



Dining decadence

FINE FOOD AND SUPERB SERVICE IS THE ANTIDOTE TO A HECTIC LIFESTYLE. ABU DHABI'S SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, QARYAT AL BERI DISHES UP BOTH

WORDS | GISELLE WHITEAKER

“Welcome to the Shangri-La Hotel. May I escort you to Bord Eau for your dinner booking?” asks the woman waiting in the lobby. This is a defining aspect of the luxury establishment – exemplary service. Throughout the weekend, staff materialise as if by magic to attend to our every whim, subtly fading into the background when no longer required. “We’ve been expecting you,” says my new friend with a smile.

I have booked a weekend away as an escape from a hectic work month, my friend Bakr joining me. We plan to dine and lie by the pool, a spa visit breaking the welcome monotony. The Shangri-La Hotel, Qaryat Al Beri is the ideal place for this – tucked away in a serene riverside location with relaxation on tap (and a souk next door, should entertainment be necessary).

Our table at Bord Eau faces the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, the silhouette unmistakable as it lingers sedately on the opposite river-bank. We sit diagonally to share the views. “Do you have any allergies, or are there any foods you don’t like?” asks Peter-Paul Kleiss, the service manager of the French fine-dining restaurant. We give him our blessedly-short list and he disappears to consult with Chef Jeff Tan.

We choose Bord Eau’s blind tasting menu, leaving decision-making to Chef Tan. Our job

is simply to savour the flavours, starting with freshly-baked bread and a tantalising capsicum dip, served with crispy crackers artfully arranged in a glass of poppy seeds. From this moment on, our taste-buds are treated to a stream of delectable creations paired with sophisticated French wines for my unsophisticated tastes, and fruity mocktails for Bakr.

The palate-cleanser is a shot of a tangy tomato consommé, served with an *amuse-bouche* of chopped salmon marinated in lime wrapped inside a wafer-thin cone, and topped with a dab of crème fraîche. “We fly our ingredients from France to ensure authenticity,” says Peter-Paul proudly as he places bowls of vibrant-green soup in front of us. The foamy asparagus concoction is so light we inhale it.

“This is King crab fished from under ice, served with Granny Smith jelly, avocado and candied yuzu; a Japanese citrus fruit,” introduces Peter-Paul. The contrasting flavours sampled together leave my tongue tingling. A roll of Dover sole with a citrus crust follows, before the veal dish that packs a distinctive truffle punch. But there’s more: another course arrives — roasted milk-fed lamb so tender it melts in our mouths.

Just as we think we are done, Peter-Paul wheels over an immense trolley, talking us

through a selection of more than a dozen French cheeses. He creates a tasting platter and we plough through the entire medley. Little do we know that the *pièce de résistance* is still to come.

With a flourish, he places balls of chocolate on the table, and before we can protest, pours a hot chocolate sauce onto a central point, which melts away, leaving an inviting opening for us to delve into. The textured crispy shell, smooth ice-cream and velvety chocolate combine into a dessert so good I could cry. “Death by chocolate,” I mutter contentedly.

On our final day, a golf buggy whisks me to CHI, The Spa for a detoxifying scrub and wrap as damage repair. “Are you allergic to seafood?” asks my therapist, unaware of the mountain of ocean-dwellers I’ve consumed at Pearls & Caviar, the hotel’s stylish Mediterranean seafood restaurant. She scrubs my worries away before slathering me with warm goo and wrapping me in comfort. While the sea-algae works its magic a head massage deletes my worries. Post-rinsing, the oil massage leaves me lethargically draped in a sweet aroma.

Revitalised, I am ready to tackle life away from this enchanted palace. But I am not ready to stop being treated like a queen. I shall wave regally from the car window all the way home. 🍷