



The Flavours of Summer

Restaurants may be somewhat quieter under new regulations, but there's still much enjoyment in dining out. Giselle Whiteaker finds flavourful fare in Reigate.

There's a simple delight in finding a hidden gem, whether it's a surprise work of art on a forest walk, a cosy hotel that only does word-of-mouth marketing, or an underpriced antique at the back of a store. Saffron Summer in Reigate, Surrey, is one of those gems.

This iteration of Saffron Summer is the sister to the award-winning eponymous Indian fine-dining restaurant in Chessington. The Reigate offering only recently opened its doors after a COVID-inspired delay – let's face it, dining out has not been at the top of

most people's agendas. But that's starting to change. We predict the promise of an unforgettable meal will soon be enough to book out this eatery's socially distanced tables, so get in while you can.

The kitchen is led by Executive Head Chef Awanish Roy, who has quite the pedigree. Roy trained at the renowned Oberoi Hotels in India, before moving to London to work in the Cinnamon Club, Roti Chai and Chai Ki restaurants. He's now shifted from Chessington to Reigate, bringing a host of delectable dishes with him.

The menus showcase the diverse range of foods from across the sub-continent. These include game dishes from places like Coorg in Karnataka; seafood specialities from the coastal belt of Goa, Kerala and Malwan; and more traditional Moghulai, Awadhi, Rajasthani and Punjabi dishes. There are Indian street foods, Indian tapas for lunch and even a special Sunday Indian roast lunch. There's really something for everyone.

It's quiet when my boyfriend Elio and I snag the window table early on a Sunday evening, although it isn't long before a steady trickle of diners arrive to collect their takeaway orders. There's a mellow ambience to match the glow from the molten glass feature lights overhead. Turmeric-coloured padded benches line the walls, around simple wooden tables. We are perched on bright-blue stools at a higher table, feeling somewhat like lords of the manor.

Saffron Summer has built a name for itself in Chessington, predominantly known for its unique modern take on classic regional dishes. The evidence is clear in the menu, with dishes like wild boar vindaloo – prepared using owner Ralph Sousa's mother-in-law's recipe – and tandoori quail, although the usual British favourites are there too, along with a host of vegetarian options.

We start with Sev Batata Puri, a traditional street-food dish. "Good choice," comments our friendly waiter. "It's good to cleanse the palate."

It's certainly an intriguing plate. Four mounds are lined up on a long yellow plate, splashed with yoghurt and tamarind chutney, a sprinkle of sev – thin gram flour noodles on top. Biting into the mounds, there are three distinct layers: Ajwaini spiced chickpeas, diced and spiced potatoes, and at the bottom, wheat crisps, adding a delightful crunch. The flavours are complex, yet subtle, inviting our tastebuds to come out and play.



Our other starter is slightly more mainstream – tandoori lamb chops. These char-grilled specimens, however, are far from ordinary. The pink-in-the-middle chops are coated in Rajasthani spices and freshly ground herbs that generate a depth of flavour that turn this into the sophisticated cousin of standard, in-your-face tandoori. There's a refinement within the dish, a certain elegance that's rare to find in such a straightforward plate.

For our mains, we land on the chef's signature dishes: Guinea Fowl Banjara and Kabuli Gosht. The scents emanating from these dishes as they are delivered to the table are heavenly. The guinea fowl is a colourful dish, the grilled breast chunks a pale orange courtesy of the peanut and dry mango marinade, egg masala hidden with the spiced paste, with vibrant red and green salad leaves adding to the rainbow. It's as gastronomically pleasing as it is visually arresting, the game flavour of the fowl tamed by the accompanying spices. To our surprise, there's very little heat, just earthy warmth and goodness.

The Kabuli Gosht is equally as succulent, slices of smoked rump of Romney Marsh lamb resting on a bed of chickpeas, with a disc of spiced lamb mince and green peas by its side. The lamb is tender, the smoky tones of the rump contrasting with the korma-like mince. This is one of those dishes that once tried quickly becomes a firm favourite. We soak up the thick sauce with naan bread that is so light and flaky that it bears no resemblance to its doughy cousin.

Pleasantly full, we peruse the dessert menu, which contains offerings from both east and west. Ramalai and pistachio kulfi sit alongside sticky toffee pudding and ice-cream. We settle for a refreshing lemon sorbet, with two spoons.

Chef Roy pops over to say hello as we make preparations to leave, his youthful face belying his gastronomic wisdom. While at Chessington, the chef said: "I want to help educate on the delights of authentic Indian food and demonstrate that there's more to the cuisine than the typical curry house favourites." Tonight, he has done precisely that.

Butter Chicken



Ingredients

For the Chicken:

- 800g chicken breast (diced into 30g pieces)
- 1 tsp ginger paste
- 1 tsp garlic paste
- 100g Greek yoghurt
- ½ tsp garam masala
- 1 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp Kashmiri chilli powder
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- Salt, to taste

For the Sauce:

- 5 tbsp rapeseed oil
- 80g unsalted butter
- 1 tbsp ginger paste
- 1 tbsp garlic paste
- 25g blanched cashew paste or sunflower seed paste for nut allergies
- 1 tbsp red chilli powder
- 400g passata, or fresh tomato purée
- Salt, to taste
- 250ml single cream
- ½ tsp garam masala
- 1 tsp kasoori methi (or dried fenugreek leaves)
- 2 green chilli, chopped, to taste (optional)
- 1 tbsp chopped coriander leaves (optional)

Method

Mix all of the ingredients for the chicken in a bowl and refrigerate for 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Heat the oil and half of the butter in a thick-bottomed pan. Add the ginger and garlic paste and cook for 2-3 minutes. Add the blanched cashew or sunflower seed paste and cook until the oil starts to leave the side of the pan. Add the red chilli powder, tomato and salt and cook for about 10 minutes. Finish by adding the remaining butter, cream and the other ingredients and cook on a slow flame. Adjust the seasoning to taste.

Cook the chicken breast in a tandoor or oven at 180°C for 4-5 minutes. Put the chicken in the sauce and let it simmer for 2-3 minutes. Serve hot with naan or pulao rice.



For more information about Saffron Summer in either Chessington or Reigate or to order takeaway, see www.saffronsummer.co.uk.