

## A \$100,000 lunch, minus the food

**Celebrity chef Mario Batali and two partners are peddling laughter, libations and lunch - but only a select few will actually get to eat.**

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LAS VEGAS (CNNMoney.com) -- I expected one of the world's most expensive meals to start with a few sublime cocktails and some mind-blowing appetizers prepared in exquisite style by celebrity chef Mario Batali.

I flew to Las Vegas at Batali's invitation for a \$100,000 lunch created by the world-famous chef and his long-time friends, bartender Tony Abou-Ganim and magician Billy Harris. The trio have teamed up to create an exclusive dining and entertainment service, dubbed *Magic, Martinis & Mario*, for - well - the kind of people who can afford a \$100,000 lunch.

The burning question for me, and probably for everyone else is of course: "Exactly what is a \$100,000 lunch like?"

Sadly, I can't tell you. I arrived at Batali's Enoteca San Marco with a big appetite and even bigger expectations, but the only thing I got to sink my teeth into was a pitch as to why the privileged will pony up for this exorbitant, albeit unique, experience.

Lunch, alas, was not actually served. Apparently you can't dish this kind of thing out to just anyone.



Mario Batali.

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Batali, also known as "Molto Mario," already sits at the helm of a gourmand's juggernaut. He runs 12 pricey restaurants in the U.S., including Babbo in New York and the new B&B Ristorante in Las Vegas. He's also published several cookbooks, and even created his own line of cast iron cookware, all while appearing regularly on the Food Network.

Batali will cook for *Magic, Martinis & Mario*, while Harris, a magician who has worked with corporate clients such as [Microsoft \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#) and [Boeing \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#), will entertain the crowd, and "master mixologist" Abou-Ganim will create specialty cocktails designed to harmonize perfectly with Batali's meals.

The venture is aimed at the corporate expense account set, which, after being rocked by corporate scandals and chastised for immoderate executive pay, is apparently ready to embrace conspicuous consumption again.

The \$100,000 price tag for a *Magic, Martinis & Mario* moment could cover an event for anywhere from 10 to 1,000 people, depending on the event. Actual costs may vary.

According to Batali, Abou-Ganim and Harris, their fee reflects how difficult it is to get the three busy men together for an afternoon anywhere in the world. Time is valuable - especially Batali's.

"He's not cheap," joked Harris, pointing at Batali.

Batali's rationale for a six-figure sit-down: "It's the opportunity cost of us having to set aside time to create the environment," Batali added. "And this is geared to a market where \$100,000 isn't a lot of money."

Event coordinator Julie Gilday-Shaffer, who also attended the *Magic, Martinis & Mario* preview, agrees. As someone who coordinates special events for clients, including [Motorola \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#), [Yahoo \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#) and [YUM! Brands \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#), she wasn't put off by the steep price tag.

"\$100,000 would be an expected budget for corporate events," she said.

In fact, she added, many of her clients have already expressed interest in booking the trio for an afternoon.

Gilday-Shaffer expects that Batali, Abou-Ganim and Harris could easily book a \$100,000 lunch as often as once a month, depending upon their availability.

The trio is already set to host a gathering for a select group of [IBM \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#) executives later this week; Abou-Ganim is at work on a signature "big blue" cocktail.

So if you're attending the computer giant's confab - or any of *Magic, Martinis & Mario's* other engagements - please do let me know how the food is. ■