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Happy 'hour' in a candlelight setting

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Complimentary bread with butter The "Kaleo" martini with orange and lemon juices

By Dr. Ink

If a first date you've had at some coffeehouse or cafe ends blissfully, Bleu Bohème in Kensington is the ideal place to test whether that rapture will evolve into a white-hot flame. The romantic atmosphere — dimly lit with stick candles — carries elements of a European castle, though on a much cozier scale.

Better yet, go during daily happy hour. You'll lessen the blow for whoever pays for those inevitable Champagne cocktails, moules frites and other French indulgences that are never cheap no matter where you go.

The daily deals save you about 20 percent on select dishes and drinks, but only for a fast hour (between 5 and 6 p.m.), which gives you just enough time to determine if your interlude will seamlessly roll into the evening, perhaps over a bottle of Cote du Rhone blanc and a plate of duck leg confit from Blue Bohème's regular menus.

Such a scenario unfolded in my recent visit during happy hour. It was moments after sunset, just as customers' faces took on radiant glows from candlelight, that a couple seated alongside me on a cushy banquette in the bar area began inquiring about each other's travel histories.



Bleu Bohème's curb appeal extends to the inside.

(Photo courtesy of Bleu Bohème)

Always one to eavesdrop, they continued sharing personal info that went above and beyond that in their "profiles," which they referenced a few times but without revealing the actual dating service. I sensed pure compatibility and felt shamelessly entertained as they reveled in a quarter-liter "pichet" of red wine (\$9.95 to \$11.95) and a fluted glass of French Champagne (\$7.95).



Crab croquettes with saffron aioli (Photo by Dr. Ink)

I ordered the “Kensington Kaleo” martini (\$10.95), named after a neighborhood resident and esteemed customer who happened to be sitting outside on the heated patio, as my waiter pointed out. He invented the drink, which calls for a couple ounces of vodka, a shot of Aperol, a teaspoon of sugar, and splashes of orange and lemon juices.

It’s a refreshingly bitter concoction designed for sipping. Yet as with all martinis that come into this clumsy grip, a portion of it sloshed out the glass and onto the table. Thanks to an astute wait staff, the embarrassing puddle was promptly cleaned up, and with no attention drawn to the mishap.

My noshes for the hour were crusty bread with butter (complimentary) and a pair of crab croquettes (\$12.95) accented with daubs of saffron aioli. Unfortunately, the shredded crab in the croquettes was overtaken by salt and excessive breadcrumbs. For the same price, I should have chosen instead the duck frites, the mushroom ravioli, or the onion-bacon Reblochon tart — reliable standbys I’ve savored in past visits.

Nonetheless, I left on a favorable note given Bleu Bohème’s top-notch service, upscale menu choices and captivating atmosphere — all of which prompted the spied-upon couple to indeed ask for a full dinner menu.

Bleu Bohème

4090 Adams Ave.
(Kensington)

619-255-4167
bleuboheme.com

Daily happy hour: 5-6 p.m.