

The View review

A delighted Dia Newland finds everything shipshape in Southampton



La Margherita • I Town Quay • Southampton • S014 2AQ
023 8033 3390 • www.lamargherita.co.uk

There cannot be many more pleasant ways to spend a warm summer's evening than sitting in a restaurant on a town quay watching yachts and ferries pass by, anticipating an enjoyable meal. La Margherita, in Southampton, is just such a place: a spacious, contemporary Anglo-Italian restaurant with bags of personality.

Of necessity, we were eating early and at 7pm in the bar area staff bustled in preparation for a busy night, stopping to provide us with that warm welcome at which good continental waiters excel. The menu is fairly extensive and well worth spending time over – with a cool glass of wine to hand – choosing from either classic Italian dishes or perhaps a simple steak and salad. We had more reason than usual to carefully inspect the menu because my companion, my daughter, has a wheat allergy and has learnt to pay particular attention to ingredients, or suffer the consequences. We noticed that La Margherita prides itself, providing they have the ingredients, on offering to make alternative dishes if requested. As it happened that wasn't necessary but it was an indication of the care taken on their customers' behalf.

I chose antipasto; a selection of cured meats with roasted peppers, olives and

'Nikos Raftopoulos, having reinvented his restaurant once again, is rightly proud of the good reputation it maintains'

Parmesan, which was plentiful and tasty. Karen couldn't resist gamberoni piccante; pan-fried king prawns with garlic, peppers and baby sweet corn finished with a touch of tomato chilli sauce. The sauce, she reported, was a perfect match for the succulent prawns, which had disappeared remarkably quickly. An indication, perhaps, that she knows me too well...

Other early diners were taking their seats, mostly families with either young children or teenagers and older 'young' couples. I was to discover as the evening went on that the restaurant would fill with large and small mixed parties, ladies out together for an enjoyable evening and people celebrating special events or just simply enjoying the weekend. Later, there would be a singer and music to dance to, but for the moment the food was everything.

Boat show is one of La Margherita's signature dishes – not surprising, considering the restaurant's position. Brought to the table wrapped in foil and opened with panache by an asbestos-fingered waitress, the calamari, mussels, prawns and tomato sauce with pasta smelt and tasted delicious and I was looking forward to tasting it. On the other side of the table, pollo Fiorentina arrived; char-grilled chicken breast with sautéed garlic, spinach and courgettes, served on a bed of saffron mashed potatoes. This time, I was quicker off the mark and given my taster, and can report this to be a tasty alternative for those who can't, or choose not

to, eat pasta. There are many other dishes, too, and a good website to visit to view the options available for all keen diners.

Against the buzz of conversation from what was by now a very full restaurant, we returned to the menu to see if there was a pudding that could tempt us. There was. I could not resist the description given to traditional tiramisu, homemade from a secret recipe from Florence, available originally at La Margherita in 1978. Many Southampton people will remember the restaurant from its previous venue near the theatre, and the owner, Nikos Raftopoulos, having reinvented his restaurant once again, is rightly proud of the good reputation it maintains, having been a Southampton icon for almost 40 years. Back to the puddings, and allergy notwithstanding, my daughter had dolce alla banana caramellata, accepting that the biscuit base would sadly remain untouched. Both choices fulfilled their promise and we definitely could eat no more.

Besides, looking around, it was clear that diners were completing their meals, enjoying the convivial atmosphere and anticipating the forthcoming entertainment. The night was just about to begin. **V**

Our meal, without drinks, came to £52.85



Enjoying the convivial atmosphere



Pollo Fiorentina

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