

Jerry & the Mermaid Restaurant
469 East Main Street
Riverhead, New York 11901
(631) 727-8489

OpenYear-round;
closed Mondays during the winter season.
Hours.....11:30 a.m.–10:00 p.m.,
Sundays through Thursdays;
11:30 a.m.–4:00 a.m.,
Saturdays and Sundays
CuisineSeafood, pasta, poultry,
steak and raw bar
Entree price range\$8.95–\$17.95
LiquorFull bar
Reservations.....Accepted only for parties
of six or more
DressCasual
Outdoor DiningYes
Water ViewsNo
Take-out.....Yes
Delivery to boats.....No
Dockage.....Yes
Call Treasure Cove Marina at (631) 727-8386.
There is a \$10 charge for docking, but Jerry &
the Mermaid will refund \$5 on dinner if you
bring your docking receipt.
Credit cardsAll major cards accepted.

Food, Fun and Friendly Mermaids

Jerry & the Mermaid's cuisine isn't the only thing that keeps customers coming back for more. It's also the quirky nautical atmosphere, and Jerry himself.

By Tom Schlichter

Jerry & the Mermaid's owner, Jerry Dicecco, shook back his head and laughed loudly, as my wife Felicia and I concluded a magic trick that involved making an entire plate of tasty appetizers quickly vanish.

"This place is all about fun and good food," he chuckled. "That's why I come to work each day. Some people hate their jobs; I love mine."

The festive atmosphere and good food may be why so many people love Jerry & the Mermaid in Riverhead, New York. It is a semiboisterous kind of place, the cuisine is excellent, and Dicecco is omnipresent, which—in this case—seems to be a good thing.

With a resume that includes stints as part owner of one restaurant; executive chef at several large, well-known establishments in the tri-state area; and chief instructor for gourmet cooking at New York Tech, Dicecco is certainly well schooled in the restaurant business.

"I've been cooking my whole life," he explained, as we finished off our first course. "And I've been to the big time. Now I just want a little place for myself, sole ownership, busy but small, fun to be around. When I heard that the Atlantis Marine Aquarium was opening up next door, I decided to take a gamble. We've been open nine years now, and I've never regretted the move."

As we ate under an awning on the front patio dining area, it occurred to us that Dicecco must stop at a lot of tables each day, because everyone seems to know him. A driver in the parking lot rolled down her window to shout out, "Hey, Jerry! We'll be coming for dinner tomorrow." A couple heading into the restaurant walked out of their way to come over and say hello. Another couple heading back to their boat trekked across the patio to shake hands and say, "We're stuffed."

"I wanted this place to have a fun, Key West feel," said Dicecco, explaining

the restaurant's casual atmosphere and unique name. He's accomplished the task. Although you can't see the water from the premises, there is a sculpture of a lighthouse painted with a mermaid and friendly sea creatures, plus undersea murals along the restaurant's west and north faces.

You can dine on the outside front patio under the awning, inside in a more formal setting, at the bar or out on the back deck. The inside dining area is decorated with a light nautical theme. Friday and Saturday are karaoke nights, although other entertainment is occasionally provided. They also offer a Quick Draw lottery machine, which many customers appreciate.

Having a good time and being relaxed is nice, but you can't stay in business without good food and good service. We found both here. Despite its reputation as a seafood restaurant, the varied menu also includes pasta, steak and poultry dishes, and plenty of desserts, plus a raw bar with fresh shell-

fish from local waters. Each day sees about 15 specials between the lunch and dinner menus. All menu items are available for take-out, too. Long Island wines are on hand, in addition to traditional favorites and frozen drinks.

We began our meal with a sampling of appetizers so huge it could have passed for dinner. There were mini-crabcakes with a delicious horseradish sauce, artichokes francaise so tender and buttery I had to roll my eyes skyward with each heavenly bite, and fresh coconut-fried shrimp breaded on the premises. These were augmented by Jerry & the Mermaid's famous buffalo wings, mini-meatballs, fried calamari, coquilles St. Jacques and tender, moist baked clams. Although we didn't try them, the mussels Luciano and steamer appetizers we saw at another table looked and smelled so good that we'll have to go back for another taste test.

For our main courses, Felicia sampled tender, stuffed lobster tails with baked

potato and a mix of fresh vegetables including zucchini, broccoli and mushrooms. I chose Alaskan king crab legs with clarified butter, baked potato and fresh veggies. These are simple dishes, so you'd expect them to be good, but my king crab legs were among the sweetest I've ever sampled, and Felicia's lobster was cooked to perfection—steaming, moist and plenty juicy.

Dessert just added to the fun and our already high caloric intake for the day. We sampled ice-cream crepes with homemade hot fudge sauce and a sinfully rich Mississippi mud cake. Other choices included key lime cheesecake, and a variety of other cake and ice-cream selections.

After dinner Dicecco sat with us again, and we shared Elise cognac—a brand he said he had only recently discovered. Marvelously smooth, it proved the perfect ending to a charmingly delightful night with a wonderfully entertaining host. ■