

BROUGHT TO YOU
BY LIFE & TIMES**FOOD** taste

Sashimi trio of prawn, saury and salmon belly



Stone grilled platter with prawn, beef, cod, scallops and ginkgo nuts.



Autumn produce include matsutake and maitake mushrooms, persimmon, chestnut and rice.



Simmered duck breast with autumn vegetables



Chestnut rice.



Ishigami preparing matsutake dobin mushi.



Zensai or appetisers platter

PICTURES BY KHOO SUTING

IT'S autumn in Japan. At Kampachi, Chef Yusuke Ishigami is embracing the season with an omakase menu designed around persimmon, matsutake (pine) mushroom and kuri (chestnut).

The Autumn Omakase is available at Kampachi in Plaza 33, Petaling Jaya, Pavilion KL, Johor Premium Outlets and its flagship restaurant at The Troika. Do note that omakase menus are largely dependent on available ingredients and the chef.

At Plaza 33, there is a special room where a window slides opens for customers to watch Ishigami prepare the dishes. A bowl of mushrooms, pear and persimmon sits on ledge of the window.

PRETTY PLATTER

The menu starts with a platter of five appetisers, each featuring one seasonal produce.

We start with persimmon with a mashed tofu dressing. It's as refreshing as the chicken fillet zested with plum sauce and chopped mizuna leaf. The sliced prawn on vinegared rice is sweet, with its flavour heightened by the tang of vinegar.

Then we bite into grilled saury pike topped with sesame seeds. The saury is soft and smooth.

Kampachi restaurant manager Chiharu Yabe says the saury swims north to Hokkaido in summer and when September comes, it makes its way back south. By this time, it has acquired enough fat to taste its best.

The fifth appetiser sounds bland. Simmered sweet potato? But this bit of root, with a touch of lemon, is a perfectly sweet ending to cool down our excited palates.

Matsutake dobin mushi is the highlight of the dinner. This wild pine mushroom

AUTUMNAL SPLENDOUR

The Japanese are extremely sensitive to seasonal changes and this is reflected in all pages of their lives, including food, writes **Tan Bee Hong**

room is the Japanese equivalent of French truffles. Treasured for its spicy fragrance, matsutake grows wild under pine trees on the forest floor. Because of this, it is highly priced at around US\$400 (RM1,400) per kg.

Ishigami uses matsutake to prepare a soup, adding ginkgo nuts and tai (bream). A first sip tastes rather bland but this is not a soup for the impatient nor the thirsty. It requires second and third sips to open up, like a shy bride.

MAINLY MAGIC

Sashimi is served on a block of ice embedded with pine needles and red maple leaves. Delightfully pretty. There's toro (salmon belly), prawn and saury pike. We have this with Kampachi's special soya sauce, infused with bonito to bring out the taste.

Then comes yakimono. Cooking on hot pebbles in a red clay tray are beef, scallops and prawns. I don't eat beef, so I get a slice of cod instead. We take time to admire Ishigami's edible art, arranged on pine needles

over the hot stones, with a sprinkle of roasted ginkgo nuts.

I am told the beef is tender and beautifully rare. The cod is amazing too, with all its sweet juices intact. I also love the buttery ginkgo nuts which are green, not yellow.

It's rare to have duck in a Japanese restaurant and simmered duck is a winner. I am told there is a duck hunting season in Japan in autumn.

The tender duck breast are simmered with grilled leek, aubergine, spinach, carrot and maitake mushroom.

If you still have tummy room, Ishigami's finale is chestnut rice, topped with black sesame seeds. Japanese chestnuts are harvested in October. These huge yellow nuts and rice are lightly seasoned and served with pickles to add flavour if needed. But really, the dish tastes perfect on its own.

Before we leave, we freshen our palates with musk melon, air flown from Shizuoka prefecture which grows award-winning melons.

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**Kampachi By Equatorial**

WHERE Level 1 Podium, Plaza 33, 1 Jalan Kemajuan, Section

13, Petaling Jaya
TEL 03-7931 6938

OPENING HOURS Monday to Saturday: Noon to 3pm, 6pm to 10pm

Saturday a la carte buffet:

11am to 2.30pm
Weekend and public holiday buffet: Noon to 2.30pm

GETTING THERE Corner of Jalan Semangat and Jalan Kemajuan

YOU'LL PAY Autumn omakase: RM450 nett

Saturday a la carte buffet: RM148 nett (adult), RM98 nett (child 5-10)

MUST TRY Autumn omakase and weekend buffet

ATMOSPHERE Zen

SERVICE Impeccable

OVERALL VERDICT Must try