



## **Merchants Cigar Bar: The Lounge With Something Extra!**

Not too many cigar bars operate in New York City and I personally can only think of three or four. Merchants Cigar Bar at 62nd and First Avenue is special not just because of its fine selection of alcohol and cigars (with a bartender who is an expert on both) but because of its elevated Modern American menu. Everything is homemade and my dining guest Gail and my choices blew us away. The menu choices might seem simple but there are many creative twists used thanks to a clever kitchen staff. The dark lighting and secluded feeling makes Merchants Cigar Bar have a super romantic feeling, especially if you get a booth.



We could not start our meal without a couple of the creatively named cocktails on the drink menu. If you like a smoky tasting margarita, I strongly recommend the Chica Morada Margarita (seen on the left) made with Vida mezcal, Chica Morada, Mandarine Napoleon, lime and habanero pepper. It has a graceful kick at the end. My dining partner Gail had the Smoke 'Em If You Got 'Em, made with Woodenville bourbon, Bacardi Quattro, Oloroso sherry, cinnamon, Angostura and orange bitters. She ordered a second one, so it had to be good. I love the way it was topped with pear slices.



We started off our meal with the amazing Ricotta Dip featuring the best ricotta I have ever eaten! This is no exaggeration as it was perfectly soft, creamy and fresh tasting. This amazing app comes with the ricotta topped with lovely fresh figs, candied pecans and Mike's Hot Honey. The sprigs of fresh herbs added a savory taste. You get four fabulous slices of grilled sourdough brushed with a little EVOO to dip in the Ricotta Dip but the waitstaff will gladly give you additional bread if you need it. The ricotta dip is enough for at least ten slices of the sourdough.



We love to test everyone's fries and those at Merchant Cigar Bar are Truffle Fries done in the shoestring style. They came out of the kitchen hot and golden, topped with Parmesan, Tartufo cheese and black truffle aioli. The aioli was "off the chain" as they say. Watch it or you will get really full on these before your entree makes it out of the kitchen!



After we got our appetizers, we decided to opt in for the New York Restaurant Week menu which is one of Manhattan's best bargains at the moment (priced at \$60). You can see that I got the amazingly tangy and sticky Chicken Lollipops made with homemade chipotle barbecue sauce. The chicken oozed juice and was so easy to eat on the bone. Gail got the Deviled Eggs which was the fanciest version of this American classic that I have ever seen. They are topped with caviar, candied bacon, saffron and chives.



Gail and I are both steak lovers so we had to order the Grilled NY Strip Steak which comes with roasted fingerling potatoes with a lovely buttery rosemary accent and grilled asparagus that was ultra tender and fresh. The steak used is beautifully marbled and topped with creamy peppercorn sauce for a touch of classic French flavor. This is a sizable portion of meat, about ten ounces! I would definitely return to get this again!

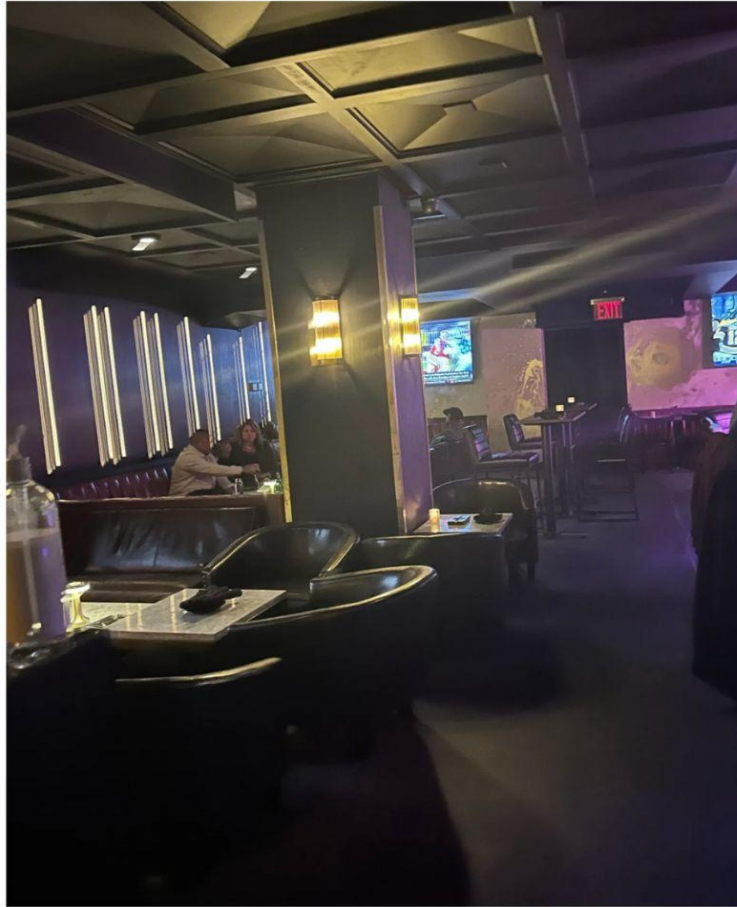


I am a sucker for good NY Cheesecake and this one was special—not just because it was ultra creamy and made that day, but because it was topped with raspberry coulis and brandied cherries. The brandied cherries added a slightly sour taste against the sweetness of the cheesecake and they perfectly balanced each other out. The peppermint leaf on top was a classy touch and you have the option to get this dessert with or without homemade whipped cream.



My pal Gail enjoys a little "death by chocolate" in her life (as many of us do) and so she ordered the Lava Chocolate Cake made with dark Valrhona chocolate. It came out with a touch of confectioners sugar on top and a pool of homemade dark chocolate underneath. It was super moist and did not disappoint!

This is a cake that will please even the fussiest chocolate addicts.



The decor is simple at Merchants Cigar Bar and is slightly masculine because of the brown leather chairs and banquettes. You can eat and smoke cigars at the bar and the bartender can run off the list and description of each liquor. He also cuts guests cigars and also gives instructions to first time smokers including how to really savor each puff. I love the no rush atmosphere at Merchants Cigar Bar and I think you will, too. If you want to go