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Wednesday December 1, 2010

Toilet concept a hit with diners of all ages

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PHOTOS BY SAM THAM

T-BOWL CONCEPT RESTAURANT,
1F-96 & 1F-97,
Sunway Pyramid Shopping Mall,
Jalan PJS 11/15, Bandar Sunway,
46150 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

TOILETS and bowel movements are usually a taboo subject at the dining table — especially in Asian cultures — but the T-bowl Concept Restaurant takes the subject to a whole new level.

Greeting customers at the outlet in Sunway Pyramid are the typical logos for male and female toilets on either side of the entrance followed by a big shiny bathtub.

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The tables comprise sinks filled with a cute assortment of toothbrushes, bath and cleaning sponges, and sink plugs covered by a sheet of plastic material as the table top.



Fitting in: The dishes are served in special plates.

To complete the loo experience, customers sit on actual toilet bowls with the lids of the colourful toilet seats down.

There is also a *tatami*-style area where the floor is fitted with squat toilets with clear coverings that you can sit cross-legged on.

Toilet-themed restaurants are not a new idea, having hit the trendy streets of Taiwan many years ago but T-bowl founder and general manager Samuel Tan, 29, said he came up with a slightly different concept when he opened the first outlet in Malaysia at Queensbay Mall in Penang three years ago.

"I spend a lot of time using the water closet so I thought why shouldn't I bring this concept out in the open? That's when the idea for T-bowl came about," said the former computing student and sales engineer who has gone on to run his food business full-time.

"Everything here has a cartoon element to liven up the place. I even created the three characters — the T-bros (the Toilet Brothers) — based on a toilet bowl, a shower head and a pile of poop," he said with a laugh.

Serving up a variety of Western and Asian dishes, Tan said his first outlet in Penang had received good response.

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Not for the squeamish: Some of the food like the Signature Giant Sausage is arranged to fit the theme.

"You would think that the older generation would be a bit squeamish at the idea but I had elderly customers who insisted on having the toilet bowl seats," he said.

The food is served in customised ceramic dishes in the shape of — you guessed it! — toilets, bath tubs and toilet lids.

To add to the experience, some of the food items on the menu are arranged to look like the actual contents of a toilet bowl.

"It was quite a challenge in the beginning, because not only did I have to come up with the food ideas with my chefs but we also had to think about how to design the food to fit in with the concept," he said.

With the bright colourful interior and an affordable menu (prices range from RM2.50 for a cup of mint tea to RM14.90 for Teppanyaki Stew Lamb Chop), it was not hard to see why the T-bowl is a hit with the younger crowd.

"We get a lot of teenagers who find the concept a refreshing change," he said.

Children, especially, found the poop-shaped food items amusing, as evident from the beaming face of six-year-old Lim Kai Xiang from Klang, who was seen digging into his soft-serve ice-cream with much enthusiasm.

Tan opened another outlet in Sungei Wang, Kuala Lumpur, about a year ago and has since moved on to turning his business into a franchise, with the recent outlet in Sunway Pyramid in Bandar Sunway and another one at Melaka Raya in the works.