

Feature

text | Mary Gostelow |



Cathay Catering

Cathay Pacific Catering Service, invariably called simply CPCS, says it is the caring caterer. Until 1996 CPCS was 25% held by HSH, parent of The Peninsula Hotel Group. Now it is 100% Cathay Pacific and is determined, says its mission statement, to be the best caterer in the whole of Asia Pacific, with the highest standard of cuisine and an effective operating system. It can offer service in Hong Kong, and also in Cebu (Cebu Pacific Catering Services Inc), Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam Air Caterers) and Taipei (China Pacific Catering Services Ltd). It also joint-ventures with LSG Sky Chefs, working as CLS Catering Services Ltd, in Toronto and Vancouver.

The 24-hour signature unit at Hong Kong International Airport became fully operational in May 1998, and it now has

50% of market share at the airport. Capacity is 80,000 meals a day, and current output is between 50,000 and 55,000, plus 10,000 school meals. 70% of airline output is for Cathay; other major

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customers are Air China, British Airways, Qantas, Singapore and Thai.

There are 1,500 employees, plus 400 contract staff, and personnel turnover is just over nine per cent. Every year the unit takes in two or three for a graduate

training programme that is massively over-subscribed. There is a 500-seat staff restaurant, employees are honoured via a STAR programme: they work eight-hour shifts, in the same area every day, and weekdays are music free (on Saturdays and Sundays, when there are few public address announcements, taped music is played).

The unit, designed by I+O, cost HK\$1.6 billion. The three-floor structure has total floor space of 50,400 sq metres. There are 16 inbound and 28 outbound delivery doors serviced by 73 highloaders. Top-ups for last-minute load increases can be effected in 38 minutes.

The ground floor includes equipment flow, incoming supplies and outbound to aircraft. Middle floor is administration, linen store and laundry. Top floor is production. Here, a 2,000 sq metre

Determined to be the best caterer in the whole of Asia Pacific



		Opposite page: Central hot kitchen, Cathay chefs		
		Left: Fruit preparation		
		Right: Tray setting		



bakery makes 85 different varieties of breads: dried yeast comes from Japan, flour from Canada. Cathay uses no frozen produce at all in Asia (some clients do request frozen vegetables for Economy meals). Prepared trays of pomelo slices, for instance, are flown in daily from the sister unit in Ho Chi Minh.

The 1,900 sq metre hot kitchen has 12 dedicated islands, one of which has 12 rice cookers, another massive tandoori ovens. There is a circular rotating table with 18 circumferential hot pads. Two workers are helped by overhead nozzles that automatically dispense egg mix and required fillings. In all, over 10,000 omelettes are prepared daily.

Executive chef **Jörg Kubisz**, has a brigade hailing from Australia, China, Germany, India, Japan, Malaysia, South Africa, Thailand and UK. Dedicated chefs and culinary consultants, work alongside customer account managers. There is a halal kitchen (main customer Malaysia Airways) and kosher (El Al flies in three times a week). 12% of all

meals are special order SPMLs, with vegetarian by far the most requested.

There are separate areas for cooking First, Business and Economy meals. Other activities include 7,000 sandwiches a day, made by teams producing filled trays, from start to finish. Yes, production belts are used, but by teams of seated workers assembling Economy trays.

The HK\$233 million high bay warehouse management system makes first-time visitors gasp. It is 73 metres by 15 metres by (height) 22 metres, with four stacker cranes, and it can hold a maximum of 2,588 pallets and 11,968 equipment bins. Apparently, unlike every human filing system, this all-automatic system is perfect.

Gm of the kitchen is **Angus Barclay**, who heads four main divisions, operations, production, commercial and supplies. There is an onsite dietician and a laboratory that takes 800 microbiological audits. In 1996 the unit was the first flight caterer in Asia to get ISO 14001 and it gained HACCP in

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1994. How does this show today? Before entering the controlled area of the unit you don a face mask, then a hair net, then an astronaut hat that comes way down your shoulders. You have a white coat, and jewellery is off. Enter an area by touching your identification label on a wall-set pad, and you ask someone to do a back rub-down with a waiting lint-removing wand. Any surviving hairs are picked up in this way. The wand is then cleverly hung up, on a rotating plate of hooks, so that when the last hook is reached the employees know that it is time to pull off one lint-removing pad to reveal a fresh one underneath. You then thoroughly wash hands.