

Tsing Tao Where authentic hospitality meets elegant taste



Restaurateur Janaka Wimalananda's second project, Tsing Tao maybe one of the most ambitious undertakings in the hospitality sector of Sri Lanka.

Words Mamduh Waheed **Photographs** Indika De Silva

Perfection is often a result of a labour of love. Passion comes from an ingrained sense of devotion, and cannot be forced. This is very much the refrain that resonated from the enthusiastic restaurateur Janaka Wimalananda, who is responsible for the establishment of both Loon Tao in Mount Lavinia, and Tsing Tao, on the first level of the Racecourse promenade on Reid Avenue, Colombo 7. "It took me about ten months to finish the refurbishment and interior," he says. "All the materials for the interior and furnishings were sourced and custom made to our designs and imported to Sri Lanka. I did not want to compromise on any aspect of the restaurant."

Though unassuming from the outside, once you enter Tsing Tao, you realise what Wimalananda is talking about. Designed by an acclaimed Sri Lankan architect, the attention to detail given in handling the interior of the restaurant is staggering. From the ceiling to the wall paper to the fabric chosen for the furniture, the cutlery to the antiques and original Chinese paintings, no expense or care has been spared to create the ambience that is a

mixture of a classical Chinese restaurant and a high end boutique. “I wanted to create the first five star restaurant that was not necessarily inside a hotel,” he explained.

The al-fresco dining area of the restaurant is located on the ground floor facing Reid Avenue. Open only in the evening it is a perfect place to feel the city while enjoying fine Chinese cuisine. Next is the first level of the restaurant where you will be greeted with the soothing beige and brown interior filled with authentic Chinese antiques and ink paintings, all hand picked by Wimalananda.

A second level of the restaurant gives you the best view, while there is a fourth area on the steps of the Racecourse, now converted into a dining area with lighting that makes for an intimate mood. The same menu is served in all four areas and you will be served with the same level of diligence.

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The first restaurateur to publish his menus online, it was viewed with skepticism by colleagues and friends alike, says Wimalananda. “But that’s like not showing the menu to my customers. They are the public. Ultimately, it’s not the items on the menu that makes for a memorable dining experience. It is the care given in sourcing the ingredients and the care given in the preparation of the dishes.”

All non-perishable ingredients used at Tsing Tao are handpicked by chefs in China and imported to Sri Lanka. And the perishables sourced locally are supplied daily. An immense and expensive task perhaps, but Wimalananda feels it is worthwhile. “Our motto is ‘Eat Fresh’, so we would rather make the extra effort and bear the additional cost.”

The restaurant’s menus are another example of attention to detail given in conceiving the ‘Tsing Tao’ experience. With an extensive wine menu and great cocktails, the mains alone contain 203 items while steamed soups are perhaps a novelty presently served only at Tsing Tao. Primarily focusing on seafood, starting from end of July Dim sum will also be served by Chef Xiangchun Meng, from the team of Chinese Chefs headed by Master Chef Huasheng Mo. With its impressive array of gourmet desserts, the restaurant may well be one of the best places for desserts in town. Desserts are followed by the ‘After dark Menu,’ another novel offering from Tsing Tao. This last menu has over 41 items with 31 different varieties of tea as well as coffee including espresso.

Tsing Tao has been serving customers since December 2012 although the formal opening was held in May this year. The reason, according to Janaka Wimalananda, was that he

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wanted feedback as well as to further fine tune his services to perfection. “I also wanted a fully trained staff to be there when we formally opened. It has to come from the heart and they need to be ready for it. One can’t force such things as authentic hospitality.”

Tsing Tao is open daily for lunch (11am to 3pm) and dinner (6pm to 11pm) with live acoustic music from 7pm onwards. Special express business lunches are served daily, Monday to Friday for corporates. □It is also an ideal venue for corporate functions, cocktails, birthday parties, anniversaries, family reunions, get togethers and seminars where one or two sections of the restaurant can be reserved □exclusively for the purpose.

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