



Simply all'Italiana

After much ado, **Cipriani Dubai** has finally flung open its doors, and with a Bellini in hand, Laurel Munshower grabs a seat to navigate its menu of famed fare

Perched at a white-clothed table on Cipriani's second level, I take in the scene before me: Below, a sea of professionally dressed diners fill the white and caramel-wood dining room. Punctuated by dust-blue banquettes, a nautical theme prevails; the brass railings and gleaming white bar area bookended by portholes displaying a choppy digital sea resemble a mid-century yacht. On the walls, larger-than-life vintage shots of supermodels – Naomi Campbell, Cindy Crawford, Linda Evangelista – blow air kisses above diners' heads. It's a stylish setup, and if you've been to any of the many other Cipriani restaurants located around the world, it's much what you would expect it to be.

Waiters in pristine white jackets perform a constant dance and chorus, bending from table to table, singing: *Buongiorno! Presto! Buon appetito!* It's mere moments before I receive a "*Buongiorno!*" of my own, as food and drink menus are presented and a slice of lemon is slipped into my glass of sparkling water. Service is swift, making it ideal for a business lunch in the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC), where upscale business lunches are practically *de rigueur*.

To start? It has to be a Bellini. This brunch-time favourite was invented more than 70 years ago in Venice by none other than Guiseppe Cipriani

himself in his legendary Harry's Bar; the simple cocktail mixed with white-peach purée is cited as the reason for Prosecco's rise in fame (which is produced near Venice).

As for the menu, it's filled with Cipriani classics and Italian favourites such as burrata "alla Mediterranea", minestrone soup, rigatoni "alla Siciliana" and tiramisu. "The aim," general manager Marco Boito, who oversees every new Cipriani opening, tells me, "is to feed guests with simple, elegant, good food."

Carpaccio "alla Cipriani" and an Alaskan king crab salad with olive oil and lemon arrive in tandem, and I realise I'm in for a whale of a meal. The portions are generous (matching the size of their price tags), though it's refreshing to find a fine-dining restaurant eschewing dainty portions. Topped by Cipriani's signature smattering of a homemade mayonnaise whisked with Worcestershire sauce and a drop of milk, the dish of thinly sliced raw beef goes down easily. In contrast to the rich carpaccio, the king crab salad is succulent and subtly sweet, enhanced by a squeeze of lemon that results in an almost refreshing feel.

My greatest task arrives with the gnocchi "alla gorgonzola". The pillowy dumplings are wickedly creamy, a cheese-lover's indulgence, but the normally distinctive blue cheese is subtle and not overpowering. My main, a veal chop "Milanese", is

lightly breaded and fried, and pounded millimetres thin into a such a nearly perfect circle it would make a geometry professor proud. Tender, salted and paired with a simple salad of rocket and cherry tomatoes, it probably seems undressed to many non-Italian diners – Where's the accompanying spaghetti or the sauce? – but this is the traditional Italian version of the dish, and stays true to Cipriani's philosophy of serving simple, good cuisine.

After nearly finishing the veal – an arduous yet delicious task – a new crisp, clean white cloth is expertly rolled out onto my table for the final, tempting dish. The thick slice of vanilla meringue, which I imagined was going to be much smaller (silly me) is light and creamy with a hint of lemon zest – but all the same pure decadence. But what better way to end a meal at a destination that's been toying with the term since the 1930s?

The important bit

WHAT: Cipriani Dubai

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