat of the night and the bar's friendly buzz is only a step away from a familiar bodega in the base of a Barcelona apartment block.



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### - AT A GLANCE -

#### GOLDEN MONKEY

Rear, 389 Lonsdale Street  
(enter via Hardware Lane)

Open Tue–Fri 5pm–3am,

Sat & Sun 7pm–3am

Phone: (03) 9602 2055

[www.goldenmonkey.com.au](http://www.goldenmonkey.com.au)

#### BAR LOURINHÃ

37 Little Collins Street

Open Mon–Wed 12pm–11am,

Thu–Fri 12pm–1am, Sat 4pm–1am

Phone: (03) 9663 7890

[www.barlourinha.com.au](http://www.barlourinha.com.au)

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