

# GSS

THE GOLD SERVICE  
SCHOLARSHIP

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MANDARIN ORIENTAL  
THE HOTEL GROUP

Dear Sponsors,

After being nominated a Winning finalist and commended as “most consistent” candidate of the Gold Service Scholarship 2023, I had the opportunity to take part in several work experiences that would allow me to develop my career in ways I did not think were possible. In particular, I had the chance to accompany the 2023 Scholar, Jupiter, in what would be one of the greatest work placements in my career – One week of stage at the iconic Mandarin Oriental in Bangkok.



More than 140 years of Hospitality are treasured in the walls of this incredible building in one of the most vibrant and exciting cities in the world.

The Mandarin Oriental is situated in the Bang Rak district, facing the Chao Phraya River.

The Hotel hosts 393 rooms, 12 Food and Beverage outlets, 2 swimming pools, gyms, outstanding events spaces, and ballrooms. Without doubt one of the most impressive operations I ever had the chance to see, made this Hotel a true leader of this sector.

After a 12-hour flight we finally arrived at the airport in Bangkok where a car of the Mandarin Oriental was waiting for us to bring us to the premises.

On arrival, they warmly welcomed us and gifted us with a local flower garland as sign of welcome and respect which is part of the Thai tradition. We straight away felt that, despite the Hotel being an international space, the Thai tradition was kept intact. After showing us to our rooms we got treated to a welcome breakfast at the River Terrace. A gorgeous space that operates as all day dining showcasing a large Menu A La Carte plus an incredible buffet with selections of bakeries, fruits, and cooked foods from all over the world.



Jupiter and I were so excited to be there that we decided to use our first day of leisure wandering around the city. We visited the Royal Palace, took a *tuk tuk* to move from one place to another and got ourselves a quick lunch in one of the biggest and most known shopping malls in Bangkok, The Siam Paragon. The shopping malls are quite impressive and culturally a place where most Thai people, especially younger generations, spend their day between local and international food, shops and use it as a space to recover from the heat.



The second day from our arrival we were introduced to the HR Team, where we got introduced to a lesson on Thai Culture that would allow us to understand in a bit more in depth all those greetings, manners, and ways to behave that we would experience in the following days. I was very impressed with how the HR was operating: their focus was all on its people, to connect the different cultures of employees that were present within the Hotel and put the same focus to their employees that they would have shown to their guest. The priority was to enhance and increase a sense of belonging to the Hotel and the brand. "People work better together when they feel they are part of something" was repeated throughout the corridors of the HR department. To prove it, there were numerous prints of the hands of loyal employees that worked in the same walls for more than 40 years.

We continued with a show round of the premises. The hotel is divided on both sides of the river with a boat shuttle operating throughout the day allowing guests and staff to cross from one side to the other. We visited all the Food and Beverage departments including the Back of House areas, kitchens, and other departments of the Hotel.

Only then I realised how big this operation is and why it takes almost 1000 employees to run. It was astonishing. For lunch we met the Food and Beverage Director, Bezhad Davarkia, who explained to us more in detail about how he runs the operation. He straight away underlined the importance of connecting with the staff to be able to succeed.

The second day, we got a tour of the operations run by the MO outside of the Hotel which includes mostly shops.

Now, we were very lucky to be there during moon cake season, the Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival, that consists in egg-based cakes to eat in a few bites. This festival is well-known and celebrated in most of East Asia and Bangkok is no exception.



Therefore, every hotel has small operations such as carts and shops that bake and sell moon cakes during this time of the year making it a million-dollar business. I was pleased to hear that the Mandarin Oriental was first for best-selling moon cakes between hotel brands. The shops we visited were located in various shopping malls within the city and offered Afternoon Teas, coffee biscuits and cakes as well as little gifts. Even outside of the Hotel the Mandarin Oriental culture was well embraced.

Despite the fact that the shops were doing great business with their selling, I understood that the hotel's priority was to keep brand awareness high between consumers and guests. Also, if not guest of the Hotel, consumer can have a little "part of the Mandarin Oriental" by buying a branded gift or cake, or just enjoy an Afternoon Tea outside of the Hotel making it more accessible for all people. The following days Jupiter and I split for working as she was more interested in seeing different outlets of the entire operations and I wanted to focus more on the fine dining areas.

I got to start at Le Normandie, a two Michelin star restaurant run by Alain Roux who I had the pleasure of meeting already at my previous stage at the Waterside Inn.

I was well looked after as Federico; the General Manager and the Head of Wine of the Hotel Antoine got me through the different steps of services of the restaurant and explained to me the concept of the place. It is a classic French fine dining that showcases the highest quality of food and service of the country.

Two Michelin star is the greatest achievement so far for any Restaurant in Bangkok. It is recognized by its guest as a special place for celebrations for important events such as Birthdays and various celebrations.

The Restaurant is located at the top floor of the hotel, surrounded by glass windows that allow a stunning view on both sides of the city.



The concept of cuisines embraces very well the vision of Alain Roux that I already experienced at his sister restaurant. It operates for lunch and dinner and showcases 3 different menus which are enhanced by the theatre of the table side service. From crepes Suzette, Dover Soles, carving ducks, tartare, and linguini caviar all prepared in the dining room in front of the guest.

I had the pleasure to actively be part of the services throughout the week, spending time with the team on the front of house, back of house and wine service. In between services, Federico would take me through different table-side service training. Every day I had different training.

What I realised during most of this week at Le Normandie were the cultural differences between the European work culture and the Thai employees. Respect is what I thought was the key point of this relationship. The Thai people have culturally a very strong feeling about respect, care and looking after each other; the care taken for every individual is impressive. A lot of situational leadership must be involved, adapting to every individual, and providing a different style of management for each person analyzing the different strengths and weaknesses.

All leaders with European background were telling me how much they learned since moving to Thailand and vice versa the Thai people from the western styles.

This exchange of cultures was wonderful to see and enriching for everyone.

During my time at Le Normandie, I had the pleasure to bond with the team, they took their time to introduce me to their culture and gave the chance to see things from a different optic.

All over I think the biggest take away from this experience was to understand how important it is to put yourself into other people's shoes, especially culturally, to understand the right way to break down language barriers. The leadership involved was key to driving a team with individuals coming from different backgrounds. The industry I work for is made of people for the people, and being able to adapt to the different circumstances and situations to tailor everyone's experience in a very personal way takes a lot of personal knowledge.

It is very applicable as well in a city like London, especially where guests are coming from all over the world. This is probably my biggest take away from this experience.

The last day, Jupiter and I tried to make the best out of the city and explored a little bit further. We went through little markets, got a Thai massage, had cocktail in jazz bars and had a Thai dinner in a traditional place suggested by our colleagues. The Thai food is just exquisite and packed with flavor. Anything your heart desires, Bangkok has it.

I cannot express in words how much gratitude I have for this given opportunity.

I would like to thank again the GSS Organisation, the trustees and sponsors that made all this happen. Every year young professionals like me grow in an outstanding way thanks to you and these great opportunities that come with this competition.

With all my heart,

Thank you *Kun* Robin

