

Martabaan by Hemant Oberoi at Emirates Palace Hotel in Abu Dhabi

Celebrated Indian Master Chef, Hemant Oberoi, took a different approach to most other celebrity chefs in UAE - it is as if he said: "Fusion? I trust in my ancestor's cooking and my traditional recipes - let me show you!"

And for this I thank him immensely.



Because in the modernity that is Abu Dhabi, traditions matter.

And for non-Indians, such as myself - dining at Martabaan was a journey of discovery of the real high-level Indian cuisine.

Yes, we are fortunate to enjoy many Indian restaurants in the Emirates, with their cacophony of different
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tastes and approaches - but the good Chef Hemant Oberoi set up shop at the Emirates Palace Hotel, and that means the tip of the top...

...and he delivered above expectations!

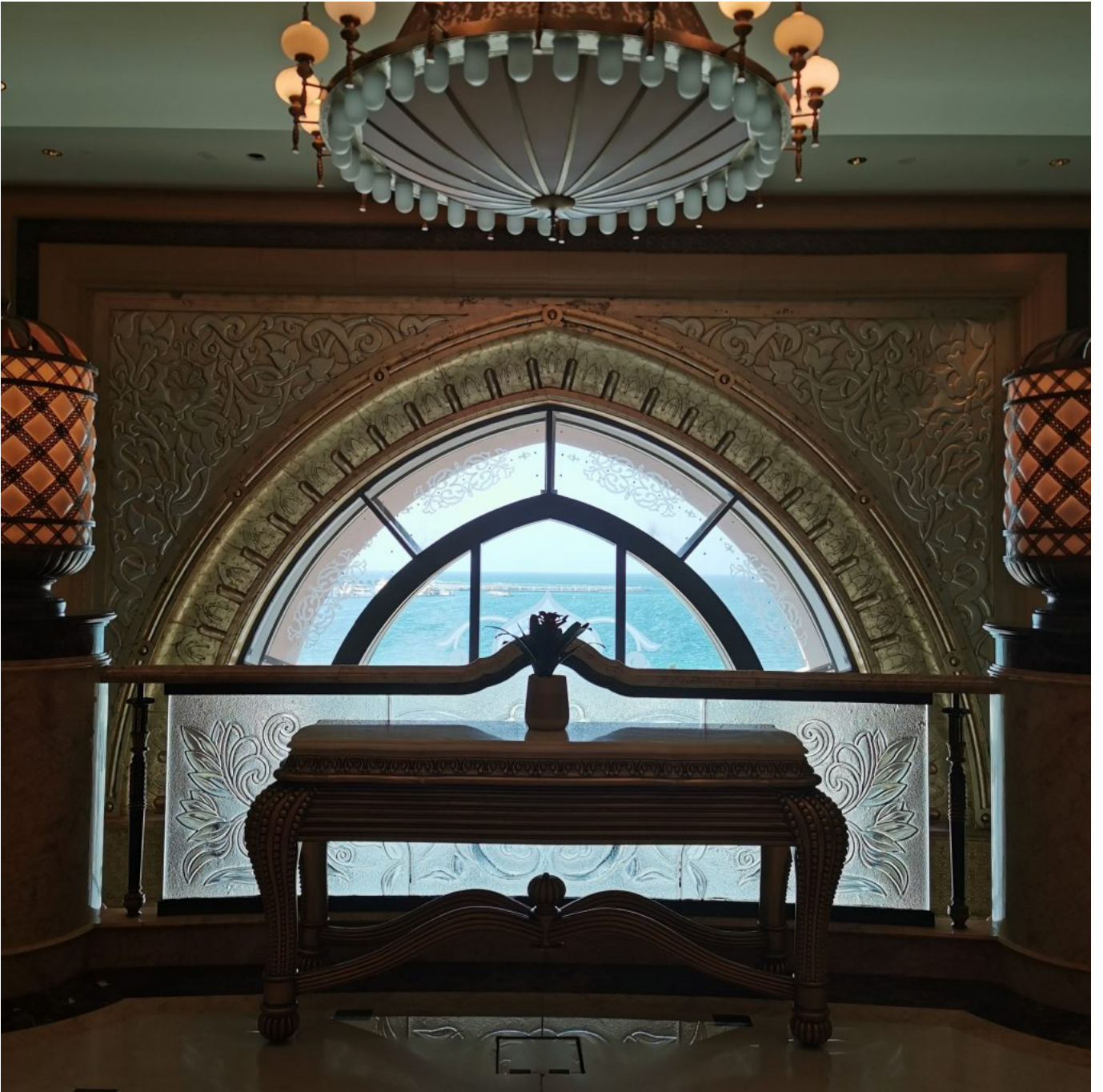




And for NRI, the non-resident Indians living in the UAE, who already know what is the real, traditional Indian cuisine, I beg of you to withhold judgment and to simply sample - because even compared to India's amazing availability of finest dining options, I believe you will find Martabaan at the top.

Just try.

Fusion is one thing, but it is not required when the roots are deep and proud.



Maratabaan is elegant, but also relaxed - an understated luxury, comfortable, yet the service is sterling.



It is also vibrant,



and aiming to please, with a fully-stocked bar,



and a selection of the finest wines.



Sans alcohol mocktails are also served, and exceptional in their balanced and contrasting flavors and aromas.



And I can't wait for the outdoor terrace to open up shortly!





But let us get directly to the food - because amazing views over the Gulf are only good to build an appetite, but they do nothing to satisfy it.

Fortunately, for that we have Chef Gaurav Kathawate, who is entrusted with the execution of these masterful recipes at Martabaan.



Let us first consider what is fusion cuisine - which I do enjoy, by the way!

In general terms, it is dishes that combine elements of different culinary traditions and that originate from different countries or cultures. That's the definition.

However, Martabaan takes a different tack, and proposes dishes that are unapologetically traditional - pure, historical, bona fide Indian - and they are presented in a modern and absolutely highest level of fine-dining: contemporary classic.

The *amuse-bouche*, which arrives at your table as a welcome gift from the Chef and his team, is a *chaat* - but not any chaat... the moment it passes the lips, there is total silence. The diners speak with their eyes. A respectful silence of people whose brains have been overwhelmed with sensory impact that causes their eyes to open wide, in surprise at how a little morsel of humble ingredients can be so amazingly powerful in taste!

This is the flavor of India.

Of thousands of years of culinary heritage, second to none on this planet.



Impeccably contemporary and even amusing in presentation, but proudly traditional.

And while your senses recover from that incredible journey, which lasted but a few moments, but which at the same time spanned throughout history, the soup arrives.

Now, I'm not really a soup person. I tolerate it at best. Occasionally, I enjoy it, but I would never dream of placing a warm edible liquid at the top of my favorites - until this.



Presented dry, and then poured carefully, the balance and depth of flavors of this Kamboocha and Coconut soup were astounding - I really knew we were in the realms of *haute cuisine* at this point.

The *chaat* had woken me up, but now I was dreaming.

Red Pumpkin soup flavoured with Coconut & Makroot leaves (Kaffir Lime Leaves) Garnished with Coconut Espuma, Pumpkin seed & Pumpkin Mash...

It was so good, that if Chef Hemant Oberoi is looking to adopt a foreign child, I put myself forward!

But, what followed was exemplary and unique:

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A stunning appetizer - Bhatti Prawn, marinated and grilled in the tandoori oven we see in so many restaurants representing South Asia, but let me assure none coming even close to the glorious delicacy presented at Martabaan by Hemant Oberoi.

See for yourself, and imagine the flavors - the charred freshness from the sea, the sweetness of the pineapple reduction, the pre-marinated jumbo prawn with yoghurt and chili and who knows what secret concoction of spices, the brilliant arrangement on the plate - simply fabulous!

And that was still the beginning...



A second appetizer - another masterpiece.

Indian herbs and spices completely enveloping a marvelous New Zealand frenched lamb chop - exceptional cut, from the world's best lamb - and then prepared divinely according to Indian traditions.

Naturally, grilled in the clay oven!



At this point, before the mains, I, for one, am immensely thankful that Chef Hemant Oberoi gave “fusion” the boot - my appreciation for Indian cuisine has been deepened and enriched by this dining experience, and I sincerely wish the same for you.

In the good Chef’s words,

This menu is an ode to all my nostalgic musings and wonderful memories of the mélange of sights, sounds, aromas and magic, only to be found in the traditional kitchens of India. It is a metaphorical jar filled with a marination of my inspirations, my creativity and an innate desire to revive age-old secrets and forgotten recipes of India’s glorious culinary legacy.

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We are now ready for the mains, dear Chef...



It could have been the build-up of ecstasy from the appetizers, or the really wonderful care the serving staff took to create the ambiance, or perhaps simply an alignment of stars - but, you know biryani, right?

It is the dish you can find at almost all corner restaurants, and basically THE ubiquitous rice dish served everywhere... but let me tell you, you haven't tasted biryani until you've tried it at Martabaan.

This is not a wild claim on my part - I've been enjoying this wonderful fragrant dish for 21 years here in UAE. From desert cook-outs to wedding feasts, from the humblest cafeterias to the highest level restaurants, from sitting on the floor cross-legged to dining halls in palaces, in this marvelous country, the UAE - but I will tell
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you now, you haven't tasted biryani until you have tried it at Martabaan.

I speak from the heart.



Firstly, just look at the yoghurt, the *raita* - this shows the attention to detail, and the thoughtfulness that went into the preparation.

Then - the base aroma, and indeed the color of the rice, comes from saffron. The intensity of the aroma from saffron was incredible.

When you visit, your nose will instantly ask the brain: "Just how much saffron have they put in this???"

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It has everything to do with culinary technique, actually - and I'll let your waiter explain at the table, so as not to ruin the surprise.

I will just re-state that it is superlative, and off the charts.

And the rice doesn't come alone, mind you...



Overall, a truly exceptional feast - but, what were you expecting at the Emirates Palace?

However, I see you there, Mr Skeptical.



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You are now thinking “Oh, I bet I have tasted better biryani.”

Especially if my dear reader is Indian, he will be a disbeliever. Because he has actually grown up with the true traditions of his patriotic cooking – since he was born he has benefited from the recipes of ancestors.

And that is true, and I have full respect for the delicacies of home cooking.

But I will make this request of you.

Just try.

Please, just try. And then let me know at prosett-at-weekenduae.com or Instagram @weekenduae – is there really a better dish anywhere in the UAE? I will travel there despite covid just to taste it, if it exists – but from my sincere perspective, Martabaan is the ultimate at this moment.

Take it or leave it.



I haven't finished.

Another surprise caught my nostrils - I'm sure you've heard how taste is strongly connected to the olfactory system.

Well, I smelled truffles.

And I couldn't believe my nose at that moment. Truffles? Maybe there were mushrooms somewhere in these delicate dishes, but truffles?

Indeed, a total surprise, and a diversion from the no-fusion mantra - unless Camembert and truffles are an
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Indian delicacy - one of the delicious *naans* which accompanied our meal was in fact the eminent French cheese and the musky truffle!



And boy did it fantastically complement the *Dhal Makhani* and the tender pieces of lamb or chick peas which were slow-cooked with red chili pickle, onion and a tomato based curry!

I almost re-booted my brain at such intense gastronomical pleasure!

If I could present the Best Fine-Dining Award for this year, without any hesitation it would go to Martabaan.

And I am convinced it was because of the devotion to tradition - I deeply respected and acknowledged the copyright Paolo Rossetti, ask first for reproduction of contents (text, photos, etc.) - prosett@weekenduae.com

intense flavors, and the balance and contrast of tastes that are the foundation of Indian cuisine - these are culinary arts that are like attending a symphony. It is not one instrument that performs for you, but an entire orchestra of flavors and fragrances, each completing each other and reaching ever-higher crescendos of excellence in taste.

I salute you, dear Chef Oberoi, and I thank you for bringing your touch to Abu Dhabi, for letting us taste what are the flavors of true India.



And I loved your dessert, too.

In closing, for a dining experience that is the superlative combination of Indian highest-level traditional cuisine copyright Paolo Rossetti, ask first for reproduction of contents (text, photos, etc.) - prossett@weekenduae.com



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with the sophistication inherent in the host Emirates Palace venue, Martabaan is the UAE's capital Indian restaurant of choice.

