

# Cognoscenti magazine

Because life is short

## Westin Grande Sukhumvit Bangkok, Thailand

There's nothing like true Thai hospitality—the wide, open smiles, the gentle and careful attentiveness. Arriving exhausted at **The Westin Grande Sukhumvit** after a 12-hour flight from Europe, visiting **Cognoscenti Magazine** editors were immediately made to feel very much at home. Within a minute of our swift check-in at the executive lounge, we were relaxing in a cool, quiet suite with tall glasses of iced tea in our hands.

Recently executive lounges have become all the rage at luxury business class properties—and nobody does them better than Westin. Here perks include complimentary breakfast, snacks throughout the day, afternoon tea, complimentary cocktails, an internet corner, free pressing of up to 3 garments (our wrinkled shirts were pressed and returned to us in less than 30 minutes), and a large, club-like space that makes the perfect spot to relax after dealing with frenetic Bangkok.

Our executive suite featured two full rooms with two bathrooms. Soft colors of bamboo and tan were combined with sharper, sleeker expanses of polished glass and wooden furniture to yield spaces equally suited to rest or work. As at other Westins we've visited, the suite was very modern in design, but here the richness and warmth of tropical Thailand was also represented: orchids adorned a pedestal in the entryway, and a lovely

platter of lychee, rose apple, sapodilla, tangerine and banana awaited us on check-in.



*Thai hospitality with all the comforts expected of a Westin property*

At some lesser hotels, business people have to endure sagging chairs or tables better suited to applying cosmetics than for working on laptop computers. Our room at the Westin Grande Sukhumvit featured a very practical, well laid-out work area that was equipped with a glass-topped desk, a swivel chair in stitched brown leather and a reticulating halogen lamp.

Westin's trademark Heavenly Bed—much beloved by loyal customers worldwide—was present as well, with a sufficient amount of crisp high thread-count linen, soft down comforters, and hypo-allergenic pillows to send even the biggest insomniac into blissful slumber.

Japanese clients have always been an important presence in Bangkok's business hotels; the Westin caters to their needs specifically with no fewer than three Japanese-speaking guest relations officers—not to mention **Kisso**, an excellent Japanese restaurant with a teppanyaki table, a sushi bar, and seven private dining rooms.

Decorated in soothing tones of sage green and bamboo, dining at **Kisso** is itself a restful experience. Here Chef Kaneo Hongu insists on using only the freshest

products, importing ingredients like fresh red- and yellow- fin tuna, sea urchin and Kobe beef directly from Japan.

At a dinner sitting, we sampled an impeccably fresh, beautifully presented sushi platter that featured such delicacies as *tokujo sushi* and *matsu sashimi*. Udon (buck-wheat) noodle soup with duck was cooked Osaka style, using clear, light Osaka soy sauce in a delicate broth made redolent with the flavors of ginger and lemongrass. Soy was artfully combined with *saketo* to enliven an excellent filet of Kobe Beef. Snowfish and salmon were beautifully grilled with a hint of honey and served with a tray of three different sauces: sesame-bean, green onion with garlic, and spicy chili.

Catering to somewhat more continental tastes, **The Med** restaurant is not so much Mediterranean as “Mediterrasian,” says Chef Jonathan Kuss. This Australian is no stranger to Pacific cuisine—he cooked in Fiji and Bali before developing The Med’s unique fusion menu. Chef Kuss has a nice touch with sauces. Pan-seared foie gras was a fine start to our meal: the balsamic dressing, which also contained hints of mango to cut through the vinegar’s tartness, was a nice—perhaps even necessary—counterbalance to the richness of imported foie gras. Lemon-spiced King Salmon was marinated in citrus juice charged with the classic Thai flavors of lemongrass, coriander, palm sugar, lime and chili. “I like ‘cooking’ seafood without heat,” said Chef Jonathan of this ceviche-like dish.

At The Med, the contemporary flair we noted elsewhere in the hotel is given a bright twist through the decorative deployment of hundreds of kinetic lights extending from floor to ceiling to create an ever-changing marquee. Live entertainment is also provided; on the evening we visited, two fine guitarists

played soft, familiar classics ranging from Brazilian to Country & Western.

The tasting menu was matched course by course with light, undistinguished, but unobjectionable wines from Australia’s Gulf Station winery.



*Dining options include The Med (above) and fine Japanese cuisine by Chef Kaneo Hongu (below).*



In a city like Bangkok, where traveling in snarled traffic only a few kilometers can take a frustrating hour or two, the Westin offers a truly unbeatable location. It’s at the junction of the Skytrain (the Asok station is literally outside the hotel door) and the Subway (scheduled to open Spring 2004).

Lending the property a rather resort-like feel are amenities such as a swimming pool, a brand-new LifeFitness-equipped gym, and a full-service spa. In the Thai Herbal Massage, the massage therapist begins with the feet—not the neck as is commonly done in the West. Using hands, wrists, elbows and knees to push, pull, and stretch different parts of the body, the therapist applies a steaming cloth poultice filled with fragrant Thai herbs like lemongrass, ginger, lime zest, delivering repeated applications to warm, energize and relax the body. Expertly done indeed!

This article was written by Jeffrey Riggs, Senior Contributing Editor to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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The Westin Grande Sukhumvit  
259 Sukhumvit Road  
Bangkok 10110  
Thailand  
Tel: 66 (0)2-651-1000  
Email: [bangkok@westin.com](mailto:bangkok@westin.com)  
Web: [www.westin.com/bangkok](http://www.westin.com/bangkok)