

# Slow down for a little taste of romance, Italy

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What do you have in mind when you think of romance? Is there a knight in shining armor? A moonlit walk on the beach?

Perhaps you envision a cozy, Italian bistro with warmly lit windows tucked away from the busy streets above. Authentic Italian music swells gently in the background as patrons lean in intently to hear their party's every word. Swags of grapevines drape over the walls, which are met by strings of soft lights that hang above you. As you take in the distinct aroma of fresh garlic and warm bread, you feel your mind dance away to Old World Italy.

In a time when schedules are

over-filled and families over-worked, lingering conversation seems to be a lost art. As the world continues to accelerate technology, speed and efficiency are becoming the top priorities in many lives. It's time to veer out of the fast lane and catch your breath. It's time to trade in drive-thru dining for something better. It's time to steal away to Cuccina Italiana.

Tucked away in the heart of downtown Cary is a humble Italian restaurant called Cuccina Italiana. The unobtrusive building sits below street level, luring you in with its soft glow and intimate atmosphere.

As I walked through the doors, the sights and smells of Italy began slowly filling my senses. After seating ourselves in a corner near the bar, my

family and I began to people watch to pass the time of our 50-minute wait on a Saturday evening.

In time, our name was called. The hostess led us through the cozy dining area to a booth near the window.

Fresh-baked fococcia bread was soon at our fingertips and was devoured quickly. We took our time surveying the menu, which offered a wide variety of pastas, chicken, veal, seafood, salads and desserts.

Unlike our waiter, warm bread was always at hand. However, the unhurried pace of the servers simply seemed in line with the unhurried ambiance of the restaurant. Our orders were placed as we settled in for some conversation, memories and plans. Couples

around us leaned in over their tables, holding each other's hands and listening to the other's every word.

Thirty minutes passed and our food arrived. Our meals included pasta marinara, shrimp-filled ravioli with tomato cream sauce and chicken sautéed in a mushroom wine sauce. The tastes seemed true to Italy, slow cooked just long enough to allow the flavors to peak. Portion size was just right, yet I had the feeling that there was no such thing as too much of such a wonderful meal!

Whether you prefer classic dishes, like spaghetti or lasagna, or a more unique dish, Cuccina Italiana prepares it beautifully. Each table seemed to be taking time to savor their

food.

Just when I thought the night couldn't get any more enjoyable, a young man brought himself to one knee, and with a rose asked his girlfriend to marry him. She accepted and the entire restaurant applauded.

So perhaps your idea of romance is candlelit intrigue. Or perhaps, if you are like me, an unhurried time of conversation with the ones you love is truly romantic. In either case, you can find yourself immersed in it at Cuccina Italiana. It's time to leave behind, even if for an evening, your life of deadlines and date books. Bring only your companions, your appetite and your time. You may find that the romance in your life is right there with you.

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