

Spice up your life with a trip to Cilantro

Eating out has definitely become more expensive as the hospitality have understandably had to increase prices to cover their own costs and the markup on wine has become eye-watering in some establishments. But play your cards right and pick one of the BYOB establishments and eating out doesn't have to break the bank.

Luckily for me, and living near Leith Walk, there are at least four BYOB restaurants within striking distance, including the authentic Cilantro restaurant serving Indian-Bangladeshi cuisine. It has quickly established a name for itself and within three weeks of opening last year, won the Best Newcomer in Scotland Award at the Asian & Restaurant Awards 2022. And in September 2023, it took the top accolade and won the Best Asian Restaurant Edinburgh. It's not difficult to see why.

They promise 'their culinary experts are masters in blending aromatic spices with fresh Scottish produce to create mouth-watering dishes.' And Cilantro delivers just that, along with faultless service from our friendly, and helpful waiter, Ratul, a Master's graduate in International Banking and Business. He even waited outside for my dining partner,

Caroline, whose Google Maps had somehow had her walking the length of Leith Walk to find the restaurant. Well, at least she got her steps in, to compensate for the feast we were about to consume.

Starting with a tray of homemade pickles and poppadums, we asked Ratul for his recommendations as my curry choices can be somewhat predictable, with Butter Chicken being a favourite.

I'd already spotted the Tawa Chicken Liver Masala Fry. He agreed they were a great choice. Ratul explained that tawa is the metal cooking utensil they are cooked in.

Unlike a lot of people, I'm not afraid of offal. While not to everyone's taste, chicken livers were a childhood staple in our house, and I'd recently spotted a recipe by Nadia Hussein for southern 'fried' chicken livers, which I've saved to cook in the near future.

They didn't disappoint – the marinade of fresh ginger, garlic, black pepper, freshly squeezed lime and homemade garam masala, paired with cooked yellow pepper and onions gave this dish a lovely crunch and enhanced the rich iron taste and creamy texture of the chicken livers.

Caroline opted for the Chicken Puri, small tender pieces of chicken in a subtle and lightly spiced sauce enhanced by fresh cilantro (coriander) leaves, which she scooped up with the puffed fried bread which accompanied it. She loved the lemon freshness and described it as 'fresh, tasty and something different.'

While Cilantro has the usual curry staples on their menu, including Korma, Rogan Josh, and Dansaks, I'd advise veering off your beaten path and taking the waiter's recommendation and trying something different. For mains, we opted for the Shatkora Lamb, tender marinated lamb cooked in a medium spiced sauce with rinds of special Bangladeshi citric fruit, herbs and coriander. I'm not sure what the fruit was exactly but the

dish had a refreshing lemon taste.

Caroline declared her Karai Chicken, a chicken curry with a tomato gravy, as 'the best curry she had ever eaten' and loved its spicy bite. I'm not sure if this was the wine talking as we were a bottle of our BYOB wine down by this stage, but I concurred that her choice was delicious. Prepared in a karahi, a type of wok, cumin, green chillies, ginger, garlic, tomatoes and coriander are the key to the flavour of the dish. We also shared a filling yellow Tarka Dahl made with stewed lentils and split peas, Pilau Rice and a Peshwari naan.

If you want to eat out but don't want to break the bank, take the tram to Cilantro. Equi-distant from either Macdonald Road or Balfour Street tram stops, not only will your taste buds be rewarded but so will your bank balance. But as the restaurant is small and bijou and perfectly formed, with only 18 covers, book to avoid disappointment. Cilantro is fast becoming the talk of the town where Asian cuisine is concerned and deservedly so.

Cilantro, 4 Albert Place, off Leith Walk, Edinburgh

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cilantrorestaurant.co.uk



Take the tram to Cilantro on Leith Walk



Veer off your beaten path and try something different for starters at Cilantro – I can highly recommend the Tawa Chicken Liver Masala Fry



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