

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

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

Name of Restaurant

Olé Spanish Restaurant and Wine Bar

Address of Restaurant

Shun Ho Tower, Nos. 24-30, Ice House Street, Central, Hongkong

Date of Visit

Thursday, July 28, 2011

CategoryTARGETs 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	Poor
General	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Food

Presentation	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Taste	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor
Quantity	Excellent	Acceptable	Poor

Wine

Choice	Extensive	Limited	Unbalanced
Cost	Reasonable	Unreasonable	Expensive
Storage of Wine	Good	Poor	Unknown
Expertise of Sommelier	Excellent	Acceptable	None

Total Cost of Meal

Very Expensive	Moderately Expensive	Very Reasonably Priced
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Name of General Manager

Mr Azhar Hayat

Name of Executive Chef

Mr Jesus Pascual

Comments

The name of the restaurant is Olé Spanish Restaurant and Wine Bar, but the only things that **TARGET** () found that was even remotely Spanish was the Executive Chef, Mr Jesus Pascual, who has held his present position for just one year, and a bottle of Spanish wine.

This medium visited Olé, last Thursday night at about 7:45 p.m., having reserved a table for 3 people under an assumed name.

Mr 'Billy' Ashar Hayat, the General Manager of this stand-alone eatery, introduced himself, almost immediately, to **TARGET**'s reviewers and suggested a quiet table – without having the slightest idea that this restaurant was about to go under this medium's microscope.

Mr Billy Ashar Hayat hails, originally, from Pakistan and has been holding down his present position for the past decade, he told **TARGET** in passing.

On seeing a young European man, aged about 25 years, walking round the restaurant, all dressed in white, **TARGET** assumed that this must be the chef and, on being introduced to him, this medium invited him to recommend a 5-course meal, including dessert, because 'we don't know anything about good Spanish food'.

At the end of the evening, we, still, did not know very much about good Spanish food.

This was the chef's choice for the evening:

Starters

Spanish Cheese Platter
Garlic Mushrooms
Stuffed Peppers with Codfish

Main Courses

Traditional Chicken Paella
Grilled Baby Lamb Chops

Dessert

Apply Millefeuille

With the above, **TARGET** ordered a bottle of Enate Crianza, Vintage 2005, at the price of \$HK520.

This wine hails from Somontano, Spain. The name, Somontano, means, literally, 'beneath the mountain'.

It was a reasonably good, table wine and little else. It is difficult to beat the French when it comes to good wines.

The Food

The first course, The Spanish Cheese Platter, was something of a disaster because not one of the 6 assorted cheeses, placed on the platter, had any discernable taste, texture, or saving grace, causing one to remember any one of them.

One started with a very mild-flavoured cheese and proceeded from that level of mildness to another, lower level of mildness until, eventually, one just gave up.

One would have thought that, with Iberia – as Spain and Portugal were originally called, collectively – having a history, dating back more than 2,200 years, the Spanish would have mastered the art of cheese-making.

Obviously, this is not the case if the 6 cheese varieties, presented to **TARGET**, last Thursday, are to be considered good examples of Spanish cheeses.

At the conclusion of the meal, this reviewer made mention to Chef Jesus Pascual of the insipidity of the cheeses.

He agreed, saying in effect, that in Hongkong, it is difficult to obtain good Spanish cheeses.

Then, for what reason did he serve the cheeses to this medium?

The second course, the Garlic Mushrooms, turned out to be an unfulfilled promise.

The button mushrooms were, clearly, sautéed, either by a Chinese or a Filipina/Filipino cook who determined not to prostitute his/her art by bowing to the requirements of Spanish cuisine ... if he or she had had any training in the art preparing Spanish food, that is.

As with the cheese course, the mushrooms had no discernable flavour even though they had been cooked with a little garlic and a generous amount of vegetable oil (Why was not butter used in the cooking process?).

Strangely, the cook forgot to season the fungus.

When the Stuffed Peppers with Codfish arrived, one had to search for the codfish within the depths of the tiny small red pepper.

But to no avail: The codfish had either been forgotten by the person, preparing the dish, or, alternatively, the fish was too fast a swimmer for the cook, trying to prepare the dish, and it was able to avoid, being decapitated before the knife came down on its head.

This is, of course, assuming that a codfish ever graced a wok in the kitchen of this restaurant.

As for the Main Courses, well, the Chicken Paella was what this reviewer would describe as having been a poor Hongkong version of this dish, with the inclusion of a great deal of laziness on the part of the kitchen staff.

The 3 pieces of chicken, discovered on this reviewer's plate, mixed in with the rice and vegetables, were of the frozen variety and came complete with chicken bones, making it almost impossible to sample the chicken – which was tasteless, anyway.

(Perhaps, that was the reason that the kitchen staff included the chicken bones in this rice dish?)

Lastly, this had to have been the oiliest paella in the history of Spain.

The second Main Dish was the Grilled Baby Lamb Chops.

These were good.

The lamb, **TARGET** was told, came from Mongolia.

At first, this reviewer pondered whether or not the lamb had been reared in either Colorado, the US, or Wales, The United Kingdom, because of the tenderness of the meat and due to its flavour.

According to Mr Billy Azhar Hayat, who has been in his present position since 1999, he said, originally, Olé purchased its lamb chops from Spain, but when that source ran dry, other areas of the world were panned, then tested for their lamb chops and, eventually, by sheer chance, the restaurant's management discovered Mongolia on the map.

Well, it's a story, isn't it?

What was interesting, also, about this dish was that the lamb chops had been cooked, just about to perfection – and the person who did the cooking could not have been the Spanish chef because he was sitting at the reception desk, most of the evening.

So, **TARGET** wondered: Were the lamb chops cooked by a member of the Filipina/Filipino contingent, mulling round in the kitchen, or by one of the Chinese people, staying in the background, out of sight?

As for the dessert, this medium would prefer not to comment on this course: It looked and, indeed, was, unappetising.

The Restaurant

Olé seats about 60 patrons in quite cozy surroundings.

A couple of Filipino guitarists make the rounds of the restaurant, playing Mexican and popular Western tunes and, actually, they are not at all bad.

The service, generally, was on the border of acceptability although, clearly, there was a clear absence of training with regard to this team of service people.

One had to ask, repeatedly, for a clean knife, fork or plate or a clean serviette – because the Nepalese waitress, assigned to **TARGET**'s table, did not seem to realise that clean utensils are common when one visits a restaurant.

In Nepal, table manners must be slightly different from those of other parts of Asia or the Western World because, after all, fingers were invented long before knives, forks and spoons, weren't they?

Other than this criticism, the serving staff are very friendly and do make an effort to please patrons.

This restaurant has been in existence for the past 14 years, **TARGET** has been told, so that it must be doing something correctly to have survived for such a period of time, all things considered sans food.

During the 3 hours of **TARGET**'s visit, numerous young ladies, nearly all, being dressed in skimpiest of outfits, came in and out of the Olé almost as though they were on parade.

It was an interesting parade of flesh, to be sure.

As with blow flies, their proboscis, having smelt the perfume of rotting flesh, so the young men of Olé struck up conversations with these ladies of the night – including Mr Billy Azhar Hayat who described the ladies as '*models*'.

Well, that's another story, isn't it?

The total cost of the visit to this restaurant, located on the fringe of Hongkong Central, was \$HK1,700.

This is not the most-expensive restaurant in the territory and it, certainly, will never be able to compete with even the dumpiest of coffee shops, located in any 3-star hotel in Hongkong, Kowloon or The New Territories, but in terms of insipidity of the dishes that Olé serves, it might just score top marks.

Mr Azhar Hayat said that, at one time, the restaurant employed an Israeli female as the Executive Chef: That must have made for an interesting combination of Spanish and Jewish cuisines.

This reviewer ponders whether or not kosher food was served at Olé, during the time of this lady's tenure of service ... or was the lady a Shiksa?

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