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Toast to Kampachi

A restaurant that has hogged the limelight in the Japanese dining scene for four decades settles into a new home. **TEXT** choo ching yee • **PHOTOGRAPHY** yap chee hong

A COOL moon shining bright in the midst of glittering stars, Kampachi by Equatorial has found a spot among the Western establishments at prime KL residential spot, The Troika. Opened last December, this is now the flagship restaurant for the almost 40-year-old brand, originally established in Hotel Equatorial, KL.

Kampachi is built to impress, with two floors of sleek sophistication. It has a dramatic high ceiling with dangling light bulbs mimicking a starry sky, a sushi counter where you can watch your meal being prepared, a well-stocked bar, and a cosy upper mezzanine level with a curved *teppanyaki* counter.

A la carte and takeaway menus are

available but we were there that night for the Spring-themed *omakase*-style (in plain English, "I'll leave it to you") meal at RM300 a head.

This is the Japanese version of the chefs' table, and dishes depend on the best and freshest produce in the pantry; choose from seven-, eight-, nine- or 11-course menus, with prices starting from RM185 per person.

Starting with a triple treat of appetisers, we found ourselves facing whole baby squid in bean paste sauce. The squid was tender and has a strong, lingering flavour and the grilled eggplant with sesame sauce was enveloped in an intense charcoal flavour. When the third offering came along, the mild taste of

noodles made of fish paste balanced the intensity of the first two.

Kampachi prides itself on a good selection of alcoholic beverages like *sake*, *shochu*, Champagne and wine.

We had warm Hiokizakura Junmai Kimoto Goriki (RM38 for 130ml) and cold Ishizuchi Funashibori Green Label (RM33 for 130ml), each exquisite in their own right. The warm Goriki was pleasantly fragrant and tart on the palate while the other sake had a milder aroma and a slightly crisper note.

A clear, intense mushroom broth was next, served in a deep green teapot. As we poured the steaming liquid into individual cups, light earthy notes wafted from the soup which was infused with



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1, 2 & 3. Kampachi is one of the classiest and most revered names on KL's Japanese food scene. 4. Fragrant teapot soup. 5. Crystals still cling to the prawns, even after the salt crust is removed. 6. Appetisers to kickstart our meal. 7. A pretty dessert for a sweet ending. 8. A selection of sushi. 9. Fresh sashimi. 10. Bamboo shoot tempura.

a combination of enoki, shiitake and shimeji mushrooms. Lovely, best enjoyed in little sips.

At Kampachi, sashimi is expected to be good, and we were very pleased with our plate of tuna belly, amberjack and flat fish. Our favourite was the fatty tuna belly – generous slices of marbled goodness, a vision of pink.

The ingredients are flown in from Japan twice weekly, on Tuesdays and Fridays – which is when the restaurant's regulars flock in for fresh fish. Of course, when there's good sashimi, the sushi is a fair bet too. Our plate of sushi topped with sea eel, baby tuna or salmon roe did not disappoint.


Perhaps to add a dose of drama, cloth-wrapped parcels were brought

to the table. Executive chef How Yoke Seng unveiled slabs of what appeared to be caked salt; he then proceeded to pound the baked crust away to reveal the prawns hidden inside. The "show" heightened the anticipation for the taste, which was perhaps why the poor prawns found it hard to meet the hyped-up expectations.

Kampachi relishes serving seasonal ingredients, and we had spring delights: bamboo shoots deep fried in tempura batter (RM35), flanked by crunchy soba and sakura leaves. We also had a striped beak perch simmered in a sweet, sake-laced sauce (RM125), reminiscent of Kabayaki sauce.

If we weren't in full Spring envy by then, the last dish, a fluffy pink glu-

tinous rice cake wrapped in a sakura leaf did the trick. Each bite revealed the sweetness of red bean paste in the cherry blossom mochi – a fitting end to a meal which showcased, for the most part, delicacy and purity of flavour. ■

rating: 

KAMPACHI BY EQUATORIAL

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Open daily for lunch, 12-3pm, happy hours, 5-7pm, and dinner, 6.30-11pm. Omakase meals are available for lunch and dinner but require reservations three days in advance.