

## **REACHING OUT**

Many of chef Saito's fans are already familiar with his signature style – his preference for slightly smaller cuts of fish, as well as a touch more salt and milder red vinegar in the rice to set off his ideal combination of texture and flavour; (below) shima aji and (right) uni.





## KL's prized sushi catch

## By Pauline Ng

HE won't be in Singapore but at least Kuala Lumpur isn't that far away for Singapore sushi afficionados to get their fix of Takashi Saito's three Michelin-starred prized morsels.

The chef of hot favourite Sushi Saito is set to open his first restaurant outside of Tokyo next year in the six-star St Regis hotel in KL Sentral. To be called Taka by Sushi Saito, it's targeted to launch on April 1 when the 48-storey skyscraper opens its doors.

How St Regis KL's owner Chua Ma Yu and his family managed the culinary coup remains unclear, but they will be unstinting in ensuring the authenticity of the upscale, high-premium Japanese restaurant.

Traditional finishes include a sushi counter made from rare hinoki wood from Japan. The counter can seat only 16 diners, but there are two private dining rooms.

Given Mr Saito's reputation – he is the youngest sushi chef to be awarded the three Michelin-star rating in 2009 and is the owner of one of only three sushi restaurants in Tokyo with the coveted three stars – reservations may be as hard to come by as they are in Tokyo. Sushi Saito was also ranked one of San Pellegrino's Asia's 50 Best Restaurants.

Even so, because all ingredients will be imported from Japan, the restaurant's pricing will not be for the faint-hearted.

"Chef Saito insists that all ingredients have to be from Japan to maintain authenticity and standards, and will pick it personally in Tokyo and send it to Kuala Lumpur every Tuesday and Friday," revealed Carmen Chua, the chief executive of ONE IFC Sdn Bhd. ONE IFC is the developer of the St Regis Hotel & Residences Kuala Lumpur.

Many of the chef's fans are already familiar with his signature style – his preference for slightly smaller cuts of fish, as well as a touch more salt and milder red vinegar in the rice to set off his ideal combination of texture and flavour. His tuna nigiri is a particular favourite.

The Kuala Lumpur restaurant will be headed by chef Satoshi Uehara who was handpicked by chef Saito after an extensive search. He will be assisted by sushi chef Masashi Kubota.

"Chef Saito has assured that chef Uehara will be able to serve food that lives up to his reputation," Ms Chua said, adding the former will also go regularly to Kuala Lumpur to ensure quality is consistent. He is scheduled to visit in February, and will be at the opening as well.

A Taka by Sushi Saito restaurant in Singapore may not be a too far-fetched proposition given that the Chuas hold the exclusive rights for Malaysia and Singapore.

A former stockbroker, Mr Chua remains a prominent investor through his flagship CMY Capital Group, which owns 60 per cent of ONE IFC. btworld@sph.com.sg