

FASHIONABLE FEAST
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HERALD-SUN "WEEKEND" INSERT

Kuala Lumpur is one of the world's truly great cities, a vibrant melting pot of Asian cultures where tradition meets modern style. There seems no end to its diversity and depth. Kuala Lumpur is world famous for the blends of culinary tastes that grace her streets and night markets, quality and choice that rivals Hong Kong, Penang and Bangkok. But sometimes a traveller needs a little luxury when eating-out and for pure dining pleasure Kuala Lumpur can boast the Feast Village at Starhill Gallery.

Only one-year old this July, Starhill Gallery is the new kid on the block along Bintang Walk. This richly cosmopolitan shopping district is popular with locals and foreigners alike, offering the best in international fashion labels, luxury hotels and hi-tech gadgets; all this just a few stops by Monorail from Kuala Lumpur's central railway station.

Starhill Gallery is a standout concept that has no peer in Malaysia. It moves away from the concept of large scale malls, instead presenting carefully selected outlets on thematically consistent floors – each with their own distinct style and character.

The net result is a home for the very best retailers in Asia and the world, attracting names such as Louis Vuitton, Jim Thompson, Suzie Wong and Kenzo. Starhill has no department stores, no box stalls and has even thrown away the floor numbers in favour of descriptive names such as Feast, Pamper, Explore, Muse and Adorn – the latter of which is home to over 70 brands of luxury watches.

As you take the escalators down to the Feast Village you enter a world of exquisitely crafted interior design that is surpassed only by the hedonistic delights of thirteen select restaurants. The first thing you notice about Feast is the combination of opaque and translucent walls that create distinct yet connected spaces. Open kitchens are partitioned by artistic screens and translucent panels, allowing air and light to move through the space. The dazzling array of reflections and colours draw you through the village like a playground for food lovers.

The accent on decor and dedication to detail is a reflection of the primary architect, Yuhkichi Kawai, whose work can also be seen around Tokyo at Bespoke Gallery and Sushi Kyotatsa. The elaborate use of glass, stone, and timber to create individual touches for lantern-lit dining areas is just part of the successful balance between continuity and character – each restaurant offers a unique element to the mix and yet together they achieve a sensational visual effect.

The menus are varied and the price is very reasonable, especially when considering the rare quality and creative expression on offer. Taste, presentation and ambience are exceptional from one end of the village to the other.

Malay food is the flavour at Fishermen's Cove, and here you have the option of cosy bamboo-lined booths in case a little romantic privacy is desired. Enak explores the continuum of Malay and Indonesian cuisine in a modern environment, MyThai presents the best influences of Thailand and Koryo Won sizzles with a Korean barbeque on every table. Indian flavours are served in a colourful ambience created by beaded glass lamps at Vansh while the middle-eastern fare of Tarbush escapes into a theme of camels and caravans.

Meat eaters can fill-up on the semi-western grills of Shook! and Jake's Charbroil Steak House, and the mood switches to something European at Sentidos Tapas Bar and the Norwegian Bakery Moments. A breath of Hong Kong rushes out of the steamy kitchen at Pak Loh Chiu Chow, but for me the highlight of them all are the dim sum and Cantonese specialties from an elegant menu at Luk Yu Tea House. Here you will also find a broad range of fine teas to accompany the delicate dishes.

Choosing one restaurant is not easy, but the semi-open spaces of the Feast Village also reflect an open invitation to order from across the village. You can enjoy the spicy mint lamb and the velvet ambience of Tarbush and still permit your friend to order the otak-otak from Enak. This works just fine if they don't mind eating their steamed fish while sitting on tassel fringed couches under Moroccan lamps.

Even the task of washing your hands takes on an element of luxury. The rest rooms are artfully lit spaces lined with sandalwood and sandstone – the wash basin is serviced by an attendant who pumps water along a bamboo aqueduct and hands you a fresh towel to dry off. They take such good care of you in the Feast Village that I am tempted to try a spa and massage in the Pamper Zone.

A few floors above on the Relish floor are two more outstanding establishments of note. Gonbei will appeal to anyone with a refined taste for the Japanese palette and especially those with an appreciation for the Robatayaki style of Japanese grilling. Not to be outdone the uniquely Taiwanese Jogoya will immerse you in a live-buffet of freshly prepared Japanese and Chinese influences.

By my counting there are at least two weeks worth of unique dining options available at Starhill Gallery, so the next time you buy an airfare through Kuala Lumpur you may want to consider the stopover option and treat yourself to something typically Malaysian – a taste of everything Asian and beyond.



East's best feast

A Kuala Lumpur mall offers a taste of the world. Words and pictures Ewen Bell

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A South Asian theme is no doubt a success story for the mall, it has even drawn away from elsewhere, famous design and architecture for those on Bintang Walk.

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What more can be said on the price of Shook! and Jake's Charbroil Steak House? The usual suspects in European at Sentidos Tapas Bar and the Norwegian Bakery Moments.

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