

People always ask me: "What's the best restaurant you've tried?"

And I never give an answer, because it depends... best in which way?

Well, in this article I'm going to present you with the best restaurant in UAE according to my taste.



This might surprise you.

In fact, I have the good fortune of reviewing some of the best restaurants, run by top Chefs, in five-star hotels, even sporting Michelin stars...

...yet a delicious meal is not only about stars.

Actually, my best food was and always will be my Mom's.

Sure, she doesn't serve fancy dishes with rare ingredients, but a really good meal – a memorable one – is based on the state of mind of the diner at that moment.

Top restaurants know this, and they work hard to create the atmosphere, the ambiance, in which the diner's subconscious is primed for an unforgettable pleasure.

For some people it's the luxury – it turns them on, and you could serve a nibble of a fastfood burger, elegantly presented, and they will say it's the most delicious burger they've ever tasted.

For other people it's the company – let's say it's a family reunion that goes exceptionally well: most likely that emotion will transfer over into favoring the delights on the plate.

This is how humans are – we are emotional beings.

And so please give me the benefit of the doubt as I present to you a small, owner-operated restaurant, at the side of the dusty seaside road from RAK to Umm al Qwain: it's called Thunder Road Restaurant.

It is not five stars, it is even unclear as to what kind of restaurant it is exactly (it says Italian with an American twist), and the menu left me totally confused... and it is but two simple dining rooms next to oil change and tyre repair shops, and unexplainably you need to walk around a parked Harley-Davidson as you enter... but kindly bear with me and I'll try explain.



The above is the decoration on the dining room wall, so I guess the intention was to be a bikers' cafe - perhaps the old highway is considered a good riding road (I can't see how it could be, compared to the many other UAE roads, but whatever..) or perhaps it used to be a biker's stopover but then it evolved?

I don't really know the history, and it doesn't matter.

What matters is the man in the kitchen, the Chef!

An Italian from Naples, Chef Francesco Romano - so Thunder Road is actually an Italian restaurant, authentic.

But this is not your ordinary modern Italian Chef...

This is the kind of old-school Chef who makes his own bread, his own pasta, his own sauces, his own pizza dough, his own focaccia, and even his own mozzarella cheese - from scratch!

And that, believe me, is the magic of Thunder Road!

Unique in UAE, and also a rarity in the home country of Italy, where convenience has pushed away old-

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fashioned hard work, and where chefs routinely prefer to chase the profit point by minimizing costly human efforts, and cutting open plastic is much faster and economical than preparing base ingredients from scratch... at the expense of original flavor and whole-hearted home-made goodness.

Why would a professional cook start making pasta dough in the early morning by hand, when he can simply tear open a cardboard box and pour it into boiling water, like we all do?

Who of us even knows how to make mozzarella cheese??? We buy it refrigerated in plastic, ready-made.

But is there even a difference in taste?

Oh, you go try Thunder Road, and you tell me!!



Besides the true homemade approach at Thunder Road, there's another reason why the food is just so delicious there...

Chef Francesco is a humble, hard-working man. He says, "I make simple food in a simple way, that's all I know."

And his dedication is apparent in how he moves, in how he focuses on each little detail – see the photo above, look at his expression, how he is 'in the moment'. This is not a hired cook filling his 10-hour shift... this is a man dedicated to his work, with pride.

In fact, Chef Francesco comes out to your table, to prepare the freshest burrata in front of your very eyes. It is on your plate within seconds of its creation – talk about fresh!

And the results are astounding in deliciousness!

Below is the focaccia, yes, all made from scratch, with the stracciatella and burrata that was prepared a few seconds before



This is one of the simplest, most basic Italian dishes – there really is nothing more than water, flour, tomatoes, and milk in this, maybe a pinch of salt, a touch of truffle oil, some fresh arugula for the greens – but the taste is phenomenal!

Thunder Road's pasta follows the same strategy – it is simply made from scratch, from the dough to the sauce...

The result? Spectacular!

Also, Chef Francesco serves in generous portions, so prepare to share!



Marinara is also one of the basic pasta sauces, but in that simplicity is a universe of complexity – it is not easy to get it right. And Chef Francesco apparently prefers to bake rather than prepare the pasta separately.

And the combination of fresh pasta and homemade sauce, then cooked in its juices rather than boiled in salty water, makes for a tasty Marinara fit for a King.





Weekend at Thunder Road, RAK

And if you swirl it onto your plate, you have a five-plus star dish in front of you. Second to none in the UAE, I promise you.



And yet Chef Francesco served you 700 grams!

Same with the Carbonara – all halal, by the way. How the good Chef managed is a mystery and a secret, but it was absolutely fantastic.



Again it came abundant in a platter, and was marvelous when plated.



Creamy and delicious, this could be served at a top restaurant in Italy, and people would love it, telling their friends, and coming back for more.



And so the theme became clear – Chef Francesco makes all the main ingredients personally from scratch, even serves them at the table himself, and the food is exceptionally delicious, and in generous portions – but what about the biker “American Twist”?

I had to try...





Weekend at Thunder Road, RAK

Well, whaddayaknow! Our good Chef knows how to make great burgers, too!



Burger: juicy, good quality meat, excellent toppings – amazing!

Fries: golden crispy on the outside, soft and light on the inside – excellent!





Weekend at Thunder Road, RAK

When you love what you do, and you simply do it well, all is delicious!

Exceptional burger and fries – no frozen nothing on that plate – all from scratch.



So there is the secret to Thunder Road... a humble roadside restaurant in Ras Al Khaimah, and yet my favorite even compared to the glitzy restaurants in the main cities.

Dessert?

Again our good Chef takes matters in hand... it's a Pandoro, a packaged Italian Christmas cake, well-known throughout Italy - not only our Chef cuts it personally at the table for us...



...but he has whipped up a special cream by hand, on the fly, and not on the menu, based on Mascarpone cheese and cream. A fine dusting of cocoa and...



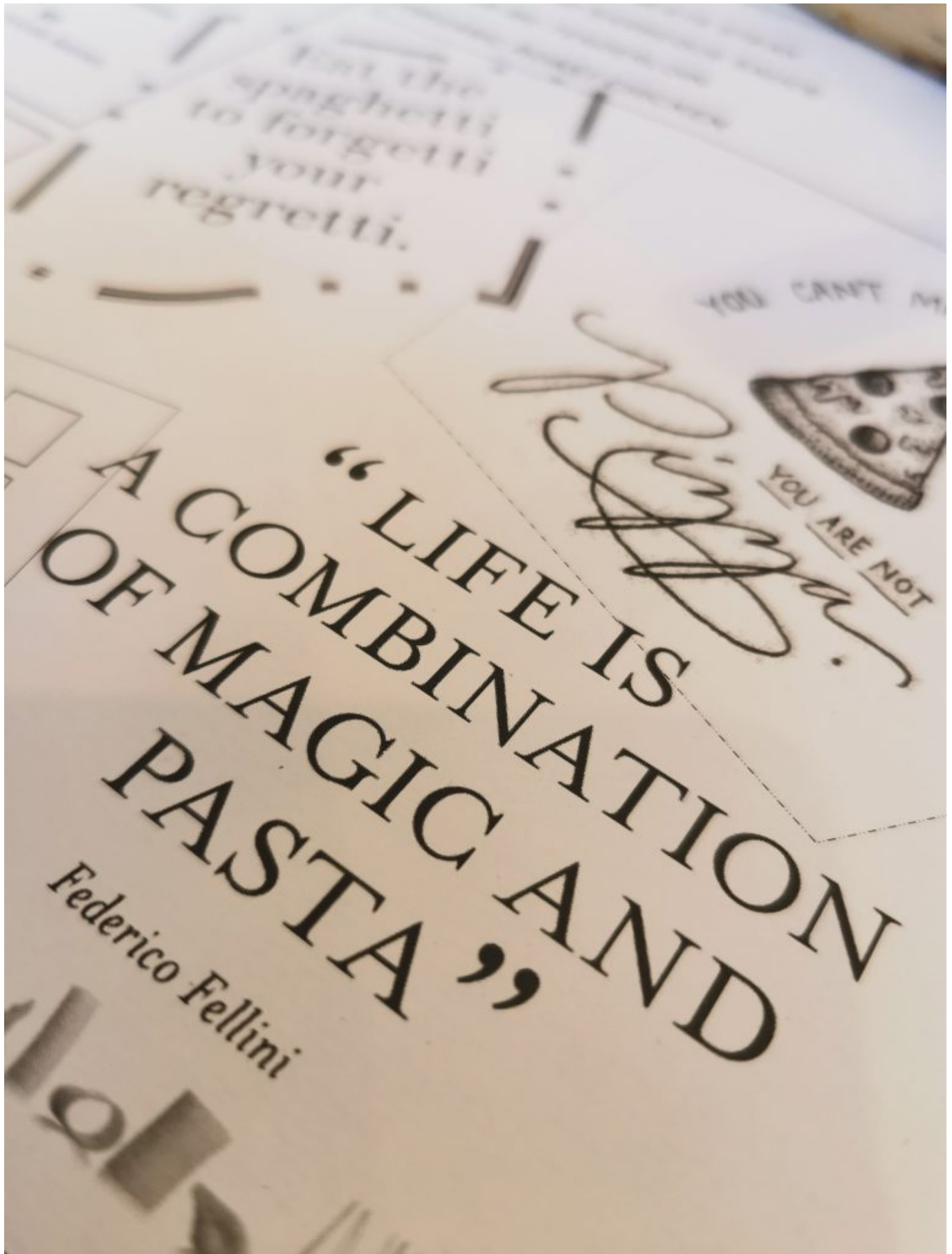


Weekend at Thunder Road, RAK

...the result was a masterpiece of yumminess!



And since there were too many slices for us, what does our good Chef do? He slips a few to the table next to us, with a cheeky wink; and one to his assistant cook, who seems to have the best job in the world... and that is the family spirit of Thunder Road restaurant.



Ah, but the menu - I couldn't make head or tail of it... just ask Chef Francesco and he'll advise what you should order on the day.

And do have a look at the products that he brings in directly from Italy - a top-quality selection.



And to finish off the meal, of course, a coffee – doppio macchiato (double extra creamy) for me, thanks; and this was the first time in 22 years of dining in UAE that it was made just right!



Overall, Thunder Road Restaurant has a weird name, muddled menu, and a humble roadside location, but the simple hard-work and dedication to the homemade preparation of basic ingredients offers fantastic results on the plate, where it counts - making Thunder Road the best restaurant I have had the pleasure of tasting in 2021. Bravo, Chef Francesco, you have my respect and appreciation.

