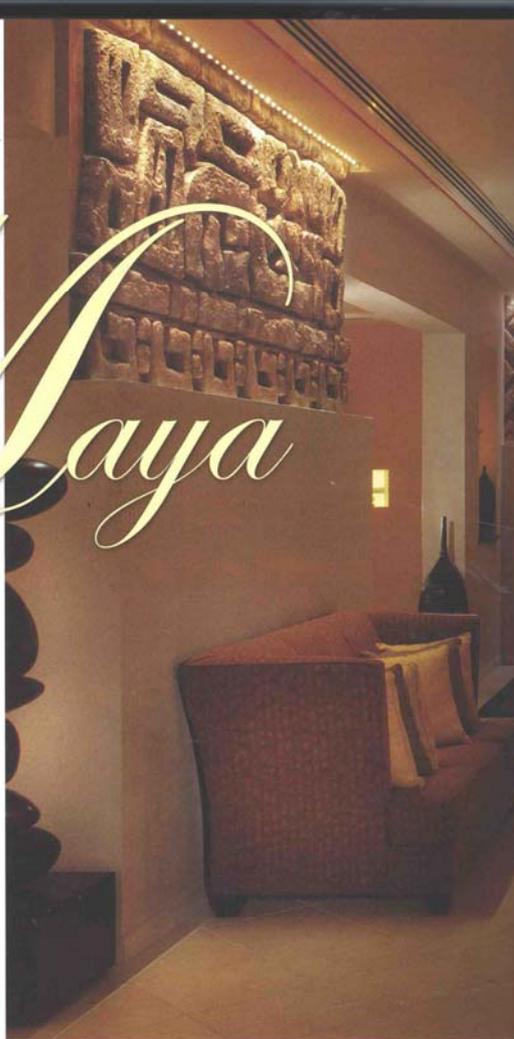


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Maya
 DUBAI



I'm a sucker for Mexican food. Having grown up in LA, we had Mexican food at the very least once a week. However, I have to admit that it was more Tex-Mex than Mexican, a fact that I learned during several trips down South to Mexico. When word came that a new Mexican restaurant had come to town, it was only a matter of days before I headed out there – salivating.

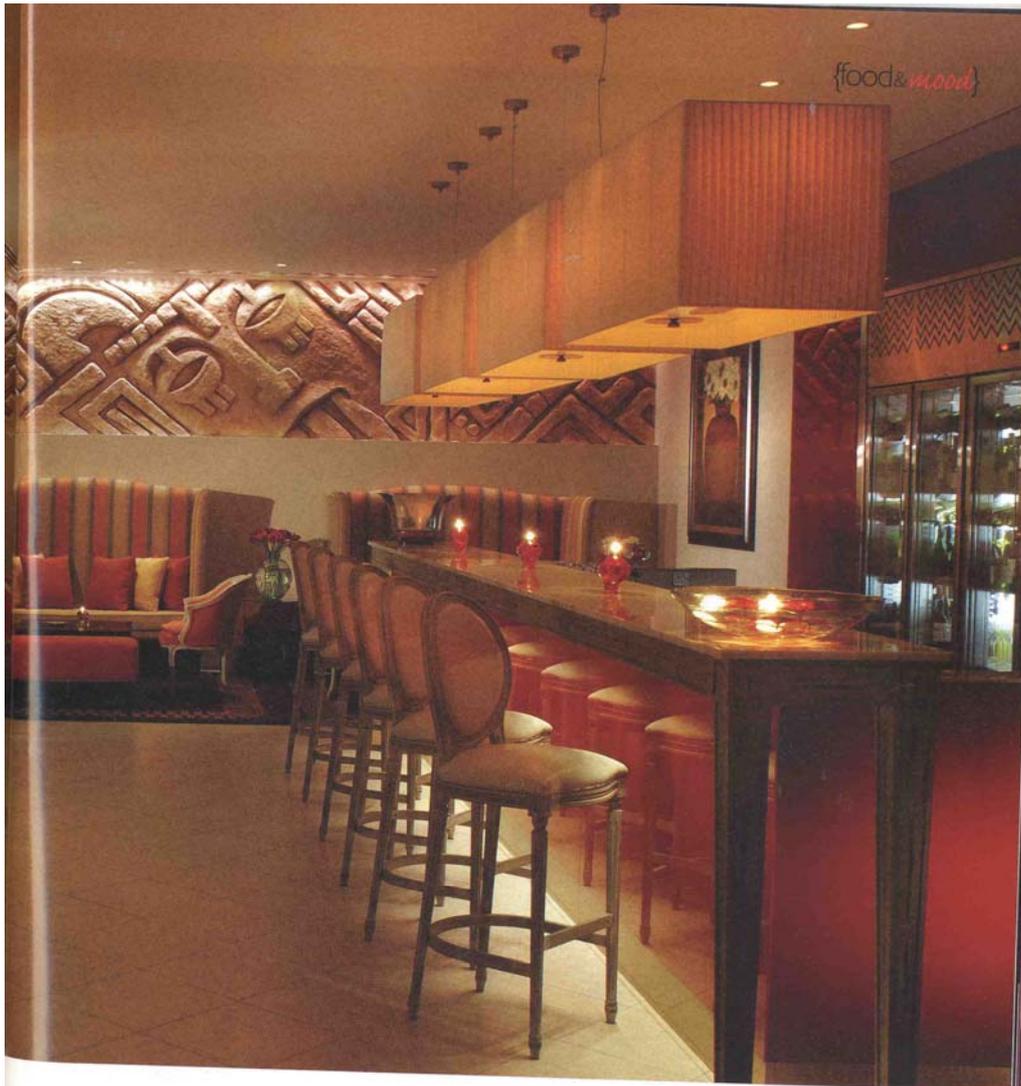
i had no idea what to expect in terms of cuisine or ambiance, but as we approached Maya, it was clear that the restaurant was going to get thumbs up on ambiance. Located just off the beach at the Royal Meridien, Maya is housed in a

rather large, dedicated two-story building with a huge outdoor terrace and bar that overlook the lawns and the sea. Soft lighting and warm colors of rust and ochre are welcoming, while a guitar playing duo complete the chill out feel. We were famished, but when the gracious hostess asked whether we started off with a cocktail upstairs,

we said yes; we wanted to experience all Maya had to offer. We were led up stairs lit with candles, into a striking bar area that is sure to be a major attraction once the weather warms up. As it were, we opted to sit out on the rooftop, which offers comfy sofas, a soft breeze, the soothing sound of waves, chill out Latin music, and a panoramic view

of the sea, the hotel, and the sprouting developments nearby. After relaxing with a superb and refreshing Guava and Mint Mojito and munching on fresh nachos with a smooth bean puree, I would have been quite content to spend the rest of the evening upstairs, sampling the rooftop tidbits. But we had reservations, and decided we

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could come back to the rooftop or outdoor terrace another time – with a group of friends. The main dining room itself is a pleasant surprise; after the warm reds, rusts, and yellows of the rest of the restaurant, its cool white walls, tables, and chairs were surprisingly refreshing – and a promise of more surprises. Menu in hand, it

was clear that this is a 'real' Mexican restaurant, reminiscent of the many fabulous establishments I had frequented South of the border, and nothing to do with cantina-style Tex Mex. Without even reading it through, I knew they would have my all time favorite Ceviche – fresh chunks of fish or seafood marinated in tangy or fiery spices – and I was

right. Unable to decide which ceviche to go for, my husband opted for the *Ceviche Tasting*, a combination of their Shrimp Ceviche, Tuna Ceviche, and Hammour Ceviche. I went for the fresh-sounding *Ensalada con Almendras*, a salad of mixed greens, cranberries, apricots, caramelized almonds, goat cheese, and spicy balsamic vinaigrette.

As we moved on to ordering our mains, my willpower wilted and I included a third appetizer that sounded simply too good to miss, *Lobster Tacos*. For mains, I chose Turf with the *Filet Mignon Mexican*, while my husband chose to Surf with the *Huachinango* (Whole baby Red Snapper). Orders placed, a fresh

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{food&mood}



basket of nachos, dip, warm fresh bread and an herb-infused cream cheese dip made its way onto our table. While the bread and cheese were heavenly, we reigned in our hunger so as to enjoy the food to come – a wise choice, it turned out. My salad was everything I had imagined, and better. Cool and colorful, the sweet fruits were perfect with the tangy goat cheese and spicy dressing. A definite favorite. My husband's ceviche taster was equally spot on, and from the taster a winner appeared: the tuna with mango, cilantro, lemon, chile poblano, and tomatillo. The Lobster tacos featured tender chunks of lobster atop soft flour tortillas and were delicately flavored with cilantro and chile de arbol sauce. If you're used to Mexican food that is slathered with cheese or sauce and where every dish tastes the same, you're in for a pleasant and lip-smacking surprise here. All the fresh ingredients dance on the tongue.

The only downside? My greediness! While each dish in itself is light, the fact that I had gorged on nachos and TWO appetizers meant I had a little trouble with my exquisite steak. The normal-sounding name, Filet Mignon Mexicano, belies the love and attention that went into making what has got to be the softest and tastiest piece of meat I've ever had. The secret, apparently, is that the meat is marinated in an adobo sauce for a good long while, infusing it with a tasty but not overpowering smoky flavor. My husband's Whole Baby Red Snapper was strangely beautiful to look at; who knew a whole fish could look that good? Thankfully, it tasted just as good, with its moist white meat paired beautifully with a mild roasted tomatillo-chile de arbol sauce.

After such a grand meal, at the hands of expert, polite and supremely helpful staff, we declined dessert.

It was hardly a sacrifice, knowing that we'd be returning for more of this fine Mexican cuisine. ■



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CHEF'S CORNER

CHEF RICHARD SANDOVAL

Born in Mexico City, Mexico, Richard Sandoval grew up surrounded by Mexican culture and food. His father, a successful restaurateur, instilled in him a passion for the cuisine of his heritage and the art of hospitality. Aged 12, Richard worked in his father's highly regarded Madieras and Villa Fiore restaurants, confirming his desire to be a chef. Sandoval later enrolled at the Culinary Institute of America, California. Upon graduation, Sandoval returned to his father's kitchens, where he was ultimately awarded the National Toque d'Oro, Chef of the Year.

Richard Sandoval moved to New York to make a splash - not with Mexican cuisine - but with a modern French menu at the successful Savann, followed by Savann Est. In 1997 he opened Maya to widespread acclaim. Sandoval introduced New Yorkers to the exciting, bold and flavorful foods that have become known as Modern Mexican. Richard Sandoval and Maya soon became local culinary celebrities earning a rave 2-Star review from The New York Times. Maya, San Francisco soon followed and earned 3-stars from the ever-discerning San Francisco Chronicle.

In 2001, Richard Sandoval headed west to bring his inventive style of gourmet Mexican cooking to

Denver, Colorado first with Tamayo, followed shortly by Zengo in February 2004, which received a glowing 3 ? -star review in The Denver Post. Sandoval next partnered with famed opera star Placido Domingo to bring Modern Mexican seafood to midtown New York with Pampano. Esquire magazine voted Pampano one of "The Best New Restaurants in America" and that same year Sandoval was named one of the "Best Chefs of 2003" in New York Magazine.

In 2004 Sandoval and his Modern Mexican group further expanded. Isla Mexican Kitchen & Tequila Bar a brilliant collaboration with internationally renowned hospitality designer, Jeffrey Beers, brought the flavors and spirit of Mexico to Treasure Island (TI) in Las Vegas. In 2005, Sandoval brought Zengo to Washington, DC and launch into the international arena when he opens Hip Kitchen in Hippodromo Boutique Hotel, in Mexico City; and Maya in Dubai. Richard Sandoval is a pioneer bringing refined Mexican food to this country. He is a revolutionary in his own culinary way, cooking with such innovation and refinement that Modern Mexican Cuisine is now recognized as one of the great culinary experiences, sentiments once reserved for French, Italian or Japanese food.

Camarones Maya

Portion: 10

Ingredient

750ml	Spicy tomato bell pepper broth
10 each	Stuffed local chiles
1.8kgs	U-15 shrimps, cleaned
30gms	Butter, melted
30gms	Olive oil
300gms	Red Bell Pepper, julienne
300gms	Green Bell Pepper, julienne
100gms	White onion, chopped
30ml	Sherry white vinegar
40ml	Honey
20gms	Coriander, chopped
30gms	Salt
15gms	Pepper

Method

- Heat a pot and season the shrimps and sauté until cooked
- Sauté the onion, bell peppers, add the spicy broth and season with vinegar, cilantro, honey and pepper
- Heat up the stuffed local chiles and place in a plate
- Add the shrimps and sauce

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