

# the great Hong Kong eating adventure



## In Singapore

The first ever Hong Kong Culinary Exchange in Southeast Asia organised by the Hong Kong Tourist Association (HKTA) took place in November last year. Inspired by the biennial Hong Kong Culinary Awards held during the Hong Kong Food Festival, this event involved some of the most established hotel restaurants in Southeast Asia. All 22 participants cooked up their own version of 'The Great Hong Kong Eating Adventure' in their respective countries, which included Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and

Philippines. Up for grabs were awards for Best Quality Cuisine and Best Restaurant Service and Ambience.

Hong Kong's culinary expert and food critic, Willie Mark was the chief judge in this gustatory tour of Southeast Asia's finest Chinese restaurants. A distinguished panel of judges in each country, included food journalists, well-known gourmets and other personalities. *Wine & Dine's* publisher, Ho Sum Kwong was one of the judges and this well-fed judge had this to say: "It was a privilege and indeed an adventure to be on the judging panel. I

was most impressed and captivated by the participating chefs' creative and culinary skills. The continuous feasting for two days over such sumptuous spreads made me feel like an Emperor."

Representing Singapore's cream of the crop were Mandarin Singapore, Marina Mandarin Singapore, Singapore Marriott Hotel, The Pan Pacific Singapore, The Oriental Singapore, Shangri-La Hotel and Orchard Hotel. The participating hotels had to create a Hong Kong Food Festival ambience through creative use of decor and innovative menu designs.

After two days of intense gourmet feasting, the results were announced at The Regent Singapore. **KT**

Here are some of the awards:

**Best Quality Cuisine**  
Hai Tien Lo, The Pan Pacific Singapore  
Chef Chan Chen Hei

**Best Restaurant Service and Ambience**  
Pine Court, Mandarin Singapore  
Chef Edmund Lui Chi Luen

**Merit of Culinary Expertise**  
Shang Palace, Shangri-La Hotel  
Chef Peter Tsang

a commendable meal the highlights of which included tender stewed duck with *cordyceps*; and stuffed bean curd puffs with truffle, pine nuts and sweet corn. Not only was the meal well-received but also the decor, the live classical music and the attentive service, resulting in Museum walking away with the Best Service And Ambience Award.

Following the Museum tasting, we leapt into a waiting bus to be

transported across town to Shang Palace at Shangri-La Hotel Kuala Lumpur. The meal was memorable for one outstanding dish of braised shark's fin stuffed with bamboo fungus and crab roe. Willie was notably impressed with the traditional, simplistic element of the dish which he saw as representing the current fashion in Hong Kong kitchens of going back to basics. "People are so fed up with this new wave nonsense," expounded Willie. "Back to the good old recipes. Back to Mamma's cooking." Chef Tse Kwok On of Shang Palace was awarded with a special Merit Award for his traditional culinary skills.

The following morning the judges congregated at Concorde Hotel Kuala Lumpur's Xin Cuisine restaurant. Chef Chin Choong Voon correctly anticipated the judges' desires to see honest, simple flavours and he excelled with a bowl of stewed *bee hoon* with separate shredded meat and preserved Chinese cabbage. Oil was kept to a minimum and we happily stirred the *bee hoon*, meat and Chinese cabbage together while still enjoying the individual flavours.

The deciding factor for most of the judges may have been the two-fish courses. First was head of red garoupa steamed with a delicate black bean sauce. The sauce was out of this world, it had itself been steamed with garlic, stock and sugar to reach such light consistency. This was followed by an even lighter fried garoupa with French beans and Chinese celery. As judges, we pointed out that the stronger-tasting

black bean sauce dish should have been served second but Chef Chin put us in our place with a retort that the head always comes first in Chinese philosophy. Chin Choong Voon captured the stomachs of the judge and was announced the Grand Winner of the Best Quality Cuisine Award at the Great Hong Kong Eating Adventure gala dinner held later in the day. Local boy Chin won a trip to the 1997 Hong Kong Food Festival to meet with Hong Kong's master chefs for further culinary exchange.

Last but not least in the schedule of tastings was Dynasty Chinese restaurant at New World Hotel Kuala Lumpur. Chef Tay Kok Beng, currently talk of the town for his avant-garde approach to Cantonese cuisine, put on a fine show with dishes such as roast chicken suspended in a skin bag, a sort of wig-wam construction; rustic

looking fresh whole abalone with chantrelle mushrooms; and shiitake mushroom rolled in wok-fried beef. The food displays stole the show with simple, rustic designs that complemented the food. New World walked away with two awards: one for presentation, the other for team effort.

The Great Hong Kong eating adventure was a treat for those KLites who made it to the participating restaurants during the respective promotions. It is only hoped that more hotels will take part for the second adventure, with more involvement from the public. **PT**



## In Kuala Lumpur

For 11 consecutive days, judges from Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines sat down to a succession of eight-course meals with the aim of discovering the true taste of Hong Kong Chinese cuisine. Presiding over each panel of judges was renowned Hong Kong gourmet, Willie Mark. The very

dapper Mr Mark, or Willie as he is affably known, proved to be an inexhaustible fount of information on Chinese Cuisine.

By the time I met up with Willie in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, he was still raring to go even after a week of tastings in Indonesia and Singapore. The first chef on the chopping board was Lee Yih Shyan of Museum, The Legend Hotel and Apartments. Chef Lee is no stranger to awards and prepared