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Checking in: Kameha Grand Zürich

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Hotel restaurants have had a bad press in the past as stuffy, dull dining rooms that you'd happily leave the premises to avoid, writes *Colette Doyle*. This is most certainly not the case however, at Zürich's Kameha Grand, where two amazing outlets vie for your custom. First up is Yu Nijuo, a Japanese fine dining restaurant where Michelin-starred chef Norman Fischer weaves his culinary magic.

The restaurant's name translates as "hot water to the power of two" and is a nod to the importance of water in Japanese culture. This is demonstrated in the ritual of *Oshibori*, which involves a personal hand towel being brought to the guest before the meal begins, designed to relieve some of the stress associated with the Western lifestyle. The cocoon-like black and red colour scheme brings together patterns from Switzerland's Appenzell region, famous for its embroidery, with traditional Japanese scenes, as a nod to the merger of influences from both countries.

The chef lives up to his billing and the food is sublime: an exquisitely presented amuse-bouche of spicy tuna, tandoori chicken and garden cress mousse piques the appetite beautifully before the sushi and sashimi platter arrives. This magnificent creation is the stuff of a pescetarian's dreams, featuring virtually every fish and seafood known to discerning diners, including salmon, tuna, eel, scallops and yellowtail.

The main courses are minimalist in keeping with pared-down Japanese style: strips of sole and fillet steak, each cooked to perfection and paired with vegetables that are artistically arranged on the plate. A milk sorbet refreshes the palate before dessert, which consists of just two choices, so we try both. Beetroot doesn't sound that promising, but delights as a deconstructed cake with the finest Swiss chocolate, while mango comes with a gossamer-light accompaniment of cream and coconut.

At L'Unico (meaning unique in Italian and echoing therefore the designation of the Kameha itself, whose name derives from Hawaiian), the style is more informal – lighter and airier with cheery, energetic staff – but no less impressive. Freshly baked bread comes with a fiery chilli dip prepared at the table that packs quite a punch.

Our antipasto is presented on a three-tier plate of the kind more normally used to serve afternoon tea and is adorned with a mouth-watering selection of mozzarella, bruschetta, salami and roasted peppers – a feast for the eyes as well as the tastebuds. Mains are that eternal Italian classic, pasta: ravioli with braised pork and spaghetti with garlic, oil and *peperoncino*, liberally doused in parmesan.

The tiramisu is one of the best I've tasted, and that's saying something given that I lived in Italy for nearly four years, while my companion's chef-recommended almond parfait is superbly yummy.

More gastronomic nuances await in our executive suite, where the panels of the sliding bathroom door are designed in the style of the squares of a chocolate bar, one of Switzerland's most famous exports. The generously proportioned suite is divided into two halves: the living space features a second wide-screen TV and a comfy sofa, ideal for lounging.

All together, there are 245 rooms, including 11 themed suites created by acclaimed Dutch interior designer Marcel Wanders, hailed by the *New York Times* as the "Lady Gaga of design". The meeting rooms all benefit from natural daylight and seem to have been the brainchild of a Swiss incarnation of Willy Wonka, with the walls again featuring faux chocolate squares. These are joined by a magnificent ballroom decked out in impressive neo-baroque style that holds nearly 1,000 guests and which extends across more than 700 square metres of space.

Up on the sixth floor, the soothing spa has four meeting rooms and a gym plus sauna, as well as a relaxing roof terrace that catches the sun. Other facilities at the hotel include the Pure Gold Bar, whose walls are adorned with the same colour as the precious metal stored in Swiss banks, and the Shisha Lounge, which pays tribute to Arabian tradition with its copious selection of hookah pipes and flavoured tobaccos.

For those who want to venture further afield, the hotel is just a 20-minute and CHF8 (£5.50) tram ride from the city centre with its scenic delights and the immediate vicinity is surrounded by the Glattspark. This covers more than 128,000 square metres of greenery that features forests, meadows and ponds and which is home to the Kameha Lake, the largest body of freshwater in Zürich.

"Life is grand" is the hotel's ubiquitous slogan and, as I bid a fond farewell to this charming property, steeped in the best traditions of the majestic hotels of yesteryear and featuring impeccable Swiss hospitality, I most decidedly have to agree.

Kameha Grand Zurich, Dufaux-Strasse 1, 8152 Opfikon, Switzerland; +41 44 525 50 00; kamehagrandzurich.com. As part of the special "Sleep with me" introductory offer, rates start from CHF199 (£136) per room per night, including breakfast to go. This offer is available until

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