

Super Chef

At H Bistro, Executive Chef, Stephen Jean Dion, is pulling out all the stops in providing an exhilarating culinary experience.





Many people think a chef's job is a combination of the fiendishly difficult and the straightforward. After all, it's just cooking – isn't it? The skills come in when you have to dish after dish arriving at diners' tables looking incredible and tasting fantastic. The chef prepares everything in the kitchen in great haste but somehow gets it right each and every time. Exhausting as that may seem, a chef also has to do a plethora of other things: find the food at the best prices and ensure its quality, train staff and, above all, make sure diners are happy with their choices and with the restaurant.

Stephen (that's pronounced 'Stefan') Jean Dion, the Executive Chef at H Bistro, Hansar Samui Resort & Spa (located at the very far western end of Fisherman's Village, Bophut, right on the beach and next to Anantara Bophut Resort & Spa), knows a thing or two about cooking. He started learning as an 18-year old apprentice in Quebec at the famed Les Halles restaurant, which became one of Canada's most respected. Following his time there, he decided to travel and came to Thailand, where he started work in Bangkok. Next, a dream job came his way and he became a private chef to the King and Queen of Jordan and spent two years catering for them and their family. His work involved catering for all kinds of dignitaries and royals from different parts of the world. After that, Stephen returned to Bangkok





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where he worked for another five years before he came down to Samui to take over at H Bistro.

Stephen prepares French-Mediterranean cuisine for guests alongside a Thai menu, allowing diners to enjoy the best of both International and Asian cuisines. Menu highlights include Maine lobster and oysters flown from Canada, Japan and France, complemented by a list of selected international wines and champagnes.

Hansar officially opened in July this year and since then the restaurant has attracted a clientele from both within and outside the resort. Despite its success, Stephen's not one to rest on his laurels and says how important it is to keep on being creative. "Creativity is essential in this kind of work," he says. "You've got to be innovative if you're going to keep on pleasing your guests." To take just one example of Stephen's innovativeness, you'll find a range of traditional dishes on the menu which are basically French. "Many people tend to associate French cooking with heavy sauces, often cream-based, but they don't want their food to be so heavy," says Stephen. "And it doesn't need to be. There's plenty of ways to make the same dishes much lighter whilst tasting every bit as good."

He's also a dab-hand at making dishes taste a lot better than you'd expect. Take steak, for example. "First of all," says Stephen, "we choose excellent quality meat. We find exactly the right supplier and make sure that the price is also right. Here at Hansar, the owners are really supportive of the fact we need the best, but we also don't want to charge guests extravagant prices." He goes on to describe what's called the sous-vide method of cooking. "I learned this in Bangkok and have to say it's a lot better than simply using the traditional pan-frying method from start to finish. What I do is take the meat, place it in a vacuum bag along with some top-quality olive oil and then slow-cook it. Afterwards, I let the meat rest before quickly searing it. The vacuum bag ensures that all the juices inside the meat are retained and the steak itself actually tastes a lot lighter." Stephen even uses a special oven for making sous-vide dishes and says how well-equipped his kitchen is, "definitely a lot better than most and that's thanks again to the owners of Hansar."



Appetiser by Aziz



Decor by Collette

Since the kitchen is open to view, just behind a massive glass window, you can see Stephen and his team at work, preparing dishes and making sure that everything is going to plan. "The kitchen's not only extremely professional," he says, "but it's also a great place to work." It's spacious and light, but that's not the only plus point: both the restaurant and the kitchen share the same great view: you can see the spectacular bay of Bo Phut stretching out in front of you.

"I'm very fortunate to work in a place like this," says Stephen. "And, unlike some of the city hotels I've worked in, Hansar caters for a much smaller number of guests. That means that the diners get more attention and we can cater for exactly what they want."

Since Hansar is a resort, it's not just a question of cooking for a few hours in the evening. "H Bistro is open daily at 6:00 am for breakfast," says Stephen, "and we don't close till late in the evening, basically not until the last guests have left." He adds that there's a second food and beverage outlet besides H Bistro. "Upstairs, there's The Chill Lounge. You can have food brought up there, but it's more of a place for cocktails and long drinks."

His day's a long one but Stephen's very passionate about what he does. He's in charge of ordering the produce and chasing down the best deals for his guests and he also ensures that the entire team functions well. This applies not just to the actual cooking but to the serving – right down to the tiniest of details. You certainly won't find him simply turning up to cook awesome dishes and then leaving for home again: an executive chef like him is on the job 24/7, if necessary.

Dimitri Waring

For reservations and further information, telephone: 0 7724 5511.

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