

Awards of Excellence 2016: Overseas Development Program (ODP)

Participants – Chef Kong Kok Kiang (Halton Executive Chef of the Year)

Cross Exposure Experience

My orientation started on 2nd October 2015. During orientation, I given a brief introduction about the hotel. The Peninsula's group executive chef is Chef Florian Trento, who hails from Switzerland and oversees 8 restaurants and a team with 135 chefs.

Working under different chefs in various kitchens within the hotel compound, I was able to experience a variety of cooking styles and dining set-ups, including their production kitchen, lobby kitchen, the Chocolate Room and Chesa Kitchen. My first day was spent in the Production Kitchen where I worked under Chef Terence Chiu. I was given the opportunity to rotate between the hot and cold kitchen, learning their banquet style and cooking methods. I was impressed that the chefs still hold true to creating their sauces, dressings and stocks from scratch. The team truly showed their commitment and dedication to their tasks and individual roles.

There was an interesting set-up in the banquet dining area, where they placed table settings for 8 mahjong tables. I was fortunate to see and get involved with their unique banquet style – something I've not seen before. Food tasting is done in front of diners (much like serving at a Chef's Table) with cooking and plating all done before them so they can interact directly with the chefs and give them feedback and comments personally. I was fortunate that day as mega celebrity Andy Lau was holding a private banquet event, which required all staff to adhere to particular rules and protocols when entering or leaving the event room.

On another day, I was attached to the Lobby Kitchen, which serves all-day dining and high tea. Their high tea session is very popular and well-received by, catering to an average of 300 guests per day. The favourite items in the English-style 3-tier high tea are the cucumber sandwiches (which require marinating the cucumbers overnight) and the scones served with clotted cream and homemade jam. The standout factor of being attached to the Lobby Kitchen for me is working with Chef Andy Cheng (Chef De Cuisine) as he demands the freshest ingredients of the best quality. On their a la carte menu, one of their signature dishes is the Croque Monsieur, which Chef Andy shared with me the secret behind its popularity – plenty of butter. The Lobby Kitchen also provides room service for all guest rooms, serving Singapore Laksa and Hainanese Chicken Rice. I was given a chance to cook both dishes, as well as taste and compare the Hong Kong version of chicken rice with our Singapore version. Safe to say, it made me proud to say our local version is still the best in the world.

I was also posted to work in the Chocolate Room with award-winning Maître Chocolatier Chef Marijn Coertjens. In Peninsula Hong Kong, all their chocolate is made in-house and for Pink Ribbon Week, they made pink-coloured chocolate to form delicate pralines and chocolate bars to raise funds for charity to do for Breast Cancer Awareness month. While working with Chef Marijn, I even got to witness a chocolate cooking demo class.

Unfortunately, I didn't get to work with Chef Rémi Van Peteghem who was the former Chef De Cuisine of Gaddi's, a European-French restaurant. He has since been transferred to another Peninsula property as Executive Sous Chef. Taking over the reign is Chef Teddy Tsui, a Hong Kong local. Gaddi's emphasises on their produce, with their personal mantra of the "Best and Freshest". 2

of their signature dishes which I personally like are the Creamy Lobster Soup with Sliced Poached Lobster and Candied Chestnut Soufflé with Cassis Coulis Vanilla Ice Cream, which I intend to attempt replicate back in my own kitchen at One Farrer Hotel & Spa. Gabbi's has a special chef's table for guests to dine in the kitchen, where they watch the chefs cooking 'live' and sits only up to 4 guests at a time.

I also experienced Chesa Kitchen, a Swiss restaurant, headed by Chef Wing- Keung Lo. Chef Florian Trento personally designed and curated all the dishes in the menu, ensuring that only authentic Swiss cuisine is served. Their signature dish is Fondue Moitie-Moitie – a dish that I strongly recommend every diner to try. The restaurant is fashioned after a cottage typically found in the Swiss Alps.

The Pastry and Bakery Kitchen is led by Executive Pastry Chef Ludovic Douteau, who has only been with Peninsula Hong Kong for 3 months. Like many other hotels, their pastries are made in-house, and they offer a program called the "Little Pastry Chefs Adventure" which caters to 4 to 10 year olds, teaching them how to create fresh pastry and bake them.

This attachment program has been fruitful and eye-opening. It brought back memories of my internship years and has reminded me of my duty as a chef to always pride myself in cooking well and using good quality ingredients. My first thought when being posted to Peninsula Hong Kong was 'Will I benefit from my experience at Peninsula Hong Kong? Will there be any language barrier?' But after the whole experience, I told myself I shouldn't have had all these concerns to begin with. The best experience for me was being able to serve 300 guests diners during their high tea session. My take-away from it all is the positive attitude and ethics held by the chefs when in the kitchen, which translates into exquisite dishes being served to diners. I can also learn from them how Peninsula Hong Kong manages to retain their staff as they have one of the lowest turnover rates in any hotel in Hong Kong. Lastly, going through this program has benefitted in providing a refresher of sorts, as it reminds me of my time at Raffles Hotel back in 1993 as a trainee under Chef Peter Knipp where he expected the highest standard for a chef, with the ability to deliver on quality, knowledge of produce and culinary skills.

In closing, I would like to express a heartfelt thank you to the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), Peter Knipp Holdings Pte Ltd, Dr Richard Helfer (Chairman of One Farrer Hotel & Spa) and Mr Gilbert Madhavan (General Manager of One Farrer Hotel & Spa), for without them, this opportunity would not have surfaced and for all the support they've provided.