

# Dining and Wining ... Where To Go ... Where Not To Go

## THE BEST RESTAURANTS OF HONGKONG ... AND THE WORST !

Name of Restaurant

Va Bene

Address of Restaurant

Numbers 17-22, Lan Kwai Fong, Central, Hongkong

Date of Visit

Tuesday, August 14, 2007

CategoryTARGET's RatingService

First Impression	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Attentiveness to Customers' Needs	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Flexibility	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Product Expertise of Serving Staff	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Speed of Service	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Cleanliness of Uniform and Serving Staff	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Ambiance

Lighting	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Music	Excellent	Acceptable	Very Poor
General	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Food

Presentation	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Taste	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Quantity	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
<b><u>Wine</u></b>			
Choice	Extensive	Limited	Unbalanced
Cost	Reasonable	Unreasonable	Very Expensive
Storage of Wine	Good	Poor	Unknown
Expertise of Sommelier --	None	Excellent	Acceptable
			Poor

**Total Cost of Meal**

Very Expensive      Moderately Expensive      Very Reasonably Priced

**Name of Executive Chef**

Mr Paolo Federici

**Comments**

The so-called entertainment area, known as Lan Kwai Fong, is located in the Central Business District of Hongkong Island, the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

It has, never, really appealed to **TARGET** () and, for that reason, this reviewer has stayed well clear of the area, for the most part.

It is full of, what **TARGET** would refer to as, the new wave of European 'gypsies', in addition to a plethora of local European drunks, males and females, sitting around on stools, getting plastered and using foul language in earshot of ladies of refinement, who might be passing by, having a little look-see.

One would not expect to find a restaurant in this area, worthy of note.

But there is at least one such restaurant.

It is Va Bene, located at Numbers 17-22, Lan Kwai Fong.

The restaurant is not particularly easy to find since it is, really, at the outer limits of this 'entertainment' area and the atmosphere of the surroundings is horrible, with European gypsies and drunks, males and females, lounging around, outside grotty pubs.

By sheer accident, **TARGET** discovered Va Bene on Tuesday, August 14, at 6:20 pm, exactly.

When this reviewer entered this 110-seater eatery, nobody was in attendance but, in the rear of the restaurant, there was a number of waiters and waitresses, chatting and having a great time in their vacuous and, sometimes, supine state.

About 5 minutes, after entering the well-lighted restaurant, a Chinese gentleman came over and **TARGET**'s reviewer asked: 'Am I too early? Are you open for business?'

'Yes, yes!' came the immediate reply. 'How many (people)?'

This reviewer was, then, escorted to a small table, up 5 steps, to a little area which separated an upper portion of the restaurant from a lower level.

Having been seated, it was noted that the table wobbled, awkwardly, with a bong-bong, bong-bong noise.

No complaint about the table was made by **TARGET** and, about 10 minutes later, an entourage of waiters and waitresses, which has been resting in another part of the restaurant, started to dribble out of their inner sanctum.

A menu was, then, presented and **TARGET** chose, what was labelled: 'Tonight's Special Menu.'

Lingua di vitello con insalatina e pesto di prezzomolo, acciughe e capperi  
*Poached veal tongue served with mixed salad dressed with parsley,  
anchovies and capers pesto*  
\$ 128

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Risotto ai funghi porcini e mirtilli  
Risotto with porcini mushroom and blueberries  
\$ 198

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Trancio di pesce spada in crosta di semi di papavero,  
crema di zucchine e porri fritti  
*Baked sword fish in poppy seed crust served  
with zucchini cream and crispy leek*  
\$ 248

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Petto d'anatra con salsa all'arancia, sfoglia di patate al timo e broccoli saltati  
*Pan fried duck breast with orange sauce served with sautéed broccoli and  
layers of potatoes and thyme*  
\$ 258

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Chocolate flan with vanilla sauce  
\$ 88

Having ordered a 3-course meal, which comprised all of the above with the lone exception of the baked sword fish course, a bread basket was placed on the table.

The bread was stale.

No points here.

The table continued to wobble, but this reviewer made no mention of this matter to anybody, wondering how long it would take before somebody noted the problem.

Bong-bong, Bong-bong went the table.

When the first course was placed on the table, about 30 minutes later, the young lady, serving **TARGET**'s table, made a faint susurrantion and, minutes later, a young man came over with a piece of cardboard to place under the table in order to prevent the wobbling – it was making a bit of a racket, by this time: Bong-bong! Bong-bong! Bong-bong!

The first course, the poached veal tongue, was, really, very good, but, since **TARGET**'s job was to taste the food and not to feast on the food, only a few pieces of the 9 slices of tongue were devoured.

The presentation of the tongue was exceptional, with somebody in the kitchen, obviously having an artistic temperament, because the 9 tongue slices had been placed on a white dish, resembling the petals of a grey flower.

After assuring the waitress that there was, definitely, nothing wrong with the tongue (because it looked as though it had been hardly touched), she left, probably not completely believing this reviewer.

Then, looking around the restaurant from the vantage point of **TARGET** in order to see whether or not anybody else had sauntered in, it was, then, that to this reviewer's astonishment, it was noted that a waiter was wiping his nose on his white, shirt sleeve.

Nobody appeared to be in charge of the staff and the sight made **TARGET** think that it was time to leave, post-haste.

But **TARGET** determined that one should not judge a sausage by its skin ... and so this reviewer stayed – and was glad of that decision, as it turned out.

Then, suddenly, there appeared a rather plump waiter from inside the kitchen area; he placed a dish of baked sword fish on the table.

*'What is this?'* **TARGET** asked.

Upon learning that it was the sword-fish course, this reviewer explained that it had never been ordered.

The plump waiter looked dumbfounded and mumbled something and, to **TARGET**'s table came another waiter who, on studying the written order, admitted that there had been a mistake (scowling at the female waitress) and tried to snatch at the platter of fish.

But it looked too good to be true.

*'Look'*, this reviewer announced to this waiter, *'this looks delicious! Let's not disappoint anybody. I'll have it.'*

And, with that, I tucked in before anybody could say Jack Robinson.

The course was, truly, wonderful.

As this reviewer had stated, earlier, somebody in the kitchen had an artistic flare because the sword fish fillets had been encrusted with poppy seeds and, then, sautéed in olive oil and covered in a delicious zucchini cream sauce.

Sword fish fillets can be tough: These were not.

**TARGET** downed half of the course.

At this point, an ethnic Indian in a dark suit came over to apologise for the ordering error.

*'Why?'* **TARGET** asked, *'The fish course was as good as it gets – anywhere!'*

Somewhat surprised by **TARGET**'s utterances, the ethnic Indian, who had, only recently, entered the restaurant, retired with the statement that the risotto dish would only be a half portion because, otherwise, it would be too large a meal.

When the risotto with porcini mushrooms arrived, about 20 minutes later, it was another happy surprise.

It was superb!

This reviewer finished the entire half portion – which was a little naughty, actually, since **TARGET**'s dietitian would have a fit if the truth were known about the eating habits of one of her patients.

Since duck was the main course, **TARGET** ordered a glass of Amarone, Vintage 2003, at the price of \$HK245, to accompany the dish.

It was a mistake because it was terribly acidic.

The pan-fried duck breast was not the best of the 4-course meal, but it was, nevertheless, quite good.

As with all of the other dishes, there had been a great deal of attention, paid to the presentation of the dishes.

Full marks here.

As for the desert, **TARGET** should never have ordered it because it was just too good to believe.

This reviewer finished it, all.

(Add another 500 calories to the daily diet, which is only supposed to comprise only 1,500 calories – Gads!)

The entire meal, with a tip, came to \$HK1,000, which is high by Hongkong's standards, especially for a stand-alone restaurant.

The restaurant is very clean, but, unfortunately, one cannot say the same for all of the serving-staff members.

The ethnic Indian, **TARGET** surmised, is the man in charge of the restaurant, but he does not understand his duties: That is, only, too obvious because none of the serving staff was under anybody's control and, aside from standing around, chatting and cracking jokes among themselves, they were not doing that for which they are paid to do.

At the end of the meal, **TARGET**'s waitress explained that the restaurant had, only recently, employed an Italian chef: Mr Paolo Federici.

I had noted this young Italian gentleman, greeting a number of ladies at one table, and taking the opportunity to kiss one of the Chinese ladies on the cheek.

Which is the wont of a true young Italian, of course.

(It is said that in every Italian, there is bit of Caruso)

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