

Airline food was never this good



STORY BY JESSIE TEH
 PICTURES COURTESY OF THE PENINSULA & CATHAY PACIFIC AIRWAYS

It was raining when two other journalists and I landed at Hong Kong International Airport. But the rain was no dampener – certainly not when a Rolls-Royce was waiting to ferry us to our hotel.

It was smooth cruising along the North Lantau Expressway towards Kowloon, and some 45 minutes later, we arrived at The Peninsula, one of the world's legendary hotels. The three-day trip, sponsored by Cathay Pacific Airways and The Peninsula, was for us to savour Cathay Pacific's "Best Chinese Food In The Air" and to experience the modern comforts of The Peninsula.

We were shown to our rooms, and, boy, were they spacious! And high-tech, too. The bedside panels controlled not only the TV and lights, but even the curtains. At the touch of a button, the curtains parted, offering a stunning view of Victoria Harbour.

Our culinary journey began that evening on the hotel's 26th floor at The Peninsula Suite, a spectacular in Hong Kong and one of the most luxurious in the world. While sipping cocktails and nibbling on canapés, we took in the spectacular harbour view.

Later, somewhat reluctant to leave such opulence, we were ushered to the Spring Moon Chinese Restaurant on the first floor. Dinner, hosted by director of public relations Lamey Chang, started off with an appetiser combination of Steamed Prawns with Egg-white Sauce, Lamb Chops with Leeks in Gravy, Sautéed Chicken and Cucumber with Chilli Paste, and Sliced Seabass with Preserved Vegetables. We rounded it all off with Bird's Nest Soup with Diced Seafood and Beaten Egg.

These are the restaurant's 30-odd exquisite dishes that are being served on virtually all Cathay Pacific flights in all classes until Oct 31.

Barely able to move after that sumptuous spread, we were hurried along to our next food stop – Gaddi's, which is known for its gourmet French cuisine. There, we simply had to make room for the delightful Roasted Seabass Fillet on Sautéed Capers, Olives, Octopus and Broad Beans with Fettuccine and a Lemon Butter Sauce.

The next stop was Felix, located on the 28th floor. The fashionable restaurant was designed by renowned French architect-designer-inventor Philippe Starck. The focal point of the restaurant is The Long Table, which can be transformed from a cocktail/dining area into a catwalk for fashion shows or exhibitions. There, we enjoyed coffee and tea and relaxed in a fun and lively setting.

The next day, a 15-minute flightseeing tour by helicopter around Hong Kong had to be postponed to the following morning owing to the weather. Flights depart from The Peninsula's rooftop helipad. The view from The Peninsula's Aerospatiale Squirrel of Hong Kong's metropolis, coastline and outlying islands was breathtaking.

After the high-flying experience, we bade farewell to The Peninsula. The ever-faithful Rolls Royce whisked us off to the airport where we were met by representatives from



(Top) Ride in style in one of the hotel's Rolls-

Cathay Pacific Catering Services (CPCS). CPCS is located about 10 minutes' drive away from the airport, and it allowed us to witness how airline food is prepared. So we donned face masks, coats, hair caps and shoe covers and thoroughly washed our hands before CPCS marketing and customer services manager Leslie Bailey took us around.

In the kitchens, which included Japanese, special meals and kosher sections, we were warned by the affable Bailey "not to stick our finger into any food". It was obvious that hygiene was top priority. The kitchen staff were all garbed in masks, hair caps and white coats. The place resembled a laboratory more than a kitchen!

We couldn't help being impressed with the care taken to prepare the meals and refreshment for airline passengers. I, for one, was especially impressed with the way the water-melons were soaked in water for two hours because the skin, as pointed out by Bailey, "is very dirty". Unfortunately, owing to the tight schedule, we didn't get to sample the dishes that had been painstakingly laid out by the chefs.

From the clinically clean CPCS, we rushed back to the airport to lunch at The Haven, located at the The Wing's first class lounge. It is one of two premium lounges at the airport. Lunch, hosted by Cathay Pacific's corporate communication manager (overseas) May Lam-Kobayashi and corporate communication executive Julie Ho, comprised noodles and a buffet spread offering a range of Asian and European cuisines.

We couldn't resist peeking into one of the five cabanas there. The cabana is a lavish spa room where passengers can refresh themselves before their flight and settle down for a soak in an enormous bathtub. Too bad we didn't have time to indulge in a soak.

Soon it was time for goodbyes. On board, I heartily tucked into the fruits and beef brisket noodles, confident that they had been prepared with meticulous and tender loving care.

W

(Top) Sliced seabass with preserved vegetables is one of the dishes served on Cathay Pacific's flights. (Above) The Peninsula Suite.