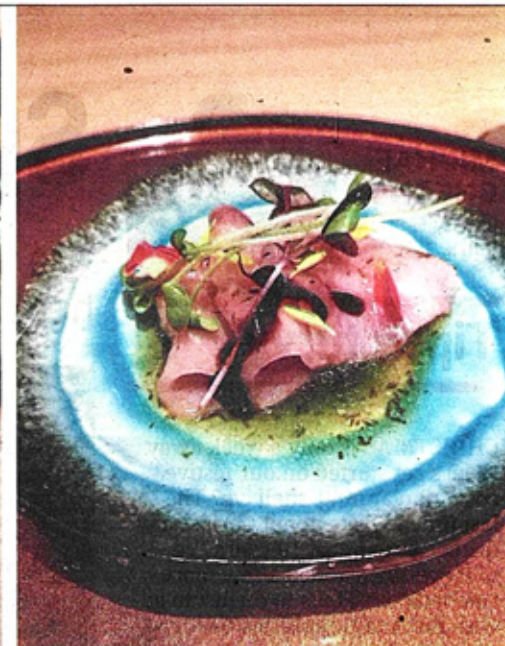




The A5 Tottori wagyu has a buttery, melt-in-the-mouth texture that is truly unbeatable. — KAMPACHI



The wagyu kushiage highlights the superb quality of the beef, crunched in a crispy exterior. — KAMPACHI



The buri (yellowtail) is only caught during winter and is supple, fresh and very tender. — Photos: ABIRAMI DURAI/The Star



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A FEW weeks ago, Takahiro Gokita was sweating bullets. The managing director of Fan Japan (Malaysia), a wholesale supplier, had committed to bringing the famed Tottori wagyu to Malaysia for the very first time.

The restaurant that would be the first to debut this glorious beef? The famed Kampachi in Kuala Lumpur, one of the first authentic Japanese restaurants in the city.

But Gokita had his work cut out for him as Tottori wagyu is so elusive and precious that farmers will not slaughter it until it is absolutely ready.

"I had to fly to Japan and tell them, 'Please, please, can you find some cows to slaughter? Malaysian customers are waiting for this!'," says the affable Gokita.

Eventually, after some delays and snafus, the wagyu arrived in Kuala Lumpur — all 150kg of it, which was what Gokita managed to wangle.

"They wouldn't give me any more than that," he says, laughing.

So what makes Tottori, and its beef, so special? Well, the prefecture — the least populous in Japan — has been rearing black cattle for hundreds of years. In the early

The culinary treasures of Tottori

A popular local restaurant is the first in Malaysia to bring in beef from a tiny prefecture in Japan, which reputedly produces the world's best Japanese wagyu.



Gokita flew all the way to Tottori in Japan to ensure that the Tottori wagyu would arrive in Malaysia for the first time.

20th century, a wagyu cattle registration system was installed, which led to the breeding of the famed "Ketaka" cows. To earn the Tottori wagyu name, the beef has to be grade three or higher, with five being the highest.

In 2017, Tottori wagyu shot to fame when it won a national wagyu competition, dubbed the wagyu Olympics, effectively

sealing its name as the best quality wagyu in Japan.

Tottori wagyu is renowned for being rich in oleic acid fat, which is what is also found in olive oil and is said to be effective in lowering cholesterol levels. In fact, Tottori wagyu 55 is beef that has 55% oleic acid, which is what it gives it intense marbling, umami flavours and that delightful melt-in-the-mouth texture so beloved among wagyu devotees.

Interestingly, wagyu from this prefecture is hardly ever exported outside of Japan. Even in Japan it is reserved for top restaurants in Tokyo. This is compounded by the fact that the prefecture only has 800 cows and makes up approximately 1% of wagyu production in the country!

This is why Tottori wagyu's appearance in Kampachi (incidentally the meat supplied is from the only halal-certified slaughterhouse in the prefecture) under the banner of the restaurant's Tottori Prefecture Showcase is nothing short of a bona fide miracle.

To celebrate the showcase — which runs until Dec 23 — Kampachi will also be highlighting a number of other ingredients from the prefecture, including sea-faring fare like yellowtail, mackerel, snow crabs and pears.

You can opt for the seven-course omakase pairing (priced at RM950 per person) or simply indulge in

some a la carte fare from the showcase. To begin, try the buri (yellowtail). Available as sashimi (RM45 per piece), the fish, which is only caught during winter, is velvety smooth, incredibly fresh and supple to the touch.

The Sawara Yusukoshoyaki or grilled Spanish mackerel with chilli pepper marinade (RM120 a serving) features mackerel that is fleshy and has a well-rounded mouthfeel. This is accentuated by the chilli pepper, which is piquant and has a horseradish-like reaction in that it really tickles your tongue and uvula and countenances the aquatic qualities of the fish with a strong, sharp counterpoint.

The Wagyu Kushiage (RM400 for three skewers) is where you will get a first taste of Tottori's prized wagyu. In this instance, the wagyu tenderloin is breaded and deep-fried: It might sound odd to disguise such prestigious beef in anything other than its natural state, but in this instance, the breading acts like a well-tailored suit adorning a fit, buff body. In other words, this is a good complement.

Each morsel offers crunch and crackle followed by a Eureka! moment when you discover the almost putty-soft, caramel-esque meat inside, its tenderness akin to the petals of flowers.

You could also opt for another iteration of the wagyu in the form of the Wagyu Ngiri Aburi Sushi

(RM400 for five pieces). Here, the A5 Tottori wagyu is lightly torched and this is where you will truly taste the much-lauded melt-in-the-mouth, malleable quality of the meat, which is so rich, buttery and velvety soft, it really does feel as though mastication is optional. Rest assured, there is little else you will be able to think about once you've had a taste of this masterful meat.

"It's my first time trying it too — it has the perfect balance, don't you think?" says Gokita, closing his eyes to fully enjoy the subtle wonders of this precious meat.

End your meal with the Japanese pear from Tottori (RM180 each).

This is a fruit with a great bite that lends itself to incredible sweetness and juiciness and is unlike any pear you are likely to have tasted before.

The Tottori Prefecture Showcase is available until Dec 23 at all three Kampachi outlets in the Klang Valley — Kampachi EQ, Kampachi Pavilion KL and Kampachi Plaza 33.



Kampachi EQ

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