

Hong Kong: Chinese Fusion Up in the Air

Holiday Inn Sokolniki's new restaurant takes a cosmopolitan approach to Asian cuisine

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May 16, 2017



Hong Kong

Since the 19th century, Hong Kong restaurateurs have furnished luxurious dishes for wealthy Cantonese merchants while catering to British imperialists' longing for a taste of home. Hong Kong at the Holiday Inn Sokolniki continues the culinary syncretism of its namesake, drawing on modern Western trends for dishes Europeans would expect on a Chinese menu.

For example, Hong Kong has transformed the classic Chinese spring rolls — greasy vegetables encased in a hard-fried casing — into the light salad of a 21st-century business professional. Here it is more of a spring greens salad, rolled in transparent rice paper, sliced like sushi, and drizzled with chipotle mayonnaise (480 rubles/\$8.20).

Hong Kong has similarly adapted dim sum, the island-city's signature dish, for European taste buds — there are Xiao Long Bao steamed dumplings with chicken and truffles (320 rubles). There are even crispy Chinese wontons, but with Eastern European blood sausage (320 rubles). The bite-sized dumplings fill the mouth with a pleasant chewiness.

The interior design and music selection hark back to the 1970s. The carrot- and lime-colored chairs are boxy, but new and comfortable. Lounge music wafts throughout the three rooms, drifting occasionally into light funk and disco.

Although the website promises a great view, the panoramic windows from the 24th floor of the Holiday Inn fail to compete with the towers of Moscow City, though the restaurant is nonetheless a pleasant spot for lunch.

It may not be the trendiest spot in town, but Hong Kong doesn't need to attract the *crème de la crème* with windows or pretend authenticity. Business travelers staying at the Holiday Inn form the majority of the restaurant's clientele, and presumably, many hail from Asia. Nevertheless, the bartender adds a touch of class to the proceeding by preparing the pear and ginger tea like a specialty cocktail, measuring, chopping and simmering the concoction until the waitress poured it milky-smooth for the table (320 rubles).

Hong Kong natives often celebrate life's big moments with a fancy restaurant meal crowned by an expensive dish. A nearby table of Asian customers continued the tradition here, ordering a luxurious dish "recommended for four people" — Peking Duck with Russian pancakes (1,500 rubles). The chef personally sliced the roasted duck with a show, layering the fatty fowl into Russian pancakes (blini). A smaller portion of steamed duck can be had for 590 rubles, cloaked in Hoisin sauce and ornamented with mandarin oranges.

As in any classy Asian joint, Hong Kong's smock-clad servers replaced the serving utensils and small plates for each course. Unfortunately, the oversized plastic chopsticks make the actual eating quite a challenge.

There are eight dishes on the dessert menu at Hong Kong, and it was definitely a case of saving the best for last. The chef spun a delicious tapioca pudding (sago-mango) — light, cool, and naturally sweet, served on a bed of crushed ice and set off by bright slices of yellow mango and fuchsia passion-fruit (320 rubles). In the brisk Moscow May, the "sago-mango" summoned visions of the tropics.

Above the bar, a mural depicts children in red T-shirts against a blue-sky background, evoking the optimism of the socialist-era Pioneer scout clubs. Perhaps Hong Kong's fusion points toward another happy moment in Russia's and China's shared history.

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