



Almost living in Astoria Plaza

By Jeffrey P. Yap • Photography by Donelon Oco

The ultimate test of a pleasant stay in a hotel is when you get to experience luxury without sacrificing the homey feeling. A boutique hotel like Astoria Plaza has captured the comforts of a home while preserving the service of a true blue five-star hotel.

Working in the hotel industry for a couple of years now has changed my taste and perspective when staying outside the comforts of my home. There is always the expectation hovering above me each time I check-in, how the staff at the front desk will attend to my needs the moment I stepped into my room, and the satisfaction I will get from the space where I will be “living” either overnight or for several days. Everything is almost measured and every little detail counts. I always require that the cliché “. . . have a wonderful stay” be enacted no matter how overused the expression is. After all, a pleasant experience is ought to be given without hesitation especially to discriminating guests like me. From a mere three-star to an overwhelming five-star, why even the themed or boutique hotels have never slipped away from my monthly itinerary of hotel hopping to experience the good life.

Ortigas Center has its share of several hotels and suites. Its strategic location, being located almost in the middle of the metropolis has captured a fair market share for its accessibility without neglecting the fact that a home away from home should also ensure that serenity and calm is never disregarded.

The Astoria Plaza along J. Escrivá Drive is just past the business district and the row of hotels a few blocks away from the main thoroughfare, which is EDSA. The advantage of choosing Astoria Plaza is that it’s away from the fanciful frenzy of the metropolis yet I could still feel that I am still almost close to the heat of things particularly the central business district of Ortigas. The easy accessibility of Astoria Plaza is no doubt, good enough especially if peace and quiet suddenly becomes a need.

A full-serviced residential suite is clearly defined as having the complete amenities of a home and a hotel. Astoria

Plaza, the 38-storey twin tower, running since 2001, sets itself apart for having five-star hotel quality: one is assured of staff that is trained to meet your needs and facilities that will redefine the standards of urban living. The amenities such as individually controlled air-conditioning system, German-technology electronic door lock system, living room, dining and kitchen area, essential kitchen facilities (electric stove, refrigerator, microwave oven, coffee and tea facility, cookware, chinaware cutlery), audio/video entry phone, cable TV, IDD/NDD facilities with data port, electronic safe, DVD/VCD player in each suite are just a few of the top brass features in Astoria Plaza.

The Zen feel and the comforts of space



Most five-star hotels I’ve been to oftentimes focus on the overall look of their interiors and facilities. Say the lobby, it should be carpeted, chandeliers should have over a hundred small working light bulbs, and the central theme should always be clean, tidy, and classy. There is nothing wrong with making the hotel look its most tip top.

Astoria Plaza doesn’t feel like one has to be extremely careful of the ornaments and the cushioned seats at the lobby. The guests are welcomed by the Zen-inspired interior design, little details such as seats meticulously crafted but still comfortable, soft lights at the lobby that cools down a rather humid afternoon or

drizzling, muggy, rainy weekday night, the quaint coffee shop located just behind the hallway leading to the where three glass pots with long stem flowers that looked like vines, tall enough for guests spectators to stand beside in awe and stare at the works of art for several minutes. It is right and just to focus on what the real needs of the guests rather than make things appear too close for comfort yet too far from the feel of what real quality service should be. The Zen-like theme is for one, an added bonus to what Astoria Plaza can offer. After all, space, as what the guests will always require is by far, an essential need especially for a suite that should

accommodate several guests whether they make use of the kitchen facilities to cook a hearty meal or simply lounge around the living room to kill time and enjoy channel surfing the cable TV.

The rooms in Astoria Plaza are spacious, an undeniable fact that is by far is impressive compared to the suites in other serviced residences in the metropolis; and to ensure that the guests experience the ultimate feel of class and comfort, the management of Astoria Plaza has recently spruced up their suites by renovating their facilities and changing the overall look of the rooms.

A chic two-bedroom suite for instance, has the bedroom clothed in stone beige, dark green or chocolate brown. Themed rooms with cool colors are said to create a cooling effect. The guests suddenly becomes at ease, away from the chaos of the city, the grime and the distraction of the modern world. A room complete with the needed facilities, in its simplicity, create an impact to the guests that deserves to relax and experience ultimate comfort. Suites are supposedly “complete in itself,” as it should have all the amenities of a home. But its mettle could only be tested if the guest feels that he need not ask for more. And this can only be achieved if a full service hotel is true to its name. Fortunately, Astoria Plaza maintains a good standard and never settles for mediocrity.

Staff who knows you well and top notch facilities

A good staff is a requirement. Friendliness is on a surface, a face value that is oftentimes becomes too fleeting after a while. Quality service entails that the people who will provide the utmost satisfaction needs to be sincere enough and is capable of knowing what are the real needs of the guests.

The greetings of the staff were well executed. There was no need for me to ask for anything, as the staff knows what I needed without asking. How clairvoyant I thought. But this was probably how they were trained. The smile for one was satisfying enough. The service men in the elevator checked my keys and guided me towards my room. “If there’s anything you need, please feel free to call the front desk, sir.” That’s what he said as I entered my suite and slouched on the living room sofa facing the window. I was told that the amenities were accessible at certain hours and room service was just a phone call away. Should I ask for more? The massage, of course, they have the spa called Stresscape Wellness, which promises to ease the tension on my back while the scent of aromatherapy brings forth a sense of well being. “I’m now attuned again to my senses,” I say after my body was well rested.

Then there’s the pool that looked so enticing to dive in. The bath tub in my room was good enough to relax my body but I wanted do to a few laps before I start the day. But the gym was one door away so why not sweat it out first? The

trainer was concerned enough that I lift lighter weights first after the intense cardio workout. Water suddenly became blissful as I headed to the pool unmindful of the children at the other end splashing water at each other, laughing their lungs out, and simply living for the moment on a quiet Sunday morning.

The food that will make you forget your name

Café Astoria at the ground floor seemed desolate in the late afternoon when I came in, but patrons flocked the reception area by the time the clock struck around dinner time. There was a buffet table near the entrance that seemed to welcome the guests, a tempting invitation that one cannot resist albeit the fact that merienda was only a few hours ago.



Dinner buffet was supposedly a smorgasbord of cuisine, an explosion of flavors as you put several dishes on your plate, unsure whether you will be overwhelmed with the amount of roasted chicken bathed in warm special sauce that the kitchen staff of Astoria has specially prepared. I opted for the a la carte but promised to enjoy the buffet the next day at breakfast.

Early evening for dinner was just timely especially for those who prefer to have full meal without the guilt of eating too much without leaving enough room for dessert. Café

Astoria’s vegetarian menu that was launched last May 2007 is an exciting addition to the wide range of dishes served in a discreet restaurant that mostly caters to businessmen on weekdays and to families and couples on weekends.

Vegetarian food is often regarded as too light and cannot satisfy a famished stomach. The menu at Astoria Plaza however, should never be regarded as mere vegetarian dish that is exclusive to hard core vegans who only enjoy greens and tofu and nothing else.

The Coriander Wild Mushroom Strudel for instance, which can either pass off as an appetizer or an entrée for its hefty serving is reported to be “selling like pancakes” because it contains seven to ten types of mushrooms wrapped in white paper flour and served with a lemon grass ginger tea. I transferred the tender pieces of strudel and the wild

mushrooms spilling out of the wrapper when I cut it with a knife onto my plate and sliced them into strips. The strudel wasn’t just all mushrooms, as there was generous dose of sautéed garlic and onions, some spice that tingles and kicks a little each time I deposited a few strips into my mouth. The stirred vegetable and definitely no meat mixture was doused with a sauce that seemed like a salsa but spicier and is quickly absorbed by the strudel once poured with the right amount. The fragrance of stir-fried wild mushrooms and the acidic fumes of the spices roles and mingled in the

air of the café, as it slowly entered by nostrils and left me asking for another serving.

And since I mentioned a dish that “sells like pancakes,” Café Astoria also serves Asian Spice Egg White Pancakes with spinach, mandarin orange salad and wasabi pepper sauce. I shook my head. “Another vegetarian dish,” I told myself as I moved the plate near the pancakes. I piled my plate with the spinach that spewed a few steamed that smelled of garlic and warm oranges. I started munching the spinach, unmindful of the elaborate handiwork as the drizzling sauce was poured at the center of the pancake, well-patterned all over the dish... It was indeed a magnum opus for a dish that was a mere pancake. I was satisfied with the flavor, the smooth impact of sweet and salty flavor lounging on my palate, the unfurled spice that hits me each time I put a spoonful of sauce on the mandarin salad. The dish was flawless, almost like a template.

The ultimate feel of Astoria Plaza

I remember the French physician Jean Mallat said that in Manila, “everyone rescues his countrymen or even strangers happily.” In Astoria Plaza, its advantage is that it can adjust well to the needs of their guests. Even the conference rooms that can accommodate 250 heads can be booked on short notice. The fast-pace of modern times is well understood and anticipated by Astoria Plaza whose goal is overall satisfaction of its loyal guests. They rescue the guests and give them their needs. A guest then sits back and simply enjoys his stay. This is what an ultimate hotel experience is about: a satisfying stay without demanding what is ought to be given.

My last few hours at Astoria Plaza were spent lounging in my room, sleeping in my firm mattress and hugging my pillows while staring at the vast landscape of Metropolitan Manila from my window. The horizon of the metro seemed far from where I was located, yet it felt like it was just a stone’s throw away.

I woke up and leafed through the pages of the book I was reading the past few days. It was supposedly a book that will make me fall sleep. The plot was monotonous and the storyline was overused. But reading it in my room in Astoria was in a way different. Perhaps the feel of the place made the plot interesting enough, or the story of a discriminating king was overly familiar, almost similar to the person who has experienced luxury and the homey feeling in a boutique hotel like Astoria Plaza. One will never know why, only that it is a truly enjoyable memory.

Astoria Plaza is located at J. Escriva Rive (formerly Amber Avenue), Ortigas Business District, Pasig City. You may get in touch with them through 6871111 or via e-mail at sales@astoriaplaza.com. You may also visit their website at www.astoriaplaza.com for more information on what a full service residential suite has to offer.