



SUPER SIZE ME

Behind the scenes at
Sheraton Macao
Hotel, Cotai Sands—
the largest hotel to
open in 2012
BY RON GLUCKMAN



LIVING LARGE Check-in at the Sheraton Macao is facilitated by 61 reception counters.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID HARTUNG



DISPATCHES
HOTEL REPORT—MACAU



CULTURAL MOSAIC Above: The Sheraton Macao currently employs a team of 1,600 people, a number that is set to grow with the opening of the Earth Tower. Between them, the multicultural staff speak 19 languages. Right: Cooking up a storm in a hotel kitchen.

Somewhere beyond or below the busy lobby of the Sheraton Macao's Sky Tower, an army of employees is at work. Some are busy sorting and delivering the 10,500 kilos of laundry processed daily off-site. Others are handling luggage, which arrives in such huge volumes that the hotel tags each piece with a bar code before placing it on a conveyor belt to a central distribution system. Still others are bustling back and forth with food, which amounts to something in the order of 6,000 eggs, 1,600 pieces of bread, 300 kilos of beef, 550 kilos of pork, and dizzying quantities of chicken, lamb, and sundry ingredients consumed every day.

Now consider this: the Sheraton Macao is not the biggest hotel in Macau. But it soon will be. When its 2,067-room Earth Tower comes online in early 2013, it and the adjacent Sky Tower will have a whopping 3,896 guest rooms between them, making this not only the world's largest Sheraton property, but also the 13th-biggest hotel on the planet. So, just how do you manage such a gargantuan operation?

"Everything in Macau is big, but this is definitely super-sized," says Vincent Ong, senior director of brand management for Asia-



Pacific at Starwood Hotels & Resorts, Sheraton's parent company. "This is a major undertaking for us. A typical Sheraton might be 300 to 380 rooms. So this is like opening 12 or 13 hotels all at once."

Staffing was a particular challenge. Labor is a scarce resource in Macau, a tiny former Portuguese colony whose population of half a million cannot meet the needs of a surging tourism sector that attracted 28 million visitors in 2011. So Sheraton recruiters scoured the international job-fair circuit in search of employees. Around 10,000 applicants from

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20 countries were screened and some 5,000 interviews conducted. The result is a veritable United Nations of languages, cultures, and backgrounds: Nepalese security, Chinese room attendants, Taiwanese waitresses, Filipino concierges, and front-office staff from as far afield as Europe and the Americas.

Prior to September 20 opening, the Sheraton Macao conducted a three-month training program to prepare employees for the big day. More than 50 staff were drafted from Starwood properties all over the world to help train newcomers in groups of 20 to 30 people, kicking things off with a daylong familiarization carnival.

"We didn't want to work with the new hires in a traditional way. We wanted to make it more fun," says Rachel Chan, general manager of human resources. "We made Starwood booths—a dozen—each with a different topic. We made the lessons into games that they could play, with prizes. It was the first time we had ever done anything like this. It was more interactive and fun for everybody."

That was followed by a two-week simulation during which the Sheraton invited 10,000 guests to check in and out, testing everything from the valet parking to housekeeping and room service.

"With hotels, of any size, it's all about processes. For instance, how many minutes does it take to check in a guest? With so many rooms, that's a critical question," says Josef Dolp, Sheraton's managing director in Macau, who likens the hotel's logistics to those of a military operation. "We just have to facilitate every process in an organized way."

Designated counters are designed to expedite check-in. Guests traveling as a group are whisked to a separate check-in area, as are loyalty-program members. In all, there are 61 counters ushering in thousands of guests

each week. And should you be stuck in line for a few minutes, regular performances in the lobby provide a diversion. During my visit, the entertainment consisted up a troop of Polynesian dancers in grass skirts and coconut bras.

It's what you don't see, however, that keeps things ticking along. All information about regular Starwood guests is entered into the computer system, so if you previously took a yoga class at Sheraton Hawaii or Hong Kong, for example, yoga mats will be waiting for you in your room. Or you could just fine-tune your asanas at the Sheraton's sprawling fitness center. Just don't expect to be working out alone: the hotel expects guests to log around 12,000 kilometers on its treadmills each month, which, incidentally, is more than the distance one would cover walking the Great Wall of China.

Here are some more numbers: In its first month of operation, the Sheraton served as many as 83,000 buffets. Its main ballroom weighs in at almost 5,000 square meters—the

equivalent of 11 basketball courts—while the outdoor swimming pools measure a total of 12,000 square meters. Once the Earth Tower opens, the hotel will house 6,256 of Sheraton's signature Sweet Sleeper beds, meaning staff will have to fluff more than 15,600 pillows (add in the duvets, and that's nearly 15 tons of feathers). In the feng shui-themed spa, therapists go through 137 liters of massage oil a month. And lighting the two towers will require in excess of 90,000 light bulbs—almost five times as many as at the Eiffel Tower. That statistic will gain more luster in coming years, as a half-size replica of the Eiffel Tower is erected nearby at a themed Parisian resort, part of the same massive Sands Cotai complex.

This is another unusual aspect of this Sheraton; as a tenant at the Sands Cotai development, it has to work in conjunction with competing brands Conrad, Holiday Inn, Four Seasons, the Venetian, and the soon-to-open St. Regis. In total, that's almost 10,000 rooms, with Sands providing services like security and

many of the food and beverage outlets.

Launched in 2007 on landfill between the islands of Coloane and Taipa (Cotai is a portmanteau of those names), this complex and hotel are testament to the vertiginous rise of disposable income in the East. From my room, I look out on surrounding construction sites filled with cranes and new foundations and marvel at the fact that five years ago, Cotai was more two of clubs than ace of spades—a dusty brownfield without any of the glitter and flash on display today.

Now, plans are afoot for a US\$1.5 billion theme park nearby, along with a US\$4 billion Wynn and US\$2.5 billion MGM resort complexes. It's quite something to be the largest hotel among all this—and a considerable challenge. "Sometimes, it's a bit like walking on the moon," says Josef Dolp. "But skillful sailors are made by rough seas." ©

Cotai Central, Taipa, Macau; 853/2880-2000; sheratonmacao.com; doubles from US\$620

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