



HISTORICALLY, INDIA, THE LAND OF SPICES, HAS CONTRIBUTED MUCH TO THE FLAVOURS OF BRITAIN. NOW, CHEF PETER JOSEPH IS BOOSTING IT UP THE FOODIE LADDER INTO THE REALMS OF EXQUISITE FINE DINING. GISELLE WHITEAKER SEEKS SUSTENANCE AT KAHANI.

Peter Joseph has an impressive pedigree. Chennai-born, he is known for being the Head Chef of Tamarind, the first Indian restaurant in the world to earn a Michelin star. Now, he's creating a new narrative in Chelsea with his first solo venture.

Kahani is the Urdu word for story and the flavours at this basement establishment are crafted as skillfully as a literary masterpiece. "I have vivid memories of the excitement of the bustling markets in India - a sensory overload of tantalising scents and bright colours and an abundance of stalls selling street food," says the Chef. "I wanted to encapsulate the excitement I felt as a child in the dishes I devise and serve at Kahani, so diners experience that same sense of wonder and delight, hence the nod to tradition that is present throughout."

This sentiment shines in every aspect of the restaurant, from the décor to the dishes, and even the cocktails. My boyfriend Elio and I begin our culinary quest at the bar, where I sip on PJ's Kahani, a blend of vodka, crème de mure, lemon juice, jasmine tea, blackberry and egg white and Elio imbibes a Tandoori Ananas - home-

made spiced rum, pineapple juice, lime juice, tandoori pineapple, cinnamon powder and honey. He describes it as "pineapple for grown-ups".

From the bar, we move to our rather special table, which looks into the semi-open kitchen. I count at least seven chefs calmly swirling around the gleaming counters, adding a sprinkle of this and a dab of that, preparing to delight the diners seated in the comfortably elegant, 90-cover dining area, which features white walls, wooden floors, funky light fittings and blue-hued armchair seats. "I believe the devil is in the detail, which is why at Kahani I have considered every element, from the look and feel of the restaurant to every ingredient we use. That is why we only use the best seasonal British produce, prepared according to authentic Indian cooking methods", says Chef Joseph.

If the soft-shell crunchy crab with Mangalorean spices and tomato chutney is anything to go by, the Indo-British flavour partnership is a perfect match. The exquisite combination of spices meets the sweet crab without overwhelming the delicate flavour. The samosa platter is

equally pleasing, the triangles comprising Punjabi aloo, Kolhapuri chicken, and Chettinad venison paired with a traffic-light trio of tamarind, tomato, and chat masala sauces.

"Authentic Indian cuisine is cooked with heart and soul as well as great spices," says Chef Joseph, "...and I've brought this idea into Kahani, using recipes from my childhood as the inspiration for modern dishes you can't help but share." One bite of the incredibly tender free-range chicken-tikka with saffron, mace, baby ginger and coriander steam and I'm tempted not to share, but Elio sees my rapture and quickly samples the offering. The two enormous smoked Malabar prawns with fresh turmeric, coconut and curry leaves that arrive next are easily divided, along with the succulent Somerset lamb chops with Kashmiri chillies and Nagercoil cloves. We are filled with admiration for the chef's understanding of flavour. "The magic of spices is in knowing how to combine them and use them in a way that doesn't overpower the



ingredients but enhances them, resulting in a beautiful euphony of flavours," says Chef Joseph. "I love working with spices that would be found in every kitchen in India - cumin, coriander, garam masala and turmeric, to name just a few. British saffron too; many people don't know that the UK grows its own saffron; we source it from Essex."

Every dish at Kahani is atypical, even those that make an appearance on the standard Indian takeaway menu: the Kahani butter chicken is rich, yet light, the tomato makhani all but oil-free, the earthy brown daal complementing the sweeter yellow daal. "When people think of British-Indian food they think of heavy, oily meals that leave you feeling lethargic. Dishes should be fragrant yet healthy," says Chef Joseph. Even the game-meat dishes exhibit levity, the venison keema with truffle naan full of deep flavours, yet not settling heavy in the belly. Elio is quick to declare this his favourite, although the tenderness of the cubes of lamb in the biryani give the venison a run for its money.

We have eaten like kings, but the chef presents us with a dessert plate of cardamom cheesecake with a raspberry coulis centre, halwa (a carrot-based pudding), and milk ice-cream, with a scattering of pistachios and fresh berries that looks too good to resist. The elements are surprisingly light and eminently satisfying. Just like a good book, Kahani inspires. "Great food tells its own tale," concludes Chef Joseph.



FROM TOP DOWN
Inside the beautiful restaurant; cocktails at Kahani; soft-shell crab; tandoori broccoli

ABOVE
Lobster at Kahani

For more information about Kahani, see www.kahanidining.com