

Pots of taste



We certainly don't hang about here at Abu Dhabi Week. The chefs at the Royal Hotel's newly opened Moroccan restaurant ArganaVert, barely had time to don their aprons before we arrived on their doorstep, pens and appetites at the ready.

We love the Moroccan style décor. Our waiter Hassan tells us that the furnishings were specially imported from Morocco in an attempt to recreate an authentic dining experience. The interior is richly decorated with guild-framed pictures, intricate tapestries, colourful glass lampshades, huge candles and ornate silver urns. All of the tableware, including the delicately embroidered napkins and tablecloths, are of a traditional design, which creates a sense of being somewhere other than Abu Dhabi.

We sink back into our comfy sofa-like seat, dotted with oversized cushions and browse the list of soups, salads, mezzah, tagines, couscous, meat, pies, seafood and pastries. We order the

traditional harira soup to start followed by calamari tagine.

We nibble on a tasty selection of complimentary appetisers while we wait; marinated olives sprinkled with Moroccan chilli, salt and pepper and accompanied by lightly grilled sardines.

The harira lives up to our expectations. This hearty soup is a flavoursome blend of lentils, chickpeas, tomatoes and seasoning. The taste is similar to minestrone and it's actually a meal in itself.

Next up is the tagine – a brown cylindrical shaped pot is served, along with a basket of rounded, flat loaves. We lift off the earthen-ware cone-shaped cover to reveal our meal, simmering happily in the base, an appetising aroma of spice and tomatoes wafts in the air.

Apparently the correct way to eat tagine is to scoop up a portion using a chunky piece of Moroccan bread. We dip, then savour our first bite of chewy calamari swimming in a tangy tomato based sauce, we detect onion, coriander, other mysterious spices and a cheeky suggestion of garlic. Our tagine looks and tastes exquisite. The average portion size is adequate for us, however if you have a large appetite, we recommend that you order a portion of couscous or rice to accompany this meal.

To finish, our waiter appears and presents us with a tray of pastries – the jawhara batilla selection. We enjoy the different tastes of sweetened coconut, dates and almonds, although the halwa shebakia – pretzel-shaped, deep-fried with a honey glaze, is definitely our favourite – a delicious end to a delightful evening.

Catriona Doherty

What? ArganaVert

Where: The Royal Hotel

How much? Mains from AED 40

We say: Try fantastic Moroccan food without forking out for a flight!

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