

Headline **Town built on skewers of meat**  
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# Town built on skewers of meat

Kajang is a town that is talked about but seldom visited by foodies because its famous product has spread to other towns. **PHILIP LIM** makes an impromptu visit to uncover its other secrets



Kajang's famous Haji Samuri Satay Restaurant



Sticks of beef and chicken satay fresh from the kitchen



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**W**Henever the name of Kajang is brought up, the response is always "satay!" That was true about 20 years ago. According to a long-time resident of Kajang, the best Kajang satay is now found in Kuala Lumpur.

Apparently, the enterprising satay men have "migrated" to the big city because the high-income earners there don't frown too much when they find out the price of a stick of satay.

Of course, Kajang itself still has a fair share of satay sellers. The entire town was built on this particular skewered meat delicacy with its aromatic peanut gravy and served with slices of cucumber and ketupat (rice cakes) for good measure.

If you are on a leisurely drive, returning to KL or Petaling Jaya from a short visit to Putrajaya, you may want to pop in for an unhurried visit that will involve at least two tall glasses of hot teh tarik.

### Satay On My Mind

Kajang would be the town for an unscheduled pit stop. According to 2006 statistics, it has a population of 230,000. In recent years, the township has expanded sideways but the town proper is still its charming old self with narrow streets and occasional traffic jams that remind KL-ites of their own turf.

If not for a wrong turn on the highway, we would have bypassed the satay town because the planned destination was actually Dengkil.

Unfortunately, Dengkil lost a carload of premier visitors due to the poor positioning of highway signs.

Naturally at 4pm, the utmost on anyone's mind was a quick bite of what had made Kajang famous.

### Only Samuri

A recent visitor to the town tipped us off on the location of the best satay house there — the one and only Haji Samuri Satay Restaurant.

Any first time visitor to this restaurant will gladly announce that it is the "mother of all satay houses". A double-storied building with a sizeable compound for parking cars, it houses several big dining halls. A visual estimate of the chairs and tables would put the total number of seated customers at 1,000 or more.

Haji Samuri Satay House is well organised and splendidly positioned. Old motorcycles which look very much like the half-forgotten Vespa of yesterday are positioned around the staircase leading to an open verandah for customers to enjoy the views from various perspectives.

Parked at its entrance, an ancient buggy-like vehicle, probably horse-drawn, lent a flavour of a bygone era to the establishment.

Restaurant Sate Kajang Haji Samuri is housed in Bangunan Dato Nazir. An impressive structure of ample proportions, it put paid to the kind of relationship that the restaurant has with the town's most famous cuisine.



All fired up for something scrumptious



Hall with just the right ambience for good company



A uniformed kitchen helper preparing a dish for eager customers

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### **Exotic Satay?**

A satay menu is prominently displayed on the wall, with various choices of meat besides chicken and beef. The culinary adventurer can have rabbit, deer, goat or fish. Topping it all are liver, heart and other edible parts.

On that hot and slightly cloudy afternoon, the place ran out of rabbit or bunnies, as some of us would like to call them, although the latter is socially incorrect.

We settled for chicken and beef. The only complaint was that the beef probably sat over the fire for far too long because it was a bit too tough.

It would also have been better if the satay was served piping hot, straight from the grill to the dining table. That's the way most greedy Malaysians prefer it.

### **Glass Kitchen & Artifacts**

Near the cashier's counter on the first floor is the glass paneled kitchen. It is the proprietor's way to "reveal all" that goes on in the kitchen.

Two workers were busily turning sticks of satay as the flames leapt and licked at the skewered meat. It goes without saying that seeing what you will be consuming helps to enhance the taste of the house's specialty.

There is another kitchen on the ground floor. Two kitchens are essential to ensure that the service is smooth and efficient.

The interior decor of Haji Samuri Restaurant comprises numerous home-grown artifacts placed strategically. There are several halls for private parties and an air-conditioned hall on the ground floor. The one upstairs wasn't open that afternoon but one can imagine that its secluded location would be ideal for office gatherings, farewell or birthday functions.

### **More Than A Satay Town**

Kajang has its historical roots in 1709. Then its foundation was laid in 1807 after the dust from the Battle of Kajang had settled. Since then, it has taken Kajang two centuries to scale up the ladder of development. Today, it is officially recognised as the district capital of Hulu Langat.

For most residents of KL and PJ, Kajang is "where other people sometimes go". However, besides satay, there are other facets to its character just waiting to be discovered. The pace, albeit slower than what city folks are accustomed to, is just perfect for a walking tour.

There's a charming but quaint post office adjacent to the satay house which calls for an inspection by curious onlookers. The next time, you are in Kajang and drinking coffee, bear in mind that the town owes its early development to the coffee estates that once dotted the land.

Today, the town is home to several institutions of higher learning. Among them are Universiti Tenaga Nasional, University of Nottingham which is situated in nearby Semenyih, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, also in close-by town of Bangi, Utar's (Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman) business school in Bandar Baru Sungai Long and Universiti Putra Malaysia's New Era College located opposite the town railway station.

Yes, satay may be the town's biggest billboard attraction but the place has more than just its huge sticks of meat.

Kajang is worthy of a close-up and personal view by outsiders who usually give this place a pass when they are on highway heading towards other better known tourist destinations.