

# It's a shop, a restaurant, a phenomenon: You could easily spend half a day at Asian megastore Foodle



The food entrepreneur who introduced Australia to bubble tea has opened an extraordinary grocery and dining hall that is the Asian answer to Eataly.

Foodle is amazing, a supermarket-sized venture at Highpoint that includes point-and-pick live seafood, a premium butcher with hotpot and Korean barbecue cuts, a sushi counter and oyster bar, a Chinese barbecue restaurant, a bakery, dumpling factory, fresh produce and grocery shelves stacked with 13,000 lines.

There's everything from the bracken you might need for your Korean stew to green curry paste to fancy French duck mousse with olives.

It's a shop, it's a restaurant, it's a phenomenon. It's so big there are maps painted on the floor. You could spend half a day here: browsing, eating a few oysters, shopping for the week, choosing a mud crab from a tank and having it cooked for you to eat on site, then wandering around some more – perhaps inspecting the special durian fridge – to build up an appetite for dumplings and roast duck.



A platter of Chinese barbecue meats. JASON SOUTH

Foodle is the brainchild of David Loh, who came to Australia from Malaysia to study accounting. In 2000, he was doing the books for a truck company when he thought it might be fun to open a bubble tea store. Cue queues down the street and a business journey that has led to Foodle, a partnership with Louis Kuo and Tomohiro Suzuki.

In various combinations, this trio is also responsible for epic eating palace Old Beijing in QV, fast-casual Sushi Jiro, which has 19 outlets around the city, and Dragon Hotpot, which has stores around Australia and Indonesia.



Foodle combines an Asian superstore with a canteen-style dining hall. JASON SOUTH

The concessions are run as collaborations and prices are keen. High-quality flathead is \$28 a kilogram, about half the price of my local inner-city fish shop. There's excellent wagyu at a steal, too, and you can have it cooked to eat on site for the cost of the meat plus \$15.

Most people sitting in the canteen-style dining hall have ordered food from King's Dumpling Kitchen. Food warmers are stacked with dim sum, stir-fries, braises and rice dishes.

The pineapple fried rice is a satisfying, exceedingly generous version of the Thai street food favourite. Barbecued meats are prepared in a drum oven calibrated for juicy meat and shatter-crisp skin.



Xiao long bao are made in-store. JASON SOUTH

Most dumplings are machine made and they're pretty good, if not especially delicate. Xiao long bao soup dumplings are made by hand – they aren't Melbourne's best but they hit the spot that's soothed by the everlasting combination of fatty pork and black vinegar.

I love this place: the ambition, sense of possibility and one-stop convenience are all thrilling. For those in the east, a store at The Glen is coming early in 2024, meaning many more Foodle foodies for Melbourne.