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Imperial Fez Authentic Moroccan Cuisine

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You may recall my last report on Rumi's Kitchen and remember how well presented the paper was. Now this time, I took things up a notch and decided to go to the Imperial Fez to see what the hype was all about from Chef Marc Jolis. It was my first five-course meal, and I was not disappointed. Now my wallet may have taken a hit, but at the end of the day I look at things like this as an investment in my career and pallet. The restaurant was beautifully decorated and felt as if you were on vacation in Morocco, so the experience was delivered and the price did cover it.

A few days back, I had made reservations for my uncle and I for Saturday night when the belly dancers were scheduled to perform. The day of the reservation was a real rough day for me. That morning I had injured my hand in a serious machinery accident and was rushed to urgent care and then the emergency room. I was in unthinkable pain, and by the time I had calmed down from the medicine I was put on, it was only four hours from my reservation for my Moroccan escape. I wasn't sure if I was going to make it, or if I was even in any condition to go, but fortunately the numbness had not worn off on my fingers and I was feeling well enough to get through the night. I was determined to make it to this restaurant and complete my report, so I had my mother drive me to my uncle's house towards Atlanta, and me and my uncle departed from there.

We arrive to the restaurant and are greeted by the host, a white Caucasian man dressed in a black dress shirt and dress pants. I find out later in the night that he is actually the son-in-law of the chef/owner. We are asked if we want chairs or a couch and we choose chairs. I am shocked they don't ask us to take our shoes off. Walking in, we see that not many people are sitting on the ground. My uncle is a thicker build type of guy, and he is not feeling sitting on the ground at all so we opt for chairs at a small round table. Once seated, we are greeted by a waiter who asks us what drink we would like. We start with water. The setting has a heavy cultural feel with Moroccan music playing loudly and the lighting providing a medium ambiance. The menu is pretty standard looking, but there is nothing standard about what is on it. Each entrée is exotic sounding with ingredients native to the country and important to the sweet and savory flavor profile of the cuisine. We both decide what we want as our main entrée after a while. It is not an easy decision, but we want to try the best of both worlds. I'll discuss this later because we have a journey to take our taste buds through, and it starts with three other courses before we get to our main entrée and then the fifth course of dessert.

Now to the prelude of the five courses... A worker comes to the table with a bucket and a kettle of water. He explains that in their culture it is tradition to wash your hands before dining. My uncle proceeds, but I tell him I only have one hand. I think he misunderstands. I was fine with washing just my one hand, but he walks away quickly. Now the taste bud journey begins, as we are started off with the first two courses: the Moroccan lentil soup and an assortment of four Moroccan salads. On the side is a sweet carrot slaw and a breadbasket with three breads. The first bread is like a cornbread, the second is like garlic toast, and the last one is like a thick pita that is real dense and chewy. The lentil soup is, of course, amazing and packed with flavor and a consistency that makes it a perfect dip for the breads. The salads are very foreign tasting and looking. I struggle to identify what exactly they are made of, but, regardless, they are satisfying and give my pallet a new experience.

At this point, the party has now begun as belly dancers enter the room drawing all attention to them. The dancefloor is opened up with sporadic lights as the dancers invite groups of ladies to dance with them. The ladies who have dates attempt to drag their men out, but only about two men make it out. Even a little boy runs out to join these beautiful dancers. My uncle and I, on the other hand, sit and enjoy the show. He starts to feel like he is at the club and decides to order himself a Captain Hook, which later lightens his mood. The place even offers me a drink, but I decline,

which makes me wonder if they would have checked my age. Now we're getting closer to the main entrée, but before we do we have an appetizer known as B'stella that looks like a funnel cake dessert. Once we get into it, we realize it is nutty with chicken encased in phyllo dough giving it excellent crunch. This is not my favorite appetizer, but it is definitely well prepared and shows skill to make such a dish.

Finally, we get to the grand finale of the night, our fourth course main entrée that we had handpicked from the exotic menu. I ordered the Signature Chef Royal Moroccan Seafood Platter, which consists of a crispy whole red snapper fish that is absolutely amazing as the skin peels off in strips to reveal flesh that is cooked perfectly and stuffed with sweet and savory flavor. The dish also includes salmon and shrimp on a stick. The plate has a plateau of rice with a roasted tomato on top, and around the plate are roasted potatoes and some lettuce underneath it all that help to lighten the plate up making the dish pop. The whole dish stays true to the cuisine, even the rice and tomato, which is surprisingly sweet. Like I said earlier, me and my uncle have ordered the best of both worlds. I got seafood and he got land food, or, to keep it simple, lamb. His entrée is a lamb morozia with sweet and spicy plums. We decide to share our entrees with each other, and even though his entrée is half the size of mine, it doesn't disappoint at all because it has forty-two exotic spices along with plums, ginger, harissa honey sauce and roasted walnuts, just to name a few. His dish is also an experience because the flavor is completely new to me. I find out later that it is the sweet and spicy plums that make the sauce that give it such a beautiful five-star flavor. The meat of the lamb falls right off the bone and absolutely melts in your mouth. His dish is definitely a sweet and savory Moroccan cuisine dish that has been mastered in the kitchen of the chef.

This report is not over yet, and neither is my dining experience. The fifth and final course of dessert has yet to come. As we wait, a special show begins with a belly dancer who dances with a sharp sword on fire balanced on her head full of hair. It is a very exotic and talented performance. Eventually dessert comes, and let's just say it is so good I forget to take a picture. It is a very simple dessert of chopped fruit that doesn't taste like just any fruit. It is like the fruit went on vacation to the spa where it sat in a tub of honey and spice. The fruit is soft and melts in your mouth. There is a baklava-type pastry that comes with it, and the whole thing is topped with coconut shreds. Finishing up the night is the Moroccan hot mint tea. This tea is very sweet and aromatic, served in about a shot-size glass.

To bring the night to an end, we almost go over to the hookah bar but ultimately decide not to. My bill comes out to about eight-five dollars just for myself. The total value of my food was all worth it, especially considering that we were served five well-put-together courses and provided entertainment. Plus, the greatly portioned food allowed you to take leftovers home to enjoy the next day. The sanitation score was a slight hassle to find, as the front of the house team had trouble understanding what I was asking for and thought I was upset about something. When they did find it, it had come out to a ninety-four, which is an excellent score for a non-American restaurant. Even considering the fact that we did not have to take off our shoes or sit on the ground, I would still say this restaurant stays true to its cuisine and avoids American ideas completely. I give my dining experience five stars. There was definitely a strong sense of community in the restaurant. It felt as if the family was taking care of you and the food was cooked in mom's kitchen. I kind of wish we were required to do more restaurant reports because I enjoy trying these top-notch places that Chef Jolis recommends and coming back to write my story of my experience. Maybe Chef Jolis would like to tag along with me to some of these places, or even possibly teach me some of his skills that I've heard so much about. There's a lot to learn from someone who has done as much living as him.