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Mission Complete – A journey of The World's 50 Best!

Kevin Chan, February 28, 2013



The World's 50 Best Restaurant List is arguably one of the most controversial lists that continues to create divided opinions and debates in the gastronomic world every year. Whilst some disagree on the voting system, others believe that the choice is a very subjective matter thereby rendering the terminology of "best" as futile. What is certain, however, is that the list has been gaining more and more attention throughout the years.

So what's my take on this list? If one could place reliance on a guide that determines who receives 3 stars by 7 anonymous inspectors for Tokyo, a city with 150,000+ restaurants, why would it be strange to rely on a list that's based on 900+ experienced foodies across the world? Therefore, rather than dwelling on the possible flaws of the list, I've decided to embrace it for what it has to offer. Being a passionate foodie who travels primarily for food, a somewhat crazy idea came to my mind 3 years ago – why not get the full experience by trying them all and documenting all meals with my camera?

Admittedly achieving such a feat has by no means been an easy task. With 50 restaurants spread across six continents, my mission of completing the 50Best list turned out to be much more demanding than I had initially anticipated. The difficulties began even before I stepped out of my house! Securing a table at some of the world's hottest restaurants sometimes required a reservation of up to a year ahead so quite frequently these journeys had to be planned well in advance. To further complicate matters, given the different time zones, it was inevitable that I would have to wake up in the middle of the night to complete reservation forms as fast as I could when the online booking system just opened, or even better, patiently wait in the telephone queue if I was lucky enough to even get through! Let us not forget the classic lottery system of **el Bulli** where only 8,000 diners were fortunate enough to get a positive response from the millions of requests they received every year.

Compared to the reservations, arrangement for flights, accommodation and transportation was more manageable, although it did come with its own array of challenges including the long queues outside embassies in the early hours for the occasional visas. At the moment, the 50Best list is still dominated by restaurants in Europe, which are relatively hassle-free, and more importantly, strategically convenient to bundle a few restaurants in one trip with short flights or long drives in between. The few painful long haul flights to Brazil or Australia for example were, however, unavoidable.

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I've always planned ahead to ensure a smooth trip but I've had my fair share of unavoidable incidents. A long delay at the Eurotunnel forced me to miss my lunch booking at **Hof van Cleve**; missing my connection flight at Amsterdam completely jeopardized my whole trip to **Faviken**; a 2-hour journey which should have been a 10min taxi ride to **Astrid y Gastón** in Lima; and the worst nightmare for all travellers, yes, my passport got pick-pocketed in Barcelona the evening after my lunch at **el Bulli**.

Despite some of these obstacles and setbacks, what I have gained from my exploration of 50Best Restaurants has been priceless and beyond my expectation. I found that the restaurants and their surrounding locations could sometimes be nearly as impressive as the food. Say the 13th century castle of **Schloss Schauenstein**, the sleek glass and steel structure of **Bras**, the Volkswagen's Autostadt surrounding **Aqua**, the panoramic view of the French Riviera from **Mirazur**, but probably nothing could beat the romantic island of **Oaxen** that could only be accessed by ferry!

The mission has also opened my mind and palate to diverse ingredients around the world, like the black chichilo sauce at **Pujol**, the jello of Amazonian herbs at **D.O.M.**, Kagawa Wagyu at **Ryugin**, or the parfait of Madagascar fruits at **Le Quartier Francais**. Without this list, I would probably have never considered travelling afar to some of these extraordinary restaurants.



Some unique dishes will last in my mind forever – the smoked ice cream at **Etxebarri**, Foie 100% Cotton at **Biko**, “sea urchin” at **Amber**, “knuckle food” at **De Librije**, round jewellery box of abalone jello at **Manresa**, “bread making in the forest” at **Narisawa**, oyster “cannelloni” at **Mirazur**, the “final touch” of **Oud Sluis**, dessert accompanied by Bocuse d’Or trophies set at **Geranium**, or the interactive chef’s counter experience at **Frantzén/Lindeberg**; needless to mention the classics like **Blumenthal**’s Bacon & Egg ice cream trolley, **Keller**’s Oyster & Pearl, **Vongerichten**’s “Egg on Egg”, **Bras**’ Gargouillou, **Bottura**’s “Magnum”, **Aduriz**’s edible stone, **Redzepi**’s smoked quail eggs, **Achatz**’s “table-plated” dessert, and of course, the **Roca Brothers**’ DKNY perfume and the “trip to Havana”!





Let us not forget that the 50Best list is an dynamic product that gets revised every year. Essentially it can be construed as a snapshot of the most interesting establishment at a given moment in time, and it is for this reason why I enjoy exploring the list. Despite the added difficulty of shooting this moving target every year, I finally completed the current 50Best list with a stunning meal at **Waku Ghin** in Singapore last week. I look forward to April when the new list is published, and dare I say, hope there will be many more new restaurants that I can explore in the coming year!

Click [HERE](#) for my 50Best experience.

Tags: [Amber](#), [Andoni Aduriz](#), [Aqua](#), [Astrid & Gastón](#), [Biko](#), [D.O.M.](#), [De Librije](#), [El Bulli](#), [El Celler de Can Roca](#), [Etxebarri](#), [Faviken](#), [frantzén lindeberg](#), [Geranium](#), [Gran Achatz](#), [Heston Blumenthal](#), [Hof Van Cleve](#), [Le Quartier Francais](#), [Manresa](#), [Massimo Bottura](#), [Michel Bras](#), [Mirazur](#), [Narisawa](#), [Oaxen](#), [Pujol](#), [rene redzepi](#), [Ryugin](#), [Schloss Schauenstein](#), [The World's 50 Best Restaurants](#), [Thomas Keller](#), [Vongerichten](#), [Waku Ghin](#)

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