

Hot tip – Durbar Indian Kitchen is open now

There's a new kid on the block in Shandwick Place – Durbar Indian Kitchen. This is brought to you by the team who run one of my favourite Asian restaurants in Edinburgh, The Khukuri Nepalese Restaurant at West Maitland Street.

It's a brave person who takes on another failed Indian restaurant, but that's exactly what owner Mukesh Sharma has done. And I can't help think with this team in place, it's going to give other curry houses a run for their money.

So while the elaborate décor of the previous restaurant hasn't changed, the menu definitely has. Durbar is serving up Indian dishes that you're unlikely to find in other curry houses. Their intention with the menu, curated by Mukesh and his talented chef with 23 years' experience in establishments in Mumbai, Dubai, London and now Edinburgh, features dishes which represent the true heart and soul of Indian cuisine from Kashmir, Lucknow, Delhi, Calcutta and Assam.

Visiting with an Australian friend who I first met while working and backpacking in India 33 years ago, Durbar Indian Kitchen was the perfect choice to reflect and reminisce about the flavours and memories of this exciting country that we had visited so long ago.

Determined that we would get a real experience, Mukesh

prepared a tasting menu, ensuring our taste buds experienced a real journey across India.

Every dish we tried was a winner. For starters, we tried the **Pani Puri**, an extremely popular street food snack from the streets of India. Crispy balls designed to be eaten as one mouthful are filled with spiced potatoes, onions, and served with tamarind chutney and pomegranate are washed down with a delightful flavoured water. The **Channa Chat**, a smashed vegetable samosa, was also served with pomegranate, yoghurt and tamarind sauce. The spicy **Tangdi Kebab**, a speciality from Delhi, of chicken drumsticks marinated in ginger and garlic, lemon juice, and Kashmiri chillies and yoghurt cooked in a clay oven, gives the meat its vibrant red colouring. The meat is spicy and fell off the bone. The **Shami Kebab**, from Lucknow, are pan fried tender lamb patties with minced lamb and split lentils flavoured with chillies, garlic, ginger, cumin and Kashmiri chillies, cooked twice, in a clay oven, and then shallow fried with a batter, served with tamarind and a mint sauce, a welcome cooling agent as the patties certainly had a kick.

For our main courses, the cheese nans were the perfect choice to mop up the tomato-based gravy of **the Ambal**. This is a sweet and sour vegetarian dish from the small state of Jammu in the North of India made with butternut squash and white radish, tamarind, ginger, garlic, mustard seeds, in an onion and tomato based gravy. **Chole** from Punjab, a spiced chickpea, had my taste buds tingling with delight at the simple marrying of flavours, eaten with Bhatura, a popular puffed deep fried India bread that gave the appearance of being crispy but was surprisingly soft. The two were made for each other.

While everyone loves a Korma, you won't find any such things on the menu at Durbar, but knowing our preference for something creamy, Mukesh served us a **Chicken Yakhni**. He explained that the literal translation of Yakhni is broth, and this dish can have loads of variations. This was the chef's

interpretation of the dish, made with yoghurt, coconut powder, mustard seeds, crushed white pepper, curry leaves, fresh coriander, and for Korma lovers, this creamy dish will win you over.

The **Lamb Laal Maas**, a classic dish from Rajasthan, was hot and garlicky. Prepared with a sauce of yoghurt and hot Mathania chillies and cooked in a thick gravy of tangy tomatoes, onions and traditional spice, the chillies give the dish its vibrant red colouring, great flavour and heat.

I'm not a fan of Indian desserts so opted for a **Mango Lassi**, probably not the best choice after all the food I'd consumed, but nonetheless. But for those who like something sweet, there was **Kheer**, a traditional Indian rice pudding, **Gulab Jamun**, traditional sweet donuts dipped in hot golden syrup, served with Chai cream liqueur – like Indian coffee cream – or **Rassmalai**, milk dough balls, dipped in saffron flavoured thickened milk, served chilled to choose from. None of them won me over, but you might like them.

At Durbar, you'll be taken on a delicious culinary journey across India celebrating the childhood road trips, family dinners and the wedding feasts that owner, Mukesh and brother Sunil, enjoyed as kids into adulthood. I promise you will not be disappointed. I, for one, am going to be a regular visitor. Oh and they also do takeaways.

www.durbarindiankitchen.com

35-37 Shandwick Place, EH2 4RG



Starters of Pani Puri, Channa Chat spicy Tangdi Kebab, and Shami Kebabs

Mains of Ambal, Chole from Punjab eaten with Bhatura; Chicken Yakhni and Lamb Lal Maas PHOTO Isaac Saina



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