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BY SHEKHAR GUPTA



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Dinner and a Show

The first Benihana outpost in India takes experiential dining to a whole new level

SHANTANU DAVID

THEY say half the eating is done by the eyes. This axiom holds especially true in Benihana, which recently opened its first outlet in India at the Epicuria Food Mall in Nehru Place. Founded by Hiroaki "Rocky" Aoki in New York City in the '60s, Benihana is credited with introducing the concept of theatrical Japanese dining to America, and subsequently the world. The restaurant chain is known for its live 'hibachi' stations (hibachi is a traditional Japanese grilling method) with juggling, wisecracking chefs cooking your meal right in front of you. Delhi, book your seats.

The restaurant looks like it was done by the same guys who did the set design for the Matrix series. The entrance is dominated by a black vintage car, while the interiors are done primarily in black and white with accents of red. Apart



Food
Review

from an al fresco area the dining sections are divided into two: tables with the live hibachi grills, and standard table and chair set ups. The menu has both set meals and a la carte options with diners being able to customise their meal as they want. The primary focus of the food are Japanese dishes prepared in teppanyaki and tempura cooking styles, apart from Japanese staples such as sushi and nigiri rolls. The service is stellar with a friendly and accommodating wait staff who are also very knowledgeable about the menu, being able to recommend dishes with authority. Caveat to the economical eater: prices are steep (with the average entree cost above Rs 750 a dish), so plan accordingly.

Given that the live hibachi section is their USP, we decided to go with the set meal and brandished our chopsticks at the grill counter, waiting for our chef to appear. But first up was the delicately flavoured Japanese Onion Soup, a simmering clear broth flecked with paper-thin



(Top) The interiors of Benihana; Sushi rolls

mushroom slices and the Benihana salad, contrastingly chilled and comprising a mixed garden of leaves dewed with a zesty ginger dressing. While crunching through our salad, the chef rolled in, literally, pushing a small cart laden with plastic squeeze bottles, filled with sauces and dress-

ings, ingredients and meats — the Hibachi Lamb and Chicken, and Hibachi Basa. Our chef, York, juggled his knives, spatulas, eggs, lemons, prawns, and really everything but the kitchen sink, and flipping objects into his chef's toque while cracking jokes and yes, cooking. With objects flying around, the smell of Kikoman soy sauce and Teriyaki and York making jokes about Japanese lemons born and brought up in India and the distances between Okinawa and Nehru Place, it turned out to be the most exhilarating meal in recent memory. The food itself wasn't extraordinary (though York did grill a mean fish, suffused with the citrus flavours of Japanese lemons). York's last juggling act with strobe-lit salt and pepper shakers didn't hurt either.

MEAL FOR TWO: Rs 5,000 (including taxes, excluding alcohol)
ADDRESS: Epicuria mall, under Nehru Place Metro Station
CONTACT: 26488884