

Sanaa: A Dining Review

by Cheryl Pendry and Sue Kulick, PassPorter Featured Columnists

Editor's Note: What do you do when your two featured columnists both write reviews of Sanaa, Animal Kingdom Lodge Villa's newest restaurant? Use them both of course! I've combined their reviews to create a kind of "tag team" approach. Bon Appetit!

Introduction to Sanaa:

Sue: Pronounced "sah-NAH", Sanaa is located at the brand new Kidani Village, the latest jewel in the DVC crown of resorts. It is the only table service restaurant currently at the resort, and it didn't disappoint!

Our ADR was for 6:50, and we arrived at the front podium at 6:40. We were given a pager, but told that this was more of a formality, as it wasn't long of a wait. Our hostess was correct. We walked outside to enjoy the Savannah in the evening, and within 5 minutes, our pager was flashing.

Our hostess led us to our table while explaining the theming of Sanaa. "Sanaa" literally means artwork, or work of art, in Swahili, and the restaurant is modeled after an African marketplace. There are no sharp edges in here. Everything is soft and muted, and colorful in a down played, subtle way. The effect is, well, stunning. The tables and chairs are inlaid with beautiful patterns. The support columns are decorated with African art, and even the windows are softly shaped domes, which match the savannah entrance of the resort in perfect symmetry!

We were led back into the dining area, and on the way, our hostess stopped to explain the wine flights that were available. You can choose from a variety of selected wine flights, each paired perfectly with the entree you select, or you can choose your own. For each flight, our hostess explained, you get a 3 ounce glass of the selected wine per course. We thought the prices were reasonable, ranging from \$14 to \$21. After the explanation of the wine flight, we walked past the bar area. This is a small alcove set off to your left. Decorated in dark colors interspersed with brightly colored glass light panels, the bar is warm and inviting. It even has a thatched roof to complete the market place feel!

Cheryl: Sanaa, which means "work of art" in Swahili, is billed on Disney's web site as serving African cuisine, with Indian flavors, for both lunch and dinner, which instantly appealed to me. Their

specialities are dishes that are slow-cooked, grilled over a wood fire or roasted in a traditional Indian clay oven. Sanaa is located downstairs from the lobby, just like at Jambo House. Stairs lead down to the restaurant, which is immediately in front of you. Unlike Boma, at first you don't see much and that adds to the sense of anticipation. As we were taken to our table, we were told all about the type of food and wine served here with full explanations of the artwork in the restaurant. Literally almost every step we took, something else was pointed out to us. It was wonderful information to have, but it was almost too much to take in. One thing I'd love to see is something written down, so that perhaps in the future, you can read about the little touches they've put in here at your leisure, as it was almost overwhelming to hear everything as we entered.

The Servers:

Sue: After years of calling our servers "cast members," imagine our surprise and delight when our server was called our "merchant."

Cheryl: Our server Christopher was excellent and obviously very familiar with the menu, despite this being the opening night. He knew all the spices used in the dishes and was full of advice for us while we were struggling to pick what we wanted.

The Food:

Sue: The menu bills itself as "The Art of African Cooking with Indian Flavors" but that doesn't do it justice. We started with the Indian-style bread selection. You choose three types of bread and three different accompaniments. We chose the Naan, the Roti and the Paneer Paratha. For our accompaniments, we chose the Cucumber Raita, the Mango Chutney and the Roasted Red Bell Pepper Hummus. I could have made a meal of these alone! The price is a standard \$8.99 no matter which breads or accompaniments you choose.

We opted out of appetizers, but the choices seemed divine. You can choose from Mustard Seed Crusted Scallops, Roasted Cauliflower, Pulled Duck with curry sauce or Potato and Pea Samosas. They are all a sampler for 2, and are all priced at \$14.99.

We decided to try the salad sampler. You get a choice of three salads for \$6.99. We chose the Roasted Potato, Corn and Spinach, the Carrot, Orange and Mint, and the Chickpeas with Cucumber and Tomato. We liked them all, but were not as thrilled with the Carrot, Orange and Mint as we were with the other two.

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I ordered the Tomato and Paneer Cheese soup. This was thick, creamy and positively delightful! The price was \$5.49, while the chef's creation of the day is \$6.99.

Then it was on to our entree. We opted to split an entree so that we would have room for dessert. After some discussion, we chose the Tandoori Shrimp with the Basmati rice side. Some of the other entree choices were Tandoori Chicken or Lamb Chops. There are curry choices, such as the shrimp with green curry sauce, and for the less adventurous, a New York Strip Steak. The menu also offers vegetarian options, such as the Dum Biryani, which is vegetables and Basmati rice wrapped in bread dough. Entree prices ranged from \$13.99 to \$27.99.

We did, of course, save room for dessert. We opted for the dessert sampler, which included the mango pudding, the egg-less chocolate cake and the cardamom butter cake. The mango pudding was light and creamy, more like a mousse than a pudding. The chocolate cake was rich and dark. The butter cake was a bit too dry for my taste. The hands-down winner was the mango pudding, and on our next trip, I will forego the sampler and just have the mango pudding.

Cheryl: The menu was quite extensive which was a pleasant change, as we sadly found on this trip that quite a few restaurants on Disney property have really cut back the amount of dishes on their menus. Not at Sanaa. The appetisers and entrees each took up an entire A4 page and I was overwhelmed by the choice presented to us. As soon as I spotted one thing that I thought I'd definitely go for, I saw something else out of the corner of my eye.

Eventually we settled for appetizers that we could all try and, without exception, the ones that I was able to sample, were absolutely superb. My choice, the mustard seed crusted scallops with a coconut cream sauce were full of flavors that all complimented each other and just the right amount. The potato and pea samosa didn't sound particularly exciting, but having sampled a bite, they tasted very good, much better than I had anticipated.

The salad sampler gives you a choice of three out of five salads on the menu and, of the ones chosen, the roasted potato, corn and spinach was my favorite. The carrot, orange and mint was slightly over dominated by the mint flavor and, although I loved the roasted beets, it certainly did have a kick to it a moment later!

Talking of having a kick, we had a visit from one of the chefs, after I mentioned that I had an allergy, and he was able to talk me through the menu. One of the first questions from our table was how spicy the food

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was and he immediately reassured us that we wouldn't find anything too spicy, just full of flavor. He was spot on.

My choice of main course was the banana leaf wrapped sustainable fish with ginger and pickled lime sauce and the sauce was my concern, as I know from my previous experience of Indian takeaways from home that lime sauce can be pretty hot. That probably explains why, when they bring the fish out, they carefully open it up for you and remove the limes that they put on top of it. The fish was absolutely perfect for the first few bites, but I guess it's something you need to eat quickly, as the further through I got, the more dry it became.

That really was our only complaint with the meal. The main courses generally come with a choice of basmati or five-grain pilaf rice and we sampled both at our table, but we found them both to be exceptionally dry, which isn't what we're used to at home.

That's something else that was very interesting. I was instantly at home with this menu, as I recognised so many of the names of the dishes from the Indian meals we regularly have in the UK, but my dining companions were asking questions about the various dishes, never having come across them before. Was it similar to the food I'm used to? Not really, but that wasn't a bad thing, as the food had more focus on flavor, rather than being hot, which is something I was very happy with.

Other choices of entries that our table sampled included the tandoori lamp chops, which got rave reviews and the New York Strip, one of the less adventurous items on the menu and again, I heard no complaints about this dish.

We didn't get as far as the desserts, as I was stuffed by the time I finished my fish.

Conclusion:

Sue: We lingered over our delightful meal, but it ended too soon. The total was reasonable, and while we were paying out of pocket, we were surprised to learn that this restaurant was only one table service credit on the dining plan. It definitely has the feel of a signature dining experience.

As this is the only restaurant at Kidani Village, I would strongly recommend an Advanced Dining Reservation if you would like to dine here. Sanaa is open for lunch and dinner. The dress code has not been defined, but most guests appeared to be in business casual. Arrive hungry…you won't be disappointed!

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Cheryl: As we dined at Sanaa on opening night, we certainly had a lot of attention from the managers there, with numerous visits to assess how we were enjoying dinner. It's a good sign, as it shows that they're obviously keen to learn from their customers and improve what they offer. Having said that, what was offered on night one was pretty good already and I can't wait to return to sample these superb dishes again on our next visit to December. Hopefully it will be just as good.

About The Author: Cheryl and Sue are friends and PassPorter message board Guides. They, along with their husbands Mark and Steve, have traveled together to both Walt Disney World and England.

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