

Superb food, excellent service a source of bliss

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LURE SEAFOOD RESTAURANT AND BAR

Delta Victoria Ocean Pointe Spa and Resort

Open Daily: Breakfast 6:30 am to 11 am, Lunch 11:30 am to 2 pm, Dinner 5 pm to 10 pm

Rating: * * * * *

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My cousin Kate sat in a trance-like state, gazing out the windows at the changing light when I arrived for dinner. "I waved at you," I said. "I didn't notice," she replied. I couldn't blame her.

The next time you're feeling jaded about living in Lotusland, take a seat in the dining room at the Delta Victoria Ocean Pointe Spa and Resort. You will be rewarded with the best view of the Inner Harbour in the city -- a sweeping panorama that begins at the Johnson Street bridge and ends at Laurel Point -- not to mention some fabulous food.

Fine dining shouldn't be snooty, and Lure is proof this is possible. After management closed the more casual Boardwalk restaurant on its lower level, significant effort was put into fine-tuning the relaxed yet elegant atmosphere upstairs and their efforts are paying off handsomely.

Since Lure is now the hotel's only restaurant, it opens before many Victorians are out of bed. You might reasonably expect a room advertising itself as a fine-dining venue to offer impressive meals in the evening, but Chef Craig Stoneman has created intriguing menus for all hours of the day.

Continental breakfasts come in three varieties for under \$15, including coffee or tea. Try the "Harbour" selection -- smoked salmon and chive cream cheese on a multigrain bagel paired with a blueberry and mango smoothie. If your taste buds need a jolt, an omelette (\$14.95) filled with locally made chorizo sausage, aged cheddar, mushrooms and scallions, served with herb and black pepper hash should do the trick.

An antipasto platter for two (\$20.95), with grilled chorizo, prosciutto, duck paté from the Cowichan Valley, marinated olives, roasted peppers, tomato confit, artichoke purée and pickled onions with a selection of breads makes an elegant lunch. If you are not dining a deux, try risotto made with local mushrooms, truffles and aged parmesan or a wild salmon burger made with coriander. As an added incentive, Lure offers a Lunch Loyalty program -- eat four lunches here and your fifth is on the house.

The level of service is immediately apparent. The website states that food is served with genuine warmth and pride, and this is true, with gracious and extremely well-informed floor staff. You get the impression that the people who work here like their jobs and quite simply, that is infectious.

Given menus, Kate and I were delighted to see we had an early opportunity to sample what Lure will be offering from tonight until March 9 for Dine Around, with three courses available for \$35. This represents a true opportunity to sample what Stoneman et al have to offer, as all dishes are offered on the regular menu.

We narrowed our choices down as we sampled complimentary breads -- soft white with an Asiago crust, a dense brown studded with olives and a softer multigrain. Carbohydrates be damned, we are Irish and we ate all of it.

Kate loved the spiced sweet potato soup, infused with lime and chipotle and drizzled with thinned sour cream, served in -- wait for it -- a warmed bowl. I enjoyed a generous serving of ahi tuna tartare, flavoured with touches of wasabi, ginger and soy which went wonderfully with its co-stars -- a salad of baby frisée and watercress, drizzled with curry oil and thin croutons made from sprouted grain baguette.

Appetizers were appropriately but generously portioned, as were entrées. We shared two generous medallions of impossibly tender stuffed lamb shoulder drizzled with a rich brown sauce, paired with pearl cous cous perfumed with fresh rosemary, and wild salmon prepared in three ways: a simply dressed tartare, a rich ragout made with Dungeness crab and a generous portion of salmon tempura, served a variety of sauces and fresh avocado. Both entrées arrived with beautifully prepared vegetables.

I couldn't beat the lingering craving I had for the tuna tartare, so about a week later, Don and I returned and shared the same appetizers with the same reactions. He continued with the remaining entrée from the Dine Around menu, a firm portion of pan-seared Pacific halibut, served with crisp pancetta, chanterelles, savoy cabbage and a rich lemon and butter sauce, while I enjoyed a perfectly cooked New York strip steak with frites.

Dessert portions are smaller here, and both times we were apprised of this, which is a nice touch. I appreciate the information and the opportunity to have something sweet without feeling as if I have overdone it. We shared the same dessert I had during dinner with my cousin, a pair of chocolate truffles served with a tiny fruit salad, creme Anglaise thickened with ground pistachios and a lacy disc of white chocolate. It was delicious, but Kate's choice of a goat cheesecake with hazelnut crust and caramelized brulée topping was masterful. Reserve to avoid disappointment.

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RATINGS

*	Below bad
**	Below average
***	Average
****	Above average
*****	Excellent