

## Ítalia

I ate at Ítalia the night of a cliff hanger national election in the land of the restaurant's namesake. No one knew what to expect at the end of the evening: would the incumbent or his left-wing opponent walk away with the prize?

Back in the north Atlantic, there were no surprises at this longstanding Reykjavík restaurant. Uninspired and comprehensive Italian fare, from mozzarella salad to saltimbocca, was on offer. And although the evening as it unfolded on Laugavegur was unlikely ever to get as exciting as the situation back on the continent, it's safe to say that at least all of us in the restaurant walked away satisfied.

As one of the earliest "international" restaurants in Reykjavík, locals are already familiar with Ítalia. It's always crammed full of diners, most often an interesting combination of tourists and the under-20 crowd. This keeps the pace of both the meal and the atmosphere energetic. Ítalia feels traditional but not stale.

After sorting our way through the extensive and almost bewildering menu of starters, pasta, pizza, fish and meat dishes, I confess I opted for the somewhat un-Italian - penne alla New Yorkese (ISK 1800). In plain English, that's pasta with tomato sauce and meatballs, one of the western world's old fashioned comfort foods. To my somewhat cynical surprise, the meatballs were freshly made and tasted wonderfully of spices and meat rather than breadcrumbs, salt and water (clearly I have been eating too many microwaveable 1944 meals). My partner's whole plaice (ISK 2450) was very slightly on the oily side, but nevertheless a joy to eat with plump capers and a fluffy baked potato.

Throughout it all glided the waiters. There were several of them - no one seemed to have responsibility for a specific section - and they flitted about the small restaurant with a relaxed dexterity that I have not often seen in Reykjavík. From the moment we were seated and brought the menus, to when we were offered a second cup of coffee to go with our towering ice cream desserts (ISK 1100), the service was cheerful, straightforward and efficient.

Ítalia may have taken its inspiration from the old country, but a dining experience here is different from the political one there: no surprises - and no disappointments.

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