

# The Man Behind Sofitel's Success

Goran Aleks, Sofitel Philippine Plaza's General Manager, shares some secrets into this hotel's outstanding performance in its food and beverage business.

BY VICTOR FABREGAS ALCUAZ

## DEFINING THE SOFITEL BRAND

**VA:** After a highly successful "branding change" from a 30-year-old "Westin brand" to a Sofitel, what is next for the "Sofitel Philippine Plaza, in terms of new concepts this 2011 and beyond?"

**GA:** In the past five years, Sofitel had as its focal point the complete upgrade of its hardware. For instance, massive enhancements made on such facilities as elevators, rooms, as well as the renovation of the iconic Imperial Suite, which will be completed late this year.

In 2011, Sofitel's thrust will be in upgrading its software by rendering highly personalized service in all areas of business. We want to surprise our guests with Sofitel's unique brand of tailor-made solutions, to every unique requirement, both large or small.

Our guests are very important to us, and we understand that each one has specific preferences and specific needs that we aim to satisfy. This means going out of our way to know them, to please them, to give them the very best, as we would our guests in our own homes.

Sofitel likewise takes pride in its core strengths in food and beverage, and indeed, it is our goal to be the market leader in these areas. This year we opened two key food and beverage outlets—**Snaps Sports Bar** and **Fever Luxe Lounge**. These outlets are run by **Head Chef Jose Luis Gonzalez** who has worked in five of the top ten restaurants in the world, such as **Noma**, **El Bulli**, **Arzak**, **El Celler de Can Roca**, and **Mugaritz**.

We always ensure that we have the best talent on board to help us achieve the finest in products and services.

## THE SPIRAL TOUCH

**VA:** Inasmuch as Spiral has maintained a strong hold and lead in the hotel coffee shop business, particularly



Goran Aleks at the helm of the constantly evolving Sofitel Philippine Plaza

**the buffet service and we foresee this hold to remain for some time, what is SOFITEL doing in terms of guest services in Spiral to ensure its continued leadership?**

**GA:** Spiral is constantly innovating itself. We hold food festivals to bring to Manila the most colorful and exciting cuisines from around the world. Take for example the Mexican food festival, in honor of the 100 years of the Mexican revolution, and the Bavarian food festival in celebration of the Oktoberfest.

At Sofitel, we believe in the art of storytelling, and so one will note that there is always rhyme and reason behind our offerings. Fascinating stories make everything come alive and make everything more meaningful. We find that when something is meaningful, experience

is heightened. I believe this is what makes Spiral so memorable.

Also, talent is one aspect of our business that is so important. We have on board a new chef for the Japanese station, who is tasked with further elevating the standards of its cuisine, which happens to be very popular among Filipinos. We also have Head Chef Gonzalez, who will be monitoring the quality of cuisine we serve at Spiral, which is one of his strongest disciplines.

Most important to note is that Spiral is moving more and more towards personalized service. Into 2012, guests will see a veering away from standard chafing dishes in favor of dishes served *a la minute*. This will further ensure top quality in food that is prepared according to the tastes and preferences of our guests.

Very recently we launched the new Davao and Boracay rooms under Sofitel's Inspired Meetings™ service concept, which has as its thrust personalized service. These rooms are one of the first in the world to showcase

mobile, interactive show kitchen stations, which enable us to provide unique food preparations for every unique taste and every unique requirement.

We see Spiral evolving quickly in this direction this year, and further more into 2012. I believe that the concept of personalized service is truly one that will revolutionize standards in food and beverage, and it is by this standard that Sofitel lives by. ■



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