

Vintage point

The EQ has opened to carry on the legacy of its predecessor in a different hospitality landscape, writes **Syida Lizta Amirul Ihsan**

THE EQ Kuala Lumpur is like an icon reborn onto the same prestige and stature as its predecessor, only at a different time.

Before the city welcomed big names like Four Seasons and St. Regis, Hotel Equatorial Kuala Lumpur, along Jalan Sultan Ismail, was one of the big names in hospitality along with Shangri-La, Merlyn, Hilton and Holiday Inn.

More than four decades on, with a rapidly changing industry landscape, bigger hotel names and Airbnb having a piece of the accommodation pie, The EQ Kuala Lumpur opens seven years after The Equatorial closed down for rebuilding and complete refurbishment.

The question is, is this new hotel up for the new, challenging game?

For a consumer like me, the hotel reopening has been quiet but when I set foot into it a few weeks ago for a weekend staycation, I was impressed.

The glass display at the lobby has patterns derived from songket fabric and the hotel commissioned artisans to work on a brass sculpture, depicting the agrarian culture of old times with people working on padi fields with buffaloes and cows.

It isn't the metropolitan Malaysia that we know now, and it's a subtle reminder of the country's humble beginnings and how far we have come.

TRADITIONAL MOTIFS

The hotel puts big emphasis on little things and you have to stay there to understand it for yourself. Hotel doors are not along corridors, but indented inside for a little bit more privacy.

The carpets on the Equator Club, on its executive floor, also has songket motif, a testament of how the owners want to retain the local spirit, to differentiate it among foreign hotels in the city.

The Technogym-equipped gym complete with a circuit training area is a space for technologically superior workout machines, but on the side, the seats are made using anyaman motifs and you'd be reminded of chairs in your grandparents' house.



The Premier room puts the bed in the middle of the room.



Infinity pool for with a view of the city.

I like how the hotel infuses traditional elements in its interior decoration and how they are made to look new, when the motifs are old.

THE GREAT LUNCH

The highlight of my stay is definitely a Koppou meal in Kampachi, an omakase-style dining in what may be the city's oldest Japanese restaurant. More than two decades ago, Japanese restaurants in the city existed mostly in hotels or office buildings.

My favourites were Kampachi in Hotel Equatorial and Chikoyu-Tei in Menara See Hoy Chan, Jalan Raja Chulan. The latter has closed down. Kampachi, meanwhile, went commercial after Equatorial's closure to open at The Troika in Jalan Binjai, Pavilion KL and Jaya 33 in Petaling Jaya.

With the opening of EQ, the Troika outpost moved back into its old home with a more upmarket feel and a hefty price tag to

match the stature of the popular 46-year-old establishment.

The meal, prepared fresh by chefs Tham Tai Guan and Yusuke Ishigami is as perfect as any Japanese meal could be — delicate, fresh and distinct — so much so that you could find yourself either drawn again to high-end Japanese food, or find it hard to go to back to your fast Japanese joint.

SMALL BUT SATISFYING

The six-course meal [Koppou menu starts from RM500 per person] looks deceptively small, yet every course is delicately presented with satisfying results. The opening dish is raw tomato and eggplant with miso paste. Both are sweet and juicy and prepare the palate for better dishes to come.

The ingredients are air-flown from Japan every other day (hence the steep price) and the tuna belly, sea bream and

spot prawn sashimi are perfect examples of exquisite freshness. No fishy smell, just sweetness from seafood.

The tempura is great, with light and fluffy batter but the best is the pan grilled Japanese Saga beef (the restaurant sources halal beef from the region) and foie gras topped with goma sauce.

DRENCHED IN SUNLIGHT

We stay in the executive premier room and the corner one has windows on both sides, allowing a huge amount of sunlight to enter the room. The flooring is wood, which I appreciate because carpets trap dust and dirt and is harder to clean.

The king-sized bed is placed in the middle of the room so my son and I had a fun time playing chase while running around the room. Most hotels have beds pushed to the wall, but this room is spacious enough to have it as an island.

The toiletry kit is from French label Balmain and the amenities kit includes a hair brush, not the usual hair comb hotels give. The bath tub is wide and deep. In short, you can just stay in this room and feel happy and contented. The sunlight helps give an illusion of space.

On the 50th floor, the Equator Club is spacious for drinks and discussions over breakfast, high-tea and dinner. A small selection of food is served, consisting mostly of finger foods but is sufficient if you are not a big eater.

I like the lounge because it is spacious. There are many areas where you can sit, either for a chat or just to admire the view of the city. A small meeting room is also available for use [with charge for second hour onwards].

THE NEW NIPAH

Nipah is the name of the restaurant in the old Equatorial and it remains for EQ. The restaurant is nicely furnished with indoor and outdoor dining areas, and while the

FAST FACTS

EQ

WHERE Equatorial Plaza
Jalan Sultan Ismail
50250 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
PHONE 032789 7777

EMAIL info@kul.equatorial.com

WEBSITE eqkualalumpur.com

STAY The hotel's room sizes are bigger compared to other city hotels I have been to. Deluxe room is 40sqm and premier room is 50sqm, making your stay more comfortable.

EAT Have a meal at Kampachi and treat yourself to one meal of high-end, Japanese food. There's buffet on weekends and lunch sets on weekdays too. Nipah serves well-rounded menu, and fresh selections for breakfast and lunch. Etoile sells breads and pastries and Sky51 will be the city's new place for rooftop parties.

DO Sanctum is the wellness-oriented space that houses the gym and pool. The gym has monsoon shower that times your bath and cleans you before you go into the steam room. The gym is completely furnished with Technogym equipment, something gym rats will appreciate.

GO The excellent location makes the hotel accessible on foot to KLCC and its surrounding areas. You can also walk to Pavilion and Jalan Bukit Bintang where the action is.

HIGH The location is central yet not noisy. The hustle and bustle of the city has moved from this stretch to KLCC in the last two decades so the row of hotels here enjoy a quieter ambience.

LOW Because the hotel isn't built on a new space, there is less curation possible for a greener space surrounding the property.

selection is pretty small, the freshness more than makes up for the lack of size.

I like the pretzel and the range of made-to-order salads for breakfast. The dessert selection, while small, is also pretty impressive in taste. The bread and butter pudding is fluffy and tasty — one of the best I have had in a long time.

Other food outlets in the hotel include Etoile Contemporary Street Cafe, Bottega Lounge and the Sky51 Bespoke Bar, Deck and Restaurant.

Its general manager Robert Lagerwey says that the original Hotel Equatorial KL was a prominent player at the forefront of the Malaysian tourism and hospitality scene for decades. "We look forward to continuing that legacy through EQ," he says.

I love everything about the hotel — the room space, the smiling staff, the little details about Malaysia that the hotel infuses. It looks completely different than its predecessor, yet in some inexplicable way, the Malaysian warmth remains.

Welcome back, EQ.

slizta@mediaprima.com.my



Chefs Tam and Ishigami preparing the Koppou meal.



A selection of freshly-made nigari sushi.



The fresh sashimi, flown from Japan.