



With a name like Pearls and Caviar, you might be tempted to show up in your Christian Louboutins and best Chanel; but this upscale eatery is not at all as pretentious as the name suggests. The atmosphere is certainly chic in shades of black, white, soft greys, and silver, but this is comfortable, liveable luxury.

Though it was too chilly to sit outside for long, the colourful floodlights were nothing compared to the spectacle of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque just across the channel. And while it's not all that convenient to get to (especially for anyone sporting those Louboutins), the location should mean that the view of the mosque will remain unobstructed even when current construction is finished.

It goes without saying that the service is as we've come to expect from the Shangri-La. But ambiance aside, the real reason to find your way down to Pearls and Caviar is the food. Our engaging hostess Floriane was able to make several excellent recommendations.

For starters, light citrus flavours and olives gave the marinated scallops a light, clean zest, and the cumin in the tomato soup lingered long after the crab raviolis were gone. One of the house specialties, the seafood bouillabaisse employs a mild broth making this a main course for anyone who truly appreciates the flavour of seafood and a light dessert of caramelised apples with vanilla cream was better than your mum makes.

Though her assistants were in charge the night of our visit, Head Chef Stephanie can rest easy in the knowledge that her restaurant is still able to deliver even in her absence. Pearls and Caviar should not be missed—just make sure your hair can stand to be outdoors for awhile.

**What?** Pearls and Caviar

**Where?** Shangri-La Hotel

**Cost:** You can splash out on the Beluga caviar and wagyu beef for AED 210, but there are plenty of mains on the menu for less than AED 100

**Why?** Fabulous atmosphere, gorgeous view, outstanding food

**Why not?** A bit difficult to get to on the shoreline of Shangri-La; expect to walk or ride in the open-air club car to get there

**We say:** Absolutely worth the small inconvenience—an excellent spot to impress clients or for a romantic date

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*Laura Fulton*

## **Review 2:**

First impressions count for a lot most of the time, and perhaps especially so when you're expecting a premium experience. At Pearls and Caviar the first impressions were decidedly mixed, and that just about sums up the evening.

Pearls and Caviar is tucked away in one corner of the Shangri-La complex. You valet-park at the hotel and a golf buggy trundles you round to the restaurant. It's not far to walk, but you'd need a map; and the buggies are part of the Shangri-La gestalt, so you might as well use them. Don't expect a clever hair-do to survive the short trip if it's at all breezy, though.

A bad start for the distaff side, then. And when we sat down we were offered a drink. Nothing unusual about that, except that the drink was water. Still or sparkling, to be fair, but we were expecting a little more choice. Throughout the meal no-one offered a drinks menu, and when we ordered a glass of something other than water to arrive with the main course it failed to turn up.

But Pearls and Caviar has invested heavily in style. The décor is impressive (check out the silver leaf on the ceiling) and the layout is good. Chairs and cushioned benches are both very comfortable, and the lighting is exemplary – bright enough to see what you're eating, dark enough to be romantic or soothing depending on your mood. This is certainly one of the best designed restaurants in town.

The menu is mostly seafood, relying on top-quality ingredients treated quite simply but with interesting combinations and beautifully presented, of course. It's the kind of food you probably wouldn't contemplate making yourself, which is the way a restaurant menu should be.

The starters were impressive, though more in size than taste. Not that calamari with a lemon vinaigrette was at all unpleasant, just a bit too sharp on the lemon front and not quite tasty enough on the fish side. And the raw tuna with a slice of avocado, a soy dip and a string of seaweed was delicate, tasted of the sea (an inspired idea, that seaweed) and yet somehow failed to deliver a massive mouthful of flavour to go with the massive quantity of fish.

One of our mains was Omani spiced kingfish, and it was the highlight of the meal. Two kingfish steaks had been marinated in a brilliant collection of spices and cooked to perfection on the Barbie along with a mini aubergine.

Excellent with a rocket salad and nothing else.

The fish we ordered for the other main course wasn't available, but we liked the sound of the rest of it – saffron crush with mussels and green onion emulsion – so invited the chef to suggest a substitute. When it came it was a generous supply of John Dory, and it was very good. The saffron crush was flavoured mash and none the worse for that. But the green onion emulsion had been replaced by yet more saffron in a cream and butter sauce studded with pink peppercorns – too much saffron, but boy those peppercorns explode in the mouth most deliciously. No word of explanation about the missing green onions.

Nor about the changes to the Citrus Variations, a plate of four mini-desserts that lived up to its name. Among other things it promised key lime pie on "crumbles" (crushed biscuits, perhaps?). What actually arrived was a slice of overly sweet custard tart sans crumbles with orange instead of grapefruit and an overarching flavour of sugar.

Our other plate was Bite the Fruits, which did indeed come as advertised and featured an intense mango purée with a couple of bitable kiwi fruit slices ... along with a tasteless glass of avocado milk, the role for which defied understanding.

So a hit and miss affair, and a surprisingly unprofessional performance both by the waiting staff and the kitchen. Why no key lime pie? Well, it seems there's lots of different definitions of what constitutes a key lime pie. No there isn't. And even if there was, a key ingredient would surely be lime.

**What?** Pearls and Caviar

**Where?** Shangri-La Hotel, Qaryat Al Beri

**How much?** AED 300–450

**Why?** Style, décor, ambiance, cooking

**Why not?** Surprisingly unprofessional waiting staff, tastes not all they could have been

**Rated:** 5/10

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