

Street food chains, eat your heart out: this is how you curry favour

This Indian restaurant calls itself the best in Scotland. Honestly? It's not far off, says **Chitra Ramaswamy**

Dunfermline. Ancient capital of Scotland, burial place of Robert the Bruce, awarded city status in 2022, and, wait for it, home to some of Scotland's greatest Indian food. Who knew? Well, the answer is anyone who's eaten there. Those in the know will instantly guess the buzzy street food restaurant to which I'm referring because ever since I started this job just over five years ago they've been trying to send me there. It is, of course, Dhoom. A multi-award-winning restaurant that knows how great it is because the opener on its website is "Welcome to Scotland's No 1 Restaurant". Bold, and I'm not convinced, mainly because the food of this country, and indeed any other, is too varied to be able to be reduced to a singular best. That would be like saying the greatest Indian food is to be found in Calcutta. Which, naturally, all Bengalis totally do say. The Indian street food concept is so ubiquitous it can feel as overdone as a bacon naan at Dishoom. From Tuk Tuk to Mowgli, certain boxes must be ticked; vintage Bollywood posters, Indi-pop music blaring, fun rope swing seating and the like. The food tends to be fast, big-flavoured and regionally non-specific with a cornucopia of chaat bombs (what my fellow middle-aged brown folk know as pani puri), chilli cheese toasties, masala chips, railway lamb curry and some variation on Auntie's Best Butter Chicken. As for the clientele, they're mostly too young to remember the British Bangladeshi curry houses of yore,



Enjoy delicacies such as kesariya malai paneer, left, in Dhoom's buzzy dining room, right

with their sweetened kormas, hot towels and unexamined relationship with the colonisers. So Dhoom, at first sight, is familiar, down to the colourful illustrations on the walls of elephants, railway stations, Ambassador cars and the Taj Mahal, the tuk-tuks repurposed as dining booths, and, yes, the Mowgli-style rope swing seating in the windows. It's a big, airy, welcoming place with canteen-style chairs and out of this world smells. What's novel here is the concept: every six months the menu rotates to focus on a specific region of India. The last one was Chennai. My pal Dawn and I come for the newly launched ten-course taster menu showcasing the food of Punjab in northwest India. For just £29.95 you get an exceptionally generous amount of food. And almost every single one of my dishes is outstanding. Dhaneshwar Prasad, the head chef, regularly travels India seeking inspiration for these ambitious menus — and it shows. It's the first time that I've encountered dal panchanga, a traditional Punjabi soup made with five lentils and five pickles. It's served in a little black cup, in a nod to the clay cups used by street food vendors all over India, and is hands down one of the most delicious things I've eaten, or rather drunk, in recent memory. Tart from the pickles, earthy and creamy with blended dals, redolent with heat that catches at the back of your throat, it's a masterclass in balance and eking

out the utmost flavour from the most humble ingredients. And that was just the pre-starter. And there's another one. Aloo tuk, a popular Sindhi street snack, is comprised of two smashed wedges of fried spiced potato, compressed, fudgy, crispy on the outside. Gorgeous. Next, a cavalcade of starters introduced with bags of charm and storytelling by almost as many servers. (The service, if a bit up and down in terms of pacing, is warm and effervescent.) There's an exemplary makhani kukkad, what's essentially butter chicken. Amritsari fish fry is a long thin finger of tilapia encased in a bronze batter spiced with fenugreek and carom seeds. Sag gosht is a skewer of marinated lamb to which a thick dark green sauce of spinach, ginger and garlic clings, served in the tiniest makki di roti — an unleavened Punjabi flatbread made with maize flour and traditionally eaten with saag, gone in a oner like a taco. This is confident, beautifully balanced food that really does take you to Punjab. Dawn, a vegetarian, is given a range of veg starters from the à la carte menu. She's blown away by a tapioca vada from Chennai and a Parsi chickpea cutlet drizzled with a beautifully made tamarind chutney. However, almost all her starters are deep-fried, and though they taste distinct and are all delicious, more variety and freshness would be welcome.

How it rated

Food
9

Service
8

Atmosphere
8

What we ate

2 x swaad-e-Punjab taster menu £59.90
Pre-starters: aloo tuk and dal panchangra
Starters: kesariya malai paneer, thelewaale chana chaat, navratan veg kebab, Amritsari fish fry, Punjabi makhani kukkad, saag gosht, kesari rabri
Mains: king prawn karahi and Amritsari chole, comes with Indian breads, pilau rice and masala chips

What we drank

Two pints lime and soda £7.90
Two half pints
Kingfisher £5.90

Total for two £74.70
(including £1 for a community help fund)

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After another three (yes, three!) starters — a soft, spicy 15-veg kebab, cube of grilled soft paneer marinated with saffron and a mellow home-style chana chaat, it's on to a palate cleanser. Kesari rabri, a north Indian sweet made with thickened milk, which tastes more like banana than mango.

By which point the belly-clutching has begun, and our main courses arrive. Yikes. Somehow the space is made for king prawn karahi — fresh, spicy and bright with tomatoes and ginger. Dawn declares her Amritsari chole perfect. They come with superlative paratha, roti, pilau rice and, of course, crinkle-cut masala chips.

What a magnificent, fun, big-hearted and flavoured meal. As far as I'm concerned Dunfermline can officially add to its status as Scotland's eighth city "the home of some of the best Indian food in the land".
Dhoom, 19-21 New Row, Dunfermline, dhoomuk.co.uk

Drink of the week

Rusacks old fashioned

Rusacks hotel, St Andrews

"This is our signature twist on an old fashioned," says Szymon Barczynski, a mixologist at this cosy wee hotel basement bar right by the 18th at the Old Course. "We add cardamom bitters to bring warm notes, as well as chocolate bitters for some richness and sweetness. It's a complex and spicy take on a classic

that's great as an aperitif — or I like it as a post-dinner drink to round off a meal."

Ingredients

- 50ml Eden Mill Guardbridge whisky
- 15ml East Neuk salt sugar syrup
- 2 dashes cardamom bitters
- 2 dashes chocolate bitters

Method

Mix all the ingredients in a tumbler with ice and serve

Enjoy this pud warm, cold — or blowtorched

Recipe of the week

This versatile crème brûlée-style dessert hits the spot every time. By **Emily Cuddeford** and **Rachel Morgan**

This is similar to a crème brûlée custard — you can either serve it warm or chill it in the fridge. If you want to turn it into crème brûlée, sprinkle the top of the chilled custard with caster sugar and place under a hot grill or use a blowtorch until the sugar has caramelised. You can also make this in ramekins for individual servings; they will still need to bake in a bain-marie, but check them after 18 minutes.



Burnt honey baked custard

Serves 4-6 with plenty of sauce
Ingredients
125g honey
270g double cream
230g milk
25g caster sugar
7 egg yolks (approx 100g)
2-4g sea salt

Method
1 Preheat the oven to 140C fan/gas 3. Start by making the burnt honey. To do this, melt 150g of honey then boil it until it reaches 170C — it will be turning a dark amber by this point. Turn off the heat and add 2 tablespoons of water — be careful and stand back while you do this, as the honey will boil and spit. Use recently boiled water for less drama. This stops the honey from setting solid. Leave to cool either in the pan or in a heatproof dish.
2 Heat the cream, milk and all the sugar in a pan until steaming.



Burnt honey baked custard. Left: Cuddeford and Morgan

In a bowl, whisk the egg yolks with the cooled honey. Once the milk is steaming, pour it over the eggs and whisk to combine. You don't want to whisk too much as it makes a foam on top. I add 4g of sea salt as I like the balance with the sweetness, but add 2g then taste and see how much you want — you can always add more, but you can't take it away.
3 Pour it into a 25cm pie dish or similar. This needs to be baked in a bain-marie, which is essentially placing the custard in a larger tin or dish and filling it up halfway with boiling water. It stops the custard cooking too quickly and scrambling the eggs.
4 Bake for 25-27 min — it will still have a jiggle in the middle but it will set as it cools.

Taken from *Kitchen Table: Simple Things Made Well* by Emily Cuddeford and Rachel Morgan (£25, HarperCollins)

Market in your diary, and Glasgow is full of beans

Table scraps

St Andrews isn't known for its nightlife but the return of **Balgrove Larder's Night Markets**, right, is about to liven things up. Held inside a converted sawmill (aka the Steak Barn) just outside town, the markets showcase the best of Scotland's artisan produce, with stalls offering quality meats, veg, dairy products and handmade local crafts. There'll be live music to soundtrack your shopping, as well as a rotating cast of local food trucks, and this year the markets are hopping on the sustainability trend. Visit the car boot sale, find vintage clothing and homeware, and attend workshops by Strathryum Flowers, with tips on



how to sustainably grow, cut and arrange flowers. The Night Markets will run on the first Tuesday of each month until September, with different seasonal produce on offer. They don't open until May 6, but we're giving you lots of notice so you don't miss out. Free, balgove.com Scotland's biggest speciality coffee festival, **Glasgow coffee festival**, will be back at the Briggait next weekend. Nineteen roasters will be exhibiting and selling, including Cairngorm Coffee Roasters, which will debut its Summer Banger blend. There will be talks on climate change and the future of the industry. Rounding off the weekend is the grand final of the SCA UK Cup Tasters Championship on April 27, where expert coffee tasters compete to find Britain's best palate. 26-27 April, tickets from £16; glasgowcoffeefestival.com **Jennifer Kennedy**



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