

Nothing Italian about it

Rococo is unforgettable. But leave your preconceptions about Italian cuisine at the door, says **Andy van Smeerdijk**

Don't let the exterior fool you. Masquerading as an apartment block in the Jumeirah Beach Residence area, the Sofitel Jumeirah Beach is one of the latest five-star hotels to take root in Dubai. And one of its outlets, much to the delight of local foodies, is Rococo Italian restaurant.

With a name that rolls off the tongue like Rocco Barocco, the menu has distinctly French overtones. But then, as Umbrian chef Enzo Reri explains, many dishes the French claim as theirs actually originated in Italy. And who are we to argue with the guy cooking our dinner?

"Some guests come in here and want to order spaghetti bolognese," he says. "I ask them – did you see it on the menu outside? Is there spaghetti there? It's like buying a ticket to *Avatar*, but when you get to the cinema you want to watch *Iron Man*."

As a concession, he says the kitchen does do a Tuscan-style oxtail ragout lasagna.

Regardless, the cuisine is superb and the service near faultless. Managed by the marvellous Stephanie Digeon, a French food buff who readily joins her waiting staff in serving meals, Rococo combines the vibe of a family-run trattoria with five-star service.

And the food? Don't tell Enzo, but it did seem a bit Provençal. For starters, I had grilled king scallops, beetroot mash, spinach, passion fruit sauce, tomatoes, sea bream



carpaccio and ginger air (froth). A medley of flavours and textures, it was *molto bene* (cue waving of arms). Meanwhile, my wife enjoyed a sea bream carpaccio with baby cress, tomatoes, roe, orange and ginger air.

The mains were just as exhausting. My wife wolfed into a succulent rack of lamb with a pistachio and almond crust, accompanied by potato and mushroom croquettes and candied shallots. I chose duck breast with honey, braised radicchio, orange slices and foie gras. The duck was succulent, probably the best I've had in the UAE. The foie gras was a guilt trip, as always.

PICK OF THE WEEK **ROCOCO**

what Italian cuisine

where Sofitel Jumeirah Beach; 04 432 8456

why Because fine cuisine and good service is a recipe for a perfect night out

cost Bill for two Dh570

Feeling somewhat force-fed, we shared dessert, which was deadly – chocolate fondant with cinnamon ice-cream, pear milkshake and ginger crisps.

Although we loved the food, service and decor, like so many

restaurants, Rococo has a case of lighting overload. A dimmer would do wonders. Yet who needs mood lighting when you have an animated chef, a charming manager and attentive staff? This is one restaurant you shouldn't miss.

THIS WEEK'S FOOD DEALS...

AL NAFOORA RESTAURANT

What Kickstart the weekend by indulging in a delectable spread of hot and cold dishes.

Where Coral Oriental, Dubai; 04 228 1999

Cost Dh65 per person; Every Friday, from 10am to 4pm

FUSION

What Enjoy the delicious Sang Baeng set menu for two and sample Fusion's mouth-watering blend of Malay, Indonesian and Thai cuisine.

Where Le Royal Méridien Beach Resort and Spa; 04 316 5550

Cost Dh280 per person

EATERY RESTAURANT

What Indulge in a delicious brunch that spreads out a variety of flavours.

Where Four Points Sheraton; 04 316 3726

Cost Dh75 per head, includes free flowing soft drinks and bubbly

THE THAI KITCHEN

What The Thai Kitchen features the flavours, colours and aromas of authentic Thai cuisine.

Where Park Hyatt; 04 317 2222

Cost Dh195 per person; Friday lunch is available between 12.30pm and 4pm