

January to March 2026

Complimentary Copy

Palate.

Begin The Year
with Flavour

Voices from the pass and the bar

WHERE THE LAND
FEEDS THE TABLE

From soil to shared plates, A Little Farm On The Hill serves more than your appetite





MICHELIN
2024

MICHELIN
2025

MICHELIN
2026



COLONIAL INDIAN HERITAGE

Nestled in The Republik, Bukit Damansara, Frangipaani offers contemporary Indian dining inspired by British colonial India. Its elegant interior, with deep woods, mosaic tiles, soft lighting and an open-air skylit patio, creates a romantic ambience, complemented by potted palms and weekend live piano music.

Serving authentic Indian cuisine, Frangipaani brings guests on a culinary journey through the vibrant subcontinent. Signatures like the crisp and tangy Bombay Prawn Koliwada, the rich and aromatic Crab Meat Xec-Xec, and their creamy Butter Chicken take centre stage.

With fine wines, crafted cocktails, refreshing lassis and a warm, greenery-filled colonial ambience, Frangipaani promises a memorable dining experience.



CRAB MEAT
XEC XEC



PRAWN KOLIWADA



ALPHONSO
AFFAIR



HARA PATTI CHAAT

FRANGIPAANI
THE REPUBLIK, LOT NO.M.03,
MEZZANINE FLOOR, JALAN MEDAN SETIA 1,
BUKIT DAMANSARA, 50490 KUALA LUMPUR

Monday - Thursday
11.30am to 3pm & 6pm to 11pm
Friday - Sunday
11.30am to 3.30pm & 6pm to 11.30pm
www.theolivetreegroup.com



A New Chapter In Taste

Blink and we're well into the new year. If you're reading this and about to flip through the rest of the magazine, know that you're likely about to break whatever New Year's resolution you've just set for yourself in 2026. Because for us Malaysians, the season for fun and feasting has only just begun. Much like the year, this quarterly tome begins not in quiet reflection, but in celebration. From Valentine's Day to Lunar New Year, and the festivals that follow—Ramadan, Raya—this is a season that reminds us how our unique culture, rituals, and flavours shape the way we gather, remember, and connect.

On the topic of celebrating, what you hold in your hands is a milestone: our inaugural full-fledged issue of *Palate*, a step beyond the annual dining guide that our readers have also just recently devoured. Thicker, broader, and more immersive, this edition celebrates the full spectrum of food, drink, and the experiences that surround them.

In this publication, we traverse Malaysia's rich culinary and creative landscape. Starting on a working farm above the city, Pete Teo and Lisa Ngan remind us that soil is the origin of all taste, and that careful cultivation—from earth to plate—can transform even the simplest ingredients. In the heart of KL, across the pond in Sarawak, and even island hopping over to Langkawi, we also meet chefs and mixologists whose craft is measured not only in technique, but in vision and story. Here, heritage and innovation coexist, whether in reimagined Sarawakian classics or cocktails that read like poetry in a glass.

That said, I'd like you to consider this release both a guide and an invitation to slow down, to savour, and to taste with intention. Food and drink will forever be among life's greatest indulgences, so partake in the curiosity, drink to human ingenuity, and enjoy the shared moments. Between farmers, chefs, mixologists, and diners, it's what makes food and drink more than sustenance: they make culture, memory, and joy.

Kuzai

Tengku Zainab Ajlaa
Editor-in-Chief

Photography: Kim Mun; Styling: Mughni Che Din, Surya Ammar; Makeup: Joey Yap;
Hair: Nicole Ng; Dress: Max Mara; Watch: Agner.

FLAVOUR ROOTED IN TRADITION

At Jade Pavilion, it begins with care - fresh ingredients, skilled hands and a dining room that simply feels good to be in. Each dish is prepared with quiet confidence, allowing the natural character of the ingredients to shine.

From the gentle bustle of the open kitchen to the warm glow of the dining space, there is a sense of care that carries through every moment. It is dining done with intention and delivered with a grace that makes each visit feel genuinely memorable.

SCAN FOR
RESERVATIONS



Jade Pavilion | Level 8
Pavilion Hotel Kuala Lumpur
Managed by Banyan Tree

12:00 pm – 2:30 pm | Lunch
6:00 pm – 10:00 pm | Dinner

+603 2117 2823

jadepavilion.pavilionhotel
@banyantree.com



Palate.

ALVIN SINCLAIR Managing Director and Publisher

EDITORIAL

TENGKU ZAINAB AJLAA Editor-in-Chief

PATRICK LOH Deputy Editor

COLIN GOMEZ Features Editor

VANESSA LIM Writer

CREATIVE

SHYE AYOB Senior Designer

ARIUMATHY MARIO PUSPANATHAN Designer

ADVERTISING

FABIAN KONG Senior Sales Director

EVENTS & MARKETING

NASYA-ANN APPADURAY Marketing Executive

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Palate is published five times annually by **Top 30 Media Sdn Bhd** Registration No: 202401049041 (1594886-A)
Level 17, Menara UOA, Tower B, No 5 Jalan Bangsar Utama 1, Bangsar, 59000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email info@top30media.com Kuan Press Sdn Bhd (621940-X), No. 1 Jalan Perindustrian PP7, Taman Perindustrian Putra Permai, 43300 Seri Kembangan, Selangor Darul Ehsan. Tel +603-8959 2332. All rights reserved.
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Flavour Led, Ingredient Driven

Horizon Grill begins with good ingredients and the care to treat them well. Fresh seafood and premium cuts are prepared with a steady hand and a modern touch, each plate guided by flavour above all else. With the city stretching out from the 58th floor, the experience feels personal, thoughtful and simply unforgettable.



Horizon Grill | Level 58
Banyan Tree Kuala Lumpur

12:00 pm - 2:30 pm | Lunch
6:00 pm - 10:00pm | Dinner

 **+603 2113 1821**

 **horizongrill.kl@banyantree.com**

SCAN FOR
RESERVATIONS



INSIDE THE ISSUE

2	Editor's Letter
46	Chef's Table: Cover Story
128	Aftertaste

GRAZE

12	SCENE AND BE SEEN These new KL spots are where the city's trendsetters are heading next.
14	STILL THE SEASON For Malaysians, Christmas and New Year are just the beginning.
18	STACKED & STUFFED These seven sandwich spots in KL serve satisfaction between the buns.
22	WOK AND WINE Pair the right wine and Malaysia's flavours come alive.
26	SPOONFUL OF SPIRIT The five types of <i>laksa</i> Malaysians love dearly.
30	LET'S DO THE ASIAN TWIST Nine Asian-fusion pastas that are worth every swirl.



SUSTENANCE

96	SERUMPUN SERAWAK KL and Osaka roots return to Mulu's heart.
98	EATING THE PROBLEM Enjoying invasive species could solve ecological dilemmas.
101	WORLD OF DESSERTS Chef Yeong shares his quirks and favourite foods.
102	LIQUID GOLD Malaysia is home to an extraordinary range of honeys.
106	PROOF OF LEADERSHIP Bar Terumi reflects Shirmy Chan's inner world.
110	A CLASE ACT Clase Azul shows tequila as art and revelation in one pour.
114	THE ART OF CANTONESE CUISINE Chef Keith Yeap on why Cantonese cuisine deserves the spotlight.
116	FARM TO FICTION Wonder what makes a vegetable? Don't. It's all made up.
121	WHERE PERANAKAN MEETS NOW Chef Abby Lee spills on her guilty pleasures and pet peeves.
122	FLAVOURS FACING EAST Karen Yap goes the extra mile for Sarawak's food culture.

RSVP

38	GRIND & GROOVE Dôme Café celebrates World Coffee Day with a caffeine-fuelled buzz.
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AT HOME

62	BOARD GOALS UNLOCKED Impress your friends with a gorgeous charcuterie board.
68	THE FIERY FIXER Ginger heats up cocktails, sweetens desserts, and boosts every broth.
73	MEN WHO COOK Andrew Antonijevic serves up his signature Sataráš Bruschetta.

74	STOVE-AVERSE FEAST Three 15-Minute air fryer recipes that hit the spot.
78	THE SEVEN PERSONALITIES OF ICE From coffee chillers to glitter cubes, ice adds personality to every drink.
82	WEEKEND BRUNCH AT HOME Tips to turn any morning get-together into a full-blown occasion.
86	STAR AND SPICE Twelve seasonings, spices, and herbs that match your zodiac.
93	IN A SUGAR RUSH Three ways to elevate your dishes with sugar.



On the COVER



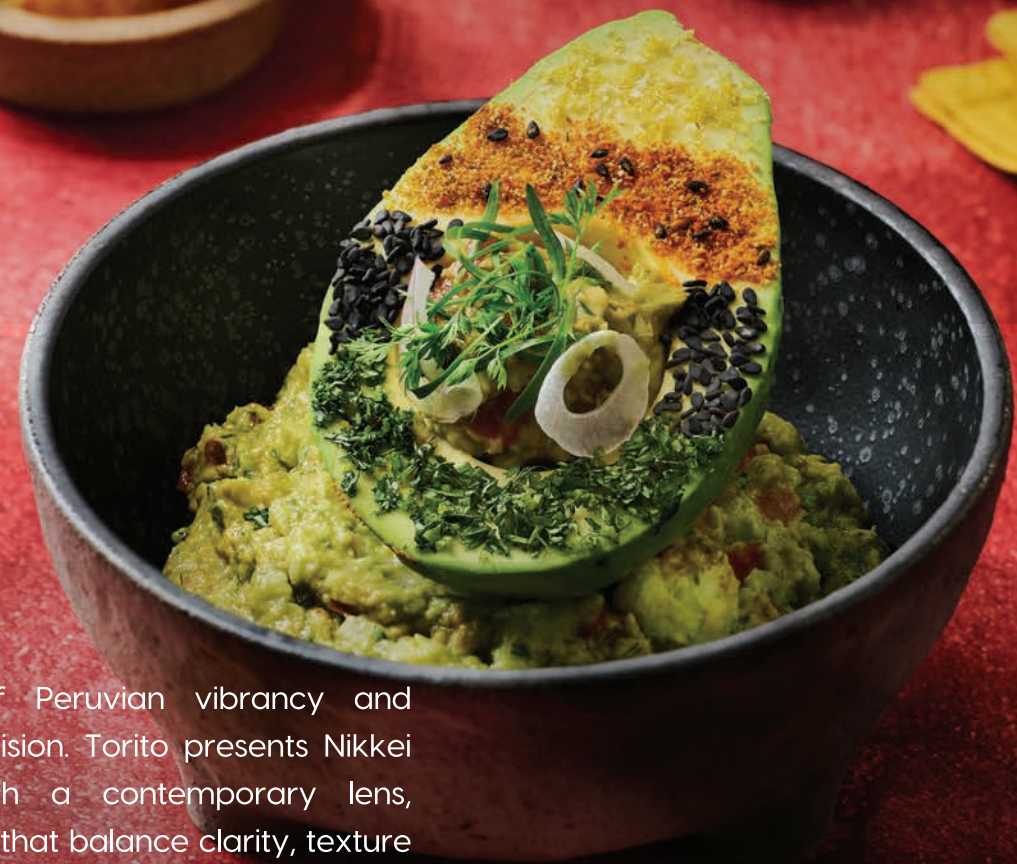
Photography: TRISHA TOH and BILLY SIMON
Conceptualised by: SHIREEN ZAINUDIN and
VIJI KRISHNAMOORTHY for HAVE YOU EATEN?

LIL' FARM, BIG HARVEST

At A Little Farm On The Hill, couple Pete Teo and Lisa Ngan aren't merely growing vegetables, but rather, they're cultivating soil—the foundation of every vibrant harvest. As a working farm supplying Malaysia's top-tier restaurants, freshness is non-negotiable. And for those who dine on-site, their in-house restaurant transforms the farm's produce into elevated dishes that tell the story of the land, care, and craft behind it.



Redefining Peruvian Nikkei in the Heart of Kuala Lumpur



A meeting of Peruvian vibrancy and Japanese precision. Torito presents Nikkei cuisine through a contemporary lens, offering dishes that balance clarity, texture and depth with understated refinement.

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Torito | Level 53, Banyan Tree Kuala Lumpur
2:00 pm - 4:30 pm | Lunch
6:00 pm - 10:00 pm | Dinner
+60 3 2113 1823
torito.kl@banyantree.com



Chef Takuya Katakura, Chef Chihiro Miyazaki, Chef Hiroki Eguchi

Slurps Of Sapporo

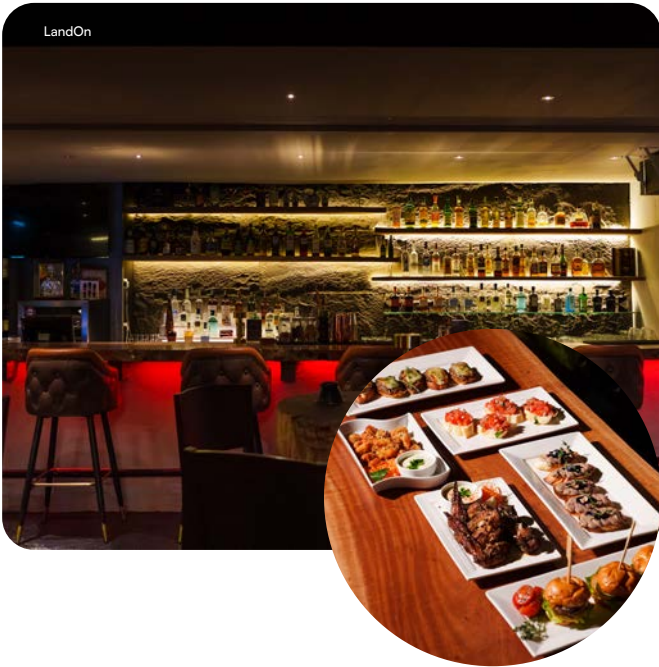
Chef Chihiro Miyazaki, founder of Tokyo's Michelin Bib Gourmand Soranobori, and Minamo follow Japan's shifting seasons with a delectable new broth. They now introduce a spicy Beef Miso ramen, inspired by Sapporo-style bowls with rich miso broth and hearty toppings like sweet corn, cabbage, and bean sprouts. Available until the end of February, it will then rotate into Minamo's seasonal menu.

Words: TENGKU ZAI

Scene & be Seen

These brand-new spots in KL have just opened their doors, but they're already on our radar. From chic dining to bakeries to buzzing nightlife, here's where the city's trendsetters are headed next.

Words: TENGKU ZAI



LandOn Calling

Descend beneath KL's busy streets and you'll find LandOn, a discreet underground hideaway in Wisma Central where cocktails tell stories and conversations happen. Part neighbourhood bar, part urban retreat, the space blends moody lighting, recycled durian-wood shelves, and Central Park-inspired furnishings to create an intimate, playful vibe. Signature cocktails like Madagasia and Whispering Jade, crafted with house-made syrups, pair perfectly with truffle fries and pan-seared beef, making LandOn a cosy, conversational escape from the city buzz just above. Tel: +6011-6521 2600



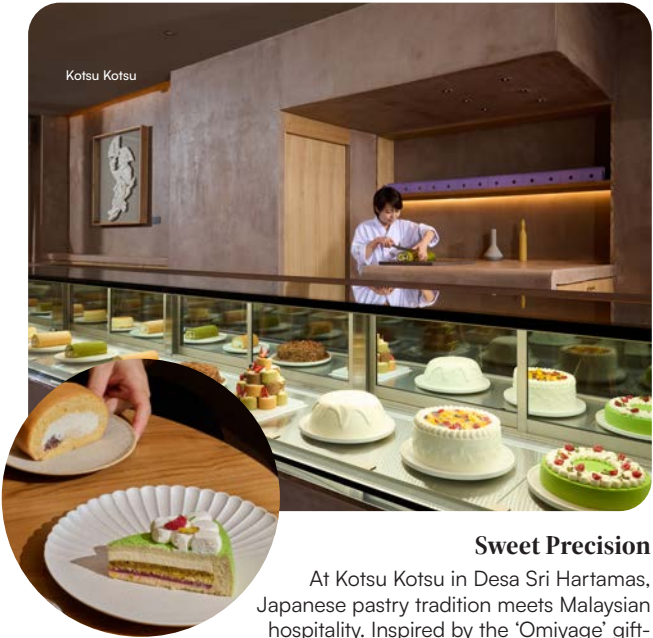
The Devil Eats Tomahawks

As Smith & Wollensky has just opened its first KL doors at Suria KLCC, it arrives with unapologetic flair. Spanning over 18,000 square feet across two levels, the steakhouse boasts sleek bars, private dining rooms, and what's perhaps the city's largest wine cellar. And yes—true to *The Devil Wears Prada*, the steaks are so good, because "she'll eat nothing else." Our favourites? The Angry Prawns, Bone Marrow, Swinging Tomahawk, and a classic Bombe Alaska. IG: @smithandwollensky.my



Nature's Kitchen

Perched high up in Ilham Tower, Gaia's serves modern Langkasuka cuisine with a heartfelt twist. Drawing inspiration from a grandmother's Northern Malaysian kitchen, vibrant Thai-influenced spices elevate rice and mixed dishes, infusing every bite with warmth and connection. Named after the Earth Mother, Gaia's celebrates the strength of women and the bounty of nature, so meals here will always be a tribute to heritage and a taste of the present. gaiaaskl.com



Sweet Precision

At Kotsu Kotsu in Desa Sri Hartamas, Japanese pastry tradition meets Malaysian hospitality. Inspired by the 'Omiyage' gift-giving culture, every roll cake and confection is baked fresh daily and cut to order for ultimate fluffiness. Chef Sasaki, a Japanese Muslim chef, ensures the cakes are halal-certified, while Chef Fukuda, a roll cake specialist, brings precision and artistry to every creation. From Japanese ovens to a four-metre-long display, every detail celebrates patience, care, and thoughtful gifting. kotsukotsumy.com



Café Magic

Step into Apricot and you might just forget you're in a busy mall. Sunlit nooks, buzzing tables, and a whimsical Dessert Tree that's part theatre, part indulgence turn European café charm into everyday magic. From bold Chicken Nduja Pasta to the brand's first in-house pizzeria, Chef Victor Yap blends Parisian flair with Malaysian warmth. Consider this a must for your next coffee date, brunch, or sweet escape. Tel: +6011-2111 0757



Triple Threat

One house, three ways to linger. Santai House, the culinary arm of Ascaro Padel at TREC, offers sun-soaked brunches and day kitchen bites, a vibrant pool club for long afternoons, and fire-grilled modern dining as night falls. With versatile spaces and a relaxed, stylish vibe, it's where guests can move seamlessly from sport to *santai*. IG: @santaihouse.kl



Nine To Night

Sun and Moon transforms a single space into two moods: sunlit brunch haven by day, super chic bistro by night. Born from the team behind popular local dining concepts Barkar and Eat and Cook, it serves porkfree dishes that balance comfort with creativity. Think fresh galettes to hearty risottos. With natural light, stunning ID, and a warm ambience, this will be your new favourite dining destination, whatever the hour. Tel: +6012-311 9953

Still The Season

For Malaysians, Christmas and New Year marks the beginning of an entire season of back-to-back festivities, with Valentine's Day, Chinese New Year, and Ramadan around the corner. Here are some of the celebratory hotel eats (and one institutional outlier) to look out for.

Words: TENGKU ZAI



Bright And Auspicious

Back to usher in the year of the fire horse is EQ Kuala Lumpur's Golden Phoenix pop-up. Among the city's finest Chinese restaurants during the nascent haute dining scene of the '80s and '90s, this edition honours over 50 years of heritage with fresh new flavours. Start with the abalone yee sang before delectable mains and a sweet ending with a snow skin mandarin orange and Golden Phoenix rice cake among others.
Tel: +603-2789 7777



Feast With Feeling

This Ramadan, Hilton KL's 'Jamuan Penuh Makna, Raikan Detik Bersama' sets the tone for a buka puasa defined by tradition, modern flavours, and meaningful connection. Served at Vasco's, the experience unfolds across more than 180 dishes, live stations, and responsibly sourced seafood with the return of Keropok Citarasa Laut. From farm-to-table produce to indulgent durian finales, it's a feast shaped by gratitude.
Tel: +603 2264 2264



Sundown Spread

At Contango, The Majestic Hotel KL, *buka puasa* unfolds as a generous Malay-inspired spread made for gathering. Towering skewers, fragrant rice, sambal-glossed prawns and grilled meats line the counter, setting the mood for the fast broken in grand, communal style.
Tel: +603-2785 8000



Fortune, Served

Ring in the Lunar New Year with three celebratory specials from Oversea Restaurant. To toss things off, yee sang arrives vibrant and plentiful—layered with fruit, seafood, and prosperity in every lift. The Hong Kong Waxed Meat Claypot Rice comforts with glossy *lap cheong*, cured meats, and fragrant rice crisped at the base. Go grand with the Prosperity Treasure Pot, a luxe assembly of abalone, prawns, roast meats, and premium produce meant for sharing.
oversea.com.my



Love Is In The Air

Looking to connect over conversation? Whether you're looking to celebrate Valentine's or Galentine's, love is served one delicate bite at a time at The Ritz-Carlton, KL's Valentine's High Tea. Indulge in ruby-red cakes, bite-sized quiches, and buttery scones stacked to perfection, inviting guests to savour sweet—and savoury—moments together.
Tel: +603-2142 8000



Tea Temptations

Looking for a different way to celebrate the new year? Usher in the Year of the Horse at Shangri-La KL's Lobby Lounge with a high tea as vibrant as the season. Bite-sized cakes and confections—featuring peanuts, oranges, and cherries—sit alongside buttery scones, while modern twists on traditional savories, like a contemporary *pai tee*, add a playful edge.
Tel: +603-2074 3900

CARVING A NEW COVE

Roberto's

A new chapter in Italian dining unfolds at Senibong Cove, where Roberto's makes its Johor debut with polished plates and a chic atmosphere.



The launch of Roberto's at Senibong Cove, Johor Bahru



Roberto's at Senibong Cove, Johor Bahru

Some evenings feel special from the moment they begin and then there are evenings like 12 November, when the universe decides to sprinkle a little extra stardust. Roberto Guiati and his team gathered at Senibong Cove in Masai, Johor, to celebrate the grand opening of Roberto's, and what unfolded was far more than a ribbon-cutting ceremony. It became a once-in-a-lifetime moment when Guiati was awarded the prestigious Knight of the 'Order of the Star of Italy', also known as the 'Cavaliere dell'Ordine della Stella d'Italia'. With that, the grand opening became grander than anything we'd imagined.

AN HONOUR CARRIED ACROSS OCEANS

Presented by Ambassador Raffaele Langella on behalf of Italy's President, Sergio Mattarella, the award was a shining testament to Guiati's dedication to Italian culture and hospitality right here in Malaysia. The 'Order of the Star of Italy' is not just any recognition; it honours individuals who strengthen Italy's ties with the world through culture, hospitality, diplomacy, and heart.

To see Guiati receive this honour here in Malaysia, surrounded by his team, partners, and community, was a moment that left everyone feeling humbled and admittedly, a little misty-eyed.

A NIGHT FILLED WITH WARMTH AND DISTINGUISHED COMPANY

The celebration was graced by notable guests who turned an already sparkling night into a truly unforgettable celebration:

- YAB Dato' Onn Hafiz Ghazi, Chief Minister of Johor
- His Excellency Raffaele Langella, Ambassador of Italy
- YB Gobind Singh Deo, Minister of Digital & MP for Damansara

Their presence reflected not just support for Roberto's, but a growing and heartfelt connection between Italy and Malaysia especially in food, culture and hospitality.

THE START OF SOMETHING AMAZING

This wasn't just the launch of a restaurant but the start of a new chapter rooted in Italian heritage, exuberant flavours, and the belief that food can bridge hearts and cultures.

The team at Roberto's is deeply grateful to Ambassador Langella and everyone who has supported their journey, and they can't wait to welcome diners to Roberto's at Senibong Cove for authentic Italian flavours, heartfelt hospitality, and the joy of good food by the waterfront.

A Night to Remember



We recently experienced one of the most meaningful moments in our journey. On 12 November, we celebrated the grand opening of Roberto's at Senibong Cove in Masai, Johor, and the evening became even more extraordinary when Mr. Roberto Guiati was honoured with the distinguished title Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy (Cavaliere dell'Ordine della Stella d'Italia).

This recognition, given during our opening celebration, made the night unforgettable for our entire team and everyone who joined us.

A PRESTIGIOUS HONOUR FROM ITALY

The award was conferred by Ambassador Raffaele Langella, representing the President of the Republic of Italy, Sergio Mattarella. This title is one of Italy's highest civilian honours. It is awarded to individuals who have made significant contributions toward strengthening cultural, economic and diplomatic ties with Italy.

We were deeply humbled that Roberto's work and dedication in Malaysia were recognised on such an important platform.

A Message from Our Hearts

Witnessing Roberto receive the Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy is a memory we will always treasure. We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Ambassador Raffaele Langella for presenting this honour and for recognising the dedication behind our journey. We are truly thankful for everyone who has supported us, encouraged us and believed in our passion for sharing authentic Italian experiences.

Grazie di cuore. Your support means more than words can express.

The grand opening of Roberto's at Senibong Cove marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for us. We look forward to creating meaningful dining experiences, continuing the legacy of Italian culture and welcoming our community to enjoy the flavours of Italy by the waterfront.

A Ceremony Graced by Distinguished Guests

The event was attended by many respected leaders, adding warmth and significance to the celebration.

WE WERE HONoured TO WELCOME:

- Yang Amat Berhormat Dato' Onn Hafiz Ghazi, the Menteri Besar (Chief Minister) of Johor
- His Excellency Raffaele Langella, the Italian Ambassador to Malaysia
- Yang Berhormat (YB) Gobind Singh Deo, Minister of Digital & Member of Parliament for Damansara
- Mr. Sean Chen, the renowned Singaporean actor

THE GRAND OPENING OF ROBERTO'S AT SENIBONG COVE



Stacked & Stuffed

Not all good food behaves, and there's satisfaction in a sandwich that refuses to stay tidy. Around KL, these seven must-try spots embrace exactly that.

Words: VANESSA L



They say the messier, the better—and who are we to argue when a delicious sandwich is essentially chaos in a stack? From Japanese sandos built on beef, and fluffy flat loaves loaded with spicy pork sausages, to exquisite English muffins to munch, here are seven sandwich spots to visit around KL that are worth both the mess and the miles.

Where Hokkaido Milk Meets Big, Beefy Intent



Sando-Icchi

Publika KL is spilling over with food and beverage options, but a sando sanctuary like Sando-Icchi is stacking rather high on the list of pit-stops to make. Important to note, their stacks start with Hokkaido milk bread before sealing it with only six toothsome selections on the menu. Topping the others is the Big-Sized Feliz Steak Sando made with Australian beef seared to a bronzed coat and tender through the middle, then slathered with their in-house black pepper sauce. To scratch that itch for a more classic chew, try the California Double Beef Cheese Sandwich. Buttery cheese slices cushioned between morning-soft milk bread, this Sando-Icchi No.3 is unapologetically tasty as it smashes two patties together. "Come hungry, leave hyped." Indeed. Tel: +6017-776 3603

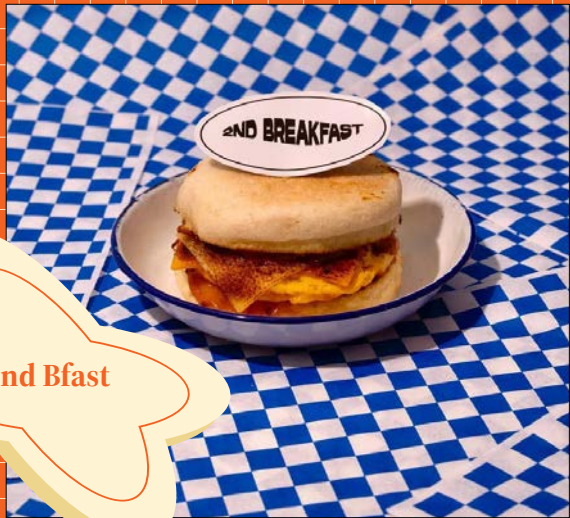
A Taste Of Italy, But In Bangsar

A little sinful, but a lot scrumptious, La Spiga D'Oro is a loaf affair by a wedded duo who wishes to introduce Italian stack stories to KL. Located within a condominium complex at Bangsar South, lip-smacking schiacciata is the star of the show at this delicatessen. They're also rightfully paired with salads, dairy spreads, and other house specials.

Skimping on ingredients? Never happens at La Spiga D'Oro. Stuffed with Milanese salami and enveloped by Swiss Emmental, the L'Andrea is a beaut. Bound by homemade mayonnaise and a tantalising truffle sauce, one bite in makes it clear why this is such a stellar melt. But if your palate is Malaysian and you're craving something creamier with some heat? The Calabrese wears a spicy shawl of nduja, mellowed by whole burrata—fresh from the cow. Add their homemade habanero jam and what you get is sunshine turned up. Messy, indulgent, and entirely worth it. Tel: +603-7971 7408



La Spiga D'Oro



2nd Bfast

A Raw Take On Freshness Coming First

Harboured at HSBC Bukit Bintang, Rawtee specialises in Italian focaccia sandwiches crafted with Muslim-friendly ingredients and a clear soft spot for generous stacks. The menu offers set combinations in two sizes, giving you six selections to play between. While the focaccia itself often steals the spotlight, it's what's tucked inside that truly wins the palate. Take the Agnello Pesto: slow-cooked lamb leg laid over bright pesto, paired with milky mozzarella and sundried tomatoes, then finished with fresh greens, crunchy pine nuts, and Grana Padano. IG: @rawtee.my



Rawtee



Scrappy Dough

Because One Breakfast Just Isn't Enough

Breakfast, for some, comes in a bowl or on a plate—be it soup noodles or springy hotcakes. Not at 2nd Bfast, though. Eschewing typical sun-up stacks, it builds breakfast around dietary-minded details tucked between toasted English muffins. With a zing inspired by Vancouver and guided by the owner's eating ethos, the menu—entirely meat-free—is never announced as such. It's meant to be enjoyed, not declared.

Found at Triptyk, 2nd Bfast features just four menu items. We love The OG that comforts with a golden-yolk centre beneath torched white and yellow cheddar, finished with sundried tomato mayo, while the two sides round it out into a morning worth waking up for. Tel: +6011-6224 2774

Remember, Always Rise To The Occasion

Scrappy Dough may be tucked away in an obscure corner of Sungai Besi, but there's nothing modest about its carb game. From sourdough focaccia and rustic loaves to generously sized bagels, everything here rises with comfort while nudging the boundaries of what good dough can be. Set within an old, industrial-style space, it's the sourdough that steals the show. Go for the Kam Heong Chicken Sandwich Bagel—bold, airy, and unmistakably Asian—or the Sambal Prawn Bagel Sandwich for those who favour a hit of local heat. Tel: +6013-427 6740



Ling's Focacceria

Amping Up Your Energy

Tucked in Ampang, AMP Café is spread across two storeys—airy, bright, and welcoming. The menu mirrors the café's ethos: hearty, thoughtful, and unapologetically satisfying. Take the classic Club Sandwich: layers of charred beef bacon and chicken hugged by crisp sourdough, topped with a sunny egg—a stack we're sure is made for hands, not cutlery.

The Tuna and Jalapeño Cheese Melt is where sea meets scorch, the jalapeño adding just enough heat, paired with singed vegetable chips for crunch. The Salt Beef Sandwich offers tang and texture: tender salt beef, bell pepper, pickled gherkins, and peppery rocket, rounded off with aioli.

Of course, AMP Café offers a diverse menu, but be sure that every sandwich packs bold flavours, unexpected touches, and comfort. And that's why they're on this list. Tel: +6017-330 3865

Pressed To Impress

Born from a corporate-to-crumb pivot, Ling's Focacceria sits quietly among the many rows of shophouses in Mutiara Damansara. Its flatbreads are baked strictly on demand, each requiring a two-day head start—a process that underscores the brand's quality-over-quantity philosophy. With 11 items on the menu, restraint is worn with pride.

Five focaccia loaves form the backbone of their offering—garlic butter, miso butter, cheesy jalapeño, sundried tomato, and Genovese—but it's the sandwiches that truly wake the palate. Signatures include the Grilled 4 Cheese featuring a generous stretch of mozzarella, Gruyère, and Colby-Jack pressed between two toasted slabs of focaccia. For something tangier, the Kimchi Grilled Cheese layers butter-brushed homemade kimchi (fermented vegetables) onto gochujang (fermented chilli paste) focaccia, finished with crisped garlic and spring onion. This Asian-leaning stack is only the beginning of what's good here. Suffice to say, Ling's Focacceria is well worth the visit. Tel: +6019-219 8252



AMP Cafe

Wok & Wine

Pairing wine with such a range of flavours may seem daunting, but the right glass can make Malaysia's beloved dishes sing even louder. Here's how to uncork a new dimension of flavour.

Words: PATRICK LOH

Built on centuries of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Indigenous influences, Malaysian food is a mosaic of our multiculturalism and an intricate dance of spices, herbs, and textures. Unsurprisingly, the complexity that makes our cuisine so exciting can intimidate even the most seasoned sommeliers. But wine, when thoughtfully chosen, amplifies those flavours instead of competing with them. Here's an exploration of how to match beloved Malaysian dishes with wines that rise to the occasion.



1. Laksa Lemak with Chardonnay

Laksa lemak’s creamy coconut broth and fragrant spices find a natural ally in a well-balanced Chardonnay. A lightly oaked Burgundy (if red is a must) or cool-climate Aussie Chardonnay offers citrus and stone-fruit brightness, with enough body to complement the richness of the soup. The wine’s subtle buttery texture mirrors coconut milk’s luxurious mouthfeel without clashing with the lemongrass and galangal aromatics.

2. Assam Pedas with Sauvignon Blanc

This sour-and-spicy fish stew from the Straits of Malacca demands a wine with high acidity and herbal lift. A zesty Sauvignon Blanc—think Marlborough or Sancerre—mirrors the tamarind’s tang and fresh herbs like daun kesum (Vietnamese coriander). Its crisp citrus notes cleanse the palate after each fiery spoonful, letting the delicate fish shine.

3. Char Kway Teow with bubbly Rosé

Char Kway Teow’s smoky *wok hei* calls for bubbles that can handle charred notes and juicy prawns. Enter a brut sparkling rosé. Its crisp acidity slices through the oily noodles while its berry-tinged effervescence highlights the briny sweetness of cockles and shrimp. If you’re feeling indulgent, a grower Champagne with a Pinot Noir base offers a toasty depth that mirrors the dish’s caramelised edges.

4. Satay with Pinot Noir

Malaysian satay—marinated, grilled skewers served with peanut sauce—needs a red with finesse. A fruit-forward Pinot Noir, ideally from New Zealand’s Central Otago or Oregon’s Willamette Valley, offers bright cherry flavours and soft tannins that echo the smokiness of charred meat while complementing the peanut sauce’s nutty depth.

5. Nasi Lemak with off-dry Riesling

Coconut rice, crunchy anchovies, roasted peanuts, and the unmistakable heat of *sambal* create a symphony of fat, salt, and spice. A chilled off-dry Riesling—particularly one from Germany’s Mosel region—strikes a beautiful balance. Its natural acidity cuts through the richness of coconut milk while a whisper of residual sweetness tames the *sambal*’s fire. For an extra local nod, try a Riesling with a limey zest that plays off the aromatic cucumber and fresh herbs on the plate.

6. Roti Canai and chicken curry with Gewürztraminer

Flaky *roti* dipped into aromatic curry is a textural treat as soft layers meet warm spice. Gewürztraminer, with its lychee and rose-petal perfume, complements the curry’s spice bouquet without overpowering the dish. The wine’s mild sweetness and subtle oiliness meld with creamy curry gravies while standing up to fragrant hits of cardamom and clove. For vegetarian dhal or *paneer* sides, Gewürztraminer’s floral character works equally well.

7. Kuih with late-harvest wines

No Malaysian meal is complete without a colourful tray of *kuih* (traditional cakes). Late-harvest wines like Sauternes provides honeyed richness to match sticky textures. For a lighter finish, a Moscato d’Asti is a refreshing counterpoint to palm sugar and pandan.

8. Beef Rendang with Shiraz

Rich, slow-cooked beef perfumed with coconut and a cabinet of spices is a dish of pure depth. Here, a bold red like Syrah from the Northern Rhône or a lush Barossa Shiraz stands tall. The wine’s dark fruit, peppery spice, and supple tannins meet *rendang*’s intense flavours head-on, creating a pairing as hearty as it is harmonious. For those who prefer a slightly lighter profile, a Spanish Rioja Reserva with soft oak notes is equally satisfying.



Balance heat with sweet: A touch of residual sugar in white wines—Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Chenin Blanc—cools spicy dishes without dulling flavour.

Respect the broth: For noodle soups, consider the soup’s base rather than the toppings. Coconut-based broths love creamy whites, while tamarind broths crave crisp acidity.

Bubbles are universal: Sparkling wines cleanse the palate and add celebratory flair, making them a safe bet with street food feasts.

Spoonful of Spirit

*Ask five Malaysians what laksa is and
you might get five different answers.
Here's why they're all right.*

Words: COLIN GOMEZ



Laksa is a dish that is ubiquitous here in Malaysia. It is every bit a part of the culinary fabric as the go-to mentions when talking local cuisine—i.e. your *nasi lemak*s and *roti canai*. But how do you define *laksa*? Now, that's a question for which the answer is not quite so entirely clear-cut.

You see, *laksa* is a dish that, much like its enjoyers up and down the country, celebrates diversity and the variety that comes with it. Having said that, you can generally separate it into two main types: curry *laksa*, a creamy, coconut milk-based soup that's rich and spicy; and *asam laksa*, a sour, tamarind-based broth often with a fishy flavour profile.

One of the many great things about *laksa* is how every state or region across the peninsula proudly holds its own interpretation of what this hearty bowl of noodles should look like. Someone from Penang will have a different conception of *laksa* to somebody from, say, KL—and yet they can both be right. Speaking of Penang, just a little south in Perak is where we'll be casting our eye for the first stop of our little *laksa* lookaround.



Perak Laksa

Perak *laksa* is a close cousin of the Penang variety that also uses tamarind and fish, but tends to place more of an emphasis on balancing the sweet and the sour. Much like the Penang variation, they often go for rice noodles—though you'll sometimes find places that opt for vermicelli or flat rice noodles instead.

Similar in its ingredient makeup, Perak *laksa* can sometimes lean on the sweeter side, courtesy of the added pineapple or sugar. The fish used is often very fresh, giving Perak *laksa* a more delicate flavour than most.



Penang Laksa

When it comes to Penang, these proud islanders favour a bowl of noodles in the *asam laksa* mould, and theirs is perhaps the most emblematic example of that style. The broth—a make-or-break element in any *laksa*—is a tamarind-based one, often mixed with mackerel to create a soup of fishy, tangy proportions.

Penangites tend to prefer a thicker rice noodle (known as *laksa mee*) to pad out their dish. Some characteristic ingredients to look out for include mint leaves and pineapple, as well as a spoonful of shrimp paste to add some extra depth. It's often topped with a hard-boiled egg for some added protein.



Melaka Laksa

Food in Melaka is unlike anywhere else in the country, and their *laksa* is no exception to that. The broth forms the heart of what's known as Nyonya laksa, consisting of a blend of coconut milk, spices, and sometimes chicken or shrimp broth. Aromatic and complex, here you'll find a good balance of spicy, sour, and creamy notes.

The spice mixture used is varied, but common ingredients include dried chillies, turmeric, galangal, lemongrass, and shrimp paste. Candlenuts are also often added to impart a savoury richness to the bowl. The unique herbs and spices prevalent in Peranakan cuisine make their influence known here, setting the *laksa* in Melaka apart from its contemporaries.



Kedah Laksa (Laksa Utara)

Keeping with *asam laksa*, we venture further north to Kedah, where their rendition—also known as *laksa utara*—comes in a fish-based broth typically fashioned from either sardines or mackerel. This version tends to be a bit lighter than the aforementioned varieties, with servings often including cucumber, herbs like basil, and a splash of fresh coconut milk.

More delicate than the Penang variety, it's comparably less zingy but with a richer texture from the additional coconut milk. The milder broth and more muted spices mean it can be considered a more "refined" *laksa*, taking a subtler approach.



Johor Laksa

Arguably the state's defining dish, perhaps the most striking feature of Johor *laksa* is the use of spaghetti as its noodle of choice. Its thick, gravy-like broth—made from ground fish, coconut milk, and various herbs and spices—is another one of its most distinctive facets. Rich and creamy, the addition of tamarind adds a tanginess that prevents the dish from becoming too cloying, while ingredients such as Vietnamese coriander, lemongrass, and galangal ensure a complex blend of sweet, spicy, and savoury notes. There's a wonderful interplay of texture here as well, with the softness of spaghetti contrasting delightfully against the crunch of the vegetables, all swimming in a pool of gravy that is luscious.



Kuala Lumpur Laksa

The bustling metropolis of KL favours a curry *laksa*. Much like the city itself, the *laksa* here is of a more cosmopolitan slant, combining the standout elements of other *laksas* to make for a palatable fusion of flavours. Rich and creamy, the coconut milk-based soup is spiced up with the addition of ingredients like turmeric, chilli, and lemongrass. KL *laksa* usually comes with egg noodles, though rice noodles are commonplace as well. A bowl often includes a smorgasbord of accoutrements like shrimp, tofu puffs, fish cakes, and sometimes chicken. Resting atop this bountiful spread will be a sprinkling of fresh herbs, bean sprouts, and hard-boiled eggs.

Let's Do The Asian Twist

When it comes to pastas, every slurp and strand tells a story—especially when had in KL. Discover nine Asian fusion pasta dishes worth twirling your fork into.

Words: VANESSA L



Pasta may be Italian at heart, but when it meets Asian flavours, flair, and spices, it steps beyond tradition into uncharted territory. Think carbonara rehashed with miso, or spaghetti not just in sauce, but veiled in a dashi emulsion. It's East twirling with West—an unexpected dialogue that reimagines what pasta can be, entwined with savoury whispers and briny notes that linger. Here, we noodle around with the nine pastas adorned with Asian-style smoke and aromatics across our beloved capital.



Annabell KL

Annabell KL, with its elegant European-inspired fashion and fixtures, makes for quite the sight. The towering centrepiece with bright bell jars, paired with the liquid-gold accents, is likely to sweep you away—and that's even before getting into the rest of the experience. Sailing in to delight is the Sea Crab Meat and Clams Linguine, where Sabah shore-picked crabs and clams steal the show—it's an Eastern twirl with an Italian silkiness.

After something a touch more sinful, perhaps? The Truffle Cream Fettuccine is where to look. Served with a *kampung* egg cooked perfectly to 63 degrees perched atop, it is every bit as rich as it is regal, ready to be broken into a woody truffle bedding.

Tel: +6011-2050 1888



AMP Café

In a shy and unshowy corner in Ampang sits AMP Café. Breathing modestly in industrial-chic subtlety, AMP Café stretches in a space of twos—think two open, sun-lit floors with seats aplenty. Beside them sits Double Zero Pizza, a neighbour whose wheat stretches beyond the oven, as they also serve up sourdough pizzas.

Whether it's their lunchtime or dinner menu you're tucking into, AMP Café has a variety of options that satiate as well as settle any sweet cravings you might have. While you'll find a little bit of everything here, from their toasties to their tacos and their signature bowls, our personal standout is the Seafood Laksa Fettuccini. Prawns, squid, and chewy clams swim about in your bowl as your fettuccine is spun into a creamy laksa carbonara—liquid gold cur-taining wide, flat strips of wheat anchored with briny bites. Yum! Tel: +6017-330 3865



Aposto

Embarking on a taste whispering in Italian, yet interpreted here in TTDI, Aposto stands out in the quaint neighbourhood not simply for its accent but for dishes crowned with dual-cuisine influences. Fresh seafood, handmade pastas, and char-grilled meat—it's evident that, as they say at Aposto, "Everything is good."

Take the Miso Chilli Vongole Aglio e Olio. Brewing a delicate white miso clam broth with *asari* and venus clams, it's a briny, bouncy bite harmonising with tuneful umami. Then, tangle your hand-cut linguine into the mix along with a splash of chilli slices; it's shells, soul, and just a lick of spice in each bite. Tel: +6010-282 4990



Chums Café & Dining

Comforting cuisine wrapped up in a cosy ambience: something about Chums Café & Dining speaks subtly with class. Maybe it’s the Michelin-starred chef orchestrating every bite offstage, or perhaps it’s the uniquely deployed scent of dried eucalyptus working its enchantment in the air? It’s a question hushed in quiet allure, really.

The menu, on the other hand, is unapologetically daring. Its elegance lingers at the threshold of a bold European entry that winks at Asian traditions. The Thai Green Curry Pasta is a standout feature in their lunch menu, harbouring a pronounced Thai green curry fragrance as its sauce with crushed peanuts as a garnish.

While doubts were spurred, the wonderfully Italian-Thai plate was a pleasant surprise that won our faith on the first forkful. While that’ll be the dish that understandably grabs attention here, you’d be remiss to go without a bite of the Oyster Spaghetti. Speckled with lively Pacific oysters buttering up your springy spaghetti, it’s tied together with a dashi emulsion that uplifts with its light smoky essence—a dish that is gently sweet, silky smooth, and ever so slightly chewy. *Tel: +6012-3702972*



Copaa KL

Copaa KL is that one supper club not meant to exclude but to entertain those with a taste to share, sip, and enjoy a proper lip-smacking bite. Their menus aren’t ones to stick around for long as well. Like a nomad on the adventurous move, Copaa KL’s offerings roam across diverse tastes and tongues, each nip a note in their menus’ songs.

There are two sharing-course menus on our visit, and among the many culinary *mélanges* it hosts is the Crab Roe with Linguini—a decadent dish with a crispy crunch allied to a silken softness. Served alongside are tantalising Asian options in the Claypot Rice, as well as the 7-Day-Aged Chicken brushed with Rempah Sauce. Trust Copaa to throw a great get-together, no questions asked. *Tel: +6017-272 8971*



Rebel Pasta

Perhaps it’s the name that gives it away, but Rebel Pasta doesn’t play by the rulebook. It’s a neighbourhood specialty pasta space where rules are optional, pastas are mandatorily handcrafted, and the prices are fixed with the people in mind. From Breast Mode: On? to the wallet-friendly Rebel Picks—and on some days, a chance to Meat the Rebels—the menu keeps things interesting.

On to pastas with a more Asian slant. Here, it’s worth checking out the Veggie Aglio Spaghetti that says goodbye to reds and hello to greens. Simmered *à la minute*, it sees olive oil slathering up your spaghetti with seasonal veggies and a stash of shimeji on the side. A flicker of chilli flakes, with a scattering of mushrooms to nestle the onsen egg over the luscious strands, completes the experience, making for a saucy hotbed ready to slurp. *Tel: +6012-331 3048*



Timothy Café

Tucked along Jalan Tun HS Lee, Timothy Café isn’t a spot to be missed. Their handmade pastas are as good as it gets. Curl around the Creamy Butter Masak Lemak, where a comforting cream sauce is kissed with traditional Malaysian *masak lemak* paste—a punch of flavour in every way. Crisped with streaky beef or chicken ham tangled throughout the pasta, it’s a smoky-salty kick in every forkful. The Miso Carbonara is briny in spirit and bold in its roots, melding Japanese miso with cream. Chicken ham adds a comforting chew, while Italian parmesan dusts the free-range poached egg pillowed atop. *Tel: +6011-6211 5167*



Mangga at The Blue Mansion

Resting in George Town’s iconic Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion, Mangga at The Blue Mansion is a Penang café of casual character with a laid-back air around it—always easy, never in haste. Sitting under the hundred-year-old mango tree in sun-speckled seating is where the Capellini Laksa Lemak is best savoured.

Coating your capellini is a creamy, coconutty laksa broth, with vegetable tempura tucked by the side for a crunchy finesse. Doused with warm turmeric sauce, this vegetarian plate impresses with every slurp, singing in bright Southeast Asian notes. *Tel: +6012-517 4006*



Staple Dough

Staple Dough seems to be singing its own name, stirring up signature slurps all around. “Sculpting handmade Italian pasta dough” is what they advertise—and every dish carries a contemporary lick with an Asian twist. It’s a special spin unveiled at Megah Rise Mall in Petaling Jaya; think Italy on an exquisite tour across Asia. Such is the Stuffed Seafood Capelletti: poached in dashi *beurre monté*, given a herbal hug, and finished with chilli oil for a little sting. A dusting of briny prawn powder sharpens that kick, turning it into a seafood medley that crowds together in one bite—and bursts in the next. *Tel: +6013-475 9859*

TERRACE REIGNS SUPREME

Snug between city bustle and suburban flow, Terrace at Sunway Pyramid redefines what makes a modern dining hub with five culinary concepts spread across three vibrant storeys.

Terrace at Sunway Pyramid is the kind of place that makes you rethink the phrase 'spoilt for choice'. Spread across three storeys and 30,000 square feet—neatly wedged between the New Pantai Expressway and the mall's iconic lion head—this culinary playground brings together five wildly different eateries under one very delicious roof. Think Balinese spice, kampung comfort, soufflés that defy gravity, and kakigori so smooth it feels engineered.



SEMINYAK BY WARUNG EROPA

Seminyak arrives with Bali's breezy charm in tow. Crowd-pleasers like the Nasi Jinggo Bowls and Ayam Kampung Goreng Kremes land fast, alongside hearty favourites like the Sop Ikan Goreng Sanur and Crispy Duck Pancake—tender duck and sambal wrapped in fluffy pancake. But the true scene-stealer is the Terrace-exclusive Nasi Jinggo Empal Seminyak. It's loaded with marinated beef, *tempe orek*, *serundeng*, and *sambal bawang* that means business.



CILI KAMPUNG

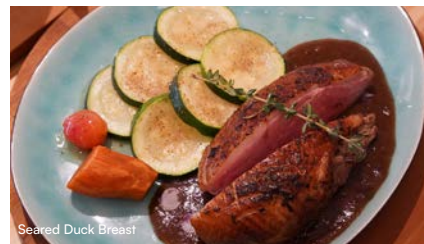
From Langkawi to the Klang Valley, Cili Kampung has long been the go-to for honest, heartwarming kampung-style cooking.

At Terrace, the Masak Lemak Beef delivers deep, Negeri Sembilan-style warmth, while icons like Sambal Petai Prawns and Terung Goreng Belacan bring the spice and nostalgia Malaysians secretly (or not-so-secretly) crave. With ample room for reunions and relatives, it's the perfect spot for family meals that may or may not involve someone taking photos of everyone's plate.



POKOK CAFE

Pokok KL arrives with its usual airy aesthetics and its greatest hits in tow—the Nasi Lemak Bomb, Chili Padi Pesto Pasta, and Pokok's Beef Burger. But this outpost has a trick up its sleeve: new must-tries like the Nasi Lemak Platter with Rendang Daging and Smoked Salmon Benedict are ready to blow your tastebuds away.



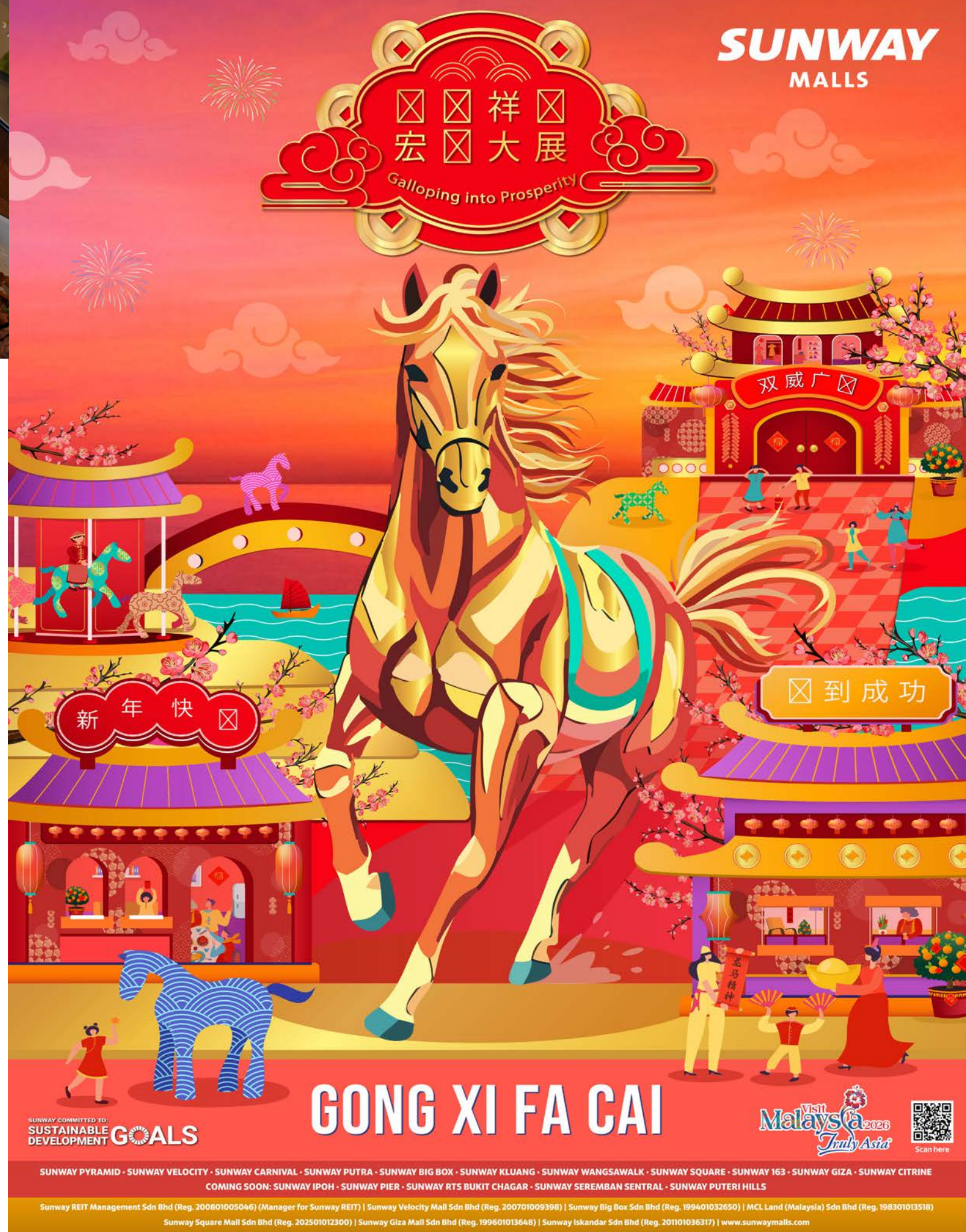
COME TRUE CAFÉ

With Taiwanese roots and a flair for fusion, Come True Café serves up comforting savouries—but let's be honest, everyone's here for the soufflés. Light, fluffy, and dramatic in all the right ways, they are the café's signature draw. The outlet-exclusive Tiramisu Soufflé is a soft, elegant cloud that tastes like dessert diplomacy done right.



AFTERMEAL

Aftermeal finally touches down at Sunway Pyramid, carrying a reputation for reinventing desserts with modern flair. Their Iron Lady Milk Tea Kakigori—shaved Tieguanyin oolong ice layered with jellies, *taro*, and sweet potato mochi—is already a cult favourite. Add a Dark Milo Kakigori or a warm Royal Matcha Latte, and you're basically set for the ideal 'one more dessert' moment.



USHER LUCK IN STYLE

This Lunar New Year, skip the scramble and head to Sunway Pyramid for nine stellar restaurants serving reunion feasts worth celebrating.

The Lunar New Year is creeping up fast, and if you haven't booked your reunion dinner yet, you might find yourself huddled around the coffee table, eating out of plastic containers and pretending it's cosy. Luckily for you, Sunway Pyramid has a stellar line-up of restaurants already taking reservations and serving the kind of Chinese food worthy of an annual family get-together. Here are nine you won't want to miss.



Lunar New Year highlights at Grand Imperial Restaurant, The Pinnacle Sunway



ANDAMAN SEAFOOD & DIM SUM

Andaman brings out the festive big guns with flavours as vibrant as a lion dance. Think hearty, homestyle dishes that taste like they've been blessed by every lucky star in the zodiac.



DIN

Din—the pork-free restaurant—is turning reunion dining into an art form fancy enough for your aunts to whisper, “Wah, got standard.” It's also the perfect spot to include your Muslim friends in the festivities.



DRAGON-I PEKING DUCK

Dragon-i breathes fire into the festivities with bold Shanghaiese flavours and all the auspicious dishes your prosperity-hungry heart could want. Basically: your reunion dinner, but with Michelin dreams.



ESQUIRE KITCHEN

Esquire Kitchen serves nostalgia by the spoonful, the plateful, and sometimes the wok-ful. It's the taste of a classic CNY at home if home had chefs who refuse to let your favourites go out of style.



GRAND IMPERIAL

Grand Imperial doesn't play when it comes to CNY. Think premium seafood, glossy roasts, and a banquet so lavish it practically yells *ong* on your behalf.



HOU DUCK

Hou Duck is here to prove that duck truly is the moment this lunar season. Crispy, juicy, and beautifully dressed to impress, their reunion offerings are basically a love letter to poultry perfection.



ORIENTAL SUN

At Oriental Sun, the reunion table glows just as brightly as its name, promising laughter, comfort, and togetherness. Expect warm, comforting flavours, and dishes designed to make even your picky cousin smile.



PUTIEN

Putien keeps things clean, fresh, and impossibly flavourful with Fujian-style signatures that taste like a New Year reset button. It's the reunion dinner for those who like their auspiciousness light yet powerful.



SOUPER TANG

Souper Tang brings nourishing, heartwarming goodness and festive warmth to the CNY table. These are the broths and herbal dishes your body will thank you for, especially after a year of 'eat first, think later'.

Grind & Groove

Who says raves are only for the night? Dôme Café turned up the daylight energy with a caffeine-fuelled celebration for World Coffee Day, complete with lattes, pastries, and the best throwback tunes.

Words: PATRICK LOH



RSVP / Grind & Groove

Imagine a rave, but swap the neon lights for sunshine and the vodka shots for steaming cups of coffee and matcha. Welcome to the coffee rave, where caffeine is the only fuel you need and the dance floor comes alive with '90s and millennial hits.

Getting it on for World Coffee Day

Dôme Café teamed up with Palate for our very first coffee rave in celebration of World Coffee Day, turning their The Intermark Mall outlet into a full-on daytime dance zone. The energy was electric as guests came to sip, sway, and celebrate their shared love of coffee.

Baristas kept the rhythm going with Dôme Café's signature brews—from the bold Long Black to the smooth Latte and the ever-popular Matcha. Between songs, guests refuelled with irresistible bites that kept spirits high: soft carrot cake, flaky puff pastries, savoury frankie rolls, and dangerously good chocolate brownies.



Malaysian DJs set the decks on fire

PREM

The DJs brought the beats, each one setting the tempo for a caffeine-fuelled afternoon. Prem, familiar to many, head-lined the B2B with his blend of hip-hop, R&B, and pop hits. Also on the deck were DJ Ayana and Kid Kally, who kept the momentum with their own high-energy mixes that had everyone moving.



KIDKALLY

DJ AYANA



Guests left with amazing goodies

By the end of the day, the crowd left Dôme Café buzzing on caffeine, good music, and great company. Guests also took home goodie bags packed with treats from Dôme Café, Fred Perry, The Golden Duck, Calpis, XO Teas, and Aureoso, along with a copy of the *Palate Dining Guide*.

All in all, Grind & Groove was a caffeine-charged celebration of connection, community, and good vibes. Here's to more raves, more coffee, and more days that start with a dance beat.



Vanessa Ee-Lyn Gomes



Leslie Gomez, YM Tengku Zai, Alvin Sinclair



Jaswin Kaur, Rajesh Daswani



Kyan Yap, YM Tengku Wazir Aziz, YM Tengku Zai, YM Tengku Amal Bahiyah, Kailash Ganeshan, Daryl Baptist



Whulandary Herman, Nik Siti Amilie



Alvin Sinclair, Sara Sinclair



Yazmin Aziz, Nasya-Ann



Che Puan Jeslina Hashim, YM Tunku Eddy Mudzaffar



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Patrick Loh, Jimmy Ong, Eryna Su



Gurveer Singh Chahal, Ganesh Thiagarajan



Sofea Sharifuddin, Fabian Kong, Rebekah Urai



YM Tengku Zai, YM Tengku Amal Bahiyah, Sunitha Thayaparan, Melissa Mae Lyn



Jude Ashvin, Jarrod Solomon



RSVP / Grind & Groove

Jimmy Ong, Eryna Su, Puan Sri Ruby Samad, Patimah Hakeen



Brendan Ansel, Daryl Baptist



Patrick Loh, Mario Ariu, Farrah Fikkeri



Jyotsana, Siddharthran



Kara Simon, Prem, KidKally

Kyan Yap

Sheikh Awadh



Nasya-Ann, Vanessa L



Darren Teh



Aziz Laikar, Catherine Goh, Calvin Soo



Kush, YM Tengku Zai, Kelvin Cheah, Tee Ming, Alex Cheah



Elitz Azhar, Meera Maniar



Che Puan Winnie Low, Nicole Low, YM Tunku Nadia Badlishah



Sylvia Tan, Amanda Goonting, Farrah Fikkeri

GATHER

The year stretches open and the festive season continues its gentle rise on A Little Farm On The Hill, where celebration is shaped by sunlight, story, and the kind of food that brings people back to one another.

*Photography: TRISHA TOH and BILLY SIMON
Words: SHIREEN ZAINUDIN
Conceptualised by: SHIREEN ZAINUDIN and
VIJI KRISHNAMOORTHY for HAVE YOU EATEN?*

around

Over 40 plant species are grown here



Forty-five minutes northeast of KL, as the city hum finally recedes, a small seven-acre farm on the hills of Janda Baik appears like a constellation of impressionist fragments. A perfectly sketched canopy of rainclouds hangs, suspended over a verdant, abundant patchwork of vegetable gardens. Timber pavilions, defined by the architectural restraint of clean minimalist lines, dot the gentle slopes. Fruit trees bow under the weight of ripening fruit.

The air here is cooler at the edges, carrying the scent of wet soil, the faint musk of sage. There is a tranquility so complete that the delivery of this luxury is almost a religious experience. One breathes deeper in this landscape, stands taller, and listens closer. You quickly realise you have stumbled into one of Malaysia's most elegantly disguised dining experiences, where communal eating is a finely cultivated tradition.

THE SUPPER CLUB THAT COULD

A Little Farm On The Hill (ALFOTH) began 11 years ago as a pragmatic dream: a farm that needed to sustain itself. "You won't find our produce in the supermarket. We supply our harvests to the top 20 restaurants in the country. So it's likely that you've eaten what we've grown, but just don't know it," says Pete Teo, one half of the couple that owns ALFOTH. And so, Lisa Ngan—trained architect, exceptional cook, orchestrator of spaces—and her husband Pete—musician, actor, creative satellite with a gravitational pull all his own—decided on a monthly supper club. Just 20 guests max. Two people in the kitchen. One seating. One menu. One leap of faith. Their reasons were both economic and instinctive. It wasn't a hobby. It wasn't a business plan. It was simply what made sense. "We supply to the best restaurants, and now we're among one of them ourselves," Pete adds proudly.

They were not by any conventional measure, 'restaurant people' or the like. But their lack of culinary orthodoxy was precisely what made the early meals magnetic. Their creative backgrounds meant that they tackled every problem sideways: not 'the industry way', but the way that felt true to them.

The couple approach the culture of eating like designers and true creatives: what is the narrative? What is the rhythm? What is the emotional temperature of a room at 12:42 PM on a Sunday? Space matters to them, as do proportions and the honesty of materials, and the choreography of movement through a place. The way sunlight wanders across timber at lunchtime, the sound of footsteps on gravel, how a flirty breeze teasing curtains tenderly murmured "home". Lisa's architectural instincts are what shape the subtlety of how people move from the lunchroom into the gardens; Pete's creative restlessness shape the progression of their narrative: a thoughtful intention of almost puritanical worship of form and function.

With space as narrative, we see books and flowers artfully placed, meals as performance, hospitality as something shaped from the guest's point of view. Challenges are approached with logic or artistic intuition. What's resulted is a lunch experience crafted as they would a story—with anticipation, release, surprise, and comfort.

Food matters hugely to them not as displays of extravagance, but in the thoughtful, curious way of people who travel widely and eat voraciously. An almost humble expression of land, season, and community. They have no culinary agenda, no desire for the pomp of fine dining. And so, the supper club grew gently; one

Food grown on the farm make a vast majority of what's on the plate

delicious,
deeply personal meal at a
time. It grew not through marketing, but
through that most Malaysian form of publicity:
people talking while eating good food.

REINVENTING THE FARM

From the outset, Pete and Lisa only knew that they wanted to establish an organic farm where people wanted to work. "No ego, no pretence. Just values." They grow over 40 varieties of vegetables, herbs, edible flowers, and fruits with a deep respect for soil, space, and life. This farming, rooted in regenerative practices, prioritises soil health, biodiversity, and environmental stewardship.

"In a world going through climate change, the importance of keeping our soil healthy cannot be understated. It is our core value. It sounds like esoteric organic-farmer-speak, but it is in fact the most important thing that we do," informs Pete. "In fact, we don't even think of ourselves as growing vegetables; we think of ourselves as growing soil."

As Pete mentioned, the bounty yielded here has now extended its reach to the city, with many of KL's top restaurants—names held in reverence by the city's food community—glad recipients. Walking through the grounds one sees terraces of vegetable beds, fish ponds, a cluster of greenhouses stitched together by paths of earth, sculpted with care. The farm also offers workshops on the aforementioned soil health, fermentation, flower growing, and botanical dyeing.

Farm buildings are simple constructions of brick, wood and steel. There is coherent deliberation in the ordered simplicity of a suspended wooden bench, racks of rebar, and flippable tables. It is all a part of a subtle design language that whispers "sure this is home, but let's make it art."

Looking ahead, ALFOTH prepares to deepen this very same third pillar: the arts. First up: an American painter who will be arriving soon to take up residency in the apartment they have built above Pete's recording studio. "The studio allows me the freedom to do arts projects unfettered by commercial considerations. It will also be the centrepiece of the arts programmes we plan to roll out at the farm."

Talks will soon follow. Then podcasting comes. Regular arts events. A way of giving back and honouring people that should matter. Those who, like themselves, root in quiet creation.

WAITING TO EXHALE

The year 2022 marked the world's tentative exhale. A cautious return to gathering, celebrating, remembering to be festive. ALFOTH leaned into it. By the time interstate travel flagged off, people were chomping at the bit, eager to drive up the hill for the privilege of being fed by two creative oddballs with a dream and very good produce. Once a month expanded into regular weekend Farmer's Lunches. Wait lists thickened like those Malaysian rainclouds.

By December that year, ALFOTH unveiled their first month-long Christmas menu modelled on the classic tableau of British colonial nostalgia: turkey, stuffing, brussels sprouts, and a trifle as iconic as the season itself. ALFOTH executed this with the sincerity it needed to make the nostalgia feel earned. And even at the expanded scale, the supper club DNA held steady. Everyone ate at the same time. If anything, it felt like sharing a meal at Pete and Lisa's home.

Fast forward to Christmas 2025. This most recent month-long menu has undergone tropical enlightenment. Affectionately monikered Fat Santa's Festive Table, the year-end feasting at ALFOTH is a celebration that rejects winter cosplay and embraces the humid, fruit-scented personality of this land. It's festive without the forced jolliness, Malaysian without the clichés, sophisticated without the snobbery.

And if December marked a tentative exhale, January doesn't close the book. For us Malaysians, the festive season isn't a date on a calendar but an overlapping choreography. Christmas here simply fires the starting pistol; what follows is a procession of reunion and revelry that stretches into Valentine's Day, Chinese New Year, the quiet discipline of Ramadan, and the luminous generosity of Hari Raya Aidilfitri. Festivity, in this part of the world, is less an ending than a rhythm. So while this story begins in tinsel and turkey, it lives on in the months that follow. Celebration is our climate, not our season.

*"No ego,
no pretence.
Just values."*

-LISA NGAN

FESTIVE FEASTING

Over-indulgence isn't the reason for the season, but it's definitely an essential ingredient. A glorified hunk of protein has always seemed central to any feast and to this end 2025 saw ALFOTH offering lamb, duck, and chicken alongside their trade-mark beef (a tomahawk Wagyu) across its two menus. There is a Christmas Day menu (A Little Farm Christmas) and the month-long Fat Santa's Festive Table.

What's on the menus are super juicy lamb chops marinated in spices before they are deep fried. Working beautifully with the two accompanying sauces: hot papaya that's sweet and spicy, and a piquant green peppercorn yoghurt, we are loving this nod to Christmas colours. Then there are duck legs, sourced from a small farm in Perak. Firstly spiced, salted, then confited, they finally finish on a grill before being served with nutmeg jam made from the farm's orchards. The organic chicken is first dry-aged before roasting on high-heat for a wonderfully crisp finish, that prized skin glistening on a bed of lentils.

Both menus are a *tour de force*. The grazing platters are a sun-dappled riot of cold cuts with melons from a Terengganu farm. A sweet, crisp, delightful pairing that makes tropical sense. The 12 leaf salad which appears weekly on the Farmer's Lunch menu possesses an alchemy yet to be replicated anywhere else. Many have tried with no success. Is it the dressing or just magic in the soil that grew these leaves? The aubergine arrives charred, a velvety indulgence enlivened by farm-made nduja, crafted from duck breasts that once belonged to those legs.

"My favourite item on our recent Christmas menu is the chocolate clafoutis," Lisa proclaims. "It was immediately a star in research and development. Rich and fruity and naughty. It's exactly what you'd want in a Christmas dessert. We are really excited to serve it." It arrives warm, slow, and unapologetically dramatic. A scoop of plum ice cream slowly melting over it. Finally, the mulled wine of cold climes has been pulled off the menu. Replaced cleverly by roselle *tuak*. A fermented, floral, liquid wink to our rice eating roots.

As December's first advent door swings open, tables at ALFOTH will brim with a dozen courses passed around and shared. Loudly and lovingly. A Malaysian Christmas meal—familiar, comforting, and reinvented to be irreverently and boldly new. A

beautifully presented feast layered with indigenous flavours, seasonal produce and the quiet poise of a kitchen that knows its land. And if their Christmas table is any indication, then the months ahead feel ripe with promise.

A KITCHEN OF 16, A COVERSATION OF MANY

ALFOTH now runs with a crew of 16 guided by head chef Wei Jian who leads with the calm confidence of someone who knows that the ingredients are doing half the heavy lifting. Though perhaps the word "crew" seems insufficient to describe the creatives, the technicians, and the culinary philosophers that keep this place running. Four members of staff are trained fine-dining chefs, and all are cross-trained to move gracefully between kitchen and front of house as needed. The team is mixed bag of personalities assembled from a complex matrix of technical brilliance and emotional compatibility. People who can live on a farm, who value honesty, who work hard and who treasure the community they've created.

Menus are created through long, meandering conversations and passionate discussions. A process of collective introspection with tough questions asked by philosophical provocateur, Pete, and Lisa. "Why does this dish deserve a place on the table? Does it deserve to exist almost an hour out of the city? What is Christmas to someone who has never celebrated? Why turkey? Why must it always be turkey?" The collaboration here is an ingredient as essential as salt. Or soil. In the end, they realise, what matters the most is memory, nostalgia, and a sense of occasion. But also the Malaysian instinct for gathering with food that invites participation rather than reverence. This shared instinct to reach across the table and feed each other with not only food, but ensure a sense of belonging and feeling of closeness.

The cooking today has definitely become more technical—layered, confident, deeply considered—yet still unmistakably ALFOTH. "It's not dotty and foamy," Pete reminds me. "It still looks like food you want to eat, and not just photograph."

Behind the scenes, the kitchen is an ecosystem of craft. Chickens are brined for 24 hours, duck breasts cured before becoming nduja, stocks simmer for up to 48 hours, vegetables are harvested mere hours before cooking. Ferments bubble

quietly in the background. The smoker—an imposing metal creature that looks equal parts spaceship and sculpture—labours through the night.

Though some dishes may no longer be easily replicable in a home kitchen, they remain accessible in spirit. Hearty, wholesome expressions of who we are as Malaysians—a tropical, multicultural country with centuries of culinary history simmering in our soil.

A MALAYSIAN INSTITUTION

Today, ALFOTH is no longer a secret whispered among food-obsessed friends. It is, unmistakably, one of Malaysia's most sought-after reservations. A village gathering in hilltop form. A farm-to-table restaurant that features in the top tables of the nation. A place that regularly appears on 'Best Of' lists and inspires the sort of urban devotion usually reserved for hard-to-get omakase counters. They operate four days a week: private bookings on Thursdays and Fridays, followed by the now-legendary Farmer's Lunches on the weekends.

What began as a once-a-month experiment has become a cultural landmark—an award-winning, always booked, rigorously personal expression of how Malaysians can eat together. And why food matters.

For many city dwellers it has become a place of pilgrimage. One earmarked for birthdays and weddings and anniversaries. ALFOTH draws in a crowd who understands the reality of what food is in Malaysia. That we do not eat along geographical lines. It's as uncomplicated to us as how tasty and accessible anything is. Because it is normal to us to have multiple cultures represented on one table. It just needs to be very, very good food. We too take a bow as guests—always a part of the whole performance. Because ALFOTH quite simply makes you feel stylish just by sitting at a table.

But perhaps the best of ALFOTH is still the unexpected stuff. The things that aren't plated or framed or advertised or sold. It's the way strangers arrive with polite smiles and might leave as friends. The way the fields whisper their proximity to the plate in every bite. The way the entire space, from the hills to the birdsong, feels like it belongs to just you if only for a few hours. It's cultural, natural, deeply familiar. But most importantly, it's magical whatever season you choose to be here. 



Roast duck



*We don't think of ourselves
as growing vegetables, but
growing soil.*

-PETE TEO



Roast carrots





Delicate by Design

Imagine a table where metallics catch the light and the tiniest design detail feels deliberate. Christofle’s Malmaison Impériale collection, first launched in 2022, has a renewed and contemporary take on the decorative codes of the Empire style and reinterprets them into graphic, modern motifs in a gold or platinum finish. Palmettes, water leaves, and geometric rosettes dance across each creation, including seven new additions.

Words: TENGKU ZAI

Board Goals Unlocked



Ever wanted to impress your friends with a gorgeous charcuterie board? Here's how to do it without making a mess of everything.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ

So, you want to know how to put together the perfect charcuterie board? Well, you've come to the right place. Have I ever done it myself? No. Because the idea of hosting fills me with a special kind of terror. Not to mention, I'd probably end up absent-mindedly eating all the ingredients halfway through arranging them.

But that won't happen to you because you're different. Probably more personable and less mentally added. With that in mind, I've scoured the annals of the internet to discern the secrets to building the perfect charcuterie board—just so I can share them with you. Because there's hope for you yet. Read on so you can build us the charcuterie board we both deserve.



The essentials

You'll need a big enough board for all your ingredients

First things first: your board. That's what everything rests on—literally—so it's imperative you pick the right kind. A wooden board is the classic option, but marble and slate make for some elegant alternatives, too. You'll also want to keep the size in mind, as it'll need to be big enough to accommodate the number of guests while still providing enough space to house everything neatly.

Step 1: The meats

Pick a variety of meats

The first ingredient you can start with is the meat. Variety is key here. You'll want to include at least three different types of cured meats that span different tastes and textures. A lineup of prosciutto, salami, and chorizo will be a good place to start. A little contrast is important, so look for a balance of soft, medium, and firm textures.

Step 2: The cheese

Include both stronger and milder cheeses

Next up: the all-important cheese selection. Again, variety is your friend. Pick at least three to five cheeses. Just remember: something hard, something soft, something blue. You'll also want cheese from both ends of the flavour spectrum: something stronger like a blue cheese or aged cheddar, alongside milder options like brie or goat cheese.

Step 3: Colour and crunch

Nuts and seeds to add some much-needed colour and crunch

Now it's time to think about adding colour and crunch. Start with crackers, a few baguette slices, maybe some crostini. Then, sprinkle in some nuts and seeds to make it pop. Almonds, walnuts, roasted pumpkin seeds, and pistachios all work well and will add refinement to your board, ensuring it catches the eye before it catches the palate.

Step 4: Sweetness

Your charcuterie board shouldn't be one-dimensional. Fruits are the perfect way to add that needed sweetness. Go for a mix of fresh fruit like grapes, figs, and apple slices, and pair them with some dried options, like apricots and cranberries. Don't forget the condiments; you'll need some to pair with the cheeses and meats you've laid out. Honey is a staple, mustard adds a nice robustness, and fig jam is another popular option.

Step 5: Adding a bit of contrast

So your charcuterie board is starting to take shape. But does everything seems a little too rich? It's easy to keep things from becoming too cloying; just add some pickled vegetables or marinated olives. These will offer a briny contrast.

Step 6: Aesthetics

Start with your larger items and then fill in the gaps with your smaller ones like fruits, nuts, and condiments. You've already got a visually arresting set of ingredients, so chances are it'll turn out well anyway. Once you're happy with the arrangement, garnish the board with some greenery for that finishing touch. Rosemary and mint do nicely.

Step 7: Wine (Or not)

A good wine can further elevate the experience

And that's it! Now, get your bottle(s) of wine out and get the party started. A dry white pairs wonderfully with your lighter cheeses, and maybe a bolder red for the richer meats. For those who don't partake, sparkling water or a mocktail will do just fine.

Closing Tips

A final tip I'll leave you with: make sure to serve everything at room temperature for optimal flavour. So, take out the meats and cheese half an hour beforehand. And with that, you're officially ready to conquer the charcuterie game. Enjoy the board, the company, and the fact that you didn't eat it all before anyone arrived.



THE ITALIAN BLUEPRINT

Chefs, pizzaiolos, and curious food lovers now have La Verace, Vero Gusto Italiano, Italy's secret weapon for anyone chasing real pizza perfection.



If there's one food that can unite a toddler's birthday party, a corporate boardroom, and a friend group that can't decide where to eat, it's pizza. Every great slice delivers comfort, culture, and a devotion to technique, but more importantly, to authentic Italian ingredients.

Enter La Verace, Vero Gusto Italiano, now officially in Malaysia as a full-fledged ambassador of true Italian flavour. In Italy, verace means 'true'. It represents honesty, heritage, and the belief that food should be made with intention and integrity. La Verace, Vero Gusto Italiano was born from years of collaboration with Italy's most passionate producers and artisans who treat tomatoes like jewels and flour like philosophy.



For them, great pizza isn't magic. It's meticulous research, rigorous testing, and a whole lot of stubborn Italian pride. As the brand likes to say: "Taste is never a coincidence, it is a choice."

But La Verace, Vero Gusto Italiano isn't just selling ingredients; it's offering an entire ecosystem for those who take pizza seriously. Think of it as the ultimate toolbox for pizza professionals: proprietary products created specifically for the brand, plus a curated range from Italy's top producers, all



designed to work harmoniously from dough to finish.

Inalca Food & Beverage Malaysia is introducing a selection tailored for local chefs, pizzaiolos, and restaurateurs, items chosen not just for practicality, but for purity. Through IF&B Malaysia, the country now has access to specialised pizza flours, premium tomato varieties, signature oils, premium dairy and—for the pizza geeks among us—the La Verace, Vero Gusto Italiano Lab.

Inspired by the whimsical symbolism of the Smorfia Napoletana, the lab blends recipes with storytelling, turning pizza-making into equal parts craft and culture.

La Verace, Vero Gusto Italiano arrives at the perfect moment. Malaysia's pizza scene has evolved far beyond "cheese plus whatever's in the fridge." Diners are curious. Chefs are ambitious. And the demand for true authenticity is louder than ever.

More than a brand, La Verace, Vero Gusto Italiano is a bridge connecting Italy's centuries-old pizza heritage with Malaysia's vibrant culinary landscape. For professionals chasing excellence, La Verace, Vero Gusto Italiano is here to raise the standard.



La VERACE

Vero Gusto Italiano

The only complete experience for authentic, high-quality pizza



AN ECOSYSTEM OF PREMIUM PIZZA INGREDIENTS OFFERED BY IF&B, BRINGING TOGETHER PROFESSIONALS AND CUSTOMERS UNDER A SHARED VALUE:

THE TRUE TASTE FROM THE VERY FIRST BITE

Ginger:

The Fiery Fixer

This spice may look rather ragged, but it's really the heat rooted behind many crafts—slipping into cocktails, sweetening desserts, and weaving wellness into every broth.

Words: VANESSA L



Ginger plays many roles—bartender, baker, and healer. One minute it kicks up crafted sips, the next it's cosying up in cookies, and before long, it's soothing away sniffles and rough coughs in a single ladle. A spice of many lives as it is a root that fuels flavour; not bad for one little crooked cure.

Like a craggy, dirt-stained lump—knobbly, puckered, and odd in size—yet once its skin is scraped, you'll meet a flavour that snaps as much as it stuns. Buried beneath the soil's dark silence is where this fiery rhizome snugly hides, waiting to awaken with its explosive breath. And so, in this article, it's ginger on duty—and we're digging into the root of it.



Italian Buck

Sipping off strong is the Italian Buck—a highball cocktail that bounces bittersweetly against its ginger beer base and Italian Amari. Toying with the classic “buck” cocktail, it was bartender Jamie Boudreau who created the Italian Buck in 2015. Rattle up some Cynar for a rustic depth, Amaro Montenegro, and a jolt of lime juice until well chilled, then strain over ice in a tall Collins glass. Top it with ginger beer and finish with a lime disc to crown the cocktail. The result? A refreshing sip that flirts with spicy-sweet complexity.

Liquid Gold: Subtle Spice, Big Boost



Ginger Tea

Needless to say, there’s not a warmer sip of wellness than ginger tea. Golden ginger ribbons or sun-fresh slivers—your cup, your call. Steep with hot water, a spoon of sweet honey or a squeeze of lemon, and there you have the ginger glow. Together, ginger and lemon awaken a rich antioxidant potion for the digestive system. Revitalising as it relieves nausea, this duo is a beloved remedy for warding off seasonal sniffles.

How about ginger with raw honey? Naturally best supped warm in winter or iced in summer, the two soothe not just sore throats but stomach linings too. Raw honey’s antibacterial properties help calm even the grottiest coughs—offering gentle and natural relief from congestion.

Tiny Root, Big Dessert Drama



Ginger Ice Cream

If warmth had a flavour, it’d look like candied ginger ice cream. The fiery infusion laces the dairy with gentle warmth as it churns. For texture, add candied ginger. It’s simple and easy to make, just bathe fresh ginger in sugar syrup until supple, then dry and dust with sugar. Chop it into chunks and fold them in. The soft churn meets the spicy-sweet bits for a balance between the creamy and the chewy, with just the right amount of heat.



Gingerbread

Festive, fun, and always a joy that gathers everyone to the table—gingerbreads are an ageless tradition come Christmas. Shape them how you like: a house, a loaf, cookies, or cake. It lends itself to a broad range of bakes. Gingerbread is a seasonal custom, with spices like ginger, cinnamon, and cloves offering a comforting peck of warmth in the cold weather.



Tong Shui

Sweet ginger dessert soups, or *tong shui*, are yet another customary collation. Drop dumplings (*tang yuan*)—black sesame, peanut, or whatever your fancy—into steaming ginger syrup. Often served during cooler months like the Lantern Festival as well as Winter Solstice (*Dong Zhi*), *tang yuan* symbolises family unity and good fortune. The ginger syrup sharpens the creamy, nutty dumpling flavours with a bright, spicy lift.

Photography: Freepik; Unsplash; Pexels; @emtulis

The Hidden Ingredient That Transforms Dishes



Ginger Chicken Soup

Per grandma’s prescription, chicken soup is a cure-all. But throw in ginger? That’s a health-lift in a ladle. Stick to your usual chicken soup formula—simmer the chicken (bones and all), garlic, goji berries or red dates—and then in go the ginger chips. Sliced, of course. This sharp rhizome adds warmth to the broth and cuts through the fat, making it lighter on the stomach. In traditional Chinese medicine, ginger chicken soup is a long-standing postpartum tonic and a go-to remedy for staving off colds.

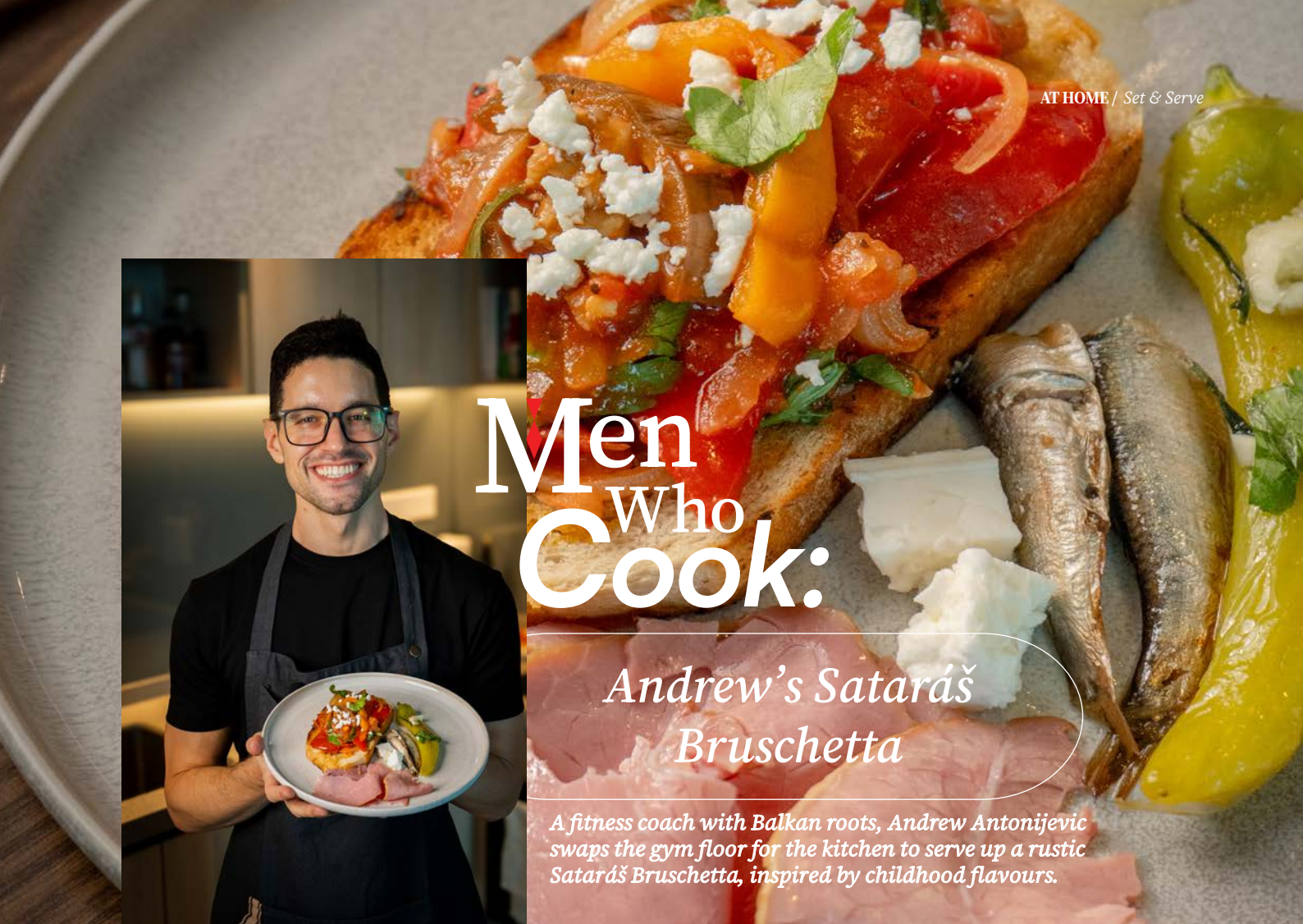
**MARINADES:
GINGER-GARLIC, SOY-GINGER,
OR CITRUS-GINGER?**

Grate fresh ginger into a rich paste, blend with garlic until equally smooth, and then soak your protein in the mixture. The enzymes in ginger tenderise the meat. Soy-ginger marinades balance salted spice with subtle heat, while citrus-ginger versions brighten up proteins with acidity and vitamin C. Ginger’s gentle kick seals the deal—flavourful, tender, and impossible to forget.



Root Of All

Ginger, for all its knobby looks and snappy spirit, never settles for just one role. From behind the bar to the baker’s oven to the family soup pot, its quiet charm has endured for centuries. Whether to settle the stomach or liven up a sip—yes, it’s a rather crooked little root, but one with the brightest stories to tell.



Men Who Cook:

Andrew’s Sataráš Bruschetta

A fitness coach with Balkan roots, Andrew Antonijevic swaps the gym floor for the kitchen to serve up a rustic Sataráš Bruschetta, inspired by childhood flavours.

Serbian-born, Aussie-bred, and now KL-based, Andrew Antonijevic is a believer in balance, which for him includes getting hands-on in the kitchen. For *Men Who Cook*, he shares his recipe for ‘Sataráš Bruschetta’: a Balkan-style veggie medley on toast, inspired by the flavours of his childhood.

Ingredients for Sataráš:

- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 red and 1 yellow capsicum, diced
- 1 small eggplant, diced
- 2 fresh tomatoes, chopped
- 1/2 can chopped tomatoes
- Olive oil
- Salt to taste
- Parsley, finely chopped
- Crusty sourdough bread
- Feta cheese
- Sardines in oil (for topping)

Method for Sataráš:

Sauté onions and garlic in olive oil until soft. Add diced capsicum and eggplant, cook until tender. Stir in both fresh and canned tomatoes. Season well with salt. Let the mixture simmer until thick and jammy. Sprinkle with parsley. Spoon warm sataráš onto toasted sourdough, then top with crumbled feta, marinated chillies, and sardines for a savoury finish.

Ingredients and method for marinated chillis:

Roast chilli peppers of choice in an air fryer for 10 minutes (while prepping Sataráš). While hot, place in a bag to naturally steam for 15 minutes. Then, peel off the skin, lay flat in a serving dish, and douse in olive oil and a splash of vinegar. Garnish with garlic.

Andrew’s Sataráš Bruschetta

Rustic, hearty, and quietly impressive—just like the man himself.

Stove-Averse Feast

Cooking-phobic? Same. That's why we've wrangled three 15-minute, ultra-easy air fryer recipes. Stay fed, stay lazy, stay you.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ

Fun fact about me: I can't cook. As in, I wouldn't put it past myself to somehow burn water. So if you're anything like me, worry not, as we've compiled three quick, easy, and most importantly, delicious recipes to satiate even the most ravenous appetite. Because the ability to cook shouldn't be a Darwinian benchmark for who deserves to walk this Earth or not.

Even if you fancy yourself a dab hand in the kitchen, you'll still want to acquaint yourself with these recipes for those days when a stove is simply the last thing you want to see. Minimal cooking, maximal flavour—that's the order of the day here. Here are three neat recipes that'll look (and taste) like you put way more effort into them than you actually did.

Air Fryer Mini Meatballs



After something quick, satisfying, and not to mention tasty? These air fryer mini meatballs are right up your alley. Juicy in the middle, crispy on the outside, and perfect for dipping—or straight up snacking, depending on your mood. And they come together in 15 minutes? Say no more.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound ground beef
- ½ cup breadcrumbs
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ¼ cup finely chopped onion
- 1 clove garlic, minced; 1 egg
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning, salt and pepper to taste

A generous amount of dipping sauce—marinara, BBQ, pick whatever you like.

When they're done, serve them hot with a bowl of your favorite dipping sauce. Marinara's classic, but BBQ adds a nice smoky kick with some sweetness. Or if you're feeling adventurous, try a spicy aioli or tangy tzatziki.

And that's it, you're done. Be it a quick dinner, a snack, or as part of a larger spread, these meatballs are sure to please. Simple, fast, and just plain good.

METHOD

Preheat the air fryer to 400°F (200°C). Get it hot and ready.

In a large bowl, combine the ground meat, breadcrumbs, Parmesan, onion, garlic, egg, and seasonings. Feel free to use your hands here.

Mix it all in until everything's well integrated, but don't overwork it, though; you want these meatballs to stay tender and not tough.

Shape the mixture into bite-sized meatballs—about 1 inch in diameter. Forget about pretty, just get them more or less in shape.

Air fry them in a single layer, leaving space between each meatball so that they cook evenly. Depending on the size, cook them for about 10 to 12 minutes, shaking the basket halfway through for that perfect golden crisp.

Air Fryer Fish Tacos With Chipotle Sauce



Here's a meal with a bit of just about everything. Flaky, seasoned cod, a creamy chipotle sauce with a bit of heat, and a bright, fresh slaw to balance it all out.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb cod fillets (cut into 1-inch pieces)
1 tbsp olive oil
1 ½ tbsp taco seasoning (plus an extra ½ tsp for the sauce)
¼ cup low-fat Greek yogurt
3 tbsp mayonnaise
1 tbsp fresh lime juice (plus lime wedges for serving)
1 ½ Tsp adobo sauce from canned chipotle in adobo
12 oz bag coleslaw mix
2 scallions (thinly sliced)
½ cup cilantro leaves
3 cups cooked brown rice

Once the fish is done, divide the brown rice among bowls. Top with the crispy fish, spoon over the slaw, and drizzle with that smoky, creamy chipotle sauce. Serve with lime wedges on the side for an extra burst of citrus.

This meal's got balance: you've got rich, flaky fish, a tangy sauce, and the crunch of the coleslaw. This could be your new go-to for those nights when you need something quick but also want to feel like you're treating yourself.

METHOD

Preheat your air fryer to 400°F (200°C). Toss the cod pieces with olive oil and 1 ½ tablespoons of taco seasoning. Arrange them in a single layer in the air fryer basket. Air fry for six to seven minutes, or until the fish is golden and opaque all the way through.

While the fish cooks, whip up the chipotle sauce. In a mini food processor, combine the Greek yogurt, mayonnaise, lime juice, adobo sauce, 1 tablespoon of water, and the remaining ½ teaspoon taco seasoning.

Blend until smooth and creamy. In a large bowl, toss the coleslaw mix with the sliced scallions and cilantro. Keep it simple—let the freshness of the slaw shine.

Air Fryer S'mores



S'mores are great, and I won't pass up the chance to whip some up when there's a fire around. But how often are you around a fire? Thankfully, we have a convenient way of serving up these sweet treats without having to share them with the flies outside.

INGREDIENTS

Marshmallows (slice them in half for better control during cooking)
Graham crackers
Blocks of chocolate, broken to size

Pro Tip: These are versatile. Throw in some peanut butter, Nutella, or salted caramel on top of the chocolate for an indulgent twist. Or, if you're feeling fancy, slide some fresh strawberries or bananas into the mix before you close up the s'mores, and you're in for an extra-sweet treat.

That's it. Campfire or not, these air fryer s'mores hit the spot—no sticks, no smoke, and no smacking the mosquitoes on your skin required. Try them out, but be warned: they're addictive.

METHOD

Preheat your air fryer to 400°F (200°C). Break your graham crackers in half and arrange them in the basket. Place a halved marshmallow, sticky side down, right on top of each cracker. You want that marshmallow to get nice and melty, so make sure it's settled in well.

Toss the basket into the air fryer and cook for two to three minutes. Keep an eye on them. Marshmallows toast fast, and if your air fryer runs hot, you might want to check in after the first minute. You're looking for that perfect, golden-brown melt. Not a burnt mess, but a nice, slightly browned marshmallow.

When they're ready, carefully remove the graham crackers from the basket. Quickly place a piece of chocolate on top of two marshmallows, then top it off with the other cracker half. Let the heat from the marshmallow melt the chocolate a bit, but make sure not to rush it. Now serve them up. You'll get that warm, gooey goodness paired with the crisp snap of the cracker.

The 7 Personalities of Ice

Ice isn't all about water—it's character pressed in time. From calming coffee ice to glitter ice in its glamour, sometimes ice sinks with a personality that swirls into the story.

Words: VANESSA L

Ice is rarely the star of the drink, yet it decides everything. From how a cocktail dilutes to how long it lingers, the right cube quietly shapes the experience before you even take a sip. These quiet workhorses influence everything from temperature to texture, softening spirits as condensation gathers along the glass.

But some cubes want more than function. They carry colour, flavour, and even attitude. This is where the conversation shifts, so we're exploring seven ice kinds of ice that bring character and personality into every pour.



1. Coffee Ice

She's a brooding little block, methodical to the core. Coffee ice is a strategist, built for control rather than fade. Frozen at peak strength, coffee ice waits for the moment your drink needs cooling without compromise, delivering caffeine, chill, and a subtle bite in equal measure.

When it hits the glass, there's no vanishing act. Dilution is off the table. Instead, coffee ice takes over the temperature and the tone, deepening flavour as it melts. Drop it into water, milk, or a drink of your choosing, and what you get is a slow, deliberate sip that stays sharp to the end.



2. Juice Ice

Cannonballing into calm with iced juice, this is a cube that doesn't just cool, it lifts the mood. Loud in colour and confident in tang, juice ice likes to be noticed for the trail it leaves behind. A streak of berry, a flash of citrus, a blush of sweetness turning the glass brighter by degrees.

It's joy, frozen. Small talk sparkles, flavours bloom, and on days it can't help itself, even the melt-out is theatrical. A little splashy, a little syrupy, and never shy about making an exit.



3. Flower Ice

More décor than dent, flower ice treats the glass like a canvas. It doesn't rush the melt, instead letting time do the styling. Edible blooms are frozen mid-flourish, like a nosegay reimagined for sipping rather than gifting.

As it thaws, the cube releases more than chill. A soft perfume, a fleeting flavour, a gentle nudge to the senses. This isn't ice for dilution or drama. Floral cubes shine where restraint rules, adding a quietly clever finish to drinks that prefer their beauty understated.



4. Fruit Ice

Fruity, fun, and universally liked, fruit ice is that girl. Juiced, chopped, and frozen into neat cubes, it brings colour and brightness to the glass and usually steals the show. Options like apples, watermelon, or strawberries are familiar, flexible, and reliably pleasing. Its strength is adaptability. Fruit ice melts generously, lending sweetness, scent, and a soft lift as it goes. Not everything needs to be complicated. Some things just need to make the drink better, then serve as a post-drink snack.



5. Herbal Ice

This is ice with a quiet agenda. Not here for attention, but for balance. The likes of basil, mint, and ginger, work gently to recalibrate both drink and mood. Flavours are nudged, freshness lifted, and energy is restored without announcement. There’s no grand gesture here, only intention. A cooler sip, a cleaner finish, a sense that something good has happened. This is wellness, frozen. Delivered calmly, and right on cue.



6. Milk Ice

Smooth and silky as milk itself, milk ice is calm, cool, and effortlessly creamy. It doesn’t fight the heat, but rather it softens it. Drop it into coffee, spiced tea, or chilled cocoa, and it turns sharpness into a velvety seam. Content to blend in, milk ice never demands attention, yet it leaves every sip gentler, softer, and all the more indulgent—a subtle comfort for when you crave dulcet calm in a glass.



7. Glitter Ice

Glitter ice is a showstopper to say the least. Of course, it does exactly what it promises—make everyone’s tongue start wagging. Shy isn’t in her vocabulary. She’s the “Oh my god, look at this drink!” moment, flaring with soft sparkles while moving effortlessly within any liquid that carries her. Flavourless but with a slight mealy bite, glitter ice is a love-it-or-leave-it cube that makes every sip feel a little more theatrical. And most importantly, fun.



CUTTING INTO LEGACY

Masaru Knives is carving its way into KL’s kitchens. With Chef Wayne Wong at the helm, here’s why every cook should fall in love with these blades too.



Some brands are built, and others are forged: slowly, stubbornly, and with a little bit of love. Masaru Knives belongs to the latter category. What began four years ago as a two-person operation in the corner of a living room—with Chef Wayne Wong packing knives beside his then-girlfriend, now wife—has now grown into a community of chefs, cooks, collectors, and curious home cooks who simply want a good knife that feels honest in the hand.

By day, Wayne is Chef de Cuisine at Dewakan; by night, he’s the driving force behind Masaru. “It wasn’t easy,” he says, “but it was rewarding.” What kept him going wasn’t just the dream of building a knife brand, but the people he met along the way. Fellow enthusiasts, blacksmiths, partners, and even those who began as clients or friends have since become collaborators, business partners, and teammates. All united by a shared fascination with Japanese blades, their culture, and the obsessive craftsmanship behind them.

That obsession is what birthed Masaru’s latest pride: the Iron Flower series, a reminder to remain resilient and to bloom even after the storm. The newest AUS8

edition follows the Raindrop Damascus VG10, with more variations already being tested in Japan. Everything in the collection is designed in Malaysia and handmade by artisans who, as Wayne reflects, “will take 101 steps just to perfect the 100th.”

Masaru began with the 45-layer Damascus AUS10—Wayne’s trusted steel since his commis days. “It didn’t change how I cut,” he says, “but it helped turn the images in my mind into reality.” And that, in essence, is Masaru’s philosophy: the right knife should make your imagination possible.

Wayne’s upbringing also shaped the brand. “We didn’t grow up wealthy. Whatever we bought had to last,” he says. He knows some customers save for months to buy their first Masaru and he takes that responsibility personally. The goal isn’t fast sales; it’s lasting value. Though he jokes, “Once someone buys their first Japanese knife, trust me, the second one comes soon.”

Beyond purveying knives, Masaru also holds sharpening workshops with K Sharpening and programmes at Le Cordon Bleu Sunway. Wayne notes, “Most people hesitate to buy one, not from lack of interest, but from not understanding the maintenance it requires. That’s the gap we want to fill.” His vision: educate and build a community where no one is afraid to ask questions. “Come say hi,” he says. “Sometimes, one question leads to the best purchase of your life.” masaruknives.com

Weekend Brunch At Home: *A How To*

Your favourite meal, upgraded: decadent dishes, beautiful presentation, and all the tips you need to make a morning get-together feel like a full-blown occasion.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ

Photography: Unsplash; Pexels



I've never been one for brunch. Part of that, I suppose, is down to its popularity and my tendency to be unnecessarily contrarian at times. That said, I've felt myself starting to come around more in recent times, mostly because brunch makes drinking in the morning more acceptable. Another, more valid reason I never liked brunch is that I always found it rather overpriced for what it is, but I now know that doesn't have to be the case.

You can make brunch at home, and in fact, you can turn it into an event while you're at it! Imagine the look on your friends' faces when you throw them the kind of brunch they've only seen on television. Maybe they'll finally wake up to the fact that you always were the cool one in the group and not Becky. Without further ado, here's a handy guide on how to throw a brunch worthy of making Becky question her life choices.

Like all undertakings of significance, it starts with a concept. Decide what yours is going to be. Do you want something more rustic and outdoorsy? Or maybe you'd rather something that's indoors and as effortlessly chic as you are? Whatever it is, make it feel intentional, so pick a theme and make sure everything from the napkins to the serving platters ties in. Pick a good playlist to soundtrack the morning, throw some fresh flowers in a vase, make sure the lighting's just right, and remember: the devil is in the details.

Now that you've decided what your brunch is going to look and feel like, it's time to get down to the meat and

potatoes of things—quite literally. The next thing we're going to be talking about is the food. Fortunately, this shouldn't be too difficult to decide on; everybody kind of knows what to expect when they're going for brunch. But what you will want to do is provide a range of options that encompasses a variety of tastes and appetites. That means you'll have your big savoury options for those who come hungry like the wolf, as well as some sweet little treats for those with decidedly more avian appetites.

Having said that, we don't want to just put out a stack of pancakes and waffles and call it a day. No, we want to have dishes so spectacular that they'll have Becky seething at home later about how good they were. Nigella Lawson you may not be, but fortunately, pulling this off is a lot easier than it sounds. It can be as simple as taking a regular brunch staple and tweaking it a little to elevate it beyond the usual. Thinking about serving some avocado toast? Throw a poached egg on top of it and a smattering of microgreens. Instant gourmet. What about a French toast, but made with brioche and a sinful amount of butter—the way God and cardiologists never intended? That'll show Becky for sure.

Now that your food looks good, all that's left is to drive home that impression with some artful plating and some visually arresting garnishes. Fresh herbs or a sprinkle of edible flowers over a luscious shakshuka in a cherry-red bowl? A feast for the eyes as much as the stomach. Don't just stop at the bowls, either; bring all your finest tableware out to play. Cake stands, tiered trays, and your



entire personality's worth of aesthetic effort—these will form the canvas on which your food can shine.

Alright, now we're getting to my favourite part of brunch and essentially its *raison d'être*, as far as I'm concerned—why, it's the drinks, of course! Mimosas are the go-to here, and for good reason, too. I mean, who doesn't like a good mimosa? Add to the fact that it couldn't be easier to prepare, and you have the veritable standard-bearer for all brunch drinks. Bloody Marys are another that pair especially well with some hearty mains. For lighter dishes, on the other hand, a gin and elderflower fizz or a light spritzer will do just the trick and are very brunch-coded. Cocktails aside, it's wise to put together a drink station stocked with fresh juices, coffee, and tea, so that guests can help themselves at their own convenience.

Finally, we get to the most important part of hosting a good brunch, and that is, of course, you. Make sure to bring out your most pleasant and relaxed self on the day, because no matter how decadent your delights are or how beautifully they're arranged on the table, it will all be for naught if the person everyone came for was running around like a caffeinated squirrel. So have help with the hosting if you need to.

Prep ahead and throw in some extra napkins, utensils, or anything else you foresee your guests needing on the day. But when the day comes, it's absolutely imperative that you forget trying to play the perfect host and join in the fun instead—your party will be all the better for it. Meanwhile, Becky will be asking herself why she even bothers, knowing deep down she'll never reach your brunch-level mastery. **P**



Star & Spice

Ever wonder what bold or brilliant spice or herb you may be? Here are a dozen seasonings, spices, and herbs that best represent your zodiac.

Words: VANESSA L

Zodiacs are multilinguals who speak in symbols, signs, planets, and elements—but what if they could speak in flavours? From fiery chili flakes to luscious lavender, we've paired the 12 zodiac signs with tasteful fixings to suit their very personality. It's a harmony that dances between constellations and the culinary.



Aries

Cayenne peppers, chili flakes, and hot peppers

The first zodiac sign, a horned symbol is the ram. Aries is seen as the spark of life. Bound by Mars, the planet of action, energy, and aggression, this explains their precipitous courage in charging headfirst into challenges. This fire sign is traced to confidence as well as competitiveness in blazing their own trail, with a profound passion for new projects and relationships. Yet this flame burns from both ends as Aries truckles to a constant need for spurs and stimuli, as they tend to struggle with lasting routines.

Bold at every sprinkle, Aries matches cayenne peppers, chili flakes, and hot peppers. Such spices are never ones to bite their tongue, conjuring heat as if fearless of the aftermath. Aries is no secondary flavour, but a fire that sharpens the senses, raising the temperature upon announcing their arrival in the room. The impression left by Aries lingers—their forthright nature and tempers akin to the hottest peppers can overwhelm others when left unchecked. Sometimes manifesting as lessons learned the hard way.



Taurus

Cinnamon, vanilla, and nutmeg



Taurus, kissed by Venus—the planet of pleasure, beauty, and harmony, is a heart that tends romance like a flourishing garden. Rooted in romance, an earth sign like Taurus is as loyal as they are deeply sensual. Though wild as the bull their sign embodies, their stubborn strength reflects well in how they nurture their peace. Their bliss is in comfort, while their bane lies in changes.

Illustrative of cinnamon, vanilla, and nutmeg, these subtle yet steady spices hint at the sensual warmth held in a Taurus' heart. Much like the earth sign, cinnamon grounds with its earthiness, a safe and snug spice that sings to Taurus' domestic instinct. Vanilla spice mirrors their fondness for tender affection alongside aesthetic pleasure. And lastly, we have nutmeg—a murmur of sweet warmth, which, once you've won them over, is akin to the trust inherent in a Taurus' character.

Photography: Pexels; Freepik; Unsplash



Gemini

Basil, coriander, and mint



The third star sign, Gemini—as told in Greek mythology—is characterised by the celestial Twins, hence, this is an air-aligned sign that represents duality in personality. Connected to Mercury, Geminis breeze through with their curiosity, wit, and communication, being versatile in social interactions as well as intellectual pursuits. But like air itself, Gemini wavers in the winds of change.

Sporting parallels to herbs such as basil, coriander, and mint, these accoutrements provide a fleeting freshness and adjust themselves in myriad ways across many dishes. For Gemini dances between roles, ideas, and people. Sprightly sweet like basil, as fresh as mint at first crush, and reminiscent of coriander with their contrasting impressions, Geminis do well to stir up a spark. However, when left out for too long, they tend to lose their charm. Their itch for constant change can also cause an internal rivalry between their twin natures.



Cancer

Sea salt and dill



Illuminated by the Moon, the celestial body that governs the emotional world, Cancer is the nurturer among all the zodiacs. Profoundly empathetic and ever the cardinal water sign, Cancer reflects emotional depth, mirroring water's ever-shifting expanse. Their kind nature suggests not softness, but a strength preserved only for those deemed dearly.

In tune with the crab is the fundamental flavour of sea salt. Just as this ocean's seasoning preserves and layers in every dish, Cancer lends a depth to every bond they bind, offering protective care. Though subtle and easily unnoticed, salt is vital to just about any recipe. Besides sea salt, dill is another little sprig that makes all the difference. Reflecting homely comfort and the sea, dill is a nod to the undercurrents of intimacy coupled with the intelligence anchored in Cancer. With strength as profound as their depths, and a seasonality about their moodiness, it is under the tender veils of such herbs that a Cancer's placid energy is harboured.



Leo

Saffron and turmeric



Leo is represented by the lion, a fixed fire sign that exudes charisma as well as confidence in their wake. Suitably so, as Leo is led by the sun, and they enliven those around them just as the sun enlivens Earth. Leos also radiate like the sun, where their creativity, vitality, and character are represented. The attention captivated by this solar sign isn't through force; instead, it's through natural presence, and just as the sun lies at the centre of the solar system, Leos often gravitates toward the limelight, too.

Bright as the sun, saffron and turmeric light up the plate as Leos do in real life. Saffron, with its golden-orange shade, echoes Leo's spirited quality. As much as precious strands of saffron add smell and colour to dishes, drinks, and desserts, so too do Leo's impart that rare regality. Turmeric, as a spice rooted in health as well as protection, runs parallel to Leo's spirit as a protector; as it is a lion's role to guard, guide, and protect its pride. Strikingly, turmeric's earthy heat embodies the inner strength within a Leo, whereas saffron's rarity, like a Leo's trust, is sealed only within a select few.



Virgo

Fennel seeds and caraway



A mutable earth sign like Virgo is an element that perseveres in problem-solving as much as they are practical. Borne of Mercury, and as the iconic maiden with wheat, Virgo often takes on an erudite slant, excelling with an analytical eye that allows them a grounded precision to help others. The wheat in their icon mirrors the wisdom harvested within Virgos as ideation, invention, and as people who are always polished, sorted, and perfected.

Virgos also resonate with fennel seeds and caraway. Delicate but distinct, these spices also aid health. Virgos' healing energy is subtle, as they thrive through small contributions. But much like the mentioned spices, their sharpness may cut through as they tend to be overly critical. On the other hand, the flexibility within a Virgo is akin to how those spices are supple enough to transform a dish.



Libra

Cardamom and rosewater



Blessed by Venus, and cardinally air-attuned, Libra is inherent in symphonising relationships. The social bridge between dialogue and a harmony designer, they often end up playing the role of peacemaker or matchmaker. In their scales, fairness strikes the truest note. Even in real life. This fundamental quality tips Libras to initiate balance across people, partnerships, and aesthetics, instead of simply contemplating it.

Cardamom and rosewater are a beautiful blend for Libras. Stirring up a balance between savoury and sweet with cardamom is akin to how a Libra bridges opposites. Contrarily, rosewater is attuned to beauty and love, resonating with Libras' Venusian charm. Together, these flavours soften bitterness yet balance. But when sought too deeply, can stifle a Libra, as pleasing all pleases none.

Scorpio

Black peppers and cloves



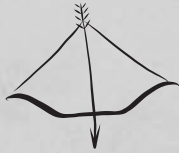
Ruled by Mars in tradition and Pluto in modern astrology, Scorpio is marked by raw passion and transformative depth. Mysterious and alluring, Scorpio's presence often goes unnoticed until they rise to meet a challenge. Like the scorpion, they strike with precision and protect fiercely when trust is earned. It is unwise to provoke a Scorpio—ever attuned to cycles of death and rebirth, their emotional depth is guided by regenerative waters that run deep beneath the surface.

Spices like black pepper and cloves suit Scorpios well. The intensity of black pepper mirrors the boldness and depth of a Scorpio's nature, while the lingering potency of cloves reflects their strong, often intimidating energy. These flavours enchant as much as they overwhelm, much like Scorpio's ability to captivate and, at times, consume.



Sagittarius

Ginger and curry blends



Half-human, half-horse, Sagittarius is the bow-and-arrow-bearing archer. This sign embodies a dual nature—one that thirsts for knowledge and yearns for freedom. Ruled by Jupiter, the planet of expansion and wisdom, Sagittarius excels in new experiences. Fire is their element, and their vibrant energy ebbs and flows, mirroring their adaptability in the face of change.

The lively nature of Sagittarius is well paired with ginger and curry blends. Ginger revitalises, much like the Sagittarian presence that brings energy and excitement to life. Curry blends echo their expansive spirit, broadening horizons and defying tradition. Bold and adventurous, Sagittarius sometimes lets promises slip, lost in the excitement of their many pursuits.



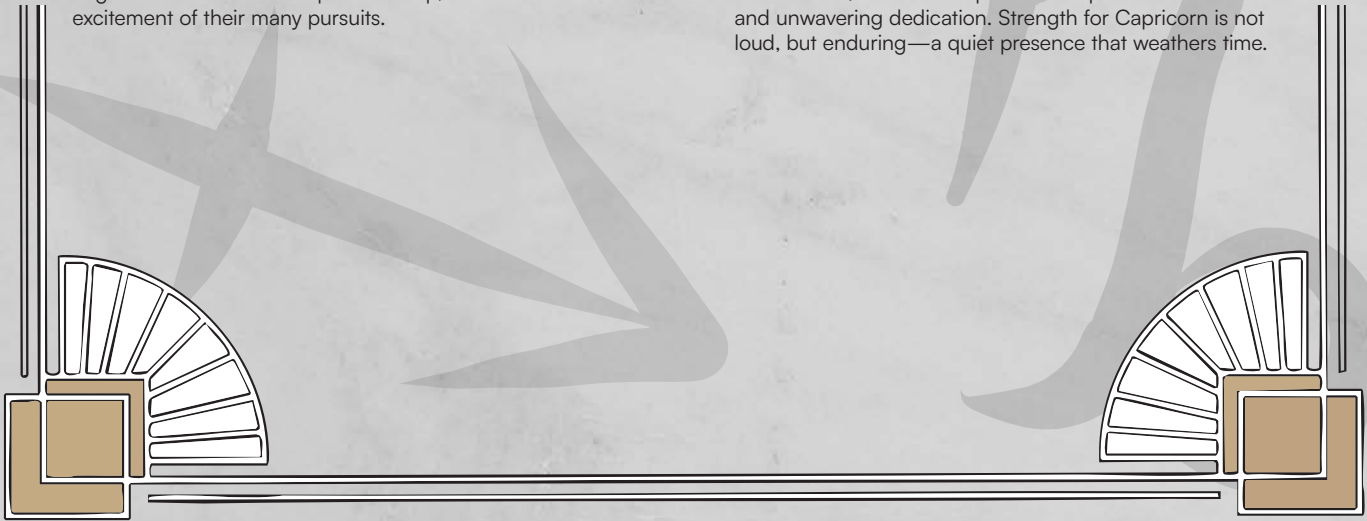
Capricorn

Rosemary and sage



An earth sign, Capricorn is steered by Saturn and embodies steady ambition. The sea-goat is a symbol of resilience, able to navigate both rugged shores and high peaks with patience and precision. Practical and future-focused, Capricorn approaches life with a keen eye on long-term goals, embracing responsibility where others might shy away. Their sense of duty is deep-rooted, like a rock in the sea. Loyal to those they care for, Capricorn strives to create lasting security through disciplined effort.

Hardy herbs like rosemary and sage resonate with Capricorn. Rosemary sharpens the senses, much like Capricorn's sharp focus, while sage, with its ties to ritual and wisdom, channels Capricorn's respect for tradition and unwavering dedication. Strength for Capricorn is not loud, but enduring—a quiet presence that weathers time.





Aquarius

Star anise and sumac



Once ruled by Saturn and now awakened by Uranus, Aquarius is the wild child—both builder and breaker, visionary and rebel. The water bearer carries ideas and knowledge, eager to challenge the norms and raise humanity’s collective consciousness. A true revolutionary, Aquarius is at the forefront of innovation and invention.

Spices like star anise and sumac highlight Aquarius’ eccentricity. The unique, stellar shape and surprising flavour of star anise capture the Aquarian spirit of unexpected brilliance. Sumac’s tart, zesty tang reflects Aquarius’ ability to redefine perceptions, challenging the status quo with refreshing perspectives. Together, these spices create a dish that dares to be different—just as Aquarius dares to break boundaries.



Pisces

Lavender, lemongrass, and seaweed

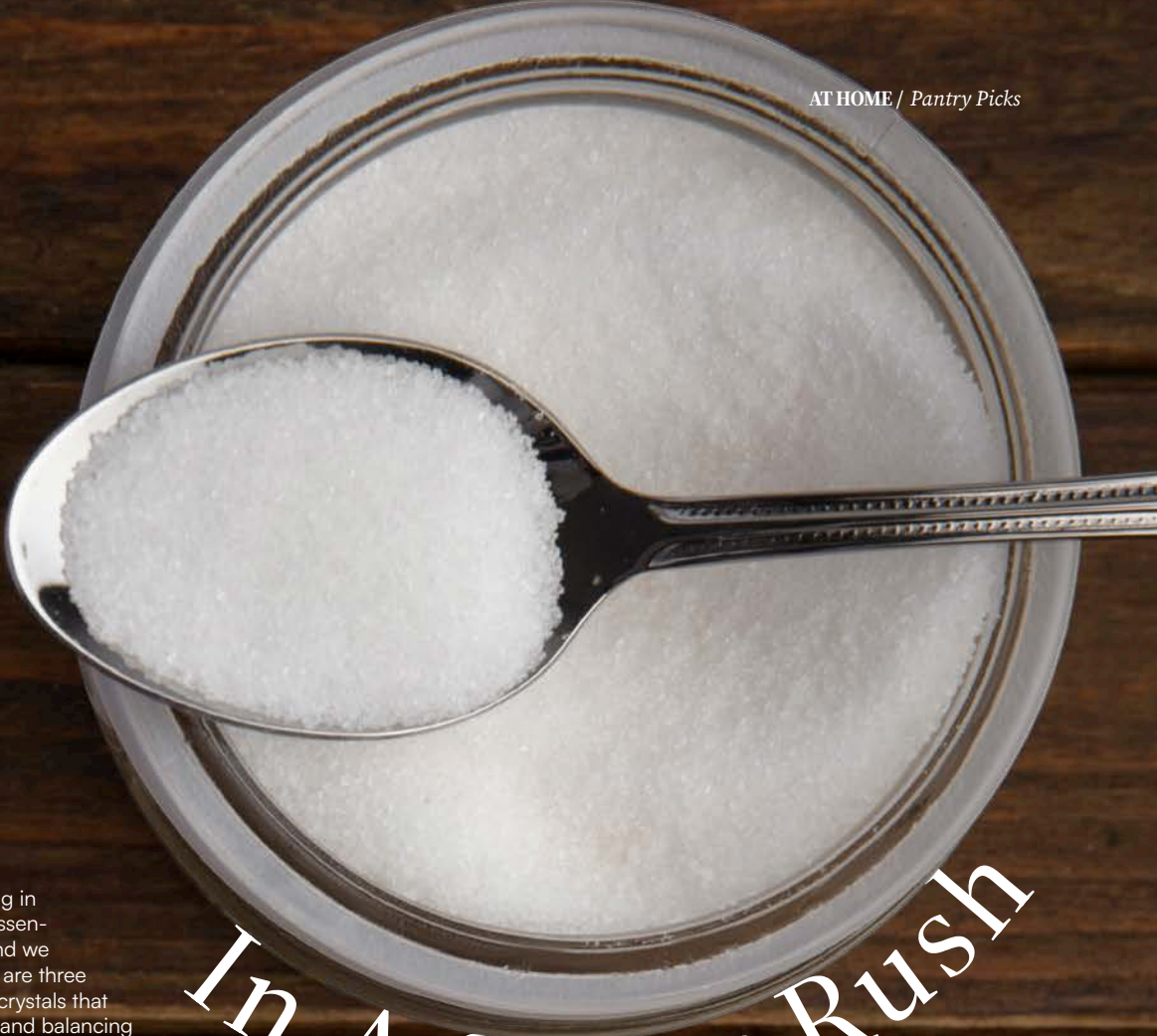


Mutable water ripples into the form of Pisces—dreamer of the sea, guided by Neptune and, in tradition, by Jupiter. Imaginative, intuitive, and deeply empathetic, Pisces embodies duality that swims between reality and dreams. With a profound connection to others, they absorb emotions and energies around them, offering a rare depth of understanding.

Lavender, lemongrass, and seaweed resonate with Pisces’ fluid and dreamy nature. Lavender soothes and evokes dreams, soft as Pisces’ ethereal energy. Lemongrass, with its light, citrusy brightness, mirrors Pisces’ ability to flow through visions and inspirations. Seaweed, drawn from the depths of the ocean, anchors Pisces in their watery, mysterious nature, adding nourishment and enchantment. Like Pisces, these flavours blur the lines between the real and the imagined, leaving a lasting impression.

Sugar may be known as a sweetener, yet in the kitchen, this sweet little thing doubles as a flavour fixer. The story of sugar isn’t just about sweetness, but about balance, and here are three sweet tricks when it comes to perfecting your plate with sugar.

Words: VANESSA L



In A Sugar Rush

The Little Flavour Fixer

1



Did you know that sugar can ease the heat burning your tongue? It binds its sugary molecules to spicy capsaicin that have your pain receptors fired up. Sugar and capsaicin are nonpolar molecules, and as your brain veers to the sweetness meddled with the chilli-charged sting, this as a result ‘cools’ the spiciness.

2

The Transformer



Scorched under a little flame, sugar changes how your food feels, tastes, and talks. For example, crème brûlée hiding beneath a caramel crust that beckons to be cracked. Or onions as they soften into a bronzed, velvet bite when cooked well down. It’s a play between texture and taste; that’s why sugar’s a transformer.

3

The Oh! So Sweetener



Of all its silent talents, sugar shines best as the sweetener in dishes, drinks, and desserts alike. From trace to torrent—subtle or strong—its magic rests in the hand that casts the sweet spell. Beyond settling acrid quarrels laced with acidity, sugar is key to letting savoury notes truly pique; a spoonful in a stew softens the bite, just as it brightens cocktails by coaxing citrus into lime. The same holds true for juices, punches, tonics, and more. Doubly so in desserts, sugar isn’t just a sweetener—it offsets and balances far beyond taste. Whether steadying sharp notes or giving structure to a delicate puff, sugar is the gentle hand that gathers every wild gesture into sweet harmony.



The Cobalt Room

S

ustainability

Fasting To Feasting

Each year, buka puasa—or the breaking of fast—at The Cobalt Room of The Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur is a grand yet unhurried affair with an abundant spread that feels more celebratory than routine. Long tables brim with heritage recipes and regional favourites from across Malaysia and beyond, in keeping with the hotel's Old World charm. Amid the colourful kuih and generous plates, there's a gentle reminder that Ramadan is as much about restraint and reflection as it is about indulgence; taking only what you need, and savouring it with intention.

Words: TENGKU ZAI

Serumpun Serawak

A journey that began in KL and Osaka returned to its roots in the wild heart of Mulu. Serumpun Sarawak stood as both a homecoming and a showcase of the state's living culture.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ



Before this year, I'd never actually been to East Malaysia. I can count several friends who call the exotic tropics of Borneo home, and through them, I was treated to little glimpses of their culture and way of life. But as much as I'd concoct half-baked plans to one day visit their lands, they, rather unsurprisingly in hindsight, never quite materialised. That all changed this year when a work assignment took me to Sabah. Now, here I was, two months later, on a flight to Sarawak by the gracious invitation of the Sarawak Tourism Board.

And so it was that I found myself in the land of the hornbills, swept away to experience its attractions and be made acquainted with its plentiful bounties. Captivating stops at the Borneo Cultures Museum, the Annah Rais longhouse, and a serene river cruise, all arranged by the Sarawak Tourism Board, functioned as a prelude to Serumpun Sarawak, a programme that forms an expansive showcase of Sarawak's indigenous communities—one that unites

its culinary artisans and its creative culture bearers in a spectacle woven to introduce the richness of the land and its culture to a global audience.

First making its way to KL before thrilling attendees further afield in Osaka, Serumpun Sarawak was now on the return leg to where it all began, deep within the ancient sanctity of the UNESCO World Heritage rainforest of Mulu. It promised to be a spectacular curtain call that would see nature, heritage, and hyperlocal flavour converge in one awe-inspiring immersion.

Set amid the tranquil seclusion of the Mulu Marriott Resort & Spa, the event opened with an enveloping rainforest encounter that greeted guests the moment they walked in—a sensory nod to the theme “We Are Nature, Nature Is Us—Everything is Everything.” The evening unfolded by way of a series of enlightening presentations before reaching its crescendo: a seven-course



gastronomic odyssey put together by one of Malaysia's foremost culinary imperators, Chef James Won.

Working in close collaboration with Sarawak's indigenous food custodians to ensure the most sincere representation of their tastes and culture, each dish was a seamless coming together of contemporary culinary techniques guided by ancestral memory and the collective wisdom of the 34 ethnic communities that make up Sarawak's rich cultural mosaic.

The dishes on offer played host to a variety of ingredients that I—and I'd wager most of my fellow diners that evening—had never come across. Rainforest botanicals, exotic freshwater produce, and traditional ferments took centre stage; these ancient expressions, a staple of local palates for centuries, now introduced themselves here to foreign tongues in magnificent fashion. It was a celebration of Sarawak's terroir, lensed through fine dining sensibilities, that stayed tightly adherent to the tenets of sustainability and reverence for the land from which it springs.

Before each course arrived at the table, guests were treated to a short narration voiced by the gentlemanly lilt of Professor Gerard Bodeker. His recorded reflections on the medicinal and therapeutic properties of the native ingredients on display served to deepen the diners' understanding, as well as the evening's connection between wellness, ecology, and culture. It was these interspersions, among others, that served to elevate the dinner into the realm of the experiential. Perhaps the most significant highlight of the evening came by way of Adrian Jo Milang, whose moving rendition of 'Ilun Kuai', the official theme song of Serumpun Sarawak penned by Zee Avi and friends, delighted the guests thronged throughout the venue.

The evening drew to a close as guests gathered and shared moments of camaraderie beneath the dimmed lights of the hall. Those once strangers were now clustered together for photographs, conversation spilling easily between these newly made friends. There was a palpable sentiment in the air that the night had achieved what it set out to do: to bring Sarawak a little closer to the world, and the world a little closer to Sarawak. **D**

Eating The Problem

Why try to beat the problem, when you can just eat the problem? Discover how eating invasive species could be the solution to both ecological and culinary dilemmas.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ

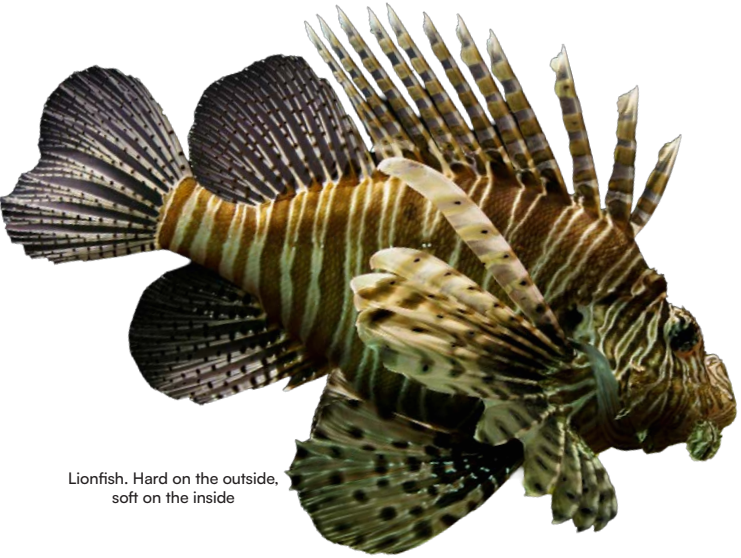


We all know invasive species are bad news. I mean, they're called "invasive" for a reason. Wreaking havoc on ecosystems everywhere, suffocating native plants, and with deleterious effects on local economies, they're a problem that continues to be a bit of a head-scratcher for the people tasked with solving them. But what if I told you that they could also be delicious? I say it's high time we took a different approach to eradicating these troublesome critters. You know how they say you can't eat your problems away? Well, in this case, you might literally be able to do just that.

Picture this: a crisp, spicy lionfish taco, served with some salsa and grilled vegetables on the side. Want fewer calories and more greens instead? A zesty kudzu salad might be just the thing you didn't know you needed. With sustainable dining on the rise and chefs everywhere paying more attention to the sustainability of the ingredients they use and the impact of their sourcing choices, the consumption of invasive species could be the next frontier we have to traverse.

Sometimes a result of human folly, invasive species have come about as a result of trying to solve a problem and inadvertently creating a bigger one in its wake. While nature can be counted on to balance itself out eventually, occasionally, it needs our help to get there. Forget farm-to-table for a minute and let's start thinking about invasive-to-table.

These species present very real options for a more sustainable alternative to traditional protein sources. But more than just sustainability, it could also be the push that livens up the culinary scene. Introducing new flavours and textures, the untapped world



Lionfish. Hard on the outside, soft on the inside

of invasive species could become a playground for some of the world's most inventive culinary minds to redraw the boundaries surrounding how we view food.

But alright, enough about why we should be eating these things and how we could end up enjoying them very much indeed. Now, let's look into some actual examples of troublesome critters that are in the midst of causing some serious problems, right now, as you read this. First up, we have the aforementioned lionfish bedeviling the U.S. Atlantic coast. An invasive species with no natural predators, they also, unfortunately, happen to reproduce very quickly. These two traits form a potent combination that has seen lionfish outcompete native species for food and habitat,

Cane toads taste better than they look



damaging coral reefs and local ecosystems since their unintentional introduction sometime in the '80s.

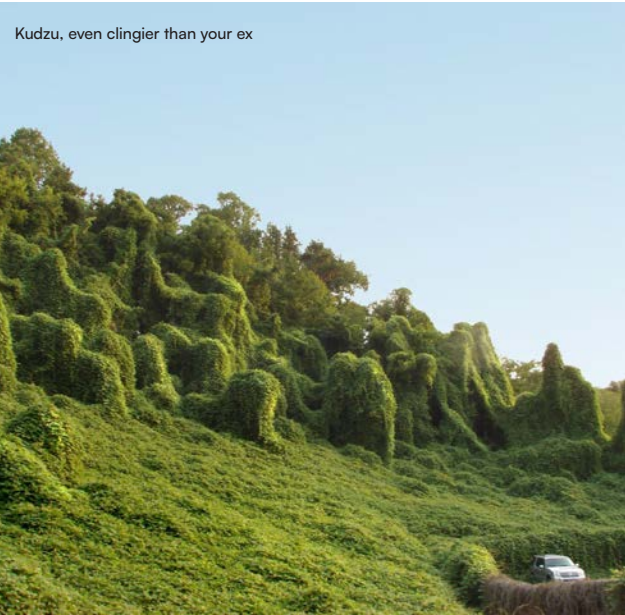
Spiky and menacing on the outside, their flesh, in contrast, happens to be delicately sweet and flaky. This makes it perfect for fish tacos, ceviche, or even lionfish sashimi, should you be so inclined. A fresh twist on your seafood dishes, and one you can feel the corals thanking you for with every bite.

Cane toads, on the other hand, are an example of an intentionally introduced species—one that has gone horribly awry. Initially brought in to tackle agricultural pests, specifically the cane beetle, they quickly became a much bigger problem themselves. An absence of natural predators has granted them free rein to populate wildly across northern Australia.

In addition to outcompeting local species for food, cane toads are also harmful to native predators, owing to the deadly toxins they secrete. Their rapid growth continues to threaten biodiversity, and in a landscape as rich in fauna as Australia's, I think we can all agree that it would be nothing less than a tragedy to see it devolve into an orgy of toads.

Now, getting people to eat them might present a challenge. For starters, they're ugly as sin. There's that whole being poisonous thing they've got going on. But despite their awful reputation, some enterprising chefs have actually come up with some creative ways to cook them. Cane toads work fried, grilled, or even stewed, sporting a flavour often compared to that of frog legs.

So far, we've discussed animals that have become invasive species, but it's not just anything with wings or four legs that can be bothersome. Plants can be intrusive too, just in slower and less obvious, but still no less damaging, ways. One example is kudzu, a fast-growing vine native to Japan and China. Kudzu grows quickly— and I do mean quickly. Do a search and you won't have to look very far for photos of it absolutely covering every inch of whatever was there before, be it a lamppost or an outhouse. It smothers trees and plants, blocking out the sunlight and slowly choking ecosystems to death. It makes buildings unsafe, too, because it grows in all sorts of nooks and crannies, causing structural damage over time.



Kudzu, even clingier than your ex

As terrifyingly claustrophobic as it makes you feel, kudzu is surprisingly versatile for such a pesky weed. The starchy root can be boiled, mashed, or used to make kudzu flour, which works well as a thickening agent in soups, stews, and sauces. The young leaves make for a good salad when eaten raw or added to stir-fries, soups, or as greens. The tender shoots, especially in the springtime, can be had pickled or sautéed, and you can even make a dessert from them, with the flowers being used to make a sweet jelly reminiscent of grape or elderberry.

These are just a few examples of invasive species that people can and should start eating. There are many different parts of the world, and each of them struggles with different invaders. You have rabbits plaguing the plains of Chile, as well as the goofy-looking nilgai in India—which, by the way, I've only just discovered today even exist. Why are their heads so disproportionately small? And why are they just randomly the largest antelope in Asia? I digress. Back to invasive species—we can do our part to help mitigate their impact just by opening up our minds, as well as our mouths. Yes, they're pests now, but who knows? In time, they could become your new favourite dish—one you can enjoy with a full stomach and a clear conscience. **P**



Rabbits? Problematic? If you lived in Chile, they would be

Photography: Flickr: Peakpx: Wikimedia

Inside Chef Yeong's World Of Desserts

From a late-night Maggi goreng to designing royal-sized cakes, Chef Yeong of The Ritz-Carlton, Langkawi proves that desserts are as much about heart as they are about skill.

Words: PATRICK LOH

We found a hidden gem in the world of pastries—Chef Yeong of The Ritz-Carlton, Langkawi. With an unshakable love for crafting the perfect finale, he's the creative force behind indulgent treats like the muskmelon sundae and matcha tiramisu. Beyond the pastries, he's also the man ensuring every restaurant at the resort from The Beach Grill to Hai Yan gets its sweet fix.

In this edition of 'Unfiltered', Chef Yeong lets us in on his favourite desserts, the trends he not-so-secretly wishes would disappear, and the most camera-ready cake he's ever created.

ON HIS FAVOURITE DESSERTS
"There are two I never get tired of. Tiramisu and a dark, rich chocolate cake," Chef Yeong says with a grin that suggests both comfort and craving. He adds that Tiramisu has this perfect balance of coffee bitterness and creamy sweetness, and a good chocolate cake ... well, that never goes out of style.

His versions of these classics, of course, carry the signature Ritz-Carlton polish. Layers of flavour that unfold with every bite, textures that dance between airy and dense, and just enough restraint to keep you wanting another spoonful.

ON HIS FAVOURITE MIDNIGHT SNACK
When the ovens are off and the resort quiets down, Chef Yeong's cravings

lean closer to home. "Malaysian Maggi goreng with telur mata," he says without hesitation. "It's quick, spicy, and satisfying. After a long day in the kitchen, that's what I reach for."

It's a humble confession, one that reminds us that even the most refined chefs find comfort in the everyday.

ON PASTRY TRENDS HE DISLIKES
"I dislike anything that's more flair than flavour," he admits. "You can build the tallest dessert, cover it in gold, or make it smoke and sparkle—but if it doesn't taste good, it's just decoration." It's an opinion that reflects his culinary philosophy. For Chef Yeong, dessert should never be about performance alone. Once the phone's done eating, you ought to enjoy what you're eating, too.

ON THE MOST INSTAGRAMMABLE DESSERT HE'S CREATED
When we ask about the most camera-ready creation he's ever made, he laughs, almost as if recalling a sweet but exhausting memory. "That would be the 100-kilogram cake I made for a royal event, for one of the Malaysian kings," he recalls. "It was an incredible challenge. Everything had to be perfect, from the structure to the decoration. You don't get a second chance with something like that."

The cake became a masterpiece of engineering and artistry, a true testament

to how far pastry can go when it meets precision and imagination. "It wasn't just about size," he adds. "It was about balance, harmony, and making sure every layer tasted as good as it looked."

ON THE BEST DESSERT AT THE RITZ-CARLTON, LANGKAWI
When asked to name a favourite from his own menu, Chef Yeong doesn't hesitate. And we're pleasantly surprised. "The Kawal Pisang and the Muskmelon Sundae," he says. "The Kawal Pisang is made up of ingredients like caramelised banana, coconut, and gula Melaka. And the Muskmelon Sundae is lighter, refreshing, perfect for the island's tropical mood." Each dessert, in its own way, mirrors the duality of the island itself: lush yet refined, comforting yet elevated.

Chef Yeong's world is one where sugar meets soul. His craft imore focused on creating moments that wow and a bite that's, ultimately, delicious. In every swirl and dusting, there's the quiet pursuit of perfection, anchored by the belief that desserts are more than endings. "They're the last impression," he says simply. "You want people to remember that feeling—the sweetness, the satisfaction, the surprise. That's the magic."

And just like that, you understand why Chef Yeong doesn't just make desserts. But rather, he makes magic of the sweetest kind. **P**

Liquid Gold

Malaysia is home to an extraordinary range of myriad honeys from around the country. Each jar holds not just sweetness, but stories of flowers, forests, and traditions.

Words: PATRICK LOH



Golden, amber, or dark as molasses, honey has always been more than a sweetener. It is nature’s edible archive, storing inside every drop the whispers of flowers, forests, and even the hands that harvest it. In Malaysia, honey isn’t just something to drizzle on toast, either. It’s a reflection of our country’s diverse landscapes, cultures, and traditions. From highland farms to coastal mangroves, the varieties of honey found across the country reveal how this golden elixir can taste wildly different, depending on where the bees roam.



TUALANG HONEY

If there is one honey that carries a mythical aura in Malaysia, it’s Tualang honey. Sourced from the towering Tualang trees deep within Kedah and Pahang’s rainforests, this honey is harvested from giant honeybee colonies that build their hives high up in branches, often 30 metres above ground. Traditionally, skilled climbers risk their lives to collect the honey at night, guided only by moonlight and smoke torches.

Tualang honey is prized for its reputed medicinal properties: antioxidant-rich, antimicrobial, and believed to boost energy. In taste, it has a complexity that feels almost wild—floral yet slightly bitter, with earthy undertones. Locals often take it by the spoonful, treating it more like a tonic than a kitchen staple.

KELULUT HONEY

From the majestic giants to the tiniest workers: Kelulut honey comes from stingless bees, or *lebah kelulut*. Unlike conventional honeybees, these miniature creatures create resinous, tube-like hives in wooden boxes or tree hollows. Farmers across the states of Terengganu, Johor, and Selangor are now turning Kelulut beekeeping into a sustainable industry, with some even exporting it overseas.

The honey itself is distinct—runny, tangy, and slightly sour, with citrusy notes that surprise first-time consumers, feeling almost like a fermented nectar. It’s used in drinks, salad dressings, or even as a finishing drizzle on fruit, cheese, or yoghurt.



MANGROVE HONEY

Venture towards coastal regions like Sabah or Sarawak, and you’ll discover Mangrove honey. Harvested from bees that forage around mangrove blossoms, this honey has a deeper, darker hue that’s sometimes almost reddish. Flavour-wise, it carries a rich caramel with salt-kissed earthiness. Because of its mineral-rich qualities, Mangrove honey is often celebrated as a natural remedy for sore throats and coughs. In coastal kitchens, you might even see it mixed with lime and hot water, a simple but powerful tonic. Its savoury-sweet balance also makes it a secret weapon in marinades for seafood or roasted meats.



Photography: Freeplik; Pexels

GELAM HONEY

If you’ve strolled through a Malaysian health store, chances are you’ve come across Gelam honey. It’s harvested from the blossoms of the Gelam tree, also known as the Melaleuca or paperbark tree, which grows abundantly in Terengganu and Johor.

What sets Gelam honey apart is its strong medicinal character. Slightly bitter with herbal, almost eucalyptus-like notes, it’s not everyone’s first choice, but many Malaysians swear by its antibacterial and anti-inflammatory powers. It’s also used topically, believed to help with skin healing. In many ways, Gelam honey showcases honey’s versatility.



WILDFLOWER HONEY

Amidst all the exotic names, there’s also the familiar comfort of wildflower honey. Bees foraging freely across Malaysia’s rolling hills, orchards, and gardens produce this variety, which can range from light and floral to dark and robust depending on the season. It’s the everyday, all-purpose honey you’ll find drizzled over *kaya* toast in a *kopitiam*, blended into herbal teas, or bottled in jars on supermarket shelves. While it might not have the prestige of Tualang or the tang of Kelulut, wildflower honey is the democratic delight—accessible, versatile, and the daily choice.

HONEY GOES GOURMET

What makes Malaysia’s honey scene even more exciting today is how chefs, mixologists, and artisanal producers are reimagining it. Cafés now swap out simple syrup for Kelulut honey in cocktails, fine dining restaurants use Tualang honey to glaze duck or pork, and boutique brands infuse local honey with spices like cinnamon, turmeric, or even chilli.

Honey pairing is also becoming a culinary art—imagine a sweet mangrove honey balancing the saltiness of local cheese, or wildflower honey accentuating the smokiness of grilled seafood. By bridging tradition with experimentation, Malaysia’s honey story continues to evolve.

A TASTE OF MALAYSIA

Ultimately, every jar of Malaysian honey is a map of where the bees have flown. From rainforest canopies to mangrove roots, from wildflowers to kitchen gardens, each variety carries the spirit of its land. To taste Malaysian honey is to taste Malaysia itself—diverse, dynamic, and endlessly surprising. 

Proof of Leadership

We don't often talk about bars as places of introspection. But sitting across from Shirmy Chan, it becomes clear that Bar Terumi was built with more than drinks in mind—it's an expression of one woman's inner world made physical.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ



Bar Terumi's setting is subdued and inviting

I'd been to Bar Terumi once before. It was an interesting night, on which I remember very much enjoying the drinks and the atmosphere. Now, several months down the line, I'm paying it a second visit. Only this time, my date is with Shirmy Chan—the co-founder of Bar Terumi, its principal mixologist, and the woman who has become synonymous with the bar itself. It's not often that you find women-owned bars, though that's slowly changing these days, and that's just one of the reasons why we thought it'd be interesting to have her tell us her story.

And so it was that after a long day at work, I jumped in a car and headed over, not quite knowing what to expect. I arrive and take in my surroundings. It's early still, and so there isn't yet quite as much of a crowd as there had been the last time I'd visited. I spot two people sitting at a table by the side, locked in quiet conversation. A couple seated at the bar share a relaxed back and forth with each other and, occasionally, the bartender.

Shirmy arrives shortly after I do and directs me to a long table by the windows. This is where she normally seats her guests if she's hosting a party, she tells me. Today though, it's just me. We take our seats and go through the obligatory introductions, as well as outlining what the next hour or so is going to entail. The first impression you get from Shirmy is of someone who's rather reserved. She wears a stern countenance that I later learn belies a calm, contemplative personality.

NEW BEGINNINGS

I figure it would be a good way to kick things off by asking her about how it all started. Bar Terumi had its beginnings in 2022, and they'd just celebrated their anniversary this past August. I ask Shirmy where the name comes from, and she tells me it was the product of a long session of thought. "The tender bar is a concept. Then a bar needs a name. I tried to link the feeling, the concept of this bar, to a name, but I couldn't find one that suits it."

She then decided to look to her family's names for inspiration. Taking her dad's name, she had the sudden idea to look up its Japanese pronunciation. It sounds something like "teru", which means "to shine". Shirmy felt it mirrored the brightness of the space she had, and so she incorporated it into the name.

A front row seat to where the magic happens



It would be just the first example of many I get throughout the night of how Shirmy goes to lengths to translate the abstractions in her mind into something tangible. That's certainly effort I can appreciate. With most bars, you get the impression that they're put together with a theme in mind or perhaps derived from a pre-existing template. Not Bar Terumi. Everything inside the bar once started as an idea or a feeling.

WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Perhaps the most evident example of this is the menu, the latest iteration of which has only just launched. We grab a copy and Shirmy walks me through it. On the first page is a cut-out of a wheel. Above it, in bold, are the words: "Pick your colour, or let fate be your bartender." Shirmy explains that the menu is based on Chinese metaphysical principles.



It's certainly one of the most unique ways I've seen of helping you choose a drink, when the plethora of options available inevitably brings about a case of paralysis by analysis. Grouping ingredients according to the five Chinese elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, water), it's all been meticulously worked out so that you can, by way of a few simple choices, arrive at a drink that perfectly suits your mood as well as the occasion. Shirmy explains the mechanics behind it to me, and while I find it incredibly absorbing, to say I fully understand it would be disingenuous.

It's yet another example of how Shirmy, with the aid of an illustrator, worked to transform the ideational into the corporeal. It becomes an occasional happening throughout the course of our conversation that Shirmy touches



on metaphysical matters, only to quickly sidestep them—as if she doesn't expect anyone to fully grasp what she's saying. I get it.

It's often the case that when you bring up the esoteric with someone not quite tuned to the same frequency, you can almost feel their scepticism in the air. It presents as a sideways glance, perhaps, or a subtle tension you feel bubbling beneath the surface. The conversation takes a palpable turn, and you're left steering it back to more familiar ground. But that's not the case here. The more I listen, the more intrigued I become by Shirmy's worldview.

LEAVE A MESSAGE

Shirmy flips through the rest of the menu before arriving at a page near the end. "Oh, this one, this is an interesting part," Shirmy begins. "We invite customers to be part of our journey and leave some positive messages for strangers." It's a page alive with an assemblage of scrawls. Some of them are elegant and looping, while others are more hurried and angular. It is a separate but ultimately connected expression of community.

She got the inspiration for it from a trip to an unassuming tea house in China, in which a lady passed her a tray of messages. She retrieved and unravelled one to read. "It said something like, 'Life is changing, life is difficult. But no matter what, just keep moving forward, and you should



have a good day.' I felt like crying at the time. It's such a simple message, right? So I decided to apply that here," Shirmy explains.

Having spent the last hour or so talking about the story behind the bar and the menu, Shirmy decides it's time for a drink. I tell her to pick one for me based on how she feels, and she relishes the opportunity. She studies me, before beckoning one of the staff and placing an order. My drink arrives—a darkly-hued, mysterious-looking potion. "This one I picked for you, because I think you're definitely a refreshing drink. Give it a try." I take a sip and mull it over for a few moments.

JUST A FEELING

"Why am I that? Why am I the Spice Whisper?" I ask Shirmy. "You are like the whisperer. And you are in this ... black water. It's just a feeling that I get. I also think you need some spicing up, because I'm guessing you've had a very long day today." Yes, I have indeed. "So I needed to get you something refreshing, to spark your sensation and reset."

"This is my day-to-day job," she tells me. "Picking drinks for people." "Do you do that often?" I ask. "I have to, because the customer often comes to me and just says, 'Shirmy, can you make one drink for me?' So I need to profile a certain person's mood of the day or their condition of the day, and then I offer them certain cocktails."

As I sip the drink so thoughtfully chosen for me, I ask Shirmy what she gets up to when she's not doing all of this. "Oh, I need a lot of me time to reset. But the thing I like to do—I think of it as a remedy—is cooking." But life is hectic these days, and she's finding time to herself increasingly hard to come by. She tells me about her growing book collection, which she doesn't read. I relate, because unfortunately, I've got one of those myself.

AS TIME GOES BY

"I like to read but I just don't have the time. I buy books, but I don't read them. I think it's a sign of being an adult, we don't have much time for that. So I set a goal: if finally, one

day, I can finish a book, that's a sign I've achieved something else. It means everything is stable. If I finish reading a book, it's a measure of something," Shirmy muses.

I reflect on what an interesting gauge that is of where one really is in life. To be able to finish a book in a single day becomes a proof of something else entirely: that things are stable, that your attention isn't scattered, and that your hours aren't stolen by the spectre of urgency. I hope for those days too. As things stand, it takes me months just to finish one. Maybe someday I'll get there. But in the meantime, I have stories like Shirmy's to tell. And I suppose it doesn't hurt doing it with a cocktail in hand. ■

A Clase Act

From hand-painted decanters to heritage-driven distilling, Clase Azul proves that tequila can be art, ritual, and revelation in a single pour.

Words: ANANDHI GOPINATH



Tequila has always had a bit of a dodgy reputation—and honestly, I helped cement it. Say the word and my brain immediately replays the worst nights of my early twenties: sticky floors, salt in places salt never should be, and shots eagerly distributed by well-meaning friends who by which time, clearly needed to go home. Back then, tequila existed solely in shot glasses, downed with the subtlety of a dare. Nobody sipped it, nobody swirled it, nobody respected it. And in fairness, the bottles available then didn't exactly demand it.

But somewhere along the way, tequila grew up. Or maybe I did. Either way, the spirit has undergone the kind of renaissance normally reserved for washed-up rockstars who suddenly discover a new producer and a good haircut. Today, tequila is one of the fastest-rising premium spirits worldwide. And this is not because people are doing better shots, but because they're finally drinking it properly.

We now know that tequila made from 100 per cent Blue Weber agave is naturally low in calories, and its distillation and filtration processes make it one of the "cleaner" spirits—though let's be realistic, alcohol is never a health supplement and never will be. Still, it's a far cry from the heavy, sugary hangover bombs of the past. And nowhere is this transformation more obvious than in the rise of Clase Azul, the Mexican house that practically re-branded tequila as a luxury collectible.

Decanters are decorated by applying brushstrokes by hand

If you've ever seen a Clase Azul bottle, you'll understand why it's having a moment. These white-and-blue hand-painted ceramic flacons resemble something you'd display on a shelf even after the last drop. When the brand arrived in Malaysia in 2020, the reaction was immediate: finally, a tequila that didn't scream "student night out," but whispered "grown-ups drink this now."

The Reposado quickly became the local favourite, and I'm convinced whisky drinkers are responsible. There's something familiar in its amber glow and rounded, oak-kissed warmth—a soft landing for those who think all clear spirits are out to harm them. It's easy on the palate, slightly sweet, gently spiced, and a real joy to sip without theatrics.

Then there's Clase Azul Gold. This one caught me off guard. It's elegant, almost impossibly smooth, gliding down my throat the way a good Scotch does. No burn, no punch, no reminder of past sins. If tequila had a velvet jacket phase, this is it. I found myself nursing it slowly, thinking, When did tequila get... classy?

But the one that really pushes boundaries is the Blanco Ahumado, the newest addition to the family. It's a modern, artisanal take on a traditional style, where the agave is slow-cooked with firewood to give it a whisper of smoke. So not quite full mezcal territory, but a flirtation with it. On the nose, there's fresh agave and citrus peel; on the palate I picked up a crisp minerality, a wisp of smoke and light herbs. The finish is soft and clean, resulting in a complex spirit that makes you rethink everything you thought you knew about blanco spirits—complex, restrained, and genuinely exciting.

And of course, we can't forget the Añejo, the richest and warmest of the bunch. It's velvety, comforting, and almost dessert-like without crossing into cloying territory. If Reposado is the gateway for whisky drinkers, then the Añejo very much seals the deal with its polished, lingering richness.



Rectification: the second step of the distillation process



From left: Clase Azul Tequila Plata, Clase Azul Tequila Reposado, Clase Azul Tequila Gold, Clase Azul Tequila Añejo, Clase Azul Tequila Ultra, Clase Azul Tequila Blanco Ahumado

It's really interesting how far tequila has come from a chaotic party ritual to a spirit worth discussing, sipping, and collecting. Clase Azul polished tequila's image, then kicked down the door and made the whole world pay attention. And as someone whose earliest tequila memories are best left unarchived, I find myself bizarrely impressed with its evolution.

Tequila, like people, deserves the chance to reinvent itself. This time, I'm here for the ride, and hurrah—no lime wedge required. **P**



Smoked agave and fresh lemon with a mineral front that gives way to a silky finish with smoky undertones

Chef Keith Yeap

The Art Of Cantonese Cuisine

Cantonese cuisine is healthy and prominent in Chinese food culture, yet it often remains underrated. We sit down with Chef Keith Yeap of Shang Palace at Shangri-La KL, to uncover what makes this quiet artistry worth celebrating.

Words: PATRICK LOH

We may think we know Chinese cuisine well—after all, it has long been part of our daily dining fabric—but Cantonese cooking tells a deeper story. It is a cuisine defined not just by its flavours, but by an artistry of restraint, precision, and an almost poetic balance. Every dish is a study in detail: the crispness of wok-fried vegetables, the clarity of double-boiled soups, the gentle perfume of steamed fish. Yet much of this quiet mastery often slips under the radar, overshadowed by bolder regional styles.

At Shang Palace, Shangri-La KL's temple to refined Chinese dining, Executive Chinese Chef Keith Yeap is peeling back the layers of that tradition. With a newly unveiled *à la carte* menu, he offers both a reverent nod to Cantonese heritage and a playful twist that refreshes it for today's palate. The result is a collection of dishes that feel both familiar and intriguing—a bridge between memory and surprise, designed to rekindle an appreciation for the art of Cantonese gastronomy.

THE ROOTS OF CANTONESE CUISINE

"Cantonese cuisine values subtlety, balance, and depth," says Chef Yeap. "It is the culinary language I grew up with, and most of the dishes are light but flavourful." For him, Cantonese cooking is not just about what's on the plate—it's about the philosophy behind each dish. Timing and precision are crucial, but so too is storytelling. "To me, it's not just cooking but a philosophy and a way of telling stories through food."

THE CORE OF THE CRAFT

Despite his openness to innovation, Chef Yeap never strays far from tradition. "I stay true to the core methods—double boiling, steaming, slow braising—but I introduce local or global influences to reinterpret them," he explains. "For example, the Jasmine-Smoked Wagyu Beef Ribs involve four different cooking techniques. It's familiar, yet surprising."



Stewed chicken drumsticks with galangal, garlic, and lemon

This balancing act defines his approach. "Cantonese cuisine is all about restraint. When designing a dish, I consider aroma, texture, temperature, and even the feel of the serving vessel. Every element must be intentional—supporting, not overpowering, one another. It's an art of quiet harmony."

CHASING 'WOK HEI'

Ask any chef and they'll tell you: mastering 'wok hei' is a lifelong pursuit. For Yeap, it is the essence of everything. "Wok hei is the soul of Chinese cooking. It's the dialogue between fire, the wok, and the ingredients. I practice wok-frying every day to perfect that fleeting moment when fragrance explodes." Precision is non-negotiable. "For example, the Wok-Fried Lamb Chops with Gui Huang Sauce requires precise oil temperature and swift execution—just one second off can make a difference."

The same dedication carries into dishes like the 48-Hour Peking Duck. "To me, it fully embodies the Cantonese spirit. It combines low-temperature cooking, fat rendering, and open-flame roasting—bringing together time, technique, and tradition."



Stew beef in soy sauce with spices and pickled

MEMORIES IN A BOWL

For Yeap, cooking is as much about memory as mastery. He recalls his grandmother's sticky rice dumplings as one of his earliest inspirations. "I remember choosing rice with her, learning how carefully she selected every ingredient. Today, I carry that same patience and care into every dish that requires slow, thoughtful preparation."

Soups, too, hold a special place. "I'd say double-boiled soups. They look clear and unassuming, but each drop is packed with hours of careful simmering. The challenge lies not in cooking long, but in getting the timing, ratios, and balance exactly right."

He reflects on soup with a touch of poetry: "Soup, to me, is like water—quiet on the surface but powerful underneath. Water is the source of life, and soup is the nourishment of the soul. It may appear plain, but its depth reveals itself slowly and meaningfully."

THE HEART OF A DISH

When asked what he hopes diners take away from his creations, Yeap answers without hesitation: "Honestly, I just want them to feel happy—genuinely happy from the heart. To me, a good dish doesn't just satisfy the stomach—it feeds the soul. If someone smiles or recalls a childhood memory after eating, that means everything to me."

He also wants to challenge the common misconception that Cantonese food is "too light or bland." "In reality, it's about balance and finesse. It's a cuisine that respects ingredients and relies on skill—not flashiness—to shine."

INSPIRATION BEYOND BORDERS

Like many chefs, Yeap's curiosity extends beyond Cantonese traditions. "Yes—far too many! I'm always curious about ingredients and culinary cultures from around the world. But I don't like to force 'fusion.' I prefer letting inspiration come naturally—through travel, encounters, or even a friend's home-cooked dish."

For him, creativity is born of spontaneity. "I follow my senses—what I see, taste, and feel. Inspiration often comes from those unplanned, beautiful moments. I believe the most touching creations aren't calculated—they come to you when something truly moves you. That's what makes them honest and beautiful."

A QUIET BUT POWERFUL ART

Chef Yeap's reflections remind us that Cantonese cuisine is not about spectacle, but subtlety. Its beauty lies in restraint, in patience, and in the quiet pursuit of balance. At Shang Palace, every dish—from the fragrant wok-fried lamb chops to the delicate double-boiled soups—invites diners to pause, taste, and appreciate the understated efforts of a culinary tradition that's too often overlooked.

In the end, perhaps that is the heart of Cantonese cooking: a cuisine that whispers rather than shouts, but leaves an impression all the more lasting for it.



Silk Lava Shrimp Ball

Farm To Fiction

*If you've ever wondered what makes a vegetable a vegetable ...
don't. It's all made up anyway.*

Words: COLIN GOMEZ



Vegetables aren't real. There, I said it. Now, most of you are probably reading this thinking that I've lost my mind. And you know what? Maybe I have. But that's beside the point. The point is that vegetables do, in fact, have no actual basis in reality. "But Colin, look, what about this piece of broccoli right here? Isn't this a vegetable?"

Glossing over the fact that you just so happened to have a head of broccoli on hand—no, it isn't actually a vegetable. It's an immature flower head (I can think of a few people who also fit this description) of the plant *Brassica oleracea* var. *italica*. In other words, it's the part of the plant that eventually blooms into flowers.

Speaking of broccoli, an interesting fact I discovered while doing the research for this article is that it actually belongs to the cabbage family—sharing a species with cauliflower, kale, Brussels sprouts and kohlrabi. All those 'vegetables' are just different cultivars of the same ancestral plant. Alright, what about carrots then? Those have to be vegetables, don't they?

Well, no—because vegetables don't exist, haven't you been paying attention? Carrots are actually a root, believe it or not. More

specifically, they're the edible taproot of the plant *Daucus carota*, harvested before the plant enters its flowering (second-year) phase. Their primary purpose is to store energy to fuel flowering and seed production later on.

Now you point to the potatoes, meekly, without quite as much conviction as you had when referring to the carrots and the broccoli. Because by now, you know better than to doubt me outright. Because you know I have receipts. Potatoes are actually modified underground stems, known as stem tubers. These tubers store nutrients—primarily starch—and have 'eyes', which are actually stem buds. Each eye can sprout into a plant of its own.

Potatoes are part of the nightshade family, which also includes tomatoes, aubergines, and peppers. You may have heard that nightshades are poisonous, and that's because the term partly derives from the famous toxic plant *Atropa belladonna* (also known as the "deadly nightshade") that inhabits the same family. "But potatoes are one of the good nightshades, right? They'd never hurt anyone." Think again. In 2013, four members of a Russian family died in their closed basement where they'd stored potatoes for the winter. Local investigators concluded that the poisonous



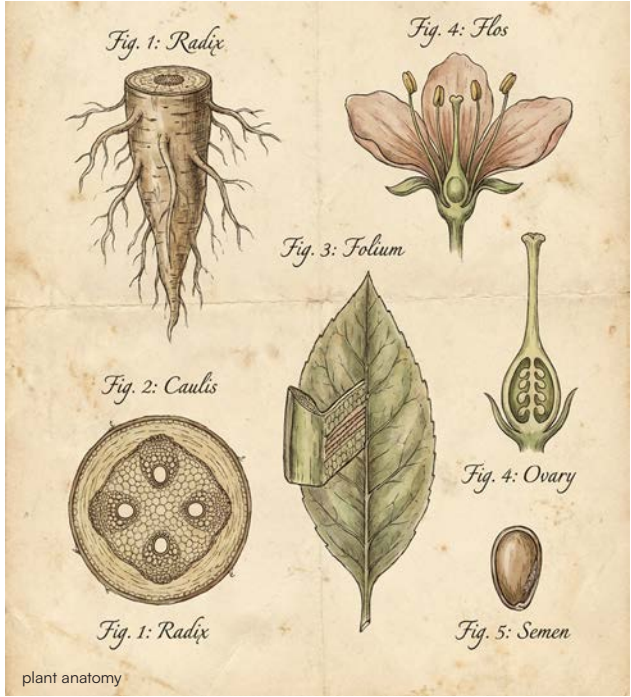
Photography: Freepik; Pixabay; Pixels: Alamy



gas generated by the rotting potatoes was what did them in. Have you ever noticed how your potatoes turn green after a while? That's because potatoes exposed to light start to produce chlorophyll. While harmless in and of itself, it's also an indicator of increased levels of solanine—which is not quite so harmless.

But no need to panic. Removing the green bits and peeling the skin will usually suffice to make the potato safe to eat again. Just apply a touch of common sense and throw it out if it starts looking more like an unripe mango.

Alright, so we've gone over what isn't a vegetable. But now the question is—what is? Why do we call these things vegetables when they're not? Have we been living a lie this entire time? Are vegetables a psy-op perpetuated by Big Green to push some sort of nefarious horticultural agenda? All very valid questions. But the simple truth is this: the concept of vegetables boils down to a matter of convenience. Vegetables are, at their core, a culinary social construct.



Does that mean we need to start unplugging from the matrix and referring to what were formerly “vegetables” in strictly botanical terms? Well, no. Yes, vegetables are a social construct—but as far as social constructs go, it's a useful one, and definitely worth keeping around. You see, if you start to dig deep enough into, well, anything, it all starts to look like a collective daydream.

Take countries, for instance. What weighty, permanent, and very serious things they seem to be. But they're all made up. They only exist because people agree they do. Yugoslavia existed because people agreed it did, as did both East and West Germany. And when people stopped agreeing, those countries stopped existing.

Money makes the world go round, so they say. You'll scarcely find anything held to a higher degree of importance—but that doesn't change the fact it's made up too. Currency holds value exclusively on the basis that we've all decided it should. Without that shared belief, what is money really, apart from germ-harboring strips of paper or numbers in a computer?

Languages are yet another thing that aren't real. Mandarin, Cantonese, and Hokkien are considered dialects of the same language—despite being mutually unintelligible—purely because political forces insist on the idea of a unified Chinese speech community.



You can therefore end up with the surreal scenario where a Spanish speaker chats to someone who speaks only Portuguese—technically different languages—yet they’d almost certainly understand each other better than a native Mandarin speaker would understand a Cantonese speaker, even though those two are officially labelled as dialects of the same actual tongue.

Having said that, we still have to abide by countries, currencies, languages, and the like—not because they’re inherently ‘real’, but because pretending they are just makes things a lot easier. Our entire society hinges on that shared make-believe, and so we go along with it. Likewise, despite the fact that vegetables hold no botanical legitimacy, the culinary category is a hell of a useful fiction.

So, when someone tries to tell you that broccoli or carrots aren’t real vegetables, you’re kind of hearing that same act of pretending. It wasn’t biology that made vegetables real—it was us. Sitting at menus, farmers’ markets, cooking shows—deciding it’s handy to lump edible plant parts into a convenient category. And so that’s exactly what we did.

Otherwise we’d be living in a world where bananas, cucumbers, and watermelons count as berries—while strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and mulberries don’t. (And that’s a botanical fact, by the way.) If insisting on botanical correctness means turning the produce aisle into linguistic chaos, save your root-structure semantics and count me all in on the culinary illusion. Vegetables might not be real. Really, they might just be a lie we live by—but thankfully, it’s a lie that feeds us just fine. **P**



When you think of homegrown talent making it big abroad, Chef Abby Lee is one such lady who comes to mind. We had the pleasure of catching up with her, the brilliant mind behind Mambo London, a proud Michelin Bib Gourmand 2025 awardee, during her takeover at The Ritz-Carlton, Langkawi. The Sarawakian-Penangite chef shares her passion for Peranakan flavours and how she’s reimagining classics like ‘Achar Awak’, ‘Otak-Otak Prawn Toast’, and ‘Umai Sarawak’ without losing their soul. But we talk more than food. Beyond the goings on of the kitchen, Chef Lee lets us in on her guilty-pleasure snacks, her biggest pet peeve, and the tunes that keep her cooking groove alive.

GUILTY-PLEASURE SNACK
“Salted egg fish skin,” she admits instantly, laughing. “Once you open the bag, you just can’t stop.” It’s an answer that perfectly captures Chef Lee, as she is indulgent, unpretentious, and proudly Malaysian at heart.

FAVOURITE INGREDIENT
“I can’t live without *gula* Melaka,” she opines. “I use it for everything sweet and savoury. It gives dishes this deep, smoky sweetness you can’t replicate.” In her hands, *gula* Melaka is memory, flavour, and a connection to home, all melted into one.

Where Peranakan Meets Now

London-based Malaysian chef Abby Lee brings her fiery flavours to The Ritz-Carlton, Langkawi, sharing her guilty pleasures and pet peeves.

Words: PATRICK LOH

DREAM DINNER GUEST
“Anthony Bourdain,” Abby says without missing a beat. “He’s a personal hero of mine. I loved how he celebrated food and people in the same breath. How he made you care about what was on the plate and who was behind it.” There’s a flicker of admiration in her voice when she talks about him. The kind of respect that runs deeper than fandom, rooted in shared purpose.

FAVOURITE MALAYSIAN STREET FOOD
“Oyster omelette,” she says, eyes lighting up. Crispy edges, soft centre, that hit of chilli sauce. It’s just perfect and she could eat it every day, she adds. It’s a dish that reflects her own cooking philosophy: a little messy, incredibly flavourful, completely satisfying.

KITCHEN JAM
“‘Watch Me Now’ by Sam Quealy,” she grins. “It’s got energy. Keeps me moving.” It’s easy to picture her in the kitchen—music blasting, pans clattering, the air thick with spice and focus. Chef Lee commands the rhythm of her space as she cooks.

PET PEEVE ON THE PASS
“Working with people who have no sense of urgency,” she says. “A kitchen runs on pace. You’ve got to feel the momentum, or everything falls apart.” It’s not said with frustration, but conviction. In her kitchen, timing isn’t just technical but instinctual.

FAVOURITE SPOT AT THE RITZ-CARLTON, LANGKAWI
“When I’m not in the kitchen, I love standing just outside The Beach Grill,” she says. “There’s this moment where you look out at the sea and everything slows down. It’s peaceful. Gives me clarity.”

Between salted egg fish skin and soulful sunsets, Chef Lee embodies a rare mix of fire and calm. Her food, much like her personality, is a balancing act—nostalgic yet progressive, comforting yet bold. And as her flavours find their way from London to Langkawi, one thing’s certain: wherever she cooks, Malaysia follows. **P**

Flavours Facing East

The kitchen is where Karen Yap found her voice—not only as a chef, but as an advocate for Sarawak's food culture. More than dinner; it's a mission to showcase and hopefully save what's being lost before it's too late.

Words: COLIN GOMEZ

I get in touch with Karen, hoping to set an appointment to speak that week. She's busy, she tells me. But wait, she has an idea. She's currently preparing a private dinner for the International Wine & Food Society. Might they be alright with me being a fly on the wall? She'll ask. The next day, Karen shoots me a text: I'm in. It's the perfect opportunity to see Karen in action up close and personal. The anticipation lingers in the back of my mind over the next week, sometimes edging its way to the forefront of my thoughts.

The day arrives, and I hop out of my car to meet the industrial surroundings of the Tong Ah Distillery. A quick check with the guard, and I make my way into the grounds. Outside, I spot a gentleman grilling duck breasts—one of Karen's helpers for the evening. I head inside the century-old distillery, taking in the scene.

You get the sense that not much has changed since its inception, a quality I appreciate. The expansive, warehouse-like interior is alive with a group of people, mingling over glasses of interestingly-hued elixirs. I make my way to the front, where a table is laid out with all manner of potions, each with its own label and origin story.

Soon enough, the third-generation steward of the distillery steps up with a mic and charming little speaker, gathering everyone around for a tour. All around me are boxes and pallets piled high with wine. The echoes of the past resonate through the high-ceilinged, white-walled corridor.

Dinner time arrives, and I, the lone outsider, find myself seated at the head of the middle table. After a considerable effort to shed my social anxiety, I settle in to enjoy what Karen has prepared. The first course is a trio of mini bites served on a wooden board. I notice that everyone's board is slightly different in shape, a sign they were carved by hand.



Terung Asam Tahai

I start from the left and bite into the *umai* of snapper with a handcrafted *sagu* crisp. The fish has a gentle tang and is soft on the palate, while the crisp tastes almost exactly like a soft *keropok*. Next is the *kasam* of sultan croquette with pineapple *cincalok*, which throws me for a loop. It's pungent, almost like a strong cheese. As a complement, we're served a glass of Endu sparkling *tuak* to pair with the meal, and its slight dryness cuts through the intensity of the croquette.

The *terung iban* and *tahai salai* consommé follows—a clean-tasting dish with just a touch of bitterness. Karen explains that she uses *terung iban* because it's sour, unlike other aubergines. The *asam siok* comes next, gently spiced with jungle aromatics and topped with a bamboo-fired quail egg.

A few more interesting courses later, it's time for the main dish. Karen has arranged for me to try the *Narar* of beef brisket—lightly salted with a smokiness in the background, reminiscent of bacon. The texture has just the right amount of chewiness to it.

After experiencing Karen's culinary mastery firsthand, I head home, ready in the warm afterglow of a dinner well spent in great company, enjoying a cuisine unlike any I've ever had before. My eagerness to speak with Karen has only grown.



Nuba Laya Abang Udung Ubih



Sambal Kelabit on Terung Hijau Bakar



Narar of Duck Yam confit

TABLE TALK

Tuesday rolls around, and I arrive at Karen’s home. The cool grey walls greet me, followed by scattered foliage. Mia, her nine-year-old rescue German Shepherd, lies outside. I ask if I can pet her, and Karen obliges. Mia seems to enjoy the attention.

Karen welcomes me inside, where we sit at her kitchen table, positioned between the living room, stove, and courtyard. She’s relaxed in an airy sundress, her hair streaked with dignified grey, her smile radiating a restrained ebullience. To me, she embodies every bit the archetype of that one cool aunt you actually don’t mind a visit from. We begin our conversation, and I keep my questions loose, letting the conversation flow naturally.

I ask what inspired her to leave the corporate world and dedicate herself to hosting ethnic dinners. She tells me it wasn’t planned—it was a natural extension of what she’d always done, coming into contact with an opportunity purely by chance.

“I’ve always been cooking food and our ethnic food, but just for friends,” Karen says. “One of my friends had started an event space off Old Klang Road, and he said, ‘You know what? I have this space—why don’t you try and do something?’ And it was because I missed my food, my culture. That was the start of a very different trajectory for me, leaving the corporate world to focus on this.”

Karen’s passion for what she does is palpable. She talks about her childhood spent in a longhouse, where life was simple, and the connection with nature was strong. It’s these fond memories that infuse her current work. “The food carries so much more than just taste,” she explains. “It carries the showcase of the ingredients, the environment in which these foods came about. It comes with a narrative of how people lived and how we try to preserve those ways of living.”

She speaks of the slow erosion of once-celebrated traditions and her role in trying to halt that decline. “We don’t cook the way we used to cook. Those recipes are slowly being forgotten and lost,” she says, her voice tinged with wistfulness.



Karen emphasises that the loss of these traditions isn’t anyone’s fault but rather a consequence of gentrification. “It’s not that we deliberately lost sight of our culture. The fast pace of urbanisation left that generation with other pursuits. You can’t fault them for that.”

However, she sees signs of hope. Young people today, especially in East Malaysia, are reconnecting with their culture. “I feel that there’s this reconnection now,” she says. This recognition of East Malaysian culture, especially Sarawakian food, is a key focus for Karen. She points out how the majority of people in Peninsular Malaysia only know a couple of dishes from Sarawak: essentially Kolo Mee and Laksa Sarawak. “Both of these dishes, as much as I love them, are migrant dishes brought by the Chinese. And they’ve become the most identifiable thing about Sarawakian food,” she says.

Karen wants to broaden the perception of Sarawakian cuisine beyond these two dishes. “We’re so much more than that,” she asserts. “I make them regularly at home, but I always tell people that there’s so much more to Sarawakian food.”

A CULTURAL KITCHEN CRUSADER

Doing something so far removed from her previous life, striking out on her own, and carving an uncharted path has transformed Karen. I ask her how this journey has changed her, and she falls into a reflective silence. “It’s gone beyond just cooking food, showcasing it, and sharing it,” she says. “I see myself more as an advocate for the cuisine now.”

Taking on this role is no small feat, but Karen is determined. “I want to see my journey replicated by younger generations,” she says, with a voice full of hope. Though unsure how that will materialise, she remains resolute. “I see so much potential in this current generation,” she smiles. “They’re participating as much as they can.” Karen may not know exactly what the future holds, but one thing’s for sure—it’s bright. **P**

Where *The* Gimlet Goes

A study in harmony, the Lunara reworks the classic gimlet, once defined by its bracing clarity, into a more layered expression. A balancing act of botanicals, aromatics, and fruit, The Botanist Gin meets lychee and raspberry, lifted by the aromatic edge of geranium leaves. Modern and quietly perfumed, it stars in Nectar of Time—a new menu launching this January at Bar Trigona, Four Seasons Hotel KL.

Words: TENGKU ZAI



Lunara, Bar Trigona



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