



# A Happy House

ESCHEW CONVEYOR BELT SUSHI AND INDULGE IN JAPANESE FINE DINING FOR A CHANGE.

The name "Fukuya" is partly inspired by one of the top restaurants in Tokyo, Fukudaya, whose brilliance Chef Ando hopes to emulate at this more humble establishment.

"The name is appropriate anyway – in Japanese, *fuku* means "happiness" while *ya* refers to "house", he reiterates. And indeed, co-partner Danny Ang has created a layout reminiscent of a wealthy family home in the olden days complete with a courtyard surrounded by mock houses and secret corridors.

The design is the first thing that strikes visitors. A car park divides the main gate from the main entrance made up of three strips of cloth swaying in the gentle breeze. Passing through them reveals



The courtyard of Fukuya restaurant.

the "master house" at the head of the path with smaller "houses" lining the way on both sides. Oil lamps illuminate the courtyard at night.

These "houses" are actually individual dining spaces – the "master house" being the main dining area while the smaller ones serve as private rooms. In true Japanese style, sliding doors open to unveil charming spaces made up of warm colours and masculine leather furnishings.

The main dining area is further divided into pockets of private spaces, including a traditional *sushi* bar where one can

watch your order being prepared in front of your very eyes. I personally enjoy the bar, as it is a vibrant corner filled with antique tea sets.

When Chef Ando reveals that the restaurant's specialty is the *kaiseki* menu, the beautiful setting becomes more than just that – it serves as the perfect complement to such gastronomical sophistication.

*Kaiseki* was originally a light meal served during tea ceremonies but the definition has expanded to include a Japanese full-course meal that is somewhat similar to a Western-style meal. Hence there are the appetisers, the main course and so on and so forth, although the menu only indicates the number of dishes that will be served.

A *kaiseki* menu, according to Chef Ando, consists only of fresh seasonal ingredients. "The upmarket restaurants in Japan usually have a *kaiseki* menu," he says. "I think it is about time that Kuala Lumpur has a similar concept, if only to increase the sophistication of eating Japanese food."

Chef Ando admits that 80% of customers are Japanese expatriates but that will change if he has his way. He further explains that the appeal of the dishes is as much about the food as the presentation. Most, if not all, of the ingredients are air-flown fresh from Japan

each week and the food is prepared according to the strictest traditional methods.

The real joy, however, is in the presentation. *Kaiseki* dishes are usually decorated with flowers or edible garnishes and served on exquisite tableware. Such is the case at Fukuya as well, and our dishes arrive looking incredibly pretty, courtesy of the fresh cherry blossoms, which were in full bloom in Japan between January and April, around the time of our visit to Fukuya. In fact, the dishes look so beautiful that we feel sorry to consume them – well, almost!

Chef Ando prepares four dishes for us: a platter of sea urchin curd, baby octopus, steamed scallops and fish; a basket of seasonal Japanese bamboo shoots; a serving of Dragon roll; and a plate of beef *wagyu*.

Vegans who like their food completely natural will take delight in the refreshing and crunchy bamboo shoots while the platter's standout item is the sea urchin curd that is smooth and tasty.

The Dragon roll is essentially a jumbo tiger prawn with lots of avocado made to resemble its namesake. Being a big fan of *sushi*, this ranks as my favourite dish with the accompanying mayonnaise and fish roe giving it that extra zing.

The most exquisite dish, however, is the beef *wagyu* where the meat is imported from a mountainside farm 200km out of Tokyo. "The meat is the best!" exclaims Chef Ando. "Many good restaurants in Japan obtain their supply from this farm."

The beef, cooked only with hot water poured over it continuously for one to two minutes, is wrapped around a grilled Japanese leek. Though not big on beef, I cannot help chowing down one piece after another, the delicate taste being such a refined experience.

Chef Ando's passion for his craft is clearly demonstrated by the loving and careful way he prepares every dish behind the *sushi* bar. Add this to the delectable pairing of premium ingredients and artistic presentation and you are all set for a superlative dining experience. ■

Note: The dishes featured in this article may not be available now as the ingredients used are seasonal. Besides the *kaiseki* menu, there is a long list of a la carte selections.

### Fukuya

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Open Hours Noon – 2.30pm  
(Lunch) and 6.30pm – 10.30pm  
(Dinner). Closed on Sundays.



From top to bottom: Chef Ando preparing a sumptuous dish at the *sushi* bar; the irresistible beef *wagyu*; a platter of Japanese appetisers.



The main dining area.



One of the private dining rooms.