



Level Lounge has quickly become one of the capital's hotspots for chilled out after-hours socialising. Abu Dhabi Week goes rooftop to see what the buzz is about ...

Level Lounge recently had crowds dancing till dawn with a Hed Kandi night for Ibiza lovers and chill-out fans. And what a night it was. Boasting a full rooftop high above the city and with revelry until the early hours, Level Lounge is officially the new home to hot DJs and dance music in Abu Dhabi.

But when the rooftop venue isn't pulsating with the party people crowd, Level Lounge changes into a mellow retreat for laid-back nibbles and super comfortable seating.

We arrive and instantly pick our spot on a large, squishy white sofa. There's an alternative in the form of bean bags, but having frequented Level Lounge a few times before, we've learnt our lesson: ten minutes of perching on a bean bag and you're fine, any longer and you're sinking towards the floor fast and have lost any feeling from the waist down.

Despite being relatively quiet, the ambience of the venue is chilled and relaxing rather than chilly and sterile. With a larger-than-life canopy covering most of the seating area and the distant hum of the city from below, the atmosphere is calm and inviting – ideal for mid-week socialising after work.

The Crowne Plaza has a recently arrived new executive chef, Lloyd Cremer, and the evidence of his work is in the tapas dishes that we order. With hot and cold tapas on offer we opt for a mixture of both and are impressed when a well-presented selection arrives.

We dive straight in for the smoked duck with pineapple and vanilla relish and it doesn't disappoint. Mouth-wateringly tender and the right side of just-pink, the duck is an instant favourite – those hints of pineapple and vanilla are subtle yet distinct.

The rest of the dishes offer varying degrees of success, from resounding approval to not quite to our tastebuds' liking. The wild mushroom risotto balls with a truffle mayonnaise are sampled – and then left to one side as we decide they're an acquired taste. But the chicken strips with a tomato, honey and chilli sauce go down well as we love the blend of sweet and spicy.

Grilled vegetables are also a dish we weren't sure about. The spiced flavour of the paprika aioli is just right and warms the taste senses; but the choice somehow doesn't quite fit on a tapas menu, and the portion size makes the vegetables fiddly to pick at even with a fork. The simpler, fingerfood mini-plates seem a better bet, like the braised calamari with saffron and olives that we fill up on.

If you fancy a light bite to accompany a few drinks and socialising, you can't go wrong with picking a few appetisers from the menu. But it's perhaps best to head elsewhere if you're after a bigger meal – or you have fussy food friends. The dishes are full of flavour – but some less adventurous mouths may not be up to the choice on offer.

## Level Lounge

Thursday, 30 April 2009 00:00

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Our favourite thing about Level Lounge? The staff. Attentive and knowledgeable, they remember our names from recent visits, recommend new drinks to try and serve quickly and quietly with a genuine smile.

Level Lounge sets the mood perfectly and provides an ideal spot for a quieter social session if you don't fancy fighting your way through crowds of an evening during the week.

**What?** Level Lounge

**Where?** Crowne Plaza, Hamdan Street

**How much?** Dishes start from AED10

**Why?** The perfect spot for afterwork reclining

**Why not?** If you're set on Spanishstyle tapas, you might be in for some disappointment. And don't expect a meal-sized dish

**Rated:** 6/10

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