

All About the Durian at Hotel ICON



Source: Unsplash (2021)

Background

Durian, also known as the king of fruits in Southeast Asia, is characterized by its spiky exterior and strong odor. The fruit is not liked by everyone and is even banned in some hotels because of its pungent smell, but Hotel ICON embraces it (Hotel ICON, n.d.). Each summer, in celebration of the Malaysian Durian Festival, Hotel ICON introduces a variety of dining offers featuring durian pastries and other gastronomic delights. Having been held for six consecutive years, the renowned durian feast has become an annual promotional highlight for Hotel ICON.

The hotel celebrates the significance of the fruit with its “All About Durian Afternoon Tea” promotion at The Market, which features more than 10 durian-infused savory and sweet dishes (SCMP, 2024). As part of the tea set, guests are also able to sample highly-prized durian flesh from different varieties at a reasonable cost. On select dates in August, the “Malaysian Durian Festival” brunch and dinner buffet at Silverbox Ballroom highlights creative durian dishes, such as Mini Musang King Durian with Abalone Duck Soup and D197 Durian Cheese Baked Caribbean Lobster (Hotel ICON, 2024).

Danny Ho, executive chef at Hotel ICON, is the mastermind behind these offerings. Ho’s decision to embrace durian in his culinary creations has been a huge success, with the Durian Afternoon Tea promotion selling out every single day (Hotel ICON, n.d.). Instead of following the safe and traditional path taken by many hotels in the city’s saturated afternoon tea landscape, the Malaysian chef was determined to stand out by experimenting with his French-learned pastry techniques on Asian ingredients. He believes this approach aligns well with Hotel ICON’s innovative ethos as a fully integrated teaching and research hotel (SCMP, 2024).

Having witnessed the exploitation of hardworking durian farmers, including his father, Ho is committed to supporting Malaysian farmers by helping them increase their income (SCMP, 2024). The hotel uses about 1.5 tonnes of fresh durian paste each month, and Ho believes that cultivating strong relationships directly with farmers is the key to securing high-quality products (SCMP, 2024).

Challenges

As many people dislike durian due to its strong odor, the durian festival dining promotion may limit the hotel's ability to attract a wider audience who may be hesitant to try the fruit. Moreover, it appears that Hotel ICON also provides durian flesh and pastries on their in-room dining menu. Combined with the smell from the kitchen and dining outlets, this may upset guests who do not like durian, as the odor can linger in the lobby and guest rooms. Additionally, since this promotion has been running for six years, innovation is required for its continuation. Without fresh menu items and new ideas, demand may begin to decline as customers grow bored with the same offerings each year.

Discussion Questions

1. How does embracing durian in its culinary offerings help Hotel ICON differentiate itself in the competitive hotel market in Hong Kong?
2. What strategies can Hotel ICON implement to accommodate guests who dislike the strong odor of durian while still celebrating the fruit during the festival?
3. How does Hotel ICON balance tradition and innovation in its culinary offerings?
4. How does the annual repetition of the durian festival create challenges for innovation?
5. How can Hotel ICON continue to innovate its durian-themed offerings to keep the promotion fresh and exciting for returning guests?
6. What feedback mechanisms could Hotel ICON implement to improve the festival each year?

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