

Those who are familiar with the Holiday Inn brand may be forgiven for brushing aside the new arrival in the capital. But this isn't just any Holiday Inn; it's an Abu Dhabi Holiday Inn.

Which means you're greeted with four star service, marble floors (what else?), an impressive entrance with ample parking – and a surprisingly pleasant venue to dine in. The chef at the Lemon Tree, Feras Barakat, is also very keen and enthusiastic, and with a long track-record at big-name hotels he definitely knows his stuff.

The Mediterranean-themed menu is generous, and the pricing – although not quite as low as you would imagine from a budget brand – is still reasonable.

Starters are well-presented. Chicken liver pâté with citrus poached pear, toasted pistachio and raspberry vinaigrette lifts the palette nicely. The seafood salad is a meal in its own right, perhaps even over-generous, but succulent king prawns, mussels, calamari and crunchy fried squid with vinaigrette are impossible to leave. The only fault with the starters would be an overuse of olive oil – the dishes needed very little help in dressing.

Duck and hamour for main courses, again, tick most boxes. The fish is light and flaky with a subtle hint of lemon; the duck breast, grilled with orange and star anise, sautéed cabbage, green beans and jus is perfectly tender, slightly pink as requested and accompanied by a great sauce. The only fault again: an overly oily dressing.

The verdict? There's already a good buzz about the eatery, and good service and a full menu make it competitive with some of the capital's fancier options. Therein lies the problem; it's a good choice for dining in the area, without having to venture off the island or battle traffic into the downtown area. But the Lemon Tree will have to fight hard (and adjust olive oil use and portion size) to keep the punters from straying.

What? Lemon Tree

Where? The Holiday Inn

Cost: AED 148 per person excluding drinks and taxes

Why? Shouldn't be overlooked – this isn't your standard Holiday Inn fare

Lemon Tree

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Why not? Worth asking the chef to go light on the dressing – but that's our only grumble

We say: Reasonable food, reasonable price, reasonable venue

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