

HOSPITALITY



An array of desserts offered at the Ritz-Carlton Beijing in cooperation with British toy brand Hamleys. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Partnership brings themed afternoon tea

By CAO YINGYING caoyingying@chinadaily.com.cn

The Ritz-Carlton Beijing joined hands with century-old British toy brand Hamleys to launch a creative Christmas afternoon tea on Dec 5.

The culinary team in the hotel integrates Christmas elements, such as Santa Claus, an elk and Christmas tree in the design of the refreshments to celebrate the festival season.

The afternoon tea desserts include Hamleys bear-shaped chocolate, British Christmas fruit-cake, hazelnut chocolate stollen, raspberry religieuse snowman and plain and raisin scones.

According to Tang Xiaoxu, executive pastry chef at the hotel, the shape of the Christmas chocolate cake was inspired by the fairy tale of Santa Claus climbing down the chimney to give out his gifts.

Dale Parkington, manager of the hotel, said that since it entered Beijing 12 years ago, the hotel has a tradition of afternoon tea, so it has made efforts to find

suitable partners to launch different themed events.

Hamleys shares similar prestige with the Ritz-Carlton hotel. Known for its high quality, Hamleys also provides a sense of happiness for guests, so it is a perfect partner for the afternoon tea, as Christmas Day is coming soon, Parkington said.

Two 1.5-meter-tall sitting Hamleys bears and a Christmas tree are showcased in the hotel lobby, which attracts children and guests to take photos.

The afternoon tea is available at 1:30 pm to 5:30 pm every day until Jan 2, 2020, priced at 358 yuan (\$50) per person or 618 yuan for two persons. In the latter case, diners can get one Hamleys bear toy as a gift.

Located at China Central Place in the center of Beijing's central business district, the Ritz-Carlton Beijing blends the city's glamor with traditional British elegance.

Set within downtown Beijing's main business district, the hotel offers a collection of five-star amenities that reflect the traditions and evolution of China.

Banyan Tree to branch out with two new brands

Rising middle class and budget air travel allow tailored products

By ALYWIN CHEW in Shanghai alywin@chinadaily.com.cn

Singapore luxury hospitality group Banyan Tree Holdings will introduce two brands in the near future to cater to "narrowly defined market segments", according to the company's founder and executive chairman Ho Kwon Ping.

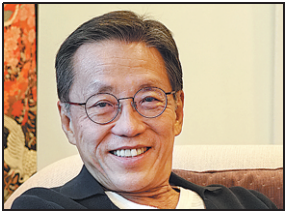
Ho spoke to China Daily on Nov 29, ahead of a networking event in Shanghai organized by the Singapore Global Network.

Noting the hospitality group's four brands — Angsana, Banyan Tree, Cassia and Dhawa — Ho said that the next two will have names that start with "e" and "f". He also revealed that resort "e" will have less than 20 private villas and offer guests an intimate and romantic experience. The resort is scheduled to open in Indonesia next year.

"If you look at the hotel business as a spectrum, from super high-end, super boutique on one end and super mass but also boutique at the other end, the two new brands will cover both ends of the spectrum," he said.

Factors behind the new brands are a rising middle class and air travel made possible by low-budget carriers, he said. "When I first started the business, there were hardly any young Asians who could travel around the world. Now you can just hop on a plane like you're hopping on a bus."

The company plans to roll out 52 new hotels around the world within three years. Nearly half of these new establishments are to be in China.



Ho Kwon Ping, founder and executive chairman of Banyan Tree Holdings

While Ho pointed out that China's hotel segment is oversaturated, he believes that the scale would eventually be tipped in the other direction.

"China today has one of the world's lowest national occupancy rates. So, yes, the market is saturated right now ... If you have this level of oversupply in Europe or Japan, you'd be dead," he said.

"But China is different — it is growing so much that in the next five years the oversupply will be eaten up."

The company's foray into China started in 2005 with Banyan Tree Ringha. The five-star resort is in the Shangri-La highlands at a Tibetan autonomous prefecture in Yunnan province. Just a year later, the company unveiled Banyan Tree Lijiang. Today, the hospitality group operates 17 hotels across China.

Anticipating the opportunities created by China's development, said Ho, has been one of the major factors behind the company's success.

"Decades ago, many people in China just wanted to copy the West ... Everybody just wanted to go to London, New York and the other major cities around the world. So, when we first started, we did something completely different — we went to Shangri-La in Yunnan province and then to Lijiang," he said. "People thought we were crazy to do so — there was

nothing at these places back then."

Today, Yunnan is a top tourist hub in China. Lijiang ranks among the most popular travel destinations within the province. According to Xinhua News Agency, Lijiang welcomed 12.32 million arrivals and saw a total revenue of 25.64 billion yuan (\$3.66 billion) during the first quarter of this year, up 21.5 percent and 15.13 percent respectively from a year ago.

While sustainable luxury has become popular in recent years, Banyan Tree Holdings had been practicing it long before such a term was coined.

Ho recalled that the motivation to make sustainability part of the company's core values stemmed from its first integrated resort, Laguna Phuket, located on a former tin mine in Phuket, Thailand. "We bought the land because it was very cheap and the location had many lagoons with beautiful waters. Little did we know that the water was bright blue because it was heavily polluted by chemicals," he said.

To salvage his investment, Ho kick-started efforts to transform the land, which included planting thousands of trees, pumping the toxic water out of the lagoons and laying new topsoil.

Two years after opening Banyan Tree Phuket, Ho and his wife launched the Banyan Tree Gallery. The retail outlet helps the community by sourcing its products from local craftsmen. The company also started a training program for locals who have no access to education. Upon completion, students get to work at Banyan Tree hotels around the world.

Sustainability also extends to how the company's resorts are built and operated. Today, the company strives to rely on more sustainable materials like bamboo and avoid the use of natural stone, Ho said. It has also banned the use of plastic bottles and straws.

Roundup

MILESTONE



Sheraton Grand Wuhan Hankou Hotel in Central China's Hubei province held a party last week to celebrate its revenue surpassing 200 million yuan (\$28.52 million) this year, marking a new era for the hotel. Since it opened in November 2014, the hotel's growth has been on a fast track, with its business revenue reaching 110 million yuan in 2015. Due to its advanced facilities and considerate services, the hotel has become a favorite among entertainment and sports celebrities who visit Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, according to the company.

CHARITY



Thirty blind students were invited to Hilton Shenyang in Northeast China's Liaoning province to celebrate Thanksgiving Day, which fell on Nov 28 this year, together with the hotel's staff members. After a special tour in the hotel, they played games, sang songs and had lunch. The hotel, as an off-campus activity center for Shenyang Blind School, has demonstrated a long-term commitment to providing opportunities for students with visual disabilities to integrate into society and enrich their extracurricular lives, the company said.

Macao lent a neighborly hand by Zhuhai to help its people settle in

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Zhuhai, a seaside city in South China's Guangdong province and the next-door neighbor of Macao, is taking measures to add convenience for the Macao people who live, work, do business in or tour the city.

One of its latest moves was to launch the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Labor Dispute Joint Mediation Center on Dec 10, the first of its kind in China.

It is also known as Zhuhai (Hengqin) Labor Dispute Quick Mediation and Arbitration Service Station. The establishment will provide human resources management services, legal and consultation services related to social welfare, as well as dispute meditation to businesses and individuals from Hong Kong and Macao.

While boosting communication in the human resources sector and improving the business environment in the Bay Area, it will play a key role in promoting the development of a multifaceted labor dispute resolution mechanism locally.

Zhuhai government has been working hard to foster cooperation in social security and social governance with the Macao government and to enable the Macao people who are investing, working or living in Zhuhai to enjoy the same treatment as locals ranging from healthcare, education, as well as housing and transport arrangements.

Healthcare

In July, the city's Hengqin New Area, just a narrow stretch of water away from Macao, began a pilot program to entitle Macao residents living in Hengqin to the local basic medical insurance.

Those who have joined the program enjoy the same benefits as locals in Zhuhai. One of the recipients, who identified herself as Ng, said that she was happy to be included in the program.

"With the welfare, we will have more options to see doctors," she said.



A group of young Macao people visit Zhuhai on Dec 7, aiming to seize cooperation opportunities in the city. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A Macao resident shows her medical insurance card issued by the Zhuhai government.

"It generally takes a long time to see a doctor at a public hospital because you need to wait in turn; and it is much more expensive to see a doctor at a private hospital in Macao," she explained. "The healthcare welfare makes it possible for me to see doctors conveniently at many more hospitals on the mainland."

The program had been available to a total of 2,383 Macao people by the end of October, according to official statistics.

Meanwhile, Zhuhai has introduced other measures to enable Macao residents to receive quality healthcare services similar to Zhuhai locals.

As part of the efforts, Macao residents' information is incorporated into Zhuhai's healthcare system. This allows Macao patients to make appointments easily with doctors in Zhuhai. Zhuhai has also partnered with the University of Macau to build a precision medicine research and development center.

Transport and education

In March, Zhuhai launched cross-border commuter bus routes between Macao and the Hengqin New Area. It has since

served more than 70,000 people, according to Zou Hua, director of the Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao affairs office of Zhuhai. She spoke at a recent press event in Zhuhai in celebration of the 20th anniversary of Macao's return to the motherland.

Zhuhai has been arranging education opportunities for more than 1,500 children from Hong Kong and Macao annually. Many schools in Zhuhai have forged sister-school relationships with Macao counterparts.

Zou said preferential policies are available to Macao children who sit for school entrance exams in Zhuhai.

According to Zou, Zhuhai has hammered out policies to help university students in Macao start their own business or look for jobs in Zhuhai by offering incentives, internships, exchange programs and job fairs in Macao.

Citing an example, she said the

Hengqin-Macao Youth Entrepreneurship Valley, a national incubator also known as InnoValley, has incubated 199 Macao projects.

Housing

Hengqin is where most Macao people choose to live or work in Zhuhai. Yang Chuan, head of the administrative committee of the Hengqin New Area, said that Hengqin is joining hands with Macao to arrange housing for the Macao people.

Covering an area of 180,000 square meters, the Macao New Neighborhood Project, jointly promoted by Zhuhai and Macao governments to address the land shortage in Macao, will open for bidding soon.

Public services in the community including education, healthcare and elderly care will be provided by companies or organizations designated by the Macao government. The Macao government will also set criteria for selecting qualified Macao buyers, according to Yang.

He said that Hengqin has made great efforts to make port customs clearance more convenient and to make it easier for Macao professionals to practice in the new area.

Professionals, such as tour guides and architects, who have registered to practice in Hong Kong and Macao, are allowed to provide services in Hengqin.

Currently, a total of 233 tour guides from Hong Kong and Macao have been licensed to work in Zhuhai. The first clinic operated by Macao doctors was opened in the Hengqin New Area in November, according to Yang.

Looking ahead, Zhuhai will build more infrastructure to connect Macao with the Chinese mainland. There will be high-speed trains and metro lines to link Macao with major cities in South China. Zhuhai will also increase water and power supplies to Macao to support the special administrative region's growth. Currently, Zhuhai's water supply meets 98 percent of the daily consumption in Macao. The power supply meets 90 percent.