

JOM! EAT: A Switzerland house in Ampang

By [David Bowden](#) - October 1, 2021 @ 11:01am / NEW STRAITS TIME (NST)

On a quest to learn more about Swiss food, David Bowden goes on a gastronomic journey to Ampang.



Search Swiss food in Malaysia and you'll mostly like find Chalet Suisse Restaurant. In the book "Everybody Eats There – Inside the World's Legendary Restaurants", the authors William Stadiem and Maria Gibbs note that: "Most hospitality pros, the ones who have been to the Mountain and have seen the Other Side, these arbiters would sigh and say "Zurich's Kronenhalle Restaurant", a temple of simplicity that may well be the most classic, most gratifying, most perfectly run restaurant in the world."

When I read this, I paused and thought – which restaurant, what no celebrity chef, no reality television show and, a restaurant in Zurich, Switzerland; how can this be?

So began my quest to learn more about Swiss food. Like most people, my knowledge of Swiss gastronomic delights was limited to chocolate, cheese and dairy products from famous names such as Nestlé.

However, from my encounters with numerous Swiss chefs and hotel general managers throughout the region, I was well aware of the professional approach Switzerland takes to training hospitality graduates.

THE ALPEN WAY TO AMPANG

Intrigued, I researched Swiss food in Malaysia and unearthed Chalet Suisse Restaurant (chalet and Suisse being the French words for house and Switzerland) in Ampang.

A reservation was made for my journey into the unknown.

At the door, I am greeted by the quietly spoken Manfred Faehndrich (please call me Manfred) who has been involved with the restaurant almost since its inception and now manages and owns it.

First impressions are important and the reception is warm as if I am entering someone's home.

The interior is just as warm with pine furniture and Swiss knick knacks adorning the walls. Its rustic atmosphere resembles, I am informed, a typical Swiss chalet restaurant.

The restaurant has that lived-in look; a look of longevity that is understandable considering it opened in May, 1996 so celebrating its 25th anniversary this year and always in the same location.

That seems so ancient to me and I conclude that they must be doing something right and that this is a tale that is worth investigating along with the food.

Scanning the menu, I notice some familiar Western dishes and some Swiss ones that are new to me. Asking the obvious question, my host rolls his eyes as if asked the same question every night.

Manfred explains: "When I meet people who aren't from Switzerland, they often ask me to describe Swiss food and I struggle to answer the question. Swiss food has evolved over time, with some traditional dishes that have spanned generations. Plus, with its four linguistic regions - German, French, Italian and Romansh, Swiss food is deeply rooted in specific geographic areas. Therefore, I dare not offer a concise, neatly-packaged answer to your question, because it doesn't exist."

Needing to delve more deeply into the menu, I find myself guided by the long-serving staff who knows the menu back to front.

I start with chicken liver terrine, move onto beef and vegetable soup, Raclette, slow-roasted Black Angus rib steak with potatoes, vegetables and two sauces and, wrap everything up with crêpes Suzette prepared and served at the table.

Most dishes are 'recognizable' except for Raclette. With so many cows in Switzerland it will come as no surprise that there are many cheeses – 450, I believe - and I am told that I would only get blank stares if I ordered Swiss cheese in Switzerland.

Manfred explains that I need to appreciate that Switzerland was historically an agricultural country with lots of snow-capped mountains making it very cold in winter.

Furthermore, when the farmers returned from a hard day's work, hearty, filling 'peasant' food was just the thing.

One such dairy product is Raclette cheese from the Valais in eastern Switzerland. Raclette is unique in that the outer layer is grilled and the hot, soft cheese scraped off and then eaten with potatoes and gherkins.

Well, it is delicious and I suggest you order it unless you have an aversion to cheese.



(Slow cooked Angus Prime Rib with baked Jacket Potato, Raclette, homemade Chicken Liver Terrine and clear Beef Soup called "Chalet Soup")

DECADES OF LONG SERVICE

With 25 years of service, I buttonhole my host near the end of my delicious meal to ask him about the secret to Chalet Suisse's success.

"We have a lot of experience," he replies, "interacting with guests is very important, to personally welcome them, talk with them and find out what they like, whether they are celebrating an anniversary, what are their preferences etc. If you treat them with the utmost respect and let them feel that we are a Chalet Suisse restaurant team here for them, they will want to return."

Manfred speaks candidly about the operations of Chalet Suisse: "The secret is the restaurant offers signature dishes related to imported Swiss cheeses such as Fondue, Raclette, Cordon Bleu and various beef dishes like sliced Veal 'Zurich Style', Rösti (potatoes) and Fish among others. Furthermore, the dishes offered are reasonably priced and have international appeal." He adds, with an established restaurant you need to work hard to be relevant to a whole new generation while still looking after regular diners.

Chalet Suisse arranges many events from ladies' nights, Swiss-international Sunday brunches, fondue and Raclette nights, imported white asparagus dinners, Easter and Mother's Day promotions as well as offers via their website and social media platforms.

Feedback and continually refining the operation is also important at Chalet Suisse. The restaurant has 90 % outstanding good feedback on social media and this encourages the staff and management to do better and to improve its food, beverages and service.

Most Swiss produced wines are consumed domestically so very little is exported. Manfred regrets that they aren't able to offer Swiss wines but they do serve Swiss-produced Fassbind brandies, spirits and liqueurs.



SWISS PRECISION

While Chalet Suisse may not be as renowned as Kronenhalle with its clockwork precision, discrete entrance down near where the Limmat River flows into Lake Zurich and museum grade artwork adorning the walls, the Ampang restaurant offers many classic Swiss and European dishes that are lovingly prepared using mostly imported ingredients and masterfully orchestrated by host Manfred Faehndrich.

The restaurant's warm, cozy and welcoming ambiance takes diners into the heart of Swiss hospitality where everyone is well fed and well looked after.

While Kronenhalle has been around much longer than Chalet Suisse, both are based upon consistency in that diners know that the dish will be as good as it can every time they dine in the respective restaurants.

I came as a stranger to Swiss cuisine but left Chalet Suisse as if I have been on a personally guided gastronomic journey over Switzerland's grassy meadows, mirror-like lakes and across the snow-covered Alps. Like a typical Swiss Chalet Restaurant, the interior is just as warm with pine furniture and Swiss knick knacks adorning the walls.



FAST FACTS

Chalet Suisse Restaurant

- WHERE:** No C11-1, Jalan Ampang Utama 1/1, off Jalan Ampang, 68000 Ampang, Selangor.
- TEL:** 03-4252 4589 (answering machine)
- HOURS:** Daily (except Monday) from 5pm to 11pm.
- EAT:** Kuala Lumpur's only Swiss restaurant serves some classic and tasty no-nonsense Swiss and European dishes.
- PICK:** Chicken Liver Terrine, Bündnerfleisch (air-dried beef, pickles and cheese), Swiss Cheese Raclette (grilled cheese), Fondue (melted Cheese in a Pot), Barley Soup Grison Style, sliced Veal Zurich style, black Angus Prime Rib and Crêpes Suzette.
- PAY** Soups (RM25), Starters (RM40-RM50), Mains (RM60-RM100) and Desserts (RM30).
- MOOD:** Authentic, rustic but welcoming interior with classic table settings.
- SERVICE:** Cheerful, obliging, knowledgeable, observant and enthusiastic.
- I SAY** If you're new to Swiss food, be guided by the knowledgeable staff, ask for Mariel or Paul