



Woven subtlety

Songket's food is as interestingly textured and refined as the famous fabric

Hidden away in a serene and tranquil area of Jalan Yap Kwan Seng lies a restaurant that has boldly taken the name of the famous Songket textile that used to be the choice of royalty. Rather than ending up being a grandiose claim, Songket Restaurant & Bar's name aptly reflects the subtle refinement that is the hallmark of the restaurant's cooking.

Just a short walk from the Petronas Twin Towers, Songket provides a calm respite from the hustle and bustle of the Kuala Lumpur city centre. It is surprising indeed to be able to find a location equally as central and as much of a relief from the city's maddening rush.

That blend of pleasant surprise woven with a delicate refinement extends to the authentic Malay cuisine that it serves. Many of the dishes may seem familiar and even, dare we say, ordinary at first, but hidden behind the flavours of each dish is no shortage of dedication and inventiveness.

Take the starter Aneka Pembuka Selera (RM30) for instance, a platter of starters consisting of *cucur udang*, *popiah goreng*, *kepak ayam* and *tauhu sumbat*. These are all foods familiar to Malaysians but rather than the dry chicken wings that are almost standard elsewhere, Songket's *kepak ayam* is full of spice and lemongrass

Songket Restaurant & Bar

No. 29, Jalan Yap Kwan Seng,
50450 Kuala Lumpur

Email: info@songketrestaurant.com

tony@songketrestaurant.com

Dining Reservation / Enquiry: (603) 2161 3331 / 012-366 0111

Operating Hours: Mon – Fri 12pm – 3pm, 6pm – 11pm

Sat – Sun & Public Holidays 5pm – 11pm



Infectious enthusiasm

Chef Zamri Jemintan is brimming with passion

Hailing from a kampung in Malacca, you would expect Chef Zamri to tell you that his dishes at Songket are all from recipes passed down through the generations. Instead, he openly tells us that he began life trained as a Western chef. But rather than see that as a disadvantage in a Malay restaurant such as Songket, his experience of various cuisines has given him the grounding to take Songket's food international.

Having amassed more than 12 years experience in various functions, from banquet kitchens to surprisingly, Chinese wok chef, Chef Zamri was also head chef at an award-winning Malay restaurant before coming to head the kitchen at Songket. His breadth of experience is vital toward his goal in seeing Malay cuisine recognised as a truly international cuisine.

Arguably, the even more important ingredient in his quest is Chef Zamri's unbridled enthusiasm for food. The unique textures and flavours he creates come through many hours of experimentation and hard work. Chef Zamri can be spotted in deep conversation with street hawkers, constantly badgering suppliers for hard-to-find ingredients and generally investing all his energy in creating new dimensions for Malay cooking.



Pandan Pudding



Durian Tiramisu

with a soft and juicy texture. What had looked seemingly normal turns out to be extraordinary.

The *cucur udang* is even more enjoyable. It banishes the nasty memories of overly heavy and starchy varieties with soft dough and a perfectly crisp outer coating, complete with a single fresh and crunchy prawn on top.

Arguably, test of the kitchen's Malay cooking has to be the satay (RM18). When the chicken and beef skewers appeared, they looked no different from anything you can get from any street stall. But one bite into the beef satay and you realise that the chef has chosen to use the best quality tenderloin for that soft, melt-in-



Rusuk Panggang

your-mouth feel. The marinate was flavoursome without being overpowering and the peanut sauce it was served with was as it should be – full of nutty goodness and not too oily.

Sauces and sambals seem to be a particular strength of Songket, which is surely the most telling barometer of a kitchen's ability to display elegance. The signature Pandan Nasi Lemak (RM6) for instance comes with a sambal from which the chefs have painstakingly removed all seeds. The result is a slightly sweet and mildly spicy sambal that elevates rather than dominates the aroma of the rice. Also served with the starter platter is an excellent, sweet chilli sauce that is thicker and stickier, proving to be the ideal partner for the crunchy-textured hors d'ouevres.

We are told Head Chef Zamri Jemintan's mantra is to elevate Malay cuisine to an equal standing with all other forms of cooking in the international

arena. In the Rusuk Panggang (RM60), one of the restaurant's most popular dishes, we would argue that he has already achieved that.

A giant portion of short rib which would easily feed two extremely hungry diners looks like it could have come off any American barbeque. However, the flavours are distinctly Malaysian. Falling of the bone doesn't begin to describe the tenderness of this dish and a duo of excellent sauces – a dark soy sauce-based condiment with sliced chillies and shallots and a funky belacan – completes an outstanding dish. Be warned that the unique chicken-flavoured pegedil, a stuffed croquette side dish, will send you over the edge of enjoyment into utter bliss.

That was a tough act to follow but in the Masak Lemak Udang Nanas (RM45), Songket kept the promise of using quality ingredients. The giant sea prawns specifically brought in from Sabah set a new bar for crunchy crustaceans that only a true wild-caught prawn ever could. Conversely, the Pucuk Paku Goreng (RM15), which are sautéed young fern leaves, is a display of the kitchen's dedication with a caramelised coconut milk sauce that requires hours of gentle reduction.

Songket's inventive interpretations of desserts should also not be missed. Rather than hide the flavour of the famed stinky fruit, Songket's Durian Tiramisu (RM15) put the Durian flavour at centre stage. But somehow, it managed to soften it with the right amount of mascarpone and bittersweet coffee so that non-durian lovers would be immediate converts. The Pandan Pudding (RM10) is possibly an even greater champion of technique, with the texture of an excellent pannacotta, achieved rather amazingly without any cream.

The fact that it provides entertainment in the form of cultural performances from 9pm every Monday through Saturday or the very reasonably priced set lunch menus are added reasons to visit Songket, but the sophistication of its traditional Malay cooking alone is a more than enough reason.



Ayam Penyet