

Jia Jia Tang Bao

Dumplings that have some of the best skins in Shanghai, steamed to order.

By CHRISTOPHER ST. CAVISH

Art by CHRISTOPHER ST. CAVISH

Location

90 Huanghe Lu near Fengyang Lu, Huangpu District (黄河路90号近凤阳路)
Shanghai, China

What to order

pork soup dumplings (鲜肉汤包, xian rou tang bao), hairy-crab-and-pork
soup dumplings (蟹粉鲜肉汤包, xie fen xian rou tang bao), hairy-crab soup...



Jia Jia is a homegrown chain that started in the 1980s. The founders (a grand word for two people who opened a tiny stall, perhaps) came from wealthy families that were wiped out during the Cultural Revolution. Still struggling years later, they decided to chance it with capitalism again. They didn't have any background in food—they grew up with servants and cooks—but eventually figured out how to recreate the soup dumplings from their youth. Or so the story goes from the second-generation boss, who runs things now, three decades later.

Jia Jia does all right, as you'll see from the line of customers most hours of the day. It's partly because it's so popular, and partly because they steam

their dumplings to order (or, at least, not ahead of time), which slows things down. The skins are not the thinnest in Shanghai, but they're among the best.

Beware that they “sell out” of the pork-only soup dumplings early in the afternoon. It's a business strategy, leaving just the more expensive varieties. On the plus side, those varieties—hairy-crab-and-pork and pure hairy crab—are good, but will cost you about \$15 a basket, which is not cheap for a hole in the wall. Both are available year-round, but are really much better between October and December, during hairy-crab season. Remember to order a 1-rmb dish of julienned fresh ginger to eat with the soup dumplings and vinegar.

CHINA, DUMPLINGS, HAIRY CRAB, SHANGHAI, SOUP DUMPLINGS
