

EATING OUT



Amaya

Halkin Arcade, Belgravia, London, SW1X 8JT

I am sure that very few people know how many Indian restaurants London has, but I am sure it will surprise you, as it did me, that there are over 3,600, which shows how popular this cuisine is.

I obviously haven't visited all of them, but I am certain that there are few, if any, that would hold a candle to Amaya. Amaya is under the same ownership as Chutney Mary's and Veeraswamy, and has rightly held a Michelin star since 2006, focusing on Indian grills seasoned with subtle and flavoursome marinades.

The restaurant is close to Knightsbridge and its entrance gives you no idea of the joys awaiting you as it is understated. On entering, the first thing that strikes you is the size of the room that houses Amaya, but that is quickly followed by how comforting and stylish the décor is, with its warming blacks and reds along with swish lighting and wooden tables. Although the décor is stylish, the real star of the show (other than the food), is the open kitchen which fills the whole of the back wall with its hot charcoals and flames licking the food lovingly, all providing the chefs with the tools to weave their magic.

Amaya offers a tapas styled Indian experience, which is unusual for an Indian restaurant, therefore most dishes have two sizes, regular and small, allowing diners to mix and match and sample more delights from the extensive menu.

Our first choice from the menu was a Salad, the Minced Chicken Lettuce Parcel (£13.5), yes, you read it correctly, a salad at an Indian restaurant! This is clearly out of the ordinary, but Amaya is not an ordinary restaurant. It is innovative and pushes boundaries, which is why it has maintained

its Michelin star for 21 years now. Here a crisp and succulent lettuce enclosed the delicate chicken in a lightly spiced sauce which was delicious in its own right, but the addition of sweet hints from small slices of apple took it to another level.

Our next dish was the Tandoori Salmon from Norwegian Waters (£27). I thought our first dish was good, but this one raised the bar even higher! Many think that tandoori is a recipe, but like many of the world's greatest dishes, it is actually a cooking method that has become synonymous with the food that is prepared. The first step in this process is to marinate and spice the salmon and then it is cooked over an intense fire in a tandoor (a clay oven). The tandoor creates an extremely hot and smoky environment which enhances the flavours from the marinade and spices by allowing them to seep into the meat or in this case the fish, creating intense flavours. Our generous piece of salmon was so light and flaky it almost melted in our mouths and is one of the best pieces of salmon I have tasted. Our second journey into the world of tandoor cooking was the Black Pepper Chicken Tikka (£15), which was so light and succulent I am considering buying a tandoor for myself! I am sure however, that I will never be able to get close to creating such a dish, as the flavours come not only from the tandoor oven, but also from the spices and marinade used, and here the rich pepper marinade includes the legendary pepper from Wayanad estate from Kerala.

Going to a restaurant should be a wonderful experience, where you are served food you could not recreate at home, that looks amazing, in a stylish environment, and at Amaya they combine these just perfectly. Our next dish, Griddled Flaked Crab cake (£17) showcased this



perfectly. Most restaurants include fillers like potato in their crab cakes, but not at Amaya. Their cakes are 100% Crab meat sitting on a delicately flavoured mixture of ginger, lime and green chilli sauce, all served in a crab shell which stimulates your eyes as well as your taste buds.

After revisiting our favourite tandoor cooking, with a Tandoori Duck Leg (£28) which just fell off the bone and was served with a ridiculously smooth mash and the classic orange accompaniment, we opted for two vegetarian dishes, the Sweet Potato Chaat (£22) and the Punjabi Channa Chaat in a tart (£20). If vegetarian dishes would always taste like these, this confirmed meat eater could be converted! The sweet potato chaat is made from griddled Indian white sweet potatoes and these cubes of loveliness are covered with a delicately spiced sauce and are eaten with little wooden forks, but the Channa Chaat was an old friend from a previous visit and it didn't disappoint. Chaat's are a family of snacks typically served at roadsides, but it would be some roadside seller that would produce such subtle, but at the same time boisterous flavours, with a pastry so crisp, and even lightly spiced as well.

Our curry dish was the Spicy Malabar Prawn Curry (£38) accompanied with Rice (£7.5) and a Garlic, Green Olive and Cumin Naan (£8.5). The curry bursts with southern Indian flavours and the addition of coconut mellows the strength of the madras spice. The rice is fluffy and the Naan tastes as good as it smells, and believe me, it smells amazing!

For dessert, we selected the Chocolate Fondant, which finished off a perfect meal with a perfect dessert. The fondant was crazily light, and the pastry would illicit a Paul Hollywood handshake.

You rarely find restaurants where you run out of superlatives to describe the food, but with Amaya I think I have found it. The food, the service and the décor are on point, and after you visit I think you will run out too.

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