

REVIEW

The Dinner Detective Saturdays at Embassy Suites Hotel in Santa Ana, \$60

Dinner theater is not normally a gateway to Broadway, so most of the time, its performances and food are forgettable. It's with these low expectations that I attended *The Dinner Detective*, a murder mystery dinner with shows in four Southern California locations. But it turned out to be more entertaining than many performances on the Great White Way.



The show is divided into a cocktail hour and then dinner presentation. For the first hour, guests can patronize the cash bar while mingling with a mix of actors and attendees to try to glean clues about the soon-to-occur murder. It is definitely not a place for the antisocial. Guests are herded into a dining area and sat 10 to a table. It's almost a guarantee that there will be a birthday or other type of celebration, which this event caters to. Guests dine on a three-course meal that is typical hotel or large wedding fare—not a culinary masterpiece, but four satisfying choices for entrees.

But you don't attend dinner theater for the food, you go for the entertainment, which was plentiful. A cast of incognito actors (roughly one per table of patrons) takes campy improvisation to a new level as actors pass out clues and drop hints during casual dinner conversation to direct attendees to the correct killer. The humor definitely skews adult and the activity is not recommended for children younger than 12. There's a prize at the end for whoever guesses the killer, but the real reward is the pursuit. As with any high audience participation event, you get out of it what you put in, so be prepared to let your inner Nancy Drew fly.

—*Julie Leupold*