

taiwanese-style pork belly buns

Taiwanese communities in the United States have been feasting on pork belly buns since long before David Chang's Momofuku restaurant empire made them popular in New York. Here, the pork belly is first seared in the pan, then braised with soy sauce, star anise, cinnamon, Sichuan pepper, and chili until it practically melts in your mouth. Peanuts and cilantro are the classic toppings, and you can add a dollop of hoisin sauce for more flavor or squirt a little chili sauce on top for some heat. You can find frozen Chinese steamed buns in the freezer section of a Chinese supermarket. Steam the buns according to the package instructions in a bamboo steamer or a wok with a metal steamer insert. Some buns also have directions on how to steam in a microwave.

serves 4 as an appetizer

1. Cut the pork belly into large pieces (2 inches in length) that are still easy to pick up with tongs.
2. Heat a Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat until a bead of water sizzles and evaporates on contact. Add the peanut oil and swirl to coat the bottom. Add the pork and sear on all sides until lightly browned. Add the garlic, ginger, and scallions and cook briefly, for about 20 seconds, so that they become aromatic.
3. Add the chicken stock, soy sauce, rice wine, sugar, cinnamon, star anise, chilies, and Sichuan pepper. Bring the liquid to boil, then reduce the heat to a simmer. Cover and simmer for 40 to 50 minutes, until the pork belly is fork tender.
4. When the pork is ready, use tongs to transfer it to a cutting board and cut into $\frac{1}{3}$ -inch-thick slices. Return the pork to the braising liquid and cover to keep warm until the buns are ready.
5. Steam the buns according to package instructions. You can assemble the buns by placing a slice of pork belly on the bottom, then top it off with a small spoonful of hoisin sauce, a dusting of crushed peanuts, and a bit of cilantro. Or for a more hands-on experience for your guests, bring the individual components to the table so that all can assemble their own buns.

1 pound pork belly, preferably boneless with skin on
1 tablespoon peanut or vegetable oil
3 garlic cloves, smashed
1 1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and sliced
2 scallions, cut into 2-inch lengths
4 cups Chicken Stock (page 172)
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons Chinese rice wine or dry sherry
2 tablespoons sugar
1 large piece cinnamon stick or cassia bark
2 pieces star anise
2 dried red chilies
1 teaspoon ground Sichuan pepper
1 package large steamed buns (6) or small steamed buns (12)
3 tablespoons hoisin sauce for serving
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup crushed peanuts
Fresh cilantro sprigs