

Coliseum Cafe closes its doors for good

By **SHALINI RAVINDRAN**

shaliniravindran@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: The iconic colonial restaurant Coliseum Cafe, which had stood the test of time over the last century, is now closing its doors permanently due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Opened in 1921 in Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman in the heart of the city centre, this historic eatery that served Hainanese Western-style cooking and colonial-era food called it a day after its tenancy agreement in a pre-war building expired in March.

Three other Coliseum Cafe outlets in Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya will remain open.

Long-time visitors and patrons of the cafe are mourning its closure, with many expressing their dismay over the decision to shut the cafe.

R. Hema, 62, said the cafe was a place to celebrate special occasions in the early 1980s.

"I was in my 20s at the time and not earning much money, so visits to the cafe were reserved for dates with my boyfriend, now my husband.

"We would have lunch at the cafe before heading to the Coliseum Cinema next door," she recalled.

Hema still has fond memories of the sizzling steaks and peach melba dessert that were must-haves during every trip there.

"The service was slow but the food was worth it," she said.

Veteran tourist guide Jane Rai expressed deep sadness over the cafe's closure.

Coliseum Cafe was one of the highlights of her heritage-walking tours of Kuala Lumpur.



End of an era:

The nearly 100-year-old Coliseum Cafe, next to the Coliseum Cinema (left) along Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Kuala Lumpur, had weathered many significant milestones in Malaysia. — FAIHAN GHANI/The Star

"There are so many untold stories revolving around the cafe's origin, the history of those who have operated it and the heritage of the pre-war shophouse over the last century," she said.

Rai hoped the owners of the building would preserve its heritage value.

Jeremy Cheah, 43, said that growing up, visiting the Coliseum Cafe was a yearly affair for him and his family.

"My parents and I would do our Christmas shopping along Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman and then have lunch at the cafe bogged down with our packages.

"As a child, it was always a treat to see smartly dressed waiters," he said.

The cafe was started by a group of friends from Hainan Island, China.

It had weathered many significant milestones and stood tall throughout the British colonial rule, the Japanese occupation, Malaya's independence, the formation of Malaysia and the millennium.

It had also seen its fair share of famous diners, including Malaysia's first prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman, cartoonist Datuk Mohammad Nor Khalid or Lat, who had left behind caricatures of diners

there, and British novelist and playwright W. Somerset Maugham, who visited the then Malaya twice in the 1920s.

The cafe's marketing manager Azrain Azman was quoted by a portal as saying they were unable to sustain the business since the movement control order was first implemented.

He said the outlet relied on dine-in and regular customers and due to the MCO, they could not visit the cafe.

The cafe, Azrain added, had planned to celebrate its centennial this year but this would no longer happen.