

SPECIALTY RESTAURANT REVIEW:

CANALETTO AND MAMA'S KITCHEN

Casual Italian dining on Zuiderdam and
Norwegian Jewel

by

Richard H. Wagner

It has been said that everyone likes Italian food. In recognition of this, all the major cruise lines have added dining venues featuring some form of Italian cuisine. Pizzerias seemingly have become just as much standard equipment on a cruise ship as the propellers. However, quite a few ships also have more ambitious Italian-style eateries.

The types of sea-going Italian dining venues span the spectrum. Sabatini's on the Princess ships and Portofino on many of the Royal Caribbean ships provide Italian fine dining experiences. Giovanni's Table on Oasis of the Seas and Allure of the Seas provides a more casual but still serious Italian cuisine. In addition, there are venues that provide what can best be described as Americanized Italian cuisine - - a style with its roots in Italy but which has been transformed first by Italian immigrants to America and then by Americans from other ethnic groups who wanted to add something of their own to the flavors. It is not surprising that cruise

ships would have venues featuring this type of cooking as it is popular not only in the United States but around the world.

In this article, we look at two of those venues - - Canaletto on Holland America's Zuiderdam and Mama's Kitchen on NCL's Norwegian Jewel.

Canaletto is located in a section of Zuiderdam's buffet restaurant. As a result, it benefits from the buffet area's floor-to-ceiling windows that provide panoramic views over the surrounding sea. However, it has no separate décor. Instead, the restaurant is defined by some low counters that divide it off from the rest of the buffet restaurant.

Consistent with its location, this is a casual restaurant. Indeed, even on a formal night, most of the guests were dressed casually.

Underscoring the lighthearted atmosphere, the waiters are dressed in black and white stripped shirts



Mama's Kitchen

like Venetian gondoliers and weave into their conversation a few Italian words albeit said with an Indonesian or Filipino accent. The twinkle in the eye lets you know that this is done tongue in cheek.

But when it comes to service, the staff is quite serious. When I was there, it was friendly and quick. Although Canaletto is located in the buffet restaurant, it is not a buffet. Rather, guests are seated by the maitre'd, the waiters take the guests orders and bring the food to the table.

The meal begins with a nice selection of antipati including ham, mozzarella, mushrooms and tomatoes. Guests also receive a basket of tasty garlic bread and olive oil.

For appetizers, one can choose between a salad, minestrone soup or zuppa di pesce. The latter is a seafood soup with vegetables, parsley and saffron. It is quite spicy.

The main courses feature favorites including penne pasta, seafood linguini, veal Milanese, chicken marsala scaloppini, baked lasagna and spaghetti with meatballs.

Going with the best known Americanized Italian dish, the spaghetti had plenty of meat and was quite tasty although I would have preferred more tomato in the sauce.

The lasagna is a meat lasagna with a four cheese sauce. I thought this was good but not spectacular.

Dessert offerings include: a dish that presents three variations on tiramisu; a limoncello crème; and a

mille-feuille of Madagascar chocolate. There is also a selection of very good gelato with fruits and nuts mixed into the ice cream.

Canaletto is open for dinner only and provides a good change of pace, especially on a longer cruise, from the more sophisticated dining of Zuiderdam's other specialty restaurant and the main dining room. Its goal is not fine dining but comfort food in a relaxed atmosphere and it meets that objective.

Canaletto is complimentary but reservations are suggested. There are Canalettos on HAL's Signature and Vista class ships.

Similar in concept is Mama's Kitchen on Norwegian Jewel. This dining venue is known by various names across the NCL fleet - - La Cucina on Norwegian Epic, Gem and Pearl; Pappa's on Norwegian Jade; La Trattoria on Norwegian Dawn and Norwegian Spirit; and as Il Adagio on Norwegian Sky.

On the Jewel, the restaurant is decorated like the kitchen in an Italian country farmhouse. On one wall, pans and kitchen utensils hang on stucco walls. On the opposite side, tables for two sit by large picture windows framed by red brick. The end opposite the galley leads to an outdoor dining area.

As the name indicates, this is a family-friendly venue. The room has several large tables for families and groups. This is conducive for sharing and the restaurant does attract families with children. Guests dress casually, including t-shirts and shorts.

The restaurant staff is international and per-

formed to the same professional and efficient standard as the staff throughout the Jewel, which I found to be very good. Although the restaurant was full, service was prompt. In addition, the staff was friendly and willing to answer questions.

As at Canaletto, the meal begins with a plate of antipasto (ham, tomato, olives, peppers) and a basket of bread. The ham was particularly interesting with a strong but agreeable flavor.

For the appetizer, I had the fried calamari. These were crispy and successfully avoided being the rubbery - - the hallmark of disappointing calamari.

For the main course, guests have a choice of pizza, pasta or entrees.

Mama's Kitchen is not Jewel's pizzeria. If one is looking for a slice or two of pizza, the ship's buffet restaurant is the place to go. The pizzas here tend to be more serious. Smoked salmon pizza, for example, is a gourmet-type pizza, combining the sophisticated taste of smoked salmon, arugula, and red onions into the pizza format. However, unlike the typical gourmet pizza, these are not individual pizzas but rather large, eight-slice pizzas designed to be shared.

There is a spectrum of pasta offerings, which can be ordered as the main course, as a side dish or as a separate course. Although it is not listed in the pasta section of the menu, one can also have a spaghetti with a nice tomato sauce.

Entrees include such favorites as risotto, chicken parmesan, pork saltimbocca and ossobuco. Also available are seared salmon and ribeye steak.

I again went with the lasagna. This was a vegetable lasagna that included zucchini and peppers as well as potato. The vegetables and sauce were woven in amongst plenty of mozzarella cheese.

Tiramisu is the signature dessert at Mama's Kitchen. It consisted of creamy layers between chocolate lady fingers with a taste of Amaretto. It was not a light dessert but not heavy either.

The ice cream is not gelato but rather a nice American-style ice cream that is served in generous portions.

Mama's Kitchen is not the most serious dining venue onboard the ship. However, it does provide a nice meal when one is looking for familiar dishes in a relaxed atmosphere. The meals are filling and one leaves with a smile on one's face.

Mama's Kitchen is open for dinner and there is a \$10 cover charge.