

JAPAS ON THE MIND

BABE RESTAURANT

A CULINARY MATRIMONY OF FUN AND FINE DINING

BY ANU VENUGOPAL

"There is no sincerer love than the love of food," said the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw – but it helps when chefs make their food unforgettable.

Chef Jeff Ramsey Japanese does that with his Japanese inspired tapas (or Japas); a treat not just for the taste buds, but a gastronomic experience that is visually and aromatically appealing to the senses.

A word of caution - dining at Babe Restaurant is not for the run-of-the-mill, ordinary, "I eat to live", sort of people. Once you have decided on your culinary adventure in the land of Babe, be prepared to abandon all preconceived notions of fine dining and get ready for a palatable escapade of the best kind. Should we expect any less from a co-founder and chef Ramsey, who earned his first Michelin star while working at the Mandarin Oriental in Tokyo?

The dining experience begins the moment the lift door open up to the restaurant, located at the 11th Floor, Work@Clearwater, Jalan Changkat Semantan, Damansara Heights. Stepping into Babe, one is greeted by friendly staff, a backdrop bar as well as a ceiling filled with glass bubbles. In the restaurant area, the deco is cosy yet classy, with mirrors and contemporary artwork, complete with a beautiful modern light chandelier. While the lights dazzle, the spotlight goes to the view of the Kuala Lumpur's skyline, with the pool deck offering the best seats in the restaurant.

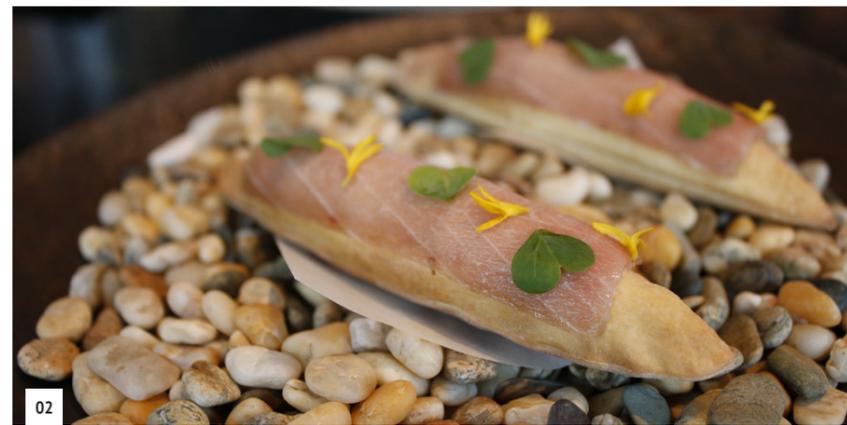
Settling down in the comfortable seats, the friendly host Celina Wu, starts off the evening with 'Down the rabbit hole' - a mystery test tube drink that intrigued this writer. Diners are meant to taste them and guess the flavours; which could be a popular Malaysian dish or a sweet drink. The flavours change regularly so diners are likely to get another flavour on each visit. The mystery and fun of this little experiment is the perfect prelude to a dining experience to come.

Setting the pace for the eight course set meal, the first dish was the Lomi Lomi Salmon, Chef Ramsey's own tribute to his one year in the island of Hawaii. The miniature sushi role stuffed with salted salmon, tomatoes allium in a crispy nori cone is the perfect start to the evening, with light, bright and punchy flavours.

The next on the list was Itoyori Sashimi with Uni, and the dish reminisces strongly with one of Japan's most famous dishes. Chef Ramsey's version combines seared sashimi of Amberjack with Sea Urchin, making it a colourful, flavourful dish - a Sashimi lover's dream come true.



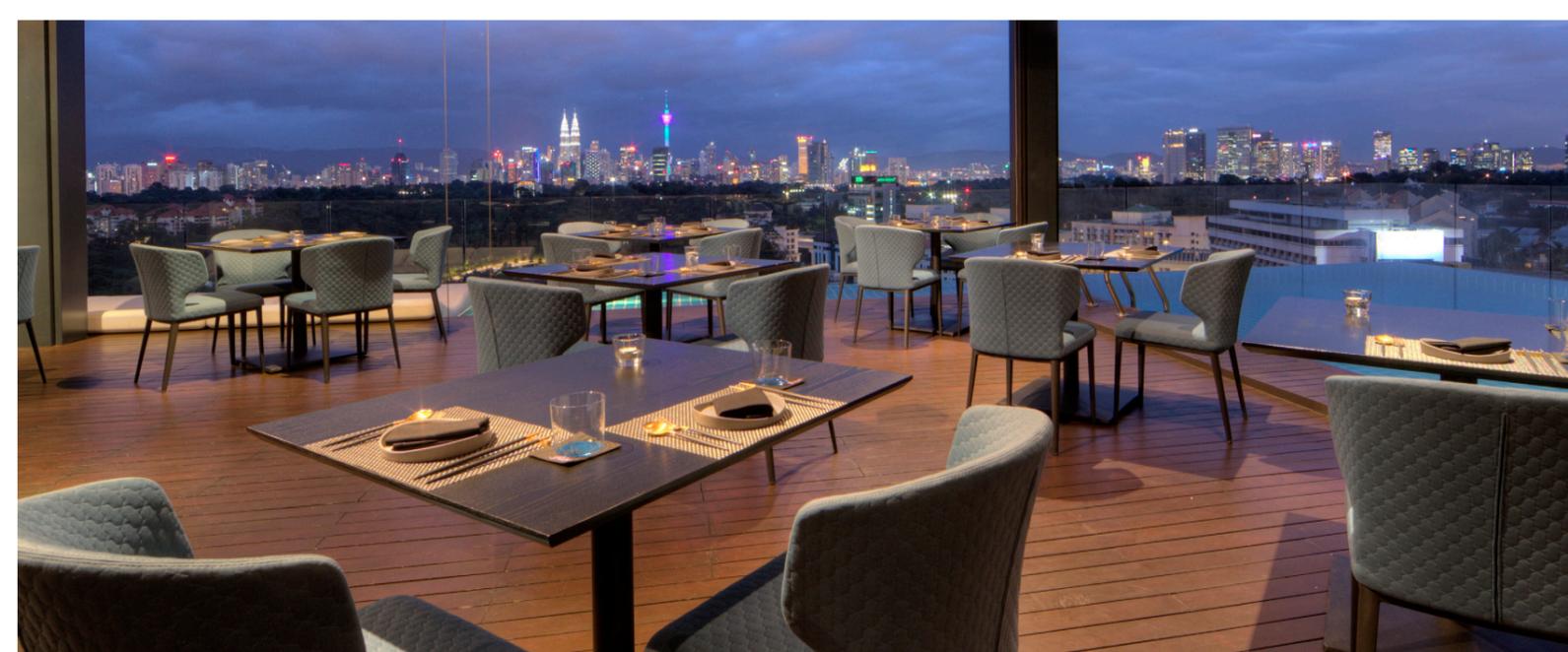
01



02



03



04



05



06

Chef Ramsey's bold and unconventional use of ingredients in his Japas is seen through the premium produce in his dishes – like the Caramelized Monkfish Liver, with passion fruit Ponzu Slushy. Admittedly, this writer was initially apprehensive upon discovering liver was on the menu – but this changed after the first bite. The "foie gras of the sea" lives up to its reputation and tastes divine when combined with the passion fruit granita.

The next dish Ootoro Crab Mousse is a zesty air bread with cured bluefin tuna belly. The crispy mini baguette, hollowed out and filled with crab meat, is a delectable dish that disappears quickly, thanks to both its size and taste.

Duck and Coke is another small dish, a crispy "sandwich" made out of chicken skin crisps, with foie gras and duck confit. Best eaten with the fingers, the sweet and savoury Coke-infused strip also bears Babe's imprint.

The Pan Seared Sea Bream in Dashi with Bubu Arera and Roasted Green Tea Froth instantly tastes familiar and comforting. The crispy skin, when combined with the soft rice and green tea infused froth provides a diversion from the regular taste, which leaves one with the sense of complete satisfaction.

Chef Ramsey's love for good beef, especially the Japanese Wagyu beef takes the spotlight in his own "Roast Beef" and Mashed Potatoes. The MB9 Wagyu is completed with Sichuan Pepper Butter and Yuzu Kosho - looks, feels and tastes like it is roasted, but surprisingly, it's not.

For those who don't eat beef, the Charcoal Grilled Alaskan Crab would be an alternative choice. Hot and fresh, the slit Alaskan crab is both smokey and meaty, with a light, zingy taste. While Chef's Ramsey's Japas comes in small portions, Babe diners can expect to feel full just before the desert Japas are served.

Do not be fooled. The Lie-Mau might look like a lime, but with the first bite, reality is soon revealed - with a kaffir lime, calamansi and

- images :
 1) Sea Bream and Rice
 2) Crab Mousse and Toro Airbread small
 3) Duck and Coke Can uncovered
 4) Alaskan Crab
 5) Lie-Mau
 6) Strawberry Shortcake

kasturi lime curd, within a milk team gummy shell. Refreshing, with a tinge of sweetness, the Lie-Mau is a great prelude to the desert end of the meal. Finally, there is the Strawberry Shortcake - pure strawberry sponge, almond cake and liquid sable and pickled rose petals, a fitting finish to the course.

With a menu that changes according to the seasons in Japan, the current winter menu not only gives diners a culinary experience that fuels the foodie, it is also a revelation of the chef's creative sensors and a reflection of his journey as a well known chef. Starting out as a dishwasher in a Japanese restaurant, he worked his way up to the ranks of a full-fledged sushi chef, and was winner of the "Sushi of the Year" at the Seven Sushi Samurai Competition in 2006, in London.

Staying true to his Japanese-American roots, Chef Ramsey's Japas are created with much care and creativity, from beginning until the end. The highly innovative dishes are evidently made with passion and devotion, using modern cooking techniques. Each dish is presented by a staff with an explanation of its ingredients, and the best way to enjoy them. Armed with the idea of giving diners a fun dining experience in a fine dining setting – Chef Ramsey and his team do more than just that.

With a selection of wine, sake and juices, Babe's Japas is a dining experience for food aficionados who enjoy taking culinary risks with the chance of discovering a whole new world of delectable food.

Babe serves ala carte and 3 tasting menu - RM 310++ per person per set for 8 course, RM 460++ per person per set for 11 course and RM 700++ per person per set for 13 course. The restaurant's operational hours are 6:00pm until 11:30pm, 4 seatings per day - 6:00pm, 7:00pm, 8:00pm and 9:00pm from Tuesdays to Sunday. For reservations visit www.babe.com.my