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Lifestyle
SECTIONS

TRAVEL

HIGH CUISINE



Five-star flight: Cathay Pacific teams up with The Peninsula Hong Kong's acclaimed Spring Moon Chinese Restaurant to present excellent gourmet dishes.

LIFE & STYLE



By MILLET M.
MANANQUIL

I recently took a food trip that had its highs and lows — mostly highs, as high as 35,000 feet.

And how do I rate this food trip? Delicious. It gave me chills and thrills. But wait, I'm flying ahead of my story.

The trip began in Manila when Rhoda Capuno, assistant marketing manager of Cathay Pacific Airways, and Mariano Garchitorena, PR director of Peninsula Manila, asked lifestyle editors: How would you like to sample Cathay Pacific's "Best Chinese Food in the Air" as prepared by The Peninsula Hong Kong?

It's coffee, tea or 30 dishes as Cathay Pacific Airways serves the 'Best Chinese Food in the Air' by The Peninsula Hong Kong chefs

But of course we would. We imagined mouthwatering dim sum we could eat while watching the latest movies in Cathay Pacific's comfy Business Class bed. We looked forward to a quiet night of reading and slumbering on The Peninsula Hong Kong's soft goosedown feather pillows, in a room with a harbor view. But the trip wasn't going to be that simple and quiet, we found out.

On board Cathay Pacific, it wasn't just

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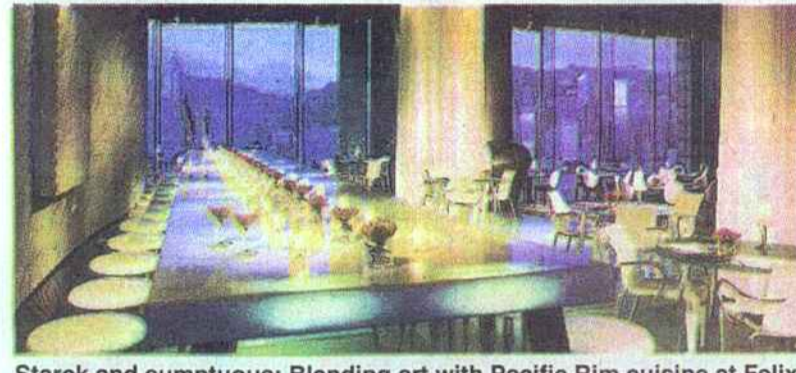
Power place: The Peninsula Hong Kong's Presidential Suite



So very 1928: The Pen's Spring Moon Chinese Restaurant



Old world elegance: Christoffe candelabras from the 1920s light up Gaddi's.



Stark and sumptuous: Blending art with Pacific Rim cuisine at Felix.

coffee, tea and dim sum. More than 30 dishes were created by The Peninsula Hong Kong's famous Spring Moon Chinese restaurant for passengers.

The best of these, Prawns with Snow Fungus and Chrysanthemum, is a culinary masterpiece by Ho Piu Yung, executive chef of Spring Moon. The story goes that chef Ho, while tasting a new seafood dish, refreshed himself with a cup of chrysanthemum tea. The tastes matched perfectly, thus inspiring his new soup.

But of course, chrysanthemum tea is just one of 25 teas served by tea masters at Spring Moon's famous tea counter.

We loved the Steamed Sea Bass with vegetables while our fellow travelers enjoyed Lamb Chops with Leeks in Gravy, and Braised Beef Brisket with Broad Bean Sauce.

Very Peninsula. Cathay Pacific

has brought five-star excellence to a new high.

Upon arrival in Hong Kong after lunch escorted by Peninsula Manila PR manager Joseph Arias, we had just stepped out of the Rolls Royce that brought us to The Peninsula when Lamey Chang, The Pen HK's PR director, welcomed us and said we would meet at the Lobby at 7 p.m. for dinner.

Excellence has always been the mantra of The Pen. But this time, we realized the hotel also has that an excellent flair for surprises.

Instead of a sit-down dinner, The Peninsula HK treated us to a culinary journey.

First stop: The Presidential Suite — the place designed by The Pen for visitors like President Bush and Prince Charles, with princely features, hi-tech security gadgets and all — where we were served salmon with caviar



Flightseeing: The Pen HK offers a 15-minute helicopter tour of HK from The Pen's rooftop helipad (below).



Flying high: Chelo Banal-Formoso, Elisa Osorio, Millet Mananquil (above) and Ethel Timbol (left)



Height of aviation history: China Clipper is a resto, an aviation museum and a library as well.



Excellence is their mantra: The Pen Manila PR manager Joseph Arias. The Pen HK PR director Lamey Chang and hotel manager Jan Svoboda stand behind Cathay Pacific asst. manager for marketing Rhoda Capun...

and lobster sushi. Trivia: The Presidential Suite has a labyrinth of his and hers dressing and sleeping areas, an office, quarters for bodyguards and cameras strategically located to view incoming visitors.

Second stop: Spring Moon Chinese Restaurant — The Pen's Cantonese resto looking very 1928, the year Peninsula HK opened — where we savored codfish with vegetables, tofu with eggplant and cabbage, shrimp with beaten egg, shark's fin soup with bamboo fungus, and scallop with XO sauce. Trivia: XO sauce was created by The Pen in the 1980s, with a secret recipe using Yunnan ham, scallops and Chinese sauces. Around 620 boxes of XO sauce are sold by The Pen monthly, in addition to those consumed in the resto.

Third stop: Gaddi's — The Pen's blue and gold supreme French resto — where we enjoyed roasted sea bass fillet on sautéed capers, olives, octopus and broad beans with fettuccini and lemon butter sauce. Trivia: Gaddi's offers a Chef's Table for four in its kitchen, allowing a front row view of the action in Gaddi's kitchen. Advance booking is required.

Fourth stop: Felix — the creation of renowned French architect-designer-inventor Philippe Stark on the 28th floor, serving Pacific Rim cuisine — where we sampled five of its best desserts. Our favorite was the Chocolate Chilli Sundae with Banana Crisps, Hot Fudge and Marshmallow Sauce. Trivia: Felix is named after Felix Bieger, three-time general manager of The Pen where he worked for 40 years. In the same way that Gaddi's pays tribute to Leo Gaddi, The Pen's first general manager who restored the hotel to its former glory after World War II.

We ended the gourmet odyssey with, excuse us, a burp of satisfaction.

The next day, we were treated to another high: A 15-minute "flightseeing" tour of Hong Kong Island. This is the highlight of The Pen's Power Breakfast offered by the hotel at its China Clipper.

The China Clipper, themed after planes which traversed the Pacific Ocean from 1935 to 1945, is a neat resto cum aviation museum cum library that contains historic aircraft parts, memorabilia, and antique photographs of aviation pioneers, including those from the collection of Enrique Zobel.

From here, we went to the hotel's rooftop helipad to board The Pen's twin-engine Aerospatiale Squirrel helicopter for a breathtaking view of Hong Kong, complete with commentary by the pilot.

Up there, we discovered parts of Hong Kong that we never saw before. It was a thrilling ride, and the pilot told us his "flightseeing" tours are always fully booked. By whom? Filmmakers, advertising people and tourists who want a different kind of high.

After the thrilling helicopter ride came a chilling tour — quite literally.

Our next destination was the Cathay Pacific Services (CPCS), a state-of-the-art humongous in-flight kitchen at Chek Lap Kok.

The size of nine football fields, this inflight kitchen in 50,400 square meters of space houses one of the world's most modern facilities in the inflight catering industry. Lesley Bailey of the CPCS proudly told us about its high-tech features. Better still, he brought us on a tour of the inflight kitchen.

Fully covered from head-to-toe in our white kitchen gear (no way the kitchen can risk taking in even one wayward strand of human hair in its foods), we saw how spanking clean and modern the CPCS

inflight kitchen was.

Up to 80,000 meals a day are produced in this kitchen that supplies in-flight meals for 33 airlines and operates other in-flight kitchens in Hong Kong, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan and Canada.

We saw how raw materials were transported into the commissary (brrr, including 76 walk-in chilly freezer rooms) by an automated bin conveyor system, how foods were systematically sorted, sliced, cooked and packed in hot and cold kitchens, as well as halal, kosher and Japanese kitchens, and how utensils were cleaned in a centralized dishwashing system and wastes taken in by a vacuum waste disposal system.

Aside from the regular dishes, Cathay Pacific prepares over 20 kinds of special meals with a minimum notice of 24 hours. These include five kinds of vegetarian meals, four kinds of religious meals, 10 kinds of medical meals and three kinds of children's meals.

Work is done by 1,500 employees, "all meticulously trained and enforcing the highest standards of hygiene and consistent product and service quality," Bailey assures.

After having seen how spanking neat and clean the inflight kitchen is, how precise every step in the food production is and amid all the technology, how human culinary skills and creativity still spell the big difference in inflight meals, we now look at airline cuisine with more appreciative eyes.

Excuse us while we enjoy our coffee, tea and dim sum. And prepare for a yummy landing.

Cathay Pacific flies daily from Manila to Hong Kong and major world destinations. For more info on flights, reservations and meals, call 848-2753. The "Best Chinese Food in the Air" is ongoing until Oct. 31.

For reservations and inquiries on Peninsula Hong Kong, call (852) 2315-3137, or Peninsula Manila at 810-3456.



CX in the City: Cathay Pacific's vast complex near the Chek Lap Kok houses its Catering Services.



Hi-loader: Equipment from flights is transferred by trucks onto a state-of-the-art system.



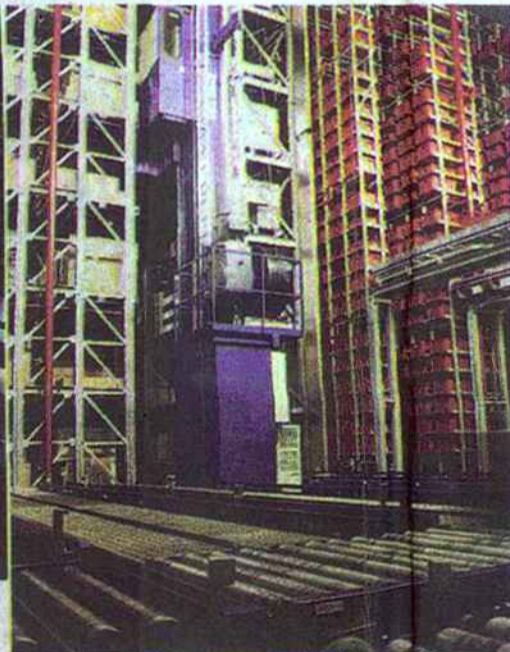
Tray setting: Appetizers are pre-set into meal carts.



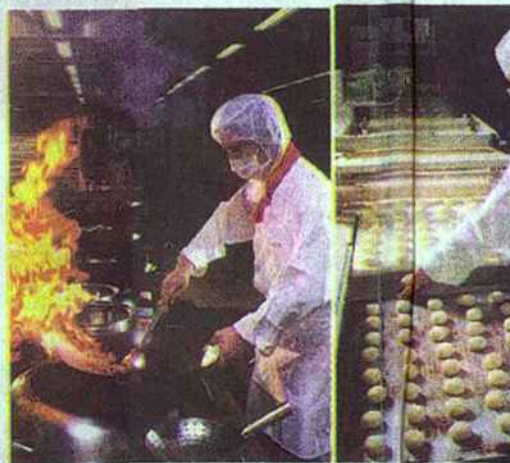
Cutting edge: CPCS cleans and packs 300,000 pieces of cutlery daily.



Fruit room: Over 3,000 kilograms of fresh fruit are used daily.



Automated storage: The technologically advanced CPCS represents a HK\$243 million investment



Hot kitchen: Some 10,000 omelettes are made in the hot wok section daily.



High on flavors: Noodles, fish fillet (top) and sea bass (right)



Daily bread: About 40,000 bread rolls and 12,000 croissants are baked daily.



Master chefs: Chef Ho Pui Yung of Spring Moon and chef Wun Pak Shun of Cathay Pacific



Ready for take-off: Meals are transferred to the aircraft by refrigerated trucks.