

# CALENDAR

## RED WHITE & BLUE

Your holiday weekend guide

**Fourth fireworks**  
roundup

**Hot dogs**  
Where to find  
our favorites

**Big movies:** 'Ice Age',  
'Public Enemies'

**Road trip:** Celebrations  
around the state



# Mbar

is mm-mm good

**A**fter a grueling workweek, vegging in front of the TV just doesn't cut it. When you're in the mood to meet friends, relax over cocktails and engage in a little people watching, it's hard to beat Mbar, the welcoming lounge that fronts Prado Restaurant at the InterContinental Montelucia Resort & Spa.

**Scene:** Arched ceilings, patterned-tile floors and elaborate fretwork evoke Spain's Moorish roots, but there's nothing Old World about the ambiance, which ranges from relaxed and sleepy on Sunday to lively and decidedly loud on Friday afternoon.

**Food:** The happy-hour menu is a pared-down, less-expensive version of the regular bar menu, both of which are inspired by Spanish tapas. You'll find 13 graze-worthy possibilities here, and, except for the \$12 M Burger, all are priced at \$5 or \$7. They're loosely arranged by category: meats, cheeses, seafood and starches.

Grilled medjool dates — smoky, spicy and sweet, thanks to crisps of bacon and hints of habanero pepper — may defy categorization, but they're the most memorable little bites on the menu (\$5).

Three dishes come in bowls and require a fork, namely — tasty chickpeas with harissa (which taste more of mint than red

chile); soupy white beans, given a sprinkle of wild oregano; and almond-studded couscous, sweetened with raisins and local honey (all \$5).

Four silken slices of prosciutto, made from a producer in Iowa, come draped over thick, crusty slices of bread, both elements outstanding (\$7). Sheep cheese with bread is another option, either full-flavored Manchego; sharp, spicy pecorino; or nutty Idiazabal (\$5 each). Fried calamari, served with supergarlicky pimenton (pimento) aioli are decent, but I've had better. And it's difficult to discern much smoke or heat in grilled heads-on Hawaiian blue prawns, seasoned with Argentina's cacho de cabre chile (\$7).

If you'd rather eat than snack, the M burger, served on a brioche bun with



Clockwise from left: Grilled medjool dates; the Amante Picante and the M Burger at Mbar at Prado at the InterContinental Montelucia.

melted Manchego and a side of fries, has your name on it (\$12).

**Drinks:** Funny, the cocktail list is 10 times more provocative than the menu. It's tempting to try one of everything (\$12 each), including the Pandango (Don Julio Reposado tequila with prickly-pear puree, a blend of exotic juices and a float of Malibu passion fruit). The jury's out on whether Amante Picante is a "culti-

nary aphrodisiac," but it's certainly refreshing: organic tequila blended with fresh cucumber, cilantro, lime and agave nectar. Unfortunately, it was nearly impossible to detect fig or star anise in the Spanish mojito.

**Lowdown:** Thanks to chef de cuisine and Slow Food advocate Claudio Urciuoli (a stickler for pristine ingredients), the quality of the food is top-notch. Problem is, precious few dishes on

the menu are all that interesting. Clearly, this is not where Urciuoli is directing his time and attention. However, if simplicity suits you — good meats, cheeses and bread, in particular — Mbar may be just the ticket.

**Hours:** Happy hour is 5-7 p.m. Mondays-Fridays.

**Details:** InterContinental Montelucia Resort & Spa, 4949 E. Lincoln Drive, Paradise Valley. 480-627-3004, [pradolife.com](http://pradolife.com).