

Perfect paneer



Fans of Indian cuisine are spoilt for choice here in Abu Dhabi – especially now that Salam Street has reopened, making India Palace easily accessible once more.

We enter through a huge wooden door flanked by ornate bronze elephants and are seated promptly. The furnishing is opulent; carved wooden furnishing, ornate gold-gilded picture frames and imposing beams overhead create a sense of extravagance that's not reflected in the price of food.

Scanning the drinks list, we are impressed by the extensive choice. All tastes seem to be catered for; whether you prefer saffron, mint, almond, pineapple, strawberry, mango or any other fruit, it's on the menu. Motivated by curiosity, we order the aspara, which is made from lychees. The unusual, sweet, milky drink is perfect for whetting our appetite.

The appetisers menu includes an array of signature Indian items such as bhajis and samosas. We fancy seafood and order the samundri tikka (spiced crab-cake) and the kurmura jheenga (crispy prawns wrapped in pastry with sweet chilli sauce). We read through the list of classic curries including jalfrezi, kormas and baltis, before ordering our favourite Indian meal - paneer tikka masala.

The appetiser portion sizes are a lot bigger than we expect; four chubby crab-cakes and six crispy prawns. We vow to order only one starter to share on our next visit. The breaded crab-cakes are savoury with a subtle spicy kick, and the prawns are flavoursome - soft and sweet on the inside with a crispy, golden brown coating.

We pause for breath before our main course arrives; paneer tikka masala with Kashmir rice. We tuck into our feast with gusto. Char-boiled cubes of cottage-cheese have been slowly cooked with onions and tomato gravy. The crumbly cottage-cheese seems to dissolve in our mouth and goes surprisingly well with the Kashmir rice. This basmati rice is flavoured with finely chopped fruit and nuts, and is a welcome change from our usual order of plain rice.

After dinner we are presented with a selection of sweets to cleanse the palate: fennel seeds, menthol sesame seeds and dhana dal. Bellies full, we leave the table and browse the selection of jewellery made by in-house craftsman. We leave sporting a shiny new pink bracelet, happily satiated.

Catriona Doherty

What? India Palace

Where? Salam Street

Cost: Main courses average AED 30

We say: Flawless service and scrumptious food

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