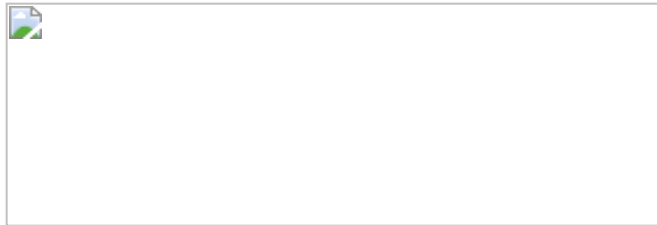


RESTAURANT

Among The Best of The Best



ITS COFFEE SHOP, UP THERE WITH THE BEST

The food outlets at Island Shangri-La, the Island Shangri-La, being one of the best hotels in the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), have, since the opening of the hotel in 1991, been exceptional.

True, there have been a few hiccoughs, but, by and large, Island Shangri-La has maintained a very high standard in both service and the quality of the food that is served in the hotel's many outlets.

Not so for the Kowloon Shangri-La, however, even though, at one time, that 5-star hotel was on a par with its 'brother' hotel on the Hongkong side of Victoria Harbour.

Recently, TARGET's team paid a surprise visit to the Island Café on the 7th floor of the Island Shangri-La.

This is the hotel's coffee shop where one would expect to find fast service in a well-worn restaurant.

TARGET was in for a very pleasant surprise.

Our intention was to compare Island Shangri-La's, daily coffee-shop buffet, with the other 2 hotel buffets in the Pacific Place Complex of Wanchai (or on the border between Central Hongkong and Wanchai).

What TARGET discovered was that the Island Café, for a luncheon buffet, is the best value in the area, dollar-for-dollar: It is extremely good.

The buffet luncheon costs \$HK208 per head, plus a 10-percent service charge, but what one gets for this price is quite amazing.

On the day that TARGET visited the Island Café, unannounced and without any reservation, this was what was on the buffet tables (Please see the end of this report)

The Appetisers

If one ate only the oysters at this buffet, one got one's money's worth.

TARGET's guest was a bit of a pig in that she ate 6 of the very fatty Chilean oysters.

They were fresh and tasted of the sea, which is the way that oysters should taste.

In fact, one of the first odours that reached this reviewer's nostrils, on entering the Island Café, was the fresh smell of oysters.

The smoked salmon, which TARGET learned from the Acting Chef, Mr Sam Chan, after many failed attempts to contact the hotel Public Relations Manager, a Ms Kelly Sum, came from Norway.

The Chilean oysters were excellent and were as good as one could obtain in the best, fine-dining restaurants, anywhere.

The oysters and the smoked salmon came with all the garnishes and, had the setting of the Island Café been a little different, one could have imagined that one was seated at one of the fancier outlets of the hotel.

The oysters and the smoked salmon scored 9 points out of 10 points.

The Soups

Neither one of the soups could have been considered good, however, one could not state that they were very bad.

The trouble with the soups was that somebody had made an error in adding too much water to the stock before adding the ingredients.

As a result, both soups were very watery – and that was only too apparent.

The Cream of Mushroom Soup had no hint of the taste of mushrooms, assuming that there had been mushrooms, added to the broth in the first place.

As for the Minced Beef and Chinese Parsley Potage, it, too, had been watered down, but not to the extent of the Cream of Mushroom Soup.

To be fair, it was very clear, without looking at the plaque, announcing the soup on the buffet table, that this was a version of a Chinese traditional soup: Sai Woo Ngau Yuk Gang.

While there was a vague suggestion of this soup, it was not at all good and, perhaps, that was the reason that few customers were bothering with it.

The soups scored about 4 points out of 10 points.

The Japanese Section

There had been a terrible mistake in the kitchen of the hotel because skinny pieces of raw fish meat had been placed on rather large squares and oblongs of vinegared rice balls.

To state that these pieces of rice and fishmeat were the food outlet's version of Japanese sushi would be to make a mockery of the morsels.

However, there was nothing wrong with either the fishmeat or in the preparation of the rice since, separately, they were both fine.

The only real problem was that somebody had made an error in putting the fishmeat with the vinegared rice in a way that gave the sushi a quite ridiculous appearance.

The sashimi, however, was all very fresh, and of a very high quality.

The fishmeat came from the Philippines, Norway, and Australia, according to Acting Chef Sam Chan.

As for the zara soba, it was exactly that which one could find in any good Japanese restaurant.

Aside for the sushi, which TARGET could not score, the rest of the selections scored 9 points out of 10 points.

The Hot Dishes

The Roast Sirloin of Beef was a bit of a disappointment because it was without much flavour.

Basically, there was nothing wrong with the beef, it was just that insufficient care had been taken in the cooking process and, as a result, it had been cooked for too long a period of time and, then, allowed to stand for a further period of time, at least, 3 more hours.

The beef, itself, was tender, but it lacked any distinctive flavour – which is what one would want when eating roast meat.

As for the Roast Turkey (which was supposed to be Roast Leg of Lamb, according to the Captain who, sheepishly, could not explain the reason that there were 2 thighs of roast turkey and no hint of a leg of lamb), it was terribly dry. However, turkey is dryish meat, in any event.

The beef scored 5 points out of 10 points and the turkey on a par with the beef.

The majority of the hot dishes – TARGET sampled them all – were either overcooked or starting to be a little dry, but that is one of the things with which one has to contend when one determines to visit a buffet of this type.

TARGET cannot criticise the quality of the food because, clearly, it was good, but unless one gets in early, buffets start to lose their appeal.

An outstanding dish was the Chinese Barbecued Suckling Piglet.

It was as good as one could find, anywhere.

TARGET cannot recommend the hot dishes as being on the same level as the Appetisers, the Japanese Selection, or the desserts.

All in all, TARGET would say that the hot dishes, on average, scored about 5 points out of 10 points.

The Desserts

If desserts are important to one's meal, then the Island Café's desserts could well finish off any meal in glorious style.

Again, TARGET sampled all of the desserts and considered that the pastries were, all, outstanding, scoring between 9 points and 9.50 points, on average.

Because there were so many choices, it was difficult to pinpoint one dessert as being much better than another, but the Cheese Cake and the Tiramisu are well worth a second tasting, as far as this reviewer is concerned.

The Coconut Sago with Melon was another dish, which caught this reviewer's fancy, but that may have been because of this reviewer's partiality for this Chinese dessert.

There were 3 flavours of ice cream on offer, but TARGET did not bother to sample these.

Overview

While Acting Chef Sam Chan may not be too pleased with TARGET's opinion of the majority of the hot dishes, the Island Shangri-La's Pastry Chef, Mr Alain Guillet, will, no doubt, be happy to hear that, in TARGET's opinion, many of his creations are of a world-class standard.

As TARGET has, already, intimated, if one ate only those outstanding dishes – the oysters, the smoked salmon, the Japanese selection of sashimi and zara soba, the majority of the salads, and the desserts – one is way ahead of the game.

At \$HK208 per head, one would be hard-pressed to get a small sandwich and a bowl of soup in any other 5-star hotel coffee shop.

That is not to suggest that the hot dishes were not worth eating, mind you, but they did not stand up very well to the other parts of the buffet.

The Island Café is very spacious and the tables are not crowded together, as is the case in the Mandarin Oriental Hongkong's coffee shop – which, in any event, does not measure up to the Shangri-La's coffee shop.

There is no interesting view out of the windows of the Island Shangri-La, but the view out of the Kowloon Shangri-La's Coffee Shop is far superior. However, that is a small price to pay.

On the negative side of the ledger, if one gets tired of hearing screaming little infants at play, and/or toddlers, walking all over the place, beware! You could find them en masse at Island Café. This was TARGET's experience on 3 different occasions.

Everybody was a child, at one stage in life, but one wonders whether or not parents should try to control their children, at least to some extent, so as not to bother other customers.

As for the service, it is first class, for the most part (TARGET found only one fool of a waiter who did not want to bring a clean knife and fork, at least, at first).

On the whole, this coffee shop rates very highly and would rate very highly in any part of the world.

Appetisers

Oysters au Naturelle
Smoked Salmon

Soups

Cream of Mushroom Soup
Minced Beef and Chinese Parsley Potage

Cold Selections

Stuffed Eggs with Anchovies
Bayonne Ham with Melon
Grilled Vegetable Platter
Tian of Zucchini and Tomato
Boiled Shrimps

Graved Lax
Smoked Tangini with Sweet Mustard Sauce

Salads

Assorted Seasonal Greens
Tomato Salad
Asparagus Salad
Broccoli Salad
Penne Pasta Seafood Salad

Japanese Section

Sashimi – Sake (Salmon), Magura (dark tuna), Herring
Sushi -- Sake, Magura, Epi (shrimp)
Zara Soba – Cold Noodles

Hot Dishes

Cauliflower au Gratin
Vegetable Provençale
Duchess Potatoes Gratinated Scallops with Leek
Cabbage Roll with Chicken and Mushroom in a Basil Cream
Picatta of Red Mullet with Saffron Cream
Chinese Egg Custard with Compoy and Crabmeat
Chinese Barbecue Collation with Papadam
Steamed Cod Fish with Preserved Vegetable
Sweet and Sour Pork
Beef Belando (Malaysian Stirfried Beef with Yams and Celery)
Shrimp and Lychee Curry Thai Style
Malay Fried Rice with Duck and Salty Egg
Thai Wokfried Vegetables
Singapore Noodles
Roast Sirloin of Beef with Sauce Bordelaise
Roast Turkey
Stuffed Bean Curd
Thai Glass Noodle Salad
Gado Gado (Indonesian Salad)
Kerabu Nanas (Malaysian Pineapple Salad)

Desserts

Assorted French Pastries
Tiramisu
Cheese Cake
Black Forest Cake
Bread and Butter Pudding
Apple Strudel with Vanilla Sauce
Chocolate Mousse
Fruit Jelly

*Caramel Custard
Nanya Pancake
Coconut Sago with Melon
Fruit Salad*

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