

ready to spice up singapore

Culinary megastar Jamie Oliver shares what to expect at his first restaurant here

text MICHELLE TCHEA

Opposite from top:
CRISPY STUFFED
RISOTTO BALLS;
JAMIE'S ITALIAN
LIVERPOOL

With over 30 restaurants in the United Kingdom alone and a string of television shows shown in 40 countries, it seems like everyone wants a bite of British celebrity chef Jamie Oliver. But whether he's filming successful TV programmes, writing record selling cookbooks or going on school dinner campaigns, Jamie sticks to his two passions: people and food.

He will be doing just that in Singapore, with the opening of Jamie's Italian at VivoCity, slated for the third quarter of the year.

Why did you choose Singapore as the first Asian city to open Jamie's Italian in?

We'd wanted to open in Asia for a number of years now, and what with the amazing food scene and diverse culture of Singapore, it's just a natural fit for us to open here first. Singapore is an incredibly vibrant place, with really lovely people and a fantastic international food culture. The casual market is growing all the time so it just felt really right.

Will you be bringing a bit of hawker food influence to Jamie's Italian?

I've always been a massive fan of street food – I think the drive and the ethos behind the hawker centres and what we're doing really comes from the same place. Using the best possible produce and keeping things really simple but delicious is right at the heart of everything we do.

What can diners expect besides pasta and Italian specialties?

We try and keep things really bold, rustic and simple with the odd little twist along the way. While you can easily visit us and have a starter and a main, I always think it's really nice when guests all get stuck in and share a load of dishes. Maybe order some antipasti, a couple of pasta dishes and a fish dish and then just all dig in.

Singapore is gaining momentum as a culinary capital. Where would you dine?

I'd want to head straight to the hawker centres. I'd be like a kid in a sweet shop.

Food in Singapore is often spicy. Will you be trying to replicate this at Jamie's Italian?

We'll have two dishes with a bit of a kick – our crispy stuffed risotto balls which come with a really lovely spicy arrabiata sauce and our fish in a bag. I'm a little bit chilli obsessed; I absolutely love them, so I'd definitely recommend those dishes.

Are you happy with the design of the Singapore restaurant?

Yes. We always try to make sure each restaurant is unique and sits well in its location. In Singapore, we held a graffiti competition. The winning design (by Mohammad Azlan Ramlan) gives the place a friendly yet edgy vibe. There's something really nice about street art. I think it can bring a really nice energy to a room.

Your latest book, 15 Minute Meals, has a health focus with calorie counts and healthy substitutions. Can we expect some of these practices at Jamie's Italian?

My absolute, unchanging view on this is that balance is key. We should all be able to enjoy a treat but they should be enjoyed in moderation. Jamie's Italian will have healthy as well as indulgent options. It all comes back to the need for better food education. People need to be aware of what they're eating and putting into



their bodies, and this needs to start at an early age.

You picked Chef Gary Clarke, who opened several Jamie's Italian outlets in the UK, to head your Singapore team. How do you think he will fare?

(London-born) Gary has been with us for four years now and is a fantastic member of the team. He joined as head chef at one of our UK restaurants and went on to helm our training academy. He's a brilliant chef and a great leader. I feel very proud that we have him on board.

How well do you think he will handle swapping his local pub for hawker centres?

I've got no worries there, I'm sure he'll absolutely love it!