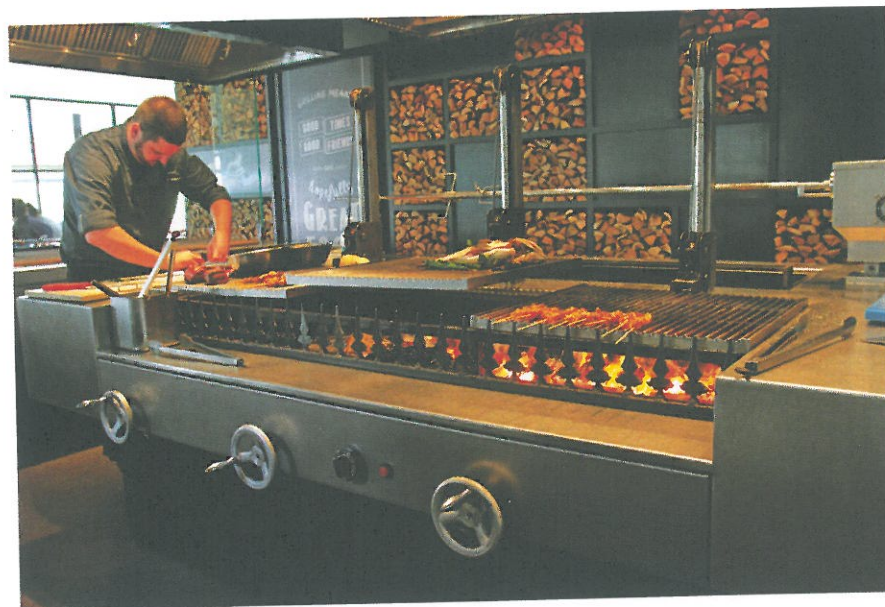


Sambal steakhouse

TEXT Ooi May Sim
PHOTOGRAPHY Yap Chee Hong



Above, from left:
Where the sizzling magic happens.

Watch your food being grilled – sexy!

Facing page, clockwise:
Size matters, especially when we're talking about tiger prawns.

A different way to enjoy fruits – grilled!

Who knew that blush-pink lamb went so well with garlic fried rice?

Grills and steakhouses are traditionally western in nature. So, a grill that serves Malaysian fusion is one that's set to draw visitors.

ENTER Charcoal. Contemporary, dark wood furniture surrounds the open grill, backed by neatly stacked logs. This stylishly modern restaurant does not look remotely Malaysian, but open its menu and the plot changes.

The menu is studded with local 'celebrities' like *ayam percik* (RM38), *sotong sumbat* (RM35), *sup ekor* (RM28), *nasi lemak* (RM36), *char kway teow* (RM38) and *asam laksa* (RM38). A note to Instagrammers: the *satay* (RM30 for a choice of chicken, beef or lamb) is served on its own miniature charcoal burner and makes for a darling photo.

Charcoal, the latest eatery to join Saujana Resorts' list of restaurants, opened in April this year. And as you may have guessed, it is known for its namesake-style open grill. With beef, lamb and chicken to fish, squid, scallops, prawns, lobsters and crab in the line-up,

diners are spoilt for choice. We selected the South Australian grain-fed beef tenderloin (RM95) and Murraylands French-cut rack of lamb (RM90), and could smell our food even before it reached our table. When it did, both meats had a nice smoky char to them and were cooked well.

When asked the secret to getting the perfect char, head chef Robert Johnson said, "Patience and attention to detail. These grills are super hot, so even 30 seconds too long will burn the bottom to a crisp."

Using a charcoal grill imparts a nice smoky aroma and flavour to meats, but there is a drawback. "The cooking time is longer because of the uneven fire. It is never the same temperature throughout the grill, so we have to keep turning and moving the meat around. Too close to the fire and it burns. Too far and it takes forever to cook," Robert adds.

Charcoal's meats are served with a choice of one side order, my favourites being the fried rice and mashed potato; the rice had bits of fragrant garlic, while the mash had a nice lemony tang. But you will never guess what else they are served with – an assortment of *sambals*! Although eating steak with *sambal* sounds a bit strange, try it and you will be amazed. Like searching for a matching sock, we meticulously paired the different *sambals* (mango, chilli garlic, green chilli, etc.) with the beef and lamb, and got different results. My favourites: mango *sambal* with lamb, and chilli garlic *sambal* with beef.

For seafood, the tiger prawns (RM79) and seabass (whole, at RM15 for 100g) proved to be good selections. Lightly marinated, the seafood's delicate flavours came forth beautifully.

Charcoal was formerly Suria Café, the hotel's all-day dining restaurant; one of its major draws was the Eurasian and Nyonya food from chef 'Auntie Belle', or Christabelle Savage. Fans will be glad to know that she's still in residence at the restaurant's new incarnation. Popular dishes include the Garlina Kari Keluak (RM38), Barkke Kari Ambila Kacang (RM36), Kari Nenas Kambrang (RM40) and Popiah Basah A la Nyonya Melaka (RM26). My pick is the Terung Sumbat Bakar (RM26) – the eggplant stuffed with *otak-otak* melts in the mouth, and leaves you wanting more.

The menu was well crafted, with wine recommendations for selected dishes and even *sambal*-meat pairings!

Desserts are not spared the restaurant's grilled treatment. Pineapple (RM20) and exotic fruits (RM20) both spend time on the grill and the *bingka ubi kayu* (RM20) comes with grilled mango.

While the fruit platter of caramelised bananas, pineapple, papaya, mango and honeydew, all topped with a refreshing pineapple sorbet, found favour, the *bingka* didn't turn out to be the soft and chewy treat expected.

Prices at Charcoal tip the higher end of the scale, but if you like grills with a touch of fusion, it is worth a visit. ☺

CHARCOAL RESTAURANT
Saujana Resort, Jalan Lapangan Terbang SAAS, Shah Alam, Selangor.
Tel: 03-7843 1234
Open daily, 6.30am until 11pm.

RATING:

