

Eastern promise

Angela Kelly enjoys distinctive, modern Indian cuisine in Bolton

INDIAN restaurants for most of us are still set in a comfortable time-warp – a universal place where we know beforehand the likely furnishings and food on offer. Visiting The Vedas in Bolton town centre, therefore, offers a trip to quite a different culinary galaxy.

Forget the lavish drapes and traditional paintings; forget the sitar background music and, most of all, forget the one-dimensional menus. Here, Indian cookery and dining have both grown up and decided to live in the intercontinental 21st century.

The Vedas is situated at the foot of Marsden House, an imposing new building on the corner of Deansgate and busy Marsden Road with little restaurant frontage on view. Step inside, though, and this contemporary Tardis has spacious, modern facilities going well beyond the eye-line.

The restaurant seats 150 but is constructed in two distinct areas, divided by downward stairs and a well-stocked bar. The furnishings are urban chic, all comfortable leather chairs and smart wooden floors, and décor is happily sparse. The minimalist approach, fortunately, does not extend to food and service.

There is a comfortable waiting area of leather couches when it's busy, but on the mid Sunday evening my husband and I visited it was fairly quiet and we were shown straight to our table.

The Vedas menu takes diners on a complete food adventure, encompassing both Indian rural tastes and the best of other countries.

For instance, some dishes had a distinct Thai influence, and from the

18 starters I chose king prawn rolls - a plateful of succulent prawns in light breadcrumbs with a small salad and a tiny pot of tangy chilli sauce. My husband's Sundal, a spicy mixture of black peas, potatoes and lime juice on a paratha, also won approval.

There is a decent wine list here and we chose a bottle of cool, clean Californian White Zinfandel, at £14.95, with a large bottle of sparkling water. Main courses include both the usual range of curries and separately-cooked meat selections and my roast duck dish turned out to be seven or eight thick cut slices of meat with a small amount of mixed vegetables, served with a separate dish of mild, creamy passanda sauce.

I had this with shared pilau rice and a keema nan stuffed with meat for a pleasing main course, and the lamb vindaloo that swiftly disappeared from my husband's plate vindicated our new choices.

Unusually for an Indian restaurant, The Vedas has half a dozen sweets available, so we selected pistachio kulfi and crème brulee – a particular favourite of mine. The former was a generous helping of flavoursome green ice cream and the latter a deliciously smooth dish of the popular concoction with burnt sugar topping, although this was the first time I had tried it cold.

We each had coffee and the final bill was £68.45, which we felt was perfectly reasonable for the quality of the food and the quick and friendly service on this enjoyable foray into updated Indian cuisine.

The Vedas 01204-3884

Tasting Notes

The Italian way

SLICE of Sicily, a delicatessen and café in Penwortham, has recently expanded its repertoire by extending its opening hours and offering an evening tapas menu.

The deli has gone from strength to strength since it opened in 2004, even winning the accolade for 'best sauce' for its green pesto in the 2008 North West Fine Food awards. It is now open from 9.30am to 10.00pm Monday to Saturday, with a bistro-style evening menu of Italian tapas dishes made from Lancashire ingredients.

There is also a takeaway menu of pizzas, pastas and other main courses. 'It's all Sicilian recipes, that you wouldn't find in most other takeaways,' owner Ettore Criscenti says. 'You won't find ham and pineapple pizza, for example, because it's not Italian.'

On the last Thursday of every month, Ettore hosts a wine-tasting evening, during which guests can sample several Italian wines. 'They're good quality wines, but at reasonable prices,' he says. 'You don't need a big wallet or a second mortgage to come in here!'

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