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We Checked In to the Best City Hotel in Malaysia. Here's What It's Like

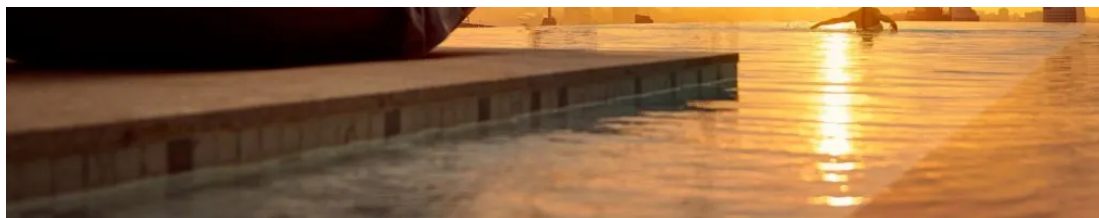
Mark Lean

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Stylish and sleek EQ Kuala Lumpur is a luxury sanctuary replete with social hotspots that conjure memories of another earlier golden era of its downtown neighborhood.

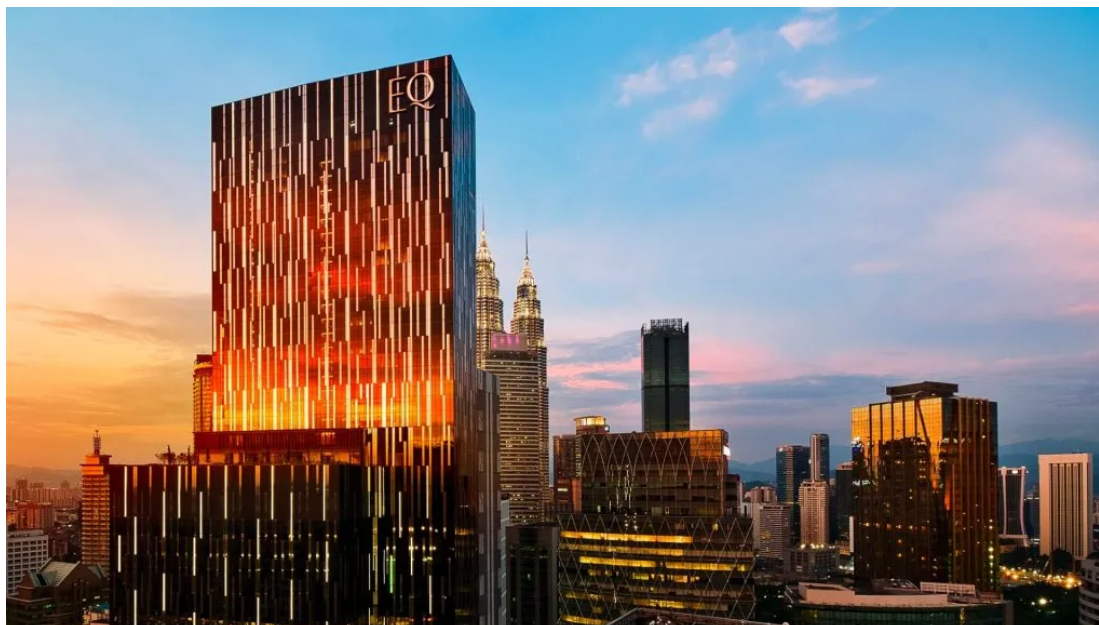
IN THE EARLY 1980S, the Blue Moon lounge, located in the then Equatorial Hotel was possibly the snazziest nightspot in Kuala Lumpur. The city's socialites and their hangers-on wouldn't feel their weekends complete without spending a Saturday morning there, arriving in their open air Mercedes coupes. Back then, The Golden Triangle was (and still is) the gravitational centre for KL's social and commercial spheres, and the Blue Moon was *the* place for pre-social media nightlife escapades. The Equatorial Hotel, as some of a certain age would remember, also housed standout restaurants such as Chalet, a spot that stoked many a fondue fantasy, and Golden Phoenix, a revered establishment that was the constant setting for any 'society' Chinese wedding banquet dinner.





Sanctum Infinity Pool

These hot spots of the past are now the stuff of memories, and the Equatorial Hotel embarked on a different destiny when it was demolished in 2012. Now, a completely new-build property has taken on the legacy and somehow elevated it: the luxury, 440-room EQ Kuala Lumpur, part of the 52-story office block Equatorial Plaza. This locally grown hotel – voted in 2023, by *Travel+Leisure Southeast Asia* readers, [Best City Hotel in Malaysia](#) and, by *T+L USA* readers, tied for 35th Best in the World – neighbors with many of the international hotel chains that now circle the Petronas Twin Towers in the very Golden Triangle where the Blue Moon lounge stood.



KL's hotel landscape no longer resembles its 1980s iteration. And, EQ Kuala Lumpur has similarly elevated old traditions with the creation of new restaurants and bars as stylish, of-the-moment answers to Chalet and the Blue Moon lounge.

Rooms and suites along with the rest of the hotel are now all about sleek and modernised interpretations of the Malaysiana aesthetic. For instance, in the lobby at Bottega lounge, its fan-like rattan

chairs are at once respectful nods to the past *and* confident design riffs on an imagined retro-kitsch future. The same goes for room interiors, which are decked in calming beige woods, snazzy Malay-inspired motifs, a combination of soft carpets and gleaming wood flooring, along with well-considered touches like international adaptors for global travellers. The sincere and stellar hospitality, however, hasn't really changed.



- AHA! Living

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At Sabayon, an elegant spot that serves contemporary European dishes the likes of foie gras with stewed raisins and duck breast with beetroot compote, the clientele is composed of couples on romantic dates along with some of the city's high society crowd that in the past would head to Chalet for celebratory meals.

Next door to Sabayon is the lofty Sky 51, which is part VIP lounge indoors and part open-air deck. The latter is a popular spot (reservations are suggested) for burgers and cheese nachos along with so-close-you-can-practically-touch views of the Petronas Twin Towers (which, in the time of the former Equatorial Hotel, was a stretch of greenery that housed the old Selangor Turf Club). Head

to one of the neon-lit outdoor tangerine pods at Blue Sky Bar for a nightcap and 'gram-worthy photo to remember. Or trying bopping to the DJ's tracks, which in KL, depending on one's luck could be a mix of hip hop or Justin Bieber.



- The Blue Room, Sky51

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Over at Kampachi, the hotel's rock star Japanese restaurant and the sole establishment that retained its original name from its Equatorial Hotel days, diners have access to possibly the most exquisite Japanese cuisine in KL. Expect precise dishes, prepared with the understanding, the skill, and the heritage of a culinary institution that remains at the top of its game. The bento lunch boxes at Kampachi have, over the decades, been the sustenance for many of the city's corporate figures. There's the Kampachi, a traditional assortment served in classic lacquer box, the sushi bento that combines sushi, sashimi, and a salad, as well as the hanakago – a mix of the chef's signature items served in an adorable flower basket.





Nipah Malaysian cuisine

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T+L Tip: Frazzled business travellers take note. EQ's Sanctum spa is known for being a sanctuary where many of the city's insiders head to recalibrate, recentre, and escape the city's famous traffic jams between business meetings and evening events. On the spa menu is a range of results-based treatments using products by award-winning beauty brand Biologique Recherche. Sign up for the 90-minute Masque Exfoliant P50 Visage facial, and cocoon up in one of Sanctum's beige spa pods.



Sanctum Spa, Statera Room

The treatment imparts a noticeable dewy glow, and luminescent skin lasting for at least a week that will make your travel-weary face (and deflated eyebags) thank you.

[EQ Kuala Lumpur](#); doubles from MYR890.

Images courtesy of EQ Kuala Lumpur.