

**PALAZZO VERSACE
ON
AUSTRALIA'S GOLD COAST**

The maxim, '*First Impressions Are Lasting Impressions*', had, as far as this scribe is concerned, always held true, truth, being the agreement with reality.

But, in the case of the supposed, five-star hotel, named Palazzo Versace, following **TARGET**'s arrival in the early hours of the morning of December 13, 2014, the mental vision of the first impressions became, in a very short space of time, jaded, very materially.

By the time that this medium's 27-day stay at Palazzo Versace had drawn to a close, this reviewer was only too happy to be shot of this Australian hotel.

Mr Gianni Versace is the founder of the Italian fashion house, bearing this gentleman's surname. The history of this world-famous fashion house goes back to 1978.

Versace, as it is more commonly known by the rich and famous who frequent this luxury clothing house, is the home of unique and very expensive clothing and accessories and, while many ladies covet Versace designs, the company, also, is a boutique hotelier.

In September of 2000, Versace opened its first hotel, named Palazzo Versace, on the Gold Coast of Australia.

Today, this hotel is said to rate as one of Australia's best – if not the best.

If this is the best, God help those international tourists who stay in other Australian hotels!

In December of 2012, a Chinese consortium bought control of this iconic hotel, which had been losing about \$A1 million (about \$HK6.50 million) per month, but, thus far, there has been little to no indication of any direct, Chinese influence insofar as management is concerned.

The hotel has some 200 guest rooms and 76 condominiums.

All of the rooms and condominiums are tastefully furnished in Versace fashion, some, however, being a little better furnished than others, mostly due to wear and tear.

As this medium discovered, however, this hotel has a very long way to go if it is intended that the present management, led by the newly appointed General Manager, Mr Subash Basrur, should attempt to aspire to the greatness that Mr Gianni Versace envisaged back in 2000.

The Gold Coast Is, Truly, Golden

The weather at Southport, the area of the Australian Gold Coast that is located about a 90-minute drive from Brisbane where Palazzo Versace is located, was hot, during last December, rising from a low of about 21 degrees Celsius to a high of about 35 degrees Celsius.

The Pacific Ocean's seas breezes make the hot weather – the humidity level is, for the most part, about 60 percent, on average – quite comfortable for most people.

For those Versace hotel guests that find the temperature too hot for them, there is the swimming pool in which to cool off and, when the spirit moves them, there is, always, one's favourite drinks, alcoholic and non-alcoholic, that one may imbibe at poolside.

The hotel comprises, among other things, three major restaurants where one is able to explore some of the unique flavours of Australian cuisine.

The Australians like to eat 'bugs'. These are not the creepy-crawlies, found in one's garden, but are Moreton Bay Bugs, the correct, scientific name, being *Thenus Orientalis*. They are, also, known as flathead lobsters in some parts of the world.

Bugs, in many respects, are superior in taste to the world-famous, Boston Lobster as well as being on a par with the South China Sea lobster, in this medium's opinion.

Then, there is Kangaroo meat for the very adventurous traveller.

Kangaroo steaks, made in the Palazzo Versace '*à la australis*', have a distinctive flavour all of their own. The meat is very tender and, although it has little fat, it is far from being dry – especially when marinated with native pepper berries, rosella flower, bush tomatoes and onions, as is the case at Vie Bar + Restaurant at Palazzo Versace.

One should, also, taste the ubiquitous Coffin Bay Oyster, a truly Australian, bivalve mollusc that could be said to rival the more-famous, Fine de Claire oyster of France.

Palazzo Versace has a well-appointed gymnasium at the basement level and it would be difficult to imagine a 1,000 square-foot room as comprehensively fitted out in sympathy with the requirements of the athletically inclined.

The Gold Coast could well be considered as one-big '*playground*' that caters for most people, from ladies, searching for bargains in the clothing shops, to the teenager, desirous of visiting the five main theme parks, all of which are within a 30-minute drive from the Palazzo Versace.

For many people, jogging in the open air is a real treat and a barefoot walk on the seashore in the early morning is extremely pleasant.

Of course, swimming, surfing the waves of the Gold Coast, and playing tennis – weather permitting – are all readily available.

That which **TARGET** (泰達財經) discovered, however, and this must be among one of the most-important virtues of this part of the Australian Continent, is that the average Australian is a fun-loving person who, aside from being a down-to-earth individual, goes out of his way to help strangers when called upon so to do.

Of course, there is always the occasional grouch bag that one comes in contact, from time to time, but, for the most part, these grouches are few and far between.

Now, The Good, The Bad, The Ugly

The buffet breakfast at Palazzo Versace – which is available between 0630 hours and 1030 hours – is very good and must rate highly, even by international standards.

Aside from a well-stocked, comprehensive salad bar, there is a wide variety of fruit yoghurts along with fresh fruit and, naturally, freshly cooked eggs of all sorts, along with ham, bacon, baked beans, hash-brown potatoes, grilled tomatoes and mushrooms.

There is an assortment of breads, ranging from English muffins to French croissants to American-styled, jam donuts.

The buffet dinner is, likewise, very good, but, unlike the breakfast – that costs \$A46 (about \$HK300 per person) if it is not part of one's room package – one gets very tired of eating boiled bugs, boiled crabs, boiled prawns, freshly chucked oysters and salads.

(The salads, sadly, are very similar to those on offer at the breakfast buffet.)

There are, also, some hot dishes, with Australian lamb and beef at the hot station, along with some over-cooked, steamed vegetables and some badly over-cooked pasta. Once in a while, there is a pork dish.

There are no hot deserts, but plenty of sugary things, cakes, mousses, etc, and, on some evenings, even some ice-cream.

The continuation of the entrance hall leads into the food outlet, labelled Le Jardin.

Here one may obtain '*Afternoon Tea*', which commences from 1030 hours and lasts for most of the day. This comprises some sandwiches and sweet things and, of course, tea.

If one is hungry for something more substantial at about 1300 hours, the time when normal people are ready to order a luncheon, one is out of luck at Palazzo Versace because, as this medium discovered, trying to obtain a hamburger with French fries and a cup of coffee, one is informed that the kitchen is very busy and that it will take at least one hour for the meal to be presented at one's table.

Le Jardin, on most days, has some four ladies in attendance along with one man.

This serving team goes flat out for most of the entire day, trying to keep up with the crush of orders – with which the kitchen staff of the hotel cannot cope, efficiently.

This anomaly is because Le Jardin's cooked food is not prepared at its kitchen, but at the kitchen, preparing food for the poolside guests.

With regard to the servers, this medium was informed by a number of them that they were students, being parttimers, working 20 hours per week and are paid by the hour.

In short, they are not permanent staff and, for many, they are without training, learning as they go along.

The foyer of the hotel, leading onto Le Jardin, is very often taken over by young children, between the ages of three years and eight years.

These children use this area as their personal playground, jumping up and down on the two-step staircase in order to try out their tiny feet and legs, while yelling and screaming their delight at various successes.

For elderly hotel guests, especially, it is quite impossible to enjoy a quiet cup of coffee at Le Jardin because the screams of the children shock them every few minutes.

Aside from Le Jardin and the coffee shop that is named Il Barocco Restaurant, there is, also, the fine-dining, Vanitas Restaurant.

TARGET had reserved a table at Vanitas Restaurant for the Christmas Day luncheon and, on entering the restaurant about 15 minutes late from the appointed time of 1300 hours, this journalist was met at the door by a young gentleman who enquired as to whether or not a table had been reserved.

There is only a very limited number of seats at this restaurant and all of the tables at the time of **TARGET**'s entrance were occupied with the lone exception of one table, booked in the name of this reporter, using his surname.

On confirming that this medium had, in fact, a reservation for luncheon, the young man, who greeted this reporter, his wife and his niece, referred to this reporter by his Christian name rather than Mr So-and-So.

Soon after being seated, it was very obvious that this food outlet could not be considered fine-dining, since, among other things, when some bread rolls were placed on the table, it was discovered that they were straight out of the freezer, the centres of which were still frozen solid while the outside of the rolls had just come out of a microwave oven or some other heating device in order to warm the tops of them.

Two ladies were the servers of the entire room and, while they were sufficiently pleasant-looking, they did that which was required of them by placing dishes on the table and little else – including that which the dishes comprised.

On scanning the wine list with the intension of ordering a bottle of Château La Fleur-Pétrus, the somewhat unpleasant sommelier explained that the hotel had no Pomerol in stock – although he did make the admission that Château La Fleur-Pétrus was a lovely choice of a Pomerol.

Then, on scanning the daily menu, not the New Year's Day luncheon menu, it was discovered that it was very limited, covering just one, letter-size piece of paper: Take it or leave it.

As for the New Year's Day luncheon, it was, in a word, insipid and, within about 40 minutes on entering Vanitas Restaurant, **TARGET** was the door.

The luncheon lacked just three things: Appearance; smell; and, taste.

Along with mediocre service.

Where Is Accountability?

Still on the subject of Palazzo Versace service, on entering the hotel at about 0130 hours on December 13, 2014, **TARGET** had to implore a couple of uniformed gentlemen to assist in offloading what the Australians call a 'People Mover' – a six-seater, minivan.

Then, having checked in, the young lady who took down some particulars of **TARGET**'s trio, instructed this reporter as to the direction of the condominium whose number was 58.

She said that we should pass through a door that was at the end of a corridor to the right of the entrance foyer and then, on crossing over from the swimming pool, there was another door through which ... etc, etc, etc.

Having been travelling for the best part of 12 hours from Hongkong, it was difficult to remember all of this lady's directions and, in any case, having been armed with two electronic keys, both made of some man-made material, it was impossible to know which key to use for which door.

Explaining this situation to this young lady as well as explaining that this was **TARGET**'s first visit to Palazzo Versace, she seemed to be a little upset, but was being forced to take a little pity on this reporter's plight and said that she would attempt to obtain somebody to assist in pointing us in the correct direction from the hotel's building to the structure that housed the condominiums.

Having negotiated the labyrinth from the hotel to the condominium complex and into Room 58 that was to serve as **TARGET**'s home for the next 27 days, this medium's trio bathed and flopped into bed.

Only to discover, rather smartly, that the room was far too hot for the comfort of average homo sapiens in which to sleep: The room temperature was about 25 degrees Celsius!

This situation was to be the bane of **TARGET**'s existence in the late evenings and very early mornings for the entire duration of the stay at this hotel.

When this matter of the lack of sufficient, cooling air-conditioning in the condominium was explained to Senior Management, it made absolutely no difference.

TARGET noted that many residents of condominiums left their doors and windows open in the evenings in order to enjoy 'air conditioning'.

In respect of the gymnasium, while it is well equipped for most enthusiasts, desirous of maintaining a healthy body, when it was pointed out to Management that, early in the mornings – between four o'clock and six o'clock – families of mosquitoes were enjoying the gymnasium, too.

Nothing was ever done about this situation although it was suggested that, when time permitted, the outer courtyard would be sprayed lest any family members of dipteran flies were making their homes in the stagnant water that was being collected among the plants.

There is quite a number of treadmills in this gymnasium, all of which come equipped with broadcasts from various news' stations, local and international, however Management has been unable to find anybody to make it possible for users of these machines to listen to the news that is being broadcast – because there is no soundtrack or picture.

Also, there are no earphones available for people to listen to the news broadcasts should, one day, it is possible to hear them.

It is highly unlikely that the scribe will be returning to Palazzo Versace although the ladies of **TARGET** will continue to purchase Versace clothing.

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