

Review: The Clan Hotel Singapore

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It's been a while since a luxury hotel opened in the Singapore CBD and this one is milking its neighborhood's rich heritage for all it's worth. Grace Ma checks-in to the new Clan Hotel for modern comforts steeped in nostalgia.



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WHEN THE LAUNCH OF THE CLAN HOTEL was first announced two years ago, promising a local spin on modern luxury, there was much buzz and more than a little skepticism as to how they'd make that happen. After all, Singapore's urban hotel landscape is crowded and dominated by the big international boys, and, so far, independent boutiques have proven themselves more adept at channeling local.

But the homegrown Far East Hospitality Group pushed through the pandemic, and finally opened its latest brand, a 30-story, 324-key hotel at the junction of Cross and Telok Ayer Streets. Its steel and glass facade definitely enmeshes it in the CBD tribe while its touch points reflect the kinship and craftsmanship that had flourished in this neighborhood in an earlier era when Chinese clan associations helped their own to settle down Singapore.



Interior designer KKS International (the ones behind another Far East historical gem, The Barracks Hotel Sentosa) artfully weaves heritage tales and local relationships in spaces like the handsome second-floor black marble and wood lobby, which has soaring ceilings and artefacts displayed on open shelves. An installation of 150 painted aluminum panels in geometric folds by Singaporean artist Grace Tan hover above the reception, which is manned by staff smartly dressed in suits designed and sewn by local tailor Q Menswear. A subtle, bespoke scent of bergamot, freesia and tea wafts through.

I tuck into the welcome tea ceremony of mung bean pastry and oolong while filling out forms and booking a slot at the rooftop pool. The latter is quite full, this being a weekend, but I managed to snag the 8:15 to 9:15 a.m. option for the next day (Saturday). It was serendipitously extended when the next slot's guests were late, and I had the waters to myself for a while. (Though that doesn't stop me from dagger-eying some youngsters hogging the Jacuzzi for what feels overly long to me.)



Black mable lobby with tea set

Membership in a clan had its privileges, and the hotel plays up the notion of belonging to an inner circle. On the table in my minimalist and neutral-hued Master Series Premier room is an “Inner Circle Guide,” a list of recommended places to eat, drink and explore in the vicinity. There is The Clan Collective, where noteworthy artisans are listed. Occupants of the Master Series Grand Premier and Premier rooms get additional perks: handcrafted soap, five complimentary snacks of your choice (including a local craft beer specially brewed for the hotel) and a personal concierge known as the Clan Keeper, who doubles up as your precinct tour and personal shopping guide.

Bubble-bath junkie tip: the tubs are in the 18 Grand Premier rooms staking the corners of levels 24 to 29. Eco-warriors, you’d be pleased to know there’s a filtered water tap in the bathroom. A frame of calligraphy brushes on the wall and a transparent tea pot alongside a packet of loose leaves and cookies wrapped in a *furoshiki* on the lounge by the window complete the fuzzy feeling of home.



Welcome Amenity Kit Teapot Set in MASTER Series Room

With such comfort, it's tempting to stay in, but the objective of The Clan is to draw you on a journey of discovery. I stumbled upon the 90-year-old Tan Hock Seng Cake Shop 'round the corner from the hotel and promptly snapped up my favorite childhood biscuits and traditional pastries. Hidden cafes and serene temples revealed themselves during the precinct tour the next day, not to mention the most fascinating interactive exhibition on Singapore's urban development that I never knew existed (but now that I do, I also know to tell you to book ahead). Pre-pandemic, I'd only aimlessly wander about cities when I'm overseas. For once, I'm doing it on home ground, and loving it.

Food-wise there are few better bases than The Clan to start your foodie adventure. The famous Amoy Street Food Centre with myriad hawker dishes starting from S\$3 is a mere five-minute walk away. And you are spoiled for choice with up-and-coming restaurants and bars lining the nearby lanes.

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But let's say you just want to lie in and have a *Crazy Rich Asian* indulgence. Master Series occupants, you can get your hawker fix from a selected list under The Clan Daily Special, even though purists may debate its authenticity and balk at the price (it starts from S\$30 for 15 sticks of satay). Personally, I thought the fish ball *mee pok* (yellow egg noodles resembling linguini) was legit with its al dente texture and lashings of fried pork lard, sprightly chili and spring onions. (The *bak kut teh*—pork ribs in herbal soup—could do with a stronger herbal flavor but that's a personal preference.) And it was all delivered neatly plated in tiffin carriers by my Clan Keeper Sam, who also laid out white plates and silver cutlery for my meal.

The Singapore tale continues in the medicine hall-inspired Qin Restaurant and Bar, with cocktails such as the rum-based Pu Luo Chung (an early reference to Singapore in Mandarin) and The Roar using locally brewed Brass Lion Gin giving vestiges of the country's history and forays. The food is fun and nourishing: the Hainan, No Rice Please riffs on the popular Hainanese chicken rice with organic chicken, barley grain balls and garlic chili aioli, while the Childhood Memories dessert of Milo textures and dinosaur motifs harkens me back to youthful treats.



The Clan Daily Special in tiffin carriers



Siphon Mushroom Tea



QIN Restaurant interior

In this pandemic period, The Clan definitely pulls its weight in giving locals plenty of reasons to stay and play, and future business travelers an incentive to linger on. Now if only they would make the meeting venue The Mahjong Room a place to play the actual game, my loco local staycay would be complete.

theclanhotel.com.sg; doubles from S\$330