

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

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

**A 30-HOUR VISIT TO TAIPA, MACAU:
SAMPLING PORTUGUESE FOOD**

The Macau Special Administrative Region (MSAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), located about one-hour's ferry ride from the Central Business District of the Hongkong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the PRC, has never been very much – and, over the past 50 years or so, things have not changed very much, too, except that nearly all of the Portuguese residents have deserted the former colony of Portugal, leaving it to the wiles of Chinese gamblers, in the main.

The newest addition to this former Portuguese colony, which was returned to the bosom of the PRC on December 20, 1999, is known as the Cotai Strip, located on Taipa.

Actually, this part of the MSAR is not new, at all, but the expansion of it is new.

However, it is little more than a huge construction site, these days, a great part of which is being abandoned, for the time being, at least, because a number of people and publicly listed companies are suffering from cash shortages, preventing them from finishing their massive building projects.

The resident, human population of the MSAR is a little more than 500,000, but, of late, many people have left the territory for lack of work (although the MSAR Government is unlikely to admit this).

The Cotai Strip is dominated by the Venetian Hotel Complex, comprising 3 separate, huge hotels: The Four Seasons Hotel; The Plaza Hotel; and, The Venetian Hotel.

These 3 hotels all have one thing in common: They exude the spirit of gambling as well as failed gamblers.

TARGET () visited The Cotai Strip on Saturday, March 7, 2009, having booked a room at The Four Seasons Hotel at a cost of \$HK1,780 per night.

The reason for the visit was not to gamble, but to sample Portuguese food because, one is often told in the HKSAR, the food in this former Portuguese colony is unique and excellent.

Well, that is one balloon which has been popped, at least at the Cotai Strip .

First, The Four Seasons Hotel

The accommodation at this Canadian-managed hotel is, really, magnificent.

Then, again, the hotel is only about 6 months old.

The standard room turned out to be a junior suite, luxuriously appointed with many excellent features.

But there was something about the hotel that was worrying: One could not relax in it.

Failed gamblers had taken up residence on a number of the armchairs, lining the foyer of the hotel, and one could spot them, easily, by the fact that (a) they smelled of not having taken a bath for at least 36 hours and (b) they were only half awake as they lounged in their chairs.

Evidently, the staff of the hotel has instructions not to bother them.

In an interview with Ms Woo Hou Yu, Front Office Assistant Manager, **TARGET** learned that the cost of the standard room had been reduced from about \$HK3,100 because the occupancy level of the hotel ranged, these days, between about 20 percent and 30 percent.

Also, the lone European-styled, restaurant of the hotel, The Belcanção, although it advertises to serve first-class, Portuguese food, it does not serve many Portuguese dishes, at all, but, instead, specialises in a buffet, with most of the dishes, being 'international' – whatever that is meant to mean.

Ms Woo Hou Yu said that, of the 3 hotels in the complex, all of the properties is owned by The Venetian Group, The Four Seasons was the best hotel, but it is only the management company, not the owner of the property.

TARGET praised the front office staff for their assistance in locating certain restaurants within the vicinity of the hotel and, then, asked whether or not the management of the hotel had problems with prostitutes.

The answer was that Ms Woo Hou Yu had never heard of any problems, but the front office staff 'handled' such matters (that of arranging the ladies of the night to entertain visitors at the hotel).

When looking a little perplexed at this answer, this young lady, who hails from Singapore, the place of her birth, responded by stating that, if a guest wanted a special service, it was the duty of the hotel to try to accommodate those requests and that the front-office staff knew best how to please guests.

Nearly all of the guests that **TARGET** surveyed, staying at the hotel, during the 30-hour visit, were adults and, mostly, gamblers.

The service is very good and the hotel is spotless, for the most part.

The Food

Eating at The Four Seasons is, pretty much, a waste of time although this medium did eat a breakfast on Sunday, March 8, 2009, at The Belcanção.

As with other parts of the hotel, the service was excellent; the European food was, at best, mediocre, however.

Within walking distance of the hotel is Café Litoral, a restaurant, claiming to specialise in serving 'Old Macau Cuisine'.

This restaurant seats about 50 guests and the food is tasty if one does not mind, rubbing shoulders with chain-smokers who fill the air with acrid, foul-smelling smog.

On the evening of **TARGET**'s visit to Café Litoral, Saturday, February 7, 2009, at about 6:30 p.m., this was that which was ordered:

Esporao Reserva, Vintage 2005
\$HK300

Cod Fish Cakes (6 pieces)
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\$HK42

Litoral Salad

\$HK80

Portuguese Vegetable Cream Soup

\$HK28

African Chicken

\$HK88

Ox-Tail Stewed with Red Wine

\$HK68

Coconut Milk Custard

\$HK20

Coffee Pudding

\$HK20

All of the above-mentioned dishes were reasonably good and, considering the prices, it was a bargain.

It was not fine-dining, however, the restaurant, having no soft furnishings and the general décor is as bare as bare can be.

One is served by Filipinas, only, all of whom seemed to have been around the block more than a few times.

The outstanding dishes were the Litoral Salad – fresh garden vegetables on top of which was a sliced, hard-boiled egg, slices of pork tongue and blanched shrimps – Cod Fish Cakes – boiled, cod-fish meat, wrapped in mashed potatoes and deep fried – and Ox Tail, stewed in red wine.

The wine – Esporao Reserva – was delicious, but with an alcoholic content at 14.50 percent by volume, one had to be careful not to overindulge.

For the most part, the food at this café can only be described as ‘*comfort food*’ with no frills, whistles and bells, at all.

To be honest to the Portuguese, this race of people can be traced back more than 2 millennia when they were just farmers in an area, located between what it now Spain and Portugal, then known as Iberia.

The Romans of the First Century A.D., spotted these farmers, carrying little jugs of foul-tasting wine, around their necks, as they worked in the fields.

The Romans, a civilised race, compared with these farmers, taught these illiterates how to make good wine and beer.

Since then, the Portuguese have graduated to making very acceptable wines.

A Visit To António

The following day, **TARGET** visited António, a 24-seater restaurant which makes the claim: ‘*Authentic Portuguese Cuisine*’.

At this restaurant, this medium ordered the following dishes:

Muralhas (Alvarinho+Trajadura)

\$HK170

Seafood Cream Soup

\$HK55

Roasted Home Made Portuguese Sausage – Flambé

\$HK110 (On the Menu, the Price is \$HK98)

Bacalhau com Natas

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\$HK160

Spinach Puree

\$HK40

Egg Pudding

\$HK60

“Sawdust Pudding” Biscuit with Cream

\$HK50

Regular Coffee

\$HK50

The most-memorable part of this meal was that the Spinach Puree was loaded with sand (perhaps, Portuguese, like chickens, like a little gravel in their food?).

The Roasted Home Made Portuguese Sausage – Flambé was all show with no substance.

It, also, was tasteless.

The white wine, selected by Mr António Neves Coelho, himself, was maiden’s water.

This medium would never recommend Muralhas (Alvarinho+Trajadura) to anybody.

There was one surly Portuguese gentleman, serving the tables, and he had the appearance of a barroom bouncer.

The rest of the staff comprised a Filipina and a Filipino, both of whom appeared to have the personalities of oysters and the knowledge of a moron.

The Experience

TARGET is unlikely to return to Macau for some time – because there is no reason for a return visit: The food is next to nothing and no attempt is being made to improve the cuisine, if one may call it that.

It seems that the managements of the 3 hotels at Cotai Strip do not care to spend any more money than is absolutely necessary on the establishment of decent food outlets, probably because they are well aware that this is a gambling complex where the emphasis is on putting their hands into the pockets of gamblers, in accordance with the MSAR laws.

The only food outlets in the complex are coffee shops and fast-food restaurants in large halls, the last-named, being where one may stuff one’s stomach with such foodstuffs that one finds at the lowest-level of restaurant of the HKSAR.

The service at this type of food outlet is fast and furious and permits a gambler the opportunity to rush, quickly back to the gambling hall ... in order to lose more money.

The shops in the complex, many of which are still to be occupied, are not doing much business and one has to wonder just how much longer they will remain there.

One may bargain with the shop staff in respect of prices just as though one were in the depths of Wanchai or Mongkok: It is expected, in fact.

The prices of brand-named goods are on a par with the HKSAR, for the most part.

The ferry ride to and from the MSAR was comfortable enough, but the people, sharing the first-class accommodation, were not particularly cultured or friendly, and their manners left a lot to be desired.

Of course, they were gamblers and ... What could one expect from gamblers?

The hotel accommodation is excellent, at least at The Four Seasons, but the ambiance is not conducive to relaxation, as already stated.

However, again, the hotel and the surroundings are designed for gamblers who are greedy buggers, for the most part ... What could one expect from gamblers?

As for the prostitutes, who abound in the area of the Cotai Strip on Taipa, well, gamblers, prostitution and booze all seem to go together, don’t they?

Anyway, for habitual gambler, a little legs-up is as good as a rest, one could state.

The best part of the 30-hour trip to Macau was getting back to Hongkong and taking a hot shower.

TARGET fully expects to be banned from re-entering the MSAR in the future because the Government of this PRC enclave does not relish criticism of its territory even though this medium has no political affiliations with any political party – anywhere.

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