Sample Negative Restaurant Review

The Zebra Diner in Need of New Stripes

The mark of a good restaurant is not necessarily its size, but the quality of its food and the generosity of its staff. Along that line, some of the finest dining experiences I've had throughout my career have been in the small diners and dives scattered throughout the suburbs of Cleveland. Regrettably, Zebra's Diner is not among these gems.

The location of the diner makes it appear promising. The owners were at least wise in this regard, having selected a spot with a splendid view of a small man-made lake. Furthermore, because the building stands on its own instead of being wedged between other storefronts, patrons are granted full view of the scenery regardless of whether they choose to sit at one of the three outdoor tables or one of the two dozen tables set up indoors. This is fortunate, considering the fact that as I approached Zebra's Diner, fully intending to take a seat outside, I noticed layers of bird droppings and cigarette ash caked onto the tables and chairs. I suppose I should have taken that as an omen, but being drawn in by the concept of a "Zebra Burger" and curious as to what such a sandwich consisted of, I decided to press on.

The seats inside the restaurant were not much better than those outdoors, but dustings of crumbs and smears of ketchup stains are at least a little less appalling than animal excrement. I seated myself at the cleanest table I could find. Looking around, I only noticed two other customers. Since it was lunchtime on a Sunday afternoon, this should have been my second warning signal, but I still continued on in my culinary adventure.

Fifteen minutes after I sat down, a teenage boy with long, greasy hair finally arrived to take my order. I began with the diner's trademark "Zebra Burger" that had intrigued me enough to draw me to the restaurant in the first place. I also ordered side of onion rings, a side of fruit salad, a sweet tea, and a "Sahara Fudge Brownie," instructing my server to bring my dessert out last, after I finished my meal.

After another 25 minutes passed, my food arrived—including my dessert. I had already begun to expect as much, especially considering the fact that, in the 40 minutes I had been there thus far, the only other customers I had spotted were the original two patrons I saw when I first came. I decided to give the hasty waiter one final chance to redeem himself by asking him about what exactly made the Zebra Burger so special. The information on the menu had been sparse at best and provided me with no clues. My server simply shrugged his shoulders and replied, “It’s just a burger,” before shuffling back off to the kitchen.

At the very least, I should give him credit for his honesty. The Zebra Burger is, in fact, just a burger. A simple hamburger with ketchup, mustard, and pickle. No special “Zebra” sauce or other distinguishing features to be found. I will take the blame for my disappointment at its ordinariness, though, seeing as how I did not inquire about what the burger consisted of in the first place. What I will not take the blame for, however, is the fact that the burger was lukewarm and served on stale bread. The onion rings were hot, at least, but otherwise nothing special, and the fruit salad was cold but made of nothing but sour grapes and flavorless chunks of out-of-season melon. Humorously, the Sahara Fudge Brownie was, perhaps, the most honest and straightforward dish of the entire meal, having been about as dry as the Sahara Desert itself.

Visiting the Zebra Diner was certainly an experience to remember, but one that I never hope to repeat and would not wish upon anyone else. If you are tempted by the luscious landscape and the intriguing black-and-white-striped storefront, you would be better off bringing a camera to the restaurant than your appetite.