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## Review: Shaka Zulu, Camden

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Horrendously overpriced with possibly the worst service in London, Shaka Zulu's only appeal is its grand décor

The 20 ft tall statue of a Zulu warrior outside the restaurant is formidable yet impressive, but that's the least of it. Covering the ceiling and walls in homage to South Africa, are countless wooden carvings of animals and animist statues, while gigantic spear-wielding warriors are spread about. The 20 ft Zulu statue outside suddenly seems reserved and modest by the standards of the interior.







I had read the decor was “borderline offensive”. Imagine; a vast, maze-like restaurant (separated by an enormous escalator), overwhelmingly adorned with 20-foot statues of Southern African ethnic bling – it may as well have been named ‘WE GOT IT FROM AFRICA!’. Sure, it was overbearing to start with, but then slowly, I realised – it’s pretty cool, or maybe the “oversensitive millennial” in me couldn’t deny the craft, visible energy and thought that went into the design of the restaurant (possibly the cost too).

Shaka Zulu is certainly a memorable space, but don’t let the punchy interior draw you in. The service here, is possibly the worst I’ve ever received. Arriving right on time for an 8:30pm reservation, we were told to queue with the crowd, which included the club goers, bar attendees and those without a prior booking. We waited for over 45 minutes, outside. Once inside, we waited for what felt like an hour; staff seemed too busy to even stop and acknowledge us. The place was undoubtedly busy – it was a Saturday night. You’d think after almost a decade of running such an enormous joint, there would’ve been a sensible structure in place, but that seemed non-existent, or at least the one they have in place needs a revision. The lack of organisation, structure and customer service was abysmal and a terrible start to the night. We spent the beginning of our night moaning and complaining to ourselves, and with the other customers, who’d also been left waiting for hours.

Hungry and annoyed, we were finally ushered to our table, two hours later. The literal descent to our table, down the grody escalators, should’ve been our clue on how the rest of the night would go. At the bottom of the escalators, we were immediately met with the bar/ nightclub which was already under way.



The entertainment that Shaka Zulu is supposedly known for, the “Theatre of Food”, was non-existent – there were no belly dancers, fire breathers, nor was there any music of African or Southern African origin. However, given the time we were (finally) sat on our table, I assumed they were present prior to our arrival. I couldn’t help feeling as though our ‘Shaka Zulu experience’ was robbed from us – we’d arrived perfectly on time for what was promised to be an enjoyable night.

We sat on our table at around 11pm and had no order taken for yet another half hour. After this three hour ordeal, none of us had patience nor the confidence that our food would come on time, so we went straight to the mains; I ordered the Grilled Deboned Baby Chicken with creamed spinach and spicy fries, while my companions ordered the Rump of Lamb and Zebra Fillet. Our food arrived just eight minutes before midnight, never mind our 8:30pm booking. The chicken was palatable, though the combination of chicken, tandoori dressing and thick beef gravy was unconvincing, but surprisingly, that that was the dish's saving grace. The sides were subpar and inadequate, and overpriced too, considering the portion sizes. For dessert, I went for the passion fruit cheesecake with roasted pistachio brittle; this was easily the highlight of this horrendous night.



We'd also asked for table water, which never came. After the third ask, two jugs of water arrived, one with unsightly red quid stains all over it. No waiter was in sight for us to ask for another. Once spotted, we received a lazy lip service in a bid to ease our dissatisfaction. I pointed to the red liquid and she replied "oh, it's just syrup". We asked for a new jug, in which she grabbed the stained one by the rim and disappeared. We never got another jug.

I had heard their wine list offers more than 100 different kinds of excellent wine, but of course that's if you can manage to receive any attention from the waiting staff. We resorted to ordering drinks from the nightclub instead – expensive, but at least these came to our table almost immediately. In seeing this, it all became clear. We, the diners were only a small part of their turnover and profit making. They showed no consideration nor care to the people who'd booked the tables to eat.

To serve a capacity of 850, while charging a fortune for possibly the worst service in London (I cannot speak for the prisons), is somewhat genius but a very depressing concept.

Shaka Zulu's only true charm is the internal decor. The venue is spectacular, but the decor alone does not make for a memorable experience. If I would like to visit the restaurant for the food, perhaps it's best enjoyed on a quiet weeknight rather than a busy weekend, otherwise save your money and time and dine elsewhere.

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