

FOOD REVIEW: BANQUET, COLCHESTER

‘This place has mastered the art of dim sum’

Customers travel from miles around to sample the authentic dishes here... Danielle Lett reports

A few weeks ago, I unfortunately caught Covid. It totally blindsided me, and even though I'm double vaxxed and boosted, it knocked me off my feet. I basically spent a week in bed, and while my sense of taste or smell were unaffected, I had no desire to eat.

Fast forward a couple of weeks after recovering, and my appetite had slowly made its way back. I was ready to get out after self-isolating. Ready to eat!

I hadn't seen my mum in a while, so we headed out for lunch on a sunny Saturday afternoon and made our way to Banquet at Stanway, Colchester - known for its daytime dim sum menu.

'Food meant for sharing' its website reads, and we both thought that was the perfect first meal out. Nothing too heavy, and lots of dishes choose from as we picked away and chatted (without the expectation to finish an entire main course).

As we arrived, we were greeted by a friendly waiter who promptly sat us at our table.

The atmosphere at Banquet at that time of day was very relaxed, which was perfect for my first post-Covid dining experience. It wasn't too loud or busy, nor was it too quiet, and everyone was spaced apart. What particularly stood out to me was how many groups there were, all enjoying sharing the plates in front of them.

And when you look at the menu, you can see why.

Banquet's dim sum menu consists of around 60 different dishes across a number of categories including steamed, pan-fried, sweet and deep-fried

dim sum, and cheung fun. There are also a handful of rice, noodles, barbecue, and vegetable dishes.

In terms of drinks, there's a fairly extensive menu serving the usual beer, wine and spirits, as well as a selection of cocktails and liqueurs. However, we went for two cokes which cost £6.20 for the pair.

We spent a good 15 minutes deciding what we wanted - we were well and truly spoilt for choice, and unsure how many plates to opt for.

To truly make the most of it and experience a bit of everything, we ordered 10 in total, sticking mostly to the dim sum rather than wasting valuable table (and stomach) space on rice or noodles.

From the steamed dim sum menu, we ordered the crystal prawn and pork dumplings (£4.95), prawn chive dumplings (£4.95), steamed char sui buns (£4.50), and the Shanghai pork dumplings (£4.75).

Anyone who's read my reviews before knows I'm a fiend for prawns - and the prawn dumplings we had must've been the catch of the day. Fresh and moreish, they certainly went down a treat, and did not disappoint. And for me, you can't order Chinese without having a few prawn dishes. It would be sacrilege.

Not only did the sticky dumplings taste wonderful, they looked great as well. If you're

someone who likes taking photos of their food, you won't get more aesthetic than these - they're perfect fodder for your Instagram feed.

The standout from the steamed dim menu however had to be the steamed char sui buns - I've never tasted anything as soft and fluffy as those buns. And the barbecue pork within was deliciously sweet and tender. I wish we'd ordered another serving of those, as three certainly weren't enough.

As the waitress made her way over with the rest of our dishes (we lost count as the table started to slowly but surely fill up), we thought to ourselves 'did we go overboard?' But we did not.

From the pan-fried and deep-fried dim sum menu, we had deep-fried prawn dumplings with salad cream (£4.95), Vietnamese spring rolls (£4.95), deep-fried squid rings (£4.75), crispy pastry savoury meat croquettes (£4.75), and garlic prawn spring rolls (£4.95).

That may seem like quite a heavy selection of fried foods for a quick lunch - but far from it. Everything was crispy and flavoursome, yet still tasted lighter than your standard Chinese takeaway (which often leaves me feeling lethargic after a few bites).

My favourite from this menu had to be the pastry meat croquettes. Filled with a sweet,

RIGHT:
Shanghai pork dumplings

BELOW:
1. Steamed char sui buns
2. Crystal prawn and pork dumplings
3. Prawn chive dumplings

Pictures:
DANIELLE LETT

Not only did the sticky dumplings taste wonderful, they looked great as well. - perfect fodder for your Instagram feed



sticky beef, these went down a treat. Once again, three weren't enough, and I'll definitely be ordering an extra serving next time.

To balance it out and finish with a little something sweet, we ended lunch with the coconut and red bean pudding (£4.20). Whenever I order Chinese, I never really go for dessert but I'm glad I tried this one. For anyone who's not had it before, it's similar to jelly, but made with coconut milk. Light and slightly creamy, it's a great dish if you want a bit of sweetness to end on, without going overboard.

It has to be said that the portions sizes across all of the dishes were ample - for each dim





sum that we ordered, they all came with three or four pieces per plate (with the exception of the squid rings which was a generous helping that was perfectly split between two people).

And the food tasted as good as it looked. Presentation is key, but obviously secondary to how it tastes. We could tell everything was made from scratch. The dim sum was hand rolled, the meat was hand sliced, and the vegetables were hand chopped. Dim sum is an art, and Banquet has certainly mastered it.

What's also great is how well-priced everything was. Our final bill came to £53.90, and each dim sum dish costs anywhere between £4 and £7 (with the

exception of some of the noodle and barbecue dishes, platters, congee, and vegetable dishes which will set you back a bit more).

I'd highly recommend a trip to Banquet - whether you're looking for something quick, or a more drawn-out dining experience where you can spend a couple of hours trying a bit of everything, it's no wonder this dim sum menu is so popular.

So popular in fact, that as we left, a couple rushed in at around 2.30pm, asking if they were still in time for the dim sum menu (as it runs Monday to Saturday until 3pm, and until 5pm on Sundays).

Lucky for them they were.



RIGHT:
1. Garlic prawn spring rolls
2. Coconut and red bean pudding
3. Deep-fried prawn dumplings with salad cream
4. Crispy pastry savoury meat croquette



1



2



3



4

LEFT:
Vietnamese spring rolls