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Mother City Fine Dining: Bukhara: North Indian fare in all its flaming, fiery, succulent glory

Bianca Coleman, Cape Town, Food & Wine, Food&Wine, Reviews, Weekly Columns Decen PRINT EMAIL A- A-



Review by Bianca Coleman

Wow. Bukhara has been going for 20 years. A visit was long overdue, and tempted by some recent menu changes, we went for a tasting last week. An upmarket Indian dining experience, the restaurants – there are branches in Cape Town, Stellenbosch, and Johannesburg – specialise in various methods of Indian cooking, all with a slant to north Indian origins where the focus is on flavours, rather than mouth-

searing heat.

Even so, I am a complete sissy when it comes to anything too hot, which I communicated to the manager on arrival. In turn, the kitchen delivered an amazing array of mostly mild dishes. When ordering from the extensive menu, look out for the little S or M which will indicate "spicy" or "mild", but do check first, the lamb barra kebab on our starter platter was way hotter than anything else. Likewise, beware of the bowls of condiments. There is a lovely green one which has mint and therefore implies coolness, but it burns like hell, which I found out the hard way.

Along with that we sampled a variety of other dishes prepared in the tandoor oven – chicken tikka, chicken cheese kebab, and chicken malai kebab, which was our favourite. We also tried the malai



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BUKHARA
arguably the finest indian cuisine on planet earth

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Along with that we sampled a variety of other dishes prepared in the tandoor oven – chicken tikka, chicken cheese kebab, and chicken malai kebab, which was our favourite. We also tried the malai salmon. Malai is an ingredient made from whole milk which is heated and then allowed to cool, after which the fat is skimmed off. Rounding things off were tandoori mushrooms generously stuffed with paneer, non-melting cheese or curd cheese made by curdling heated milk with lemon juice, vinegar, or other food acids. The beauty of tandoor cooking is that because of the extremely high temperatures, food is cooked fast, thus retaining all its succulence.

From the salad and raita section of the menu we were served papdi chat and frankly, as divine as all the other food was, I could happily eat a giant bowl of that as a full meal. It's a typical Indian street food made with crisp fried dough wafers known as papri, with slices of boiled potato, and topped with yoghurt, tangy tamarind sauce, and crunchy vermicelli.

We paced ourselves carefully for the main courses – murg (chicken) lababdar, lamb rogan josh, and a selection of vegetarian dishes. Although I eat all the meats, fish, and poultry in the world, I love veggies and Indian food offers so many wonderful options. Palak paneer is creamy spinach with cubes of cheese hidden inside; dhal fry is sweet yellow lentils, and aloo jeera of course is the classic potato dish spiced with cumin seeds. The curries in their creamy gravies, and the vegetables, were served with saffron rice, lemon rice and Malabar parantha, which is known as the "croissant" of naan breads as it is so buttery and flaky.

We finished with gajar halwa, which is made predominantly of carrots and served with vanilla ice cream. With spicy food wine pairing can often be challenging, but we found The Wolftrap viognier chenin blend with its fruitiness stood up well.

New on the menu are Indian tapas, although these are not available during the busy festive season. At lunch time or warm evenings, the wraparound balcony with its view of the street theatre in Church Street Mall below is a must, or you can sit inside for a ringside seat to the flaming fiery drama of the kitchen. Either way your surroundings are going to be entertaining and a great accompaniment to a fabulous meal.

* Bukhara is at 33 Church Street, Cape Town.
Call 021 424 0000 for reservations.
Trading hours daily: 12pm to 3pm; 6pm to 11pm.
For Bukhara branches around the country, visit bukhara.com.

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THE NEXT 48 HOURS

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Bukhara: North Indian fare in all its flaming, fiery, succulent glory

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Tandoor cooking retains all of the succulence because of the high heat the food is cooked at

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