

The Hobbit House Restaurant Full of Dwarfs

While the Philippine capital Manila has no dearth of the strange and exotic to mesmerize visitors, the Hobbit House – called ‘the world’s most unusual restaurant’ – would be hard to trump. Located in Marcelo H. del Pilar street, between Arquiza and Padre Faura streets, the restaurant is staffed entirely by midgets.



Billing itself as “The only restaurant in the world owned, managed and staffed entirely by Hobbits”, the Hobbit House has managed to survive in an ultra-competitive area with its unique offer of fine dining, more than 100 worldwide beers, diverse offerings of live music and, of course, its unforgettable staff of ‘Hobbits’.

The restaurant was founded over 30 years ago by Peace Corps volunteer and college professor Jim Turner, a full-sized American bachelor in his late 70s. The inspiration for the establishment’s theme was, of course, J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, a novel written in 1937 that gave birth to the contemporary fantasy genre. Subtitled ‘Tales of the Middle Earth’, the novel’s author surely never could have foreseen that his opus would be brought to life in faraway Manila in the form of a restaurant and a rock/blues/folk music venue.

The bistro with the world’s tiniest waiters and waitresses offers two levels: the main restaurant area downstairs with its nightly musical offerings of folk, rock, country, jazz and blues, plus another, smaller area upstairs called ‘The Hobbit Hideaway’ for customers more interested in the pub attractions of pool tables and dart boards.

Most of the tiny waiters and waitresses have been with the Hobbit House for years. One waitress, Josie Versoza, 38, has been with the establishment nearly 20 years. Originally from Catbalogan in Northern Samar, Josie came to Manila with family members, seeking employment. She was working at a fabrics company when she heard about the opening at the Hobbit House.

Merely boasting a novel theme, however, does not automatically guarantee success for a restaurant/nightclub in this competitive environment. Years before, a restaurant run by the Friendship Club of the Deaf, Inc. opened a theme eatery in Luneta Park featuring a staff composed entirely of deaf mutes.

Customers were required to write their selections from the menu down on pads. The waitresses and waiters, though, proved virtually impossible to summon for drink refills or other needs, thus forfeiting most return business. Today the establishment has been reduced to a small snack shop, though the proceeds still go to the deaf charity.

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The Hobbit House, however, unburdened by such drawbacks, continues to draw amused, amazed and delighted patrons from around the world year after year with its tiny, charming staffers. A few years ago, the Hobbit House made the local news in Manila by hosting a 'Teeny-Weeny Wedding' between two of its staff members. The wedding ceremony was attended by a proudly beaming Jim Turner.

Another newscast featured a six-foot-plus basketball player trying his hand at performing a waiter shift at the Hobbit House, presenting an eye-opening contrast to his coworkers, most of whom reached only to his waist.

The Hobbit House's staffers have occasionally taken some time off to perform as a traveling troupe in dance and variety shows in Singapore and elsewhere in Asia, including one member, Egoy, who does a memorable impersonation of Elvis.

The diminutive waiters and waitresses present a surreal sight as they circulate among the tables, carrying trays almost as big as they are. The concept has been so successful that there is now even a second location, at a tourist resort in the central Philippines on Boracay. The establishment has been written about in guidebooks around the world, clearly reinforcing its well-deserved reputation as 'the world's most unusual restaurant'.

The Hobbit House, Marcelo H. del Pilar, Manila, Philippines

Photos: TR, Flickr

<http://www.hobbithousemanila.com>

<http://newsgroups.derkeiler.com>

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