



Villa Azur

Here's a restaurant that gives you a reason to celebrate

Words by Vanessa Pascale

Vibrant. Joyous. Celebratory. That's the vibe Villa Azur Restaurant & Lounge radiates upon arrival. Lively music streams in from the patio, up through the chic lounge, into the entryway, heralding us to join the festivities within. Ornate chandeliers and candles softly light the European-inspired restaurant, while luxe, tufted seating and airy champagne and cream hues foster cozy nooks, perfect for intimate gatherings.



Beyond the main dining room is the outdoor patio where a spritely chanteuse is singing and dancing her way through rows of tables. This is where much of the restaurant's excitement is unfolding, and everyone in South Beach seems to know it, including A-listers like Halle Berry, Gerard Butler, and Michael Jordan, who have all dined here in the past. Open since 2012, the restaurant is brimming with varied parties from groups of young ladies celebrating birthdays to older couples enjoying date night.

The fare served at Villa Azur is characterized as French Mediterranean with an Italian twist. Helmed by Erwin Mallet, the French executive chef is known for utilizing fresh ingredients and employing a cooking style that fuses old techniques with new ones. His menu boasts an array of elevated fare, including a \$200 Le Villa Azur seafood platter with 12 oysters, 8 clams, 4 tiger prawns, 1 jumbo shrimp, and 1 Maine lobster; two kinds of caviar; Chateaubriand; and Artichokes Gnocchi.

Tonight, the chef has prepared a special menu for us. We start with the Provencal Octopus (\$25) and Truffle Brie Cheese (\$21). These are two appetizers that I would've ordered myself, so I am quite excited to dig in. The pan seared octopus is prepared with olives, cherry tomatoes, basil, and fingerling potatoes --flavors that work together nicely and complement the octopus, and the brie is a divinely creamy dish that impresses.

For our main course, we are served the Branzino (\$45), a whole butterflied fish that is and light, delicious, and flakes apart perfectly; the 10-Hour Short Ribs (\$29), which are slow cooked in a Coca-Cola sauce and served with sweet mashed potatoes; and a side of mushrooms (\$8). The ribs literally melt in my mouth. Every bite is bursting with rich flavor and thoroughly savored. I could've easily eaten seconds of both, if that were an option.

And no meal is complete without dessert, which came in the form of three mini sweet tastings. They were all unique, tasty --and the perfect portion. As we blissfully sway to the music and spoon out the last yummy morsels left in our tiny dessert bowls, a waiter comes by with a couple of Sex on the Beach shots. "Why not?" we concede as we toss back the sweet liquid. Though we're not here to celebrate an anniversary, bachelorette party, or birthday as many of our fellow diners are doing, we're celebrating *Saturday*, and this is a great place to do it! **ML**

Villa Azur is located at 309 23rd St, Miami Beach, FL 33139. For more information, visit www.villaazurmiami.com or call 305-763-8688.

