



# For the love of Laksa

Darwin's lip-smacking laksa scene is influenced by its tantalising proximity to Southeast Asia.

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**L**aksa is synonymous with Darwin (Garramilla). The spicy noodle soup originates from Southeast Asia's Peranakan culture and its beguiling hotpot of Chinese, Malay and Indonesian influences. There's a common theory in the tropics that suggests that eating spicy food, despite the initial burning sensation, will actually help to cool you down. In Darwin's steaming dry season heat, I set out to test this theory.

Darwin considers itself the laksa capital of Australia, and for good reason. Commencing in 2019 the whole month of October has been devoted to the fragrant, spicy soup. The Darwin International Laksa Festival is hotly contested as chefs vie for coveted 'Lakstar' status. Diners chime in to vote too, with plenty of good-natured social commentary where everyone has an opinion on their favourite laksa joint.

Darwin's proximity to Asia is to thank for its vibrant multi-cultural community, with over 100 nationalities calling the tropical city home. The richly aromatic laksa noodle soup is a menu staple here. Markets such as Parap Village Markets and Mindil Beach Sunset Markets should be your first stop on the laksa trail.

This is how I find myself standing in a queue at Mary's famed food truck (2020 Lakstar People's Choice

winner) early one Saturday morning, sweat streaming down my back in Darwin's notorious humidity, as I ruminate on which laksa to order. I opted for the chicken version and was not disappointed. Mary, who makes her laksa from scratch, has been ladling bowls of laksa for 20-odd years and is a bit of a Territory icon. Slurping my way through the broth, the only disappointment is that I reach the bottom of the bowl too soon.

Chow! is another legend in the laksa stakes, taking out the coveted Lakstar Golden Bowl in 2021 and 2023. The bright and lively South Vietnamese restaurant has a prime spot in the Waterfront precinct and offers six versions of laksa for meat lovers and vegans alike. Come for the delicious laksa and linger over cocktails for the fun vibe. Singaporean-style KOPI stop is a local favourite, claiming the People's Choice gong in 2023. Tucked away in a quiet laneway at the quiet end of town, don't be surprised to see diners tucking into laksa for breakfast. As I tuck into a bowl of broth early one morning I feel nostalgic for Asian holidays with their cacophony of sights, smells and flavours.

Unassuming Chok's Place is a perennial Lakstar with regular podium appearances. Deservedly so. What it lacks in ambience it makes up for in flavour. One of those cheap and cheerful food court places in the Smith Street Mall's Galleria building, Chok's

laksa is tantalisingly flavoursome and aromatic. But it's while cruising the harbour with Darwin Harbour Cruises that I find the most surprising laksa experience. Escaping the heat on a balmy tropical evening, I board the 25m power-cat at Stokes Hill Wharf for a sunset dinner cruise. With the sky tinted a burnt orange to fiery scarlet to a soft dusky pink, I take a look at the menu and I'm pleasantly surprised to find laksa featured. I discover a flavourful NT Barramundi Coconut Laksa spiced with lemongrass and fried shallots which goes perfectly with a glass of sparkling wine accompanied by the soothing whoosh of the ocean beneath our hull.

It's fair to say that Darwin is indisputably Australia's laksa capital. I'll be eagerly lining up at this year's International Laksa Festival to devour as many bowls of the delectable broth as my stomach can handle.

## THE DETAILS

**TOUR** Tick off two Darwin bucket-list experiences with

Darwin Harbour Cruises. Tuck into a bowl of delicious laksa while watching one of the best sunsets in Australia. Visit [darwinharbourcruises.com.au](http://darwinharbourcruises.com.au) to book. **WATCH** Curious about Darwin's best laksa? Watch our latest video to hear locals share their favourite orders.

