



Wood and red brick set the eatery's convivial tone



Strato offers hearty Italian fare, with a focus on integrity, presentation and quality

# Heavenly homemade *hors d'oeuvres*

Gourmands seeking authentic Italian comfort foods need only look skyward to find a feast of flavours in the firmament

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**A**ntipasto aficionados and adventurous aesthetes alike can indulge their cravings at Strato, a sanctuary in the skies which serves up familiar favourites from *la bel paese* with more than a touch of class. Part of Troika Sky Dining's growing stable of high-end dining establishments, Strato's fare ranges from hearty to hedonistic, perfect for an evening with the family or faithful friends.

"We do take a modern approach towards the interpretation of our dishes, and much of our menu does have a fusion twist, such as our crab meat pasta. At its core, though, Strato is about bringing Mama's cooking to Malaysian tables, with a focus on integrity, presentation and the quality of our ingredients," says Troika Sky Dining executive sous chef Amin Mohd Saidin.

Encompassing two floors of The Troika in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, the eatery lives up to its name through a panoramic view of the city skyline, with the greenery of KLCC Park as a breathtaking backdrop. The ambience is intimate and warm, with abundant wood tones and red brick complementing the amiability of the attentive service staff.

The centrepiece of Strato's ensemble is the elegant spiral staircase that brings diners from Claret, Troika Sky Dining's curated wine bar on Level 23a, to the trattoria-style trappings of its sister saloon on the floor above. A palpable shift in atmosphere accompanies the transition and serves to delineate the two brands, with overall cohesion maintained through a central mezzanine overlooking the lounge.

"Classic Italian dining starts with the *antipasto*, a communal dish which is chosen for its colours, flavours and textures and shared by everyone at the table. A variety of cold and dry meats are included, which historically arose in Italian cuisine as salting and curing were utilised to preserve foods in the absence of chillers," says Amin.

Like the prelude to a symphony, the *antipasto* introduces the themes of the ensuing gastronomic arrangement while teasing the palate with a taste of things to come. Our own experience began with the cured meat platter, a savoury assortment of pepperonis served with toasted sourdough bread, pickled mushrooms, artichoke, grilled zucchini and sun-dried tomatoes.

Each element can be enjoyed on its own or mixed and matched as sourdough toppings in an impromptu *bruschetta*, though the convivial surroundings and emphasis on communal dining favour the latter. Personally, this reviewer found the freshness of the garden fare benefited from individual attention, as the cured meats tended to overpower more subtle accents from the artichoke.

As a nod to prevailing notions of Italian dining, fresh bread paired with olive oil and vinegar dip is served throughout the evening. The practice rose in Italy as a celebration and formal tasting of the year's olive crop, but has caught on virtually everywhere else as a complement to the meal itself. The option is there, and serves as a welcome sundry for the carb-hungry, as well as a topical icebreaker.

"To ensure the quality of our ingredients, we take great care with how we source them. Our flour, for example, comes from France, while our cured meats originate in Spain. We also use Brittany lobsters from southern France, as the sweetness of the meat and its texture provide a completely different experience," says Amin.

And where would an Italian establishment be without that most prevalent of Continental cuisine classics, the pizza? Strato features a robust assortment of flatbread feasts ranging from seafood staples such as prawn, squid, sea bass and béchamel sauce to vegetarian victuals that serve up portobello mushrooms, cheese sauce and egg with Neapolitan nuances.





Novelty seekers can try the Mystery Pizza, which adds a touch of *je ne sais quoi* to the menu with unusual toppings specially selected by the chef. Our own foray into mozzarella masterpieces came with Italian sausage, tomato sauce, spinach, sweet and sour capsicums, and onions, applied in proportions generous enough to satisfy even the most demanding appetites.

“Every month, we have a promotion that showcases specialties within the various Italian provinces, paired with regional wines. We call it our Cucina series, with the most recent focus on Umbria, where spaghetti, black truffles and lentil stews are popular, taken with homemade wine,” says Strato sous chef Azwan Mat Yacob.

As expected of a *ristorante* with Strato’s pedigree, its pasta portfolio presents a plethora of epicurean possibilities, from carbonara with smoked haddock and bottargo to ravioli with Wagyu beef cheek and trotter dressed in sage butter, preserved lemon and fried onion.

The lobster linguini is highly recommended, served in a sweet tomato sauce that perfectly complements the richness of the maritime delicacy. The simplicity of the dish works in its favour, giving ample space for the lobster to justify its place at the top of the pasta menu’s pricing tiers.

In terms of pairings, the *linguini* goes well with a light *Allegrini* Soave, a customary pairing for seafood and shellfish whose fresh, fruity tones provide a piquant counterpoint to the vigorous flavours found in the dish. Lovers of the vine can also avail themselves of the impressive variety of vintages arrayed in well-stocked wine racks lining the mezzanine.

The highlight of the evening for this reviewer came with the eatery’s divine desserts, which intersperse tried-and-true treats such as banana and coffee tiramisu and strawberry panna cotta with more adventurous offerings such as moist semolina *mascarpone* cake and



vanilla dome with white chocolate crumble and brandy sponge.

If you’re blessed with a sweet tooth, however, you can’t go wrong with Strato’s take on the humble caramel pudding, served with Chiboust cream and strawberries, or the chocolate mousse cheesecake, both of which merit a visit to this getaway in the sky all by themselves.

With its conscious move away from commercialised dining, it’s no surprise that Strato has earned accolades in Malaysia’s gastronomic landscape for its authentic approach to Italian cuisine. While bookings are encouraged for large groups of eight or more, walk-in diners are also welcome to experience the warmth of Italy in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. 🍷

#### FROM TOP:

Strato’s perch commands a panoramic view of Kuala Lumpur’s skyline

Strato’s generous toppings satisfy even the most demanding appetites

#### BELOW, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

The cured meat platter is served with toasted sourdough bread, pickled mushrooms, artichoke, grilled zucchini and sundried tomatoes

The caramel pudding with Chiboust cream is worth a visit all by itself

The chocolate mousse cheesecake is a sinful delight

