



An eatery along Petaling Street with tables and chairs taking up walking space and patrons dining close to the road. — Photos: MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI and LOW LAY PHON/The Star

# Eateries prioritise profits over public safety in KL

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KUALA LUMPUR'S bustling food scene owes much of its charm to al fresco dining.

However, unauthorised dining in public spaces is costing Kuala Lumpur City Hall (DBKL) millions of ringgit in lost revenue.

What began as a wish to dine in the open air has turned into chaos, with thousands of stalls and restaurants spilling onto pavements, parking bays and roads – sidestepping permit fees that could have been reinvested for public infrastructure.

Despite the charm, these setups often operate without approval, contributing to congestion, posing safety risks and blurring the lines between public and private spaces.

With enforcement trailing far behind, illegal operations are flourishing, turning shared city spaces into private cash cows.

## Rules and regulations

Under DBKL guidelines, restaurant and cafe operators must pay RM20 to RM50 per table per month and provide a security deposit of up to RM10,000, depending on the number of tables (see graphics).

But with widespread disregard for these rules, DBKL continues to lose millions in uncollected fees and deposits each year.

Only licensed businesses with approved permits can place tables and chairs in designated areas – and even then, there are clear restrictions on size, placement and operating hours.

You can spot an illegal setup if a restaurant places tables on parking bays, obstructs walkways or roads while lacking the required DBKL permit sticker, or if a roadside stall sets up tables and chairs.

A DBKL spokesperson from the

## Restaurants continue to flout rules by placing furniture, serving diners on walkways



The table does not have a DBKL sticker (inset) to show that the owner has obtained a permit to place it outside the eatery premises.



Enforcement Department clarified that only licensed businesses operating as restaurants, cafes or coffeeshops could apply for outdoor seating permits.

“These are issued by DBKL’s Licensing and Business Development Department.

“But outdoor dining isn’t a free-for-all. Applications for table and chair permits go through Keja (Mesyuarat Jawatankuasa Kelulusan Permit Kerusi Meja), a special DBKL committee.”

The “Permit Meletak Kerusi Meja” sticker, priced at RM1, is issued to eateries that have been approved by Keja to place tables and chairs in public spaces.

The spokesperson added: “Keja representatives from various DBKL departments review each request before approval.”

Representatives from Companies Commission of Malaysia (SSM) and Kuala Lumpur Fire and Rescue Department are also involved.

The fire department enforces the 6m rule, which ensures fire engines have enough road clearance in case of emergencies.

Kuala Lumpur Fire and Rescue director Senior Assistant Fire Commissioner Hassan ‘As’ari Omar stressed the importance of keeping public spaces clear.

“Tables and chairs can create obstacles, but in some cases we allow them as long as they can be quickly removed,” he told StarMetro.

“The issue is when businesses permanently fix tables to the ground, violating the 6m-rule and obstructing emergency

response efforts.”

Permit approvals also depend on space availability and the nature of neighbouring businesses, he said.

For example, a business on a corner lot may apply to use the adjacent space, provided their neighbour agrees.

However, approvals remain at the committee’s discretion. Priority is given to businesses at corner lots or dead-end spaces to minimise disruption.

## Dining prohibited in carparks

Tables and chairs cannot be placed in carparks, said the DBKL spokesperson.

“If you see a parking space taken up by tables, chairs or any obstruction, it’s illegal.



A food truck along Jalan Tun Sambanthan in Brickfields, with a canopy and seating with extra chairs stacked up nearby. The tactile paving is meant for pedestrian accessibility.

### DBKL al fresco dining rules

- Only restaurants, coffeeshops, cafes are allowed to apply for permits at commercial premises within residential areas
- Roadside stalls are **NOT ALLOWED** to put out tables and chairs
- Food trucks are **NOT ALLOWED** to put out tables and chairs or canopies. They are only permitted to sell food for takeaway
- Corner or end lots with an open area on the side
- Middle or end lots that do not have an open side area may be considered based on site suitability
- Must be located at least 6.10m away from an intersection for premises situated on corner or end lots
- Premises must not be located on main roads or major routes
- The number of tables and chairs allowed depends on the availability of suitable space

**Permitted locations for placing tables and chairs:**

- Walkways in front of business premises
- The space in front or beside an eatery or restaurant, with a width between 1.52m and 3.05m
- Road shoulders that have a width of more than 3.05m

**Business owners must have a valid DBKL business premises licence:**

- Regulated under Street, Drainage, and Building Act 1974

**Operating Hours:**

- 6pm to 3am only

Source: DBKL

### Permit and deposit fees for chairs and tables

**Permit fees:**

- RM20 per month for each table measuring 2ft x 2ft (includes two chairs)
- RM50 per month for each table measuring 4ft x 4ft (includes four chairs)
- Other charges – RM1 per sticker per table

**Deposit:**

- Less than 10 tables – RM3,000
- 10 to 20 tables – RM5,000
- More than 20 tables – RM10,000

This deposit may be forfeited if the business fails to comply with the conditions set by the permit approval committee

Source: DBKL

“Businesses can use walkways in front of their premises only if they don’t obstruct public access. “We have these rules to prevent misuse of public spaces and unnecessary inconvenience.”

Only DBKL-approved structures are allowed, meaning businesses cannot modify or extend their setup into public areas, such as adding seating decks or planter boxes.

Outdoor dining comes with responsibilities – businesses must keep their spaces clean, remove tables and chairs after hours and avoid leaving them as eyesores, stacked or padlocked in corners.

DBKL has the authority to seize any furniture if businesses exceed their permit allocation or operate beyond permitted hours.

“Our enforcement officers conduct daily patrols to ensure compliance and the mayor can introduce new conditions at any time based on the city’s needs or public complaints,” added the spokesperson.

“These patrols ensure that traders and vendors adhere to the regulations and conditions outlined in their business licence.

“The mayor can also introduce new conditions at any time, depending on the city’s needs or public complaints. Regulations are meant to be flexible.”

On possible penalties, the spokesperson said for first-time offenders, DBKL would issue a verbal warning if they are found obstructing public spaces with

their business items. “If they repeat the offence, we will take stricter action by issuing a violation notice under Section 46 of Street, Drainage and Building Act 1974, which carries a RM500 fine per offence.

“For repeat offenders, DBKL will proceed with enforcement, including the confiscation and removal of obstructing items.”

According to the latest data, from January 2024 until now, DBKL has issued 3,094 violation notices under Section 46(1)(d) of the Act.

“We have also carried out 212 operations against businesses illegally placing tables, chairs, umbrellas and other items on pavements and public parking bays without a valid permit.

“Through these enforcement efforts, we have confiscated 2,008 tables, 1,949 chairs and 1,538 other business-related items.

“DBKL will continue regular monitoring and enforcement to ensure compliance and maintain order in public spaces.”

City Hall welcomes public feedback via the ADU@KL Portal or by contacting its call centre at 03-2617 9000.