

A slice of space... A slice of Heaven

By Ben Kritz

ASTORIA PLAZA

DIFFERENT people look for different things in a hotel. For the frequent traveler, it's a clean, comfortable place to relax and stretch out after long flights and the hectic bustle of airports. For the business person, it's a well-appointed meeting place with friendly and efficient staff to take care of every detail so work can get done. For the casual vacationers, from romantic couples to families to good friends, it's a place to get away from it all for a little while and experience luxurious pampering. There is a place that meets the expectations of all these people. Ideally located just steps off Shaw Boulevard along J. Escrivá Drive on the edge of Ortigas Center is the Astoria Plaza. The Astoria is already a favorite with a growing number of international and Filipino visitors alike, and is quickly gaining a reputation as one of the city's premier accommodation and meeting facilities. The Astoria Plaza is rated #1 of five hotels in the Pasig/Ortigas area by travelers on TripAdvisor.com, ahead of several prestigious and more expensive addresses. Even a brief stay at the Astoria will prove the high marks in service, comfort, facilities, and value are well-deserved.

The modern lobby is bright and welcoming, and the cheerful and efficient front desk staff makes sure every guest's visit begins pleasantly. A new lobby expansion, still receiving its finishing touches, promises to be a showpiece, as the Astoria has commissioned the Almaria sisters, well-known for their beautiful cutting-edge interior designs for other upscale restaurants and hotels.

The other thing that is immediately obvious is that the same high standard of professionalism demonstrated by the desk staff is shared by everyone at the Astoria Plaza, because the entire facility, from top to bottom, is spotlessly clean and perfectly maintained. The Astoria is not a new hotel, having been opened in 2001, but from its appearance, it looks as though it was opened yesterday.

The Astoria Plaza does not have ordinary "hotel rooms" but rather describes their accommodations as "Expansive Suites". There are, at present, 100 of them, and more planned for the near future.

As soon as one steps into one of these suites, it is clear that the description is definitely appropriate and no mere clever marketing phrase. In fact, it's a bit of an understatement: the smallest suites are 60 square meters and sizes range up to a positively vast 130 square meters in a two-bedroom suite. The bedroom alone in our one-bedroom suite was much larger than most standard hotel rooms. The décor is decidedly modern, sleek and subtle instead of showy, featuring wide white-tiled floors and accents of dark wood, glass, and chrome, and all of it brought together in a cleverly functional and comfortable way. Beds are large and plush, and generously endowed with soft blankets. Furnishings in the large living room and dining area are similarly enjoyable, inviting one to relax and feel at home.

The Western-style bathroom features a contoured tub and shower, and includes a built-in hair dryer, a nice touch for the ladies.

A complete kitchen, not the abbreviated version usually found in hotels, is provided, fully equipped with range and oven, microwave, refrigerator and freezer, and a coffee and tea service complete with its



own hot water pot. There is even a full set of dishes, and eating and cooking utensils. Storage space is more than generous; there is a complete set of cabinets in the kitchen, big his-and-hers closets in the bedroom, and shelves and drawer space in every room.

Technological comforts are not missed either. The living room and bedroom have separate air-conditioning units. There is a television—cable, of course—and a telephone in each room. A DVD player is provided in the living room, and a small CD player in the bedroom. Every suite also has an internet con-

fitness center. For after-workout pampering—or for pampering for its own sake—the Stressscape spa and massage center is available. On the ground floor, easily accessible from the lobby, are other convenient and enjoyable shops and services. These include two eclectic fashion boutiques called TONIC and ISHQ; Travelnet, a convenient agency to assist with tour and travel needs;

the Genesis Valet Shop laundry and cleaning service (the hotel also offers in-room pick-up for laundry services); the McGill Cosmetic Surgery and Dermatological Clinic; Salon de Astoria hair and beauty stylists; and, a favorite of expats around Manila for years, Santis Delicatessen. The Astoria Plaza branch of Santis is the largest of their several outlets, and features, in addition to the wide selection of excellent breads, wines, meats and cheeses, and other imported delicacies found in all of them, a cozy coffee and snack shop.

The location of the Astoria Plaza is near-perfect. Easily accessible from Shaw Boulevard and EDSA, the Astoria is just far enough away from the busy thoroughfares to be peaceful and quiet, yet near enough to be within walking distance of most of the businesses and attractions in the

get-away, the Astoria Plaza is also a fine location for business meetings and other functions. Judging from the activity on a typical weekday, the facilities and service are no secret to firms in the

Ortigas area. The Astoria boasts 11 meeting rooms for business meetings or other gatherings, and can accommodate up to 300 people. In addition, a fully-equipped business center and two boardrooms are available for individual business travelers or small groups. Parking facilities, sometimes a challenge in other places around Metro Manila, are no problem here, with six levels of valet-serviced secure underground parking available.

Of course, no fine hotel is complete without a good restaurant. The Astoria Plaza, however, doesn't have a good restaurant, it has a fantastic restaurant. The Café Astoria, under the direction of Chef Ferdinand Ramos is without a doubt one of the very best in Metro Manila, if not the entire country.

Breakfast and lunch, served buffet-style, is a delightful mix of Filipino and Western fare, a great



fresh vegetables. Not only are the steaks of the highest quality, they are prepared to exact perfection. As any dining connoisseur can attest, only a chef of the highest skill can make a rare and a well-done fil-

let arrive at the same time at the same table and have both be judged perfect. What little room left for dessert can be topped off with the Café's excellent cheesecake smothered in blueberries.

Every dish is not only a delight to the palate, it is a visual work of art, such as can only be made by people of enormous professional pride and true passion for their work. The same is true of the wait staff, efficient and attentive beyond measure. In a hotel in which everyone is a consummate professional and demonstrates impeccable customer service, the staff of the Café Astoria does the impossible and stands out. Not only in the Café itself, but also in the relaxing lounge just off the lobby where Romel Bantayan the bartender presides over an inviting and comfortable retreat after an excellent dinner, and who also happens to make the best martini in town. As a perfect complement to the already-wonderful food and ambiance, the Café Astoria engages talented local musicians. Our dinner was made even more pleasant by the acoustic sounds of a trio called Present Perfect, a delight to the ears as much as the food is to the palate.

With everything the Astoria Plaza has to offer, one might expect to pay a premium price for it, but rates are surprisingly reasonable.

Nightly rates, depending on the type of accommodations, range from 1 Bedroom suite Php 3,950+++ 2 Bedroom suite Php 5,850+++ . A hearty breakfast at the Café Astoria can be had for Php 350+++ and lunch buffet and dinner buffet Php 540+++ .

In addition, the Astoria Plaza regularly offers various promotions and discounted package rates. International visitors will certainly appreciate the bargain prices for such quality of accommodations and service, and even domestic travelers will be challenged to try to find such elegance for the value.

Whether for business or pleasure, the Astoria Plaza is sure to satisfy even the most discerning of visitors.

Close to attractions and business centers, with easy access to transportation and major travel routes, clean, spacious, and well-appointed accommodations, excellent cuisine, and outstanding service, the Astoria Plaza truly is a "home away from home," and an excellent choice for visitors, not only in the Ortigas area, but in all of Metro Manila.



nection. Though one cannot help but feel comfortable and safe, sophisticated personal security features are thoughtfully provided. Rooms are equipped with electronic door locks, high-tech German-built videophone entry control stations, and personal electronic safes.

The rooms are so comfortable, guests may be tempted to content themselves with simply relaxing, putting their feet up and enjoying a movie, or the nice city views. But the Astoria Plaza has much more to offer. An outdoor terrace on the third floor contains a swimming pool, with a kiddie pool for young guests.

There is also a nicely-equipped and well-maintained

Ortigas area. Shangri-La Plaza and Robinson's Starmall are about 10 minutes away by foot, as is the Shaw MRT light-rail station, with easy access to shopping and entertainment in the Makati area. For those wishing to take it easy, complimentary shuttle service from the hotel to shopping and business establishments around Ortigas, including SM Megamall, Robinson's Galleria, the Podium, the Asian Development Bank, and the San Miguel Complex, is readily available. Simple conveniences such as ATM machines, convenience stores, and local restaurants and cafes are just steps away.

Not just a choice for vacationers or those looking for a leisurely

way to start the morning or to take a break from the day's busy activities. Dinner is a culinary experience that cannot be found elsewhere, and worth a visit to the Astoria Plaza all by itself. The menu features something for every taste, with dishes from the Philippines and the rest of the world. Try the Blackfish Lumpia or Curried Shrimp a la Pobre appetizers, subtly spicy and with ingredients so fresh one could be forgiven for imagining the kitchen staff could be personally pulling them from the sea as they were ordered. Follow those with the Grilled Fillet of Beef Tenderloin, served with a unique and tasty Madera and anchovy sauce, melt-in-your-mouth creamy mashed potatoes, and perfectly steamed