

EATING OUT



Chutney Mary

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For many years I have either walked or driven past Chutney Mary, both when they were in Chelsea and also after they moved to St James's Street, and every time I have said to myself I really should go there as it looks spectacular, and the reviews are excellent. But, to my shame, it wasn't until recently that I finally crossed over their threshold, and I am so disappointed that I hadn't done so before, as I am not sure the reviews did it justice.

Chutney Mary has won countless awards, the latest being the prestigious AA Restaurant of the Year Award, and has remained a firm favourite with diners for over 34 years, as it has evolved and reinvented itself as tastes and influences have changed over the years, without ever compromising on quality.

Our introduction to our evening at Chutney Mary started at the aptly named Pukka Bar (Pukka is informal slang for excellent quality). The range of cocktails is extensive, with many incorporating Indian influences, and the Mango Chilli Daiquiri deserves an individual mention as it was a clever spicy twist on the classic Daiquiri with the addition of the chilli on the edge of the glass. In fact it was so delicious, my wife's eyes lit up when she was offered a second, and in fact she hasn't stopped talking about how it is now her favourite cocktail! To accompany our drinks we ordered a Poppadom Basket, and when it arrived there were four varieties of crispy poppadoms along with some exquisite honey baked kale. To accompany these, were two very different chutneys, a slightly sharper lime and chilli chutney and a smoother and milder strawberry chutney - yes, strawberry!



All of this was served in an original tray, made and carved in Kashmir, the first sign of the attention to detail that runs through everything Chutney Mary does.

Having enjoyed all that the Pukka Bar had to offer, we made our way down to the restaurant which is one of the most beautiful restaurant settings I have seen. The décor is classy, and the atmosphere serene and relaxed with a real feel of 1930's elegance. The tables are well spaced, and when we arrived it was full of diners enjoying sumptuous food. However, as stunning a restaurant it is, and this one is truly stunning, a restaurant does not survive without serving great food that its diners would not be able to create at home, and at Chutney Mary the food really is the star.

The selection of starters is an eclectic mix of choices, offering vegetables, fish, seafood and meats and we selected the Tandoori Artichoke Hearts (£17), Tokri Chaat (£16.50), Golden Fried Prawns (£20) and the Baked Venison Samosas (£18). Tokri translates as 'a basket', and here the basket is a lattice of fried strands of potato packed with the wonderfully flavoursome ingredients that make up a great Chaat, namely chickpeas, oca, potato, spicy and sweet chutneys and curd, all topped by crunchy and fruity pomegranate seeds. The prawns are large and covered in crispy batter, accompanied by a spicy mayo, and the samosas are light (because they are baked not fried) and packed with the most tasty, tender and gamey venison. The above were all great, but the stand out starter was the Tandoori Artichoke Hearts. Artichoke is such an underrated vegetable which is such a shame as its flavour is complex and its combination of herbaceous, sweet, and bitter flavours with its crunchy texture lend themselves perfectly to the addition of tandoori spice. These hearts sat on a smooth artichoke



purée delicately flavoured with garlic, and every mouthful was a foodies joy.

Mains again, offer the dinner an embarrassment of riches ranging from traditional slow cooked curries to dishes from the barbecue, and there is nothing better than the taste of large prawns grilled over a flame, and here the Wild Madagascan Prawns (£42) were meaty with just enough char to enhance the sweet flavour and firm texture. To accompany these, we selected the Butter Chicken (£32) and the Lamb Curry (£36) along with a Garlic Naan and Steamed Rice. The Butter Chicken was succulent and was bathing in a lightly spiced fragrant tomato-based sauce, perfect with the fluffy rice. The Lamb Curry was rich with plenty of body, and the lamb was so succulent it melted in the mouth and the sauce was great to mop up with the doughy naan. Both curries were a joy, with the balance of spices and the quality of ingredients on point, elevating them to a higher level, showcasing exactly why Chutney Mary has remained such a firm favourite and I can't believe it hasn't been awarded a Michelin star yet.

Desserts are often ignored by diners at an Indian restaurant, but don't fall into that trap, as my Coconut Surprise was a dessert that would grace any table in the world for taste, and was visually stunning. Here Coconut Kulfi has been moulded into a half coconut shape with chocolate substituting for the skin, all sitting on a coconut crumble, providing a heady mixture of tastes and textures, and provided a perfect end to a perfect meal.

On reflection, I am struggling to remember a time when I had enjoyed a meal more. The décor is immaculate, the service attentive, but not intrusive, and the food delicious, with expert spice combinations catering for all diners' spice tolerances, and I will certainly not take long to return again.

www.chutneymary.com