

# BAG THIS PIE

Serious pie connoisseurs like **EVONNE LYN LEE** and her pie-loving peers will not settle for less than the best, so they sacrificed their waist lines and cleared their palates to rate pies for you.



Royals Cafe's Mini Pies

Baker's Oven



Family-size Chicken Pies



B-PieShoppe



Johnny Ngiam Oven Marvel



The PieShoppe's Smiley Pies

Few would argue the British claim to being the ultimate exponent of pie making. During our days as a British colony, they introduced many classic British dishes to the Singaporean palate including the chicken pie.

It was from the British that Sloane Court hotel owner, the late Mr Chiam Heng Luan picked up his pie skills when he set up a bakery in 1965. Singaporeans have been eating chicken pies for six decades. According to Polar Puffs, they started selling them in the 1950s. Since then, another 11 bakeries have introduced chicken pies, the latest being Bakerzin Artisan Bread at myVillage Serangoon Gardens which recently opened.

Five chicken pie fans who are also keen cooks and bakers, formed the panel of food tasters to attempt the ambitious task of rating Singapore's best chicken pies. They comprise Evonne Lee, 50s, freelance writer whose baked goodies have graced several covers of a food and travel magazine, Margaret Poh, 40s, former broadcast journalist, Debbie Hew, 40s, bank administrative officer, Carol Wee, 30s, assistant manager, communications, and Sara Lee Foong Chee, 50s, operations manager, who bakes and sells chicken pies in Malaysia, and who made a special trip to Singapore specially for the sampling session.

We were well prepared for the onslaught of chicken pies, with a tub of tangy lemon sorbet and premium Japanese tea to cleanse our palates after each pie. And a rating form each.

We nailed down four determining criteria for a great tasting chicken pie.

**CRUST:** Bakeries reviewed use either 100% butter, a mixture of butter and vegetable shortening or just pastry margarine. Butter renders aroma whilst vegetable shortening yields a good-textured crust. Puff pastry that is well made whether with good quality butter, pastry margarine or vegetable shortening has to be light and flaky with distinct leaves or layers. Combining both results in a buttery pastry that puffs up, as in the case of Baker's Oven - it was well baked, light, airy with layers. Cutting through it, we liked the 'crispy' crunch as it yielded to the knife.

Good quality Australian or New Zealand butter with a high butterfat percentage produces a crust that's flaky with rich buttery aroma. Bakerzin, Cottage Pies, Oven Marvel, Pie Shoppe and Big Ben's testify to using 100% butter. Bakerzin's puff pastry stood out for its addictive buttery aroma, an indication of good quality butter used. Our only gripe was that the pastry was rather oily.



Pie Kia Family



Bakerzin Artisan Bread



Big Ben's Place



Freshly Baked Chicken Pies Oven Marvel



Cottage Pies

If shortcrust is used, pastry must be slightly crumbly yet light (not dense) when bitten into. The Pie Shoppe and Big Ben's pies had enough fat in its shortcrust pastry, baked to a golden brown.

Looks-wise, we singled out the Balmoral pie for its dome-shape uppercrust. Eating this pie is biting into history. Baker, Lim Ming Noong has been faithfully using the same recipe and also the pie moulds since 1965!

**FILLING:** Regardless of whether it's cooked with or without cream, the filling has to be moist, chunky with fresh succulent chicken (thigh meat ensures a resilient bite), fresh vegetables and then judiciously seasoned with salt and pepper. For added aroma and flavour, herbs if used, is a bonus.

Several bakeries like Oven Marvel, Balmoral, Swisslink, Royals Café and Don's had generous fillings. Those who enjoy herbs will like Pie Shoppe's filling for its distinctive herb aroma. Oven Marvel' pie filling was cooked in a mild white sauce that was not cloying. Bakerzin's pie filling had a "very English" taste but we found it too creamy, making it a little heavy to support the light crust. The panel liked Swisslink's pie well-cooked filling; tender chicken that is well seasoned with a mild herb aroma. However, we concurred that there

was too much potato. We would have liked more chicken in Swisslink's pies.

While we like Big Ben's Pies for its shortcrust pastry, we agreed that the filling was too runny and insufficient. If you want a halal pie, go for Polar Puff's pies.

**CRUST AND FILLING RATIO:** A great tasting chicken pie is a fine balance of flavours and textures with a good crust and filling ratio. Is the pastry too thick? Chunky filling but pastry too weak to support it? Filling not moist enough? Generally, with a balanced crust and filling ratio, there is sufficient bite to ensure a delicious robust mouthful. Baker's Oven and Oven Marvel scored well for a good crust and filling ratio.

**Price:** Is it good value for money? Baker's Oven's pie which scored well in other criteria, got the unanimous vote for offering the best value for money at \$1.50 each. At \$2.80, Bakerzin's pie certainly lives up to its artisanal reputation considering the high quality ingredients used.

### TIPS: STORING AND REHEATING PIES

All bakeries highly recommend that oven-fresh pies are best enjoyed when consumed at their respective outlets or within 24 hours as take-away. Storing pies overnight is generally not recommended. You can also buy frozen unbaked ones from Pie Shoppe, Baker's Oven, Big Ben's and Swisslink and bake them at home.

#### However, if you must, here are the general guidelines:


- Store pies overnight in the fridge not freezer. Bakerzin and Pie Shoppe, however, differ, saying that baked pies can be placed in the freezer for a couple of weeks.
- Remove chilled pies from fridge and bring it to room temperature for 10 to 25 minutes for big pies.
- If using a convection oven: Pre-heat it to 1800celcius for five minutes. Bake pies ten minutes, up to twenty minutes for family size pies until warmed through.
- For frozen unbaked pies: Thaw unbaked pies for 40 to 60 minutes. Pre-heat the oven at 1800celcius for 20 minutes. Beat an egg in a small bowl; brush a layer of beaten egg on the upper crust and bake 25 to 30 minutes.
- Do not microwave the pies.



# foodfile

## tried & tasted

S/N	Outlet	Crust (puff, shortcrust) 3 points	Filling 2 points	Crust/ Filling Ratio 3 points	Price 2 points	Rating 10 points	Dine In and/or Take out	Remarks
1	<b>Baker's Oven</b> CK Tangs: 10 am-9.30 pm People's Park: 9 am-8 pm Fook Hai Building, Chinatown: 8 am-8 pm	2	1.5	2	2 \$1.50	7.5	Take out	Panel's favourite. Value for money pie. Flaky, layered and golden brown crust- crispy sound when cutting through it. Chunky and tasty filling.
2	<b>Oven Marvel</b> (formerly Delicious Muffins) 91 Bencoolen Street #01-51 Sunshine Plaza Tel: 9636 1503 (Wendy) 11.30 am - 8 pm. Closed 8th, 18th, 28th of each month	2	1.5	2	1 \$3.00	6.5	Dine In & Take out	Interesting shape "like a sunflower". Tasty, generous and moist filling. Crust light and buttery but not layered enough. Rather oily.
3	<b>The Pie Shoppe</b> 46, Siglap Drive (new location) Tel: 6876 1175 10 am-7 pm, Daily except Monday	2 (shortcrust)	1.5	2	1 \$5.00 Mama* \$2.00 mini	6.5	Dine In & Take out	A firm and well-filled pie with a distinct herb aroma. Crust a bit thick. "Smiley" piped onto crust a nice touch. One taster said: "Once you taste this pie, you know where it's from!" Expensive at \$5 for 250g (*medium) size pie.
4	<b>Don - Your Personal Pie Club</b> 20 Cross Street #01- 34/35/36 China Square Tel: 6536 0925/ 6327 4344 8 am - 9 pm Daily	2	1	2	1 \$4.60 quarter	6	Dine In & Take out	Upper crust flaky, but lower crust not fully cooked through. Chunky filling with egg, though tasty has too much potato.
5	<b>The Royals Café</b> 19 Upper East Coast Rd, Crescendo Bldg Tel: 6445 6457, 7.30 am - 11 pm Daily City Square Mall #02-K17/20 12 noon - 10 pm Daily Tel: 6509 9617, 6509 9618	1.5	1.5	1.5	1 \$4.50 quarter	5.5	Dine In & Take out	Pastry is light and flaky. Generous filling with egg and flavoured with parsley. Meat bit dry.
6	<b>Swisslink Bakery &amp; Café</b> 109 Clementi Street 11, #01-07 Tel: 6778 7858 11 Eng Kong Terrace Tel: 6462 0223 9 am-8.30 pm Daily	1.5	1	2	1 \$4.50 quarter \$1.10 mini	5.5	Dine In & Take out	Flaky and well baked thin crust. Well seasoned and tasty filling with subtle hint of herbs. More potato than chicken. Bonus: egg added.
7	<b>Bakerzin Artisan Bread</b> 1 Maju Avenue, #01- 26/27/28 myVillage, Serangoon Gardens Tel: 6634 5638 9 am-9pm Daily	1.5	1	1.5	1 \$2.80	5	Dine In & Take out	Flaky crust has lovely butter aroma but one taster found it too rich. Filling too creamy and a bit too moist. Tastes very English.
8	<b>Balmoral Bakery</b> 105 Clementi Street 12, Sunset Way, #01-06 Tel: 6779 2064 9 am - 8 pm Daily	1	1	1.5	1.5 \$1.30	5	Take out	Crust is crispy but salty at first bite. Filling is generous though a little dry. Presentable shape - best looking pie.
9	<b>The Pie Kia Shop</b> AMK Hub; North Point Yishun; Compass Point Sengkang; Century Square Tampines, 10 Chua Chu Kang Ave 4, #01-22 10 am to 10 pm Daily	1	1	1.5	1.5 \$1.00 mini	5	Dine In & Take out	Crust a bit thick and dry but flaky. Filling not proportionate to crust.

S/N	Outlet	Crust (puff, shortcrust) 3 points	Filling 2 points	Crust/ Filling Ratio 3 points	Price 2 points	Rating 10 points	Dine In and/or Take out	Remarks
10	<b>Big Ben's Pies</b> 15 Swan Lake Ave, Opera Estate Tel: 6876 0737 Tuesday-Thursday: 12 noon - 10 pm, Friday- Sunday: till 6pm. Closed on Monday.	1.5 (shortcrust)	1	1	0.5 \$3.60	4	Dine In & Take out	Shortcrust pastry well baked to an even golden brown. Filling too runny and "does not fill up the pie". Small and compact at 165g but expensive for its size. Distinctive English taste.
11	<b>Cottage Pies Café</b> 1 Pasir Ris Central St 3 #01-01 White Sands Shopping Mall Tel: 6585 1741 7.30 am - 10 pm, Monday - Saturday 11 am - 10 pm, Sunday & Public Holidays	1	0.5	1	1 \$1.10 mini	3.5	Dine In & Take out	Crust although has layers is too dry and hard. Shredded chicken in filling is bland and not moist. Not enough vegetables.
12	<b>Polar Puffs</b> Various outlets www.polarpuffs-cakes.com	1	0.5	1	1 \$2.00	3.5	Dine In & Take out	Crust evenly baked to light golden brown. Filling not enough, can't taste much chicken and not well seasoned. 




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