

# Coriander Lounge Southampton

Words by Emma Caulton



"Luckily for us everyone is crazy for curry," smiles Mujib Mohammed who recently opened Coriander Lounge with his friend Nab Miah. And it's lucky for us crazy curry lovers that they did. Sharon and I were thoroughly spoiled all evening by Mujib and Nab who do service with a wide, beaming smile.

Coriander Lounge is a surprisingly pretty restaurant for its town centre location opposite the ruins of the church of the seafarers in Southampton's High Street: an area that's currently on the up. Its frontage is, appropriately, the colour of fresh coriander with the feathery fronds of coriander leaves etched into the glass windows. Inside it's lush and opulent with iridescent organza draped across doorways, bright embroidered cushions adorn an Indian bench, and contemporary chandeliers cascade down the centre of the restaurant. Colours are deep and rich... aubergine, bay leaf, ginger and cumin.

We take the table by the window; Sharon has a crisp glass of sauvignon blanc and I have a well-rounded shiraz and we're brought the lightest, crispiest little popadums to dip into chutneys and sauces that include a moreish taramind and coriander sauce – dark, rich and aromatic.

For starters we're served meltingly succulent tandoori lamb chops, bharti prawns, lovely soft king prawns which have been marinated in yogurt, fresh coriander and mustard and baked, and chicken reshmi kebab, chicken roasted with garlic and spices; all served with a not overly sweet mango dipping sauce.

"Perfect," says Sharon.

And then we wait for our mains. This is the real authentic Indian experience: fresh herbs and spices, carefully chosen ingredients, and all dishes freshly prepared from scratch.

We're served: mango chicken given extra bite from fresh ginger, tamarind jhinga – tandoori king prawns cooked with fresh peppers in an excellent tangy sauce, and kashmiri lamb flavoured with the gentlest kick of fennel. Accompaniments are zeera aloo – potato sautéed with cumin and fresh coriander that tastes as good as it sounds, fresh peshwari naan as light and moist as an almond croissant (Sharon says it's the best she's ever eaten and she's a peshwari naan fan), and very good spinach with garlic that has real depth of flavour. Plus there are bowls of light pilau rice and a really flavoursome fried rice. And then Nab brings out a chef's special (nargesi kufta – not on the

menu), a far superior version of scotch egg with an egg surrounded by minced lamb, caramelised onions, lentils and cashew nuts – unusual and tasty. Everything is beautifully seasoned, spiced and well-balanced. This is clever curry – and the restaurant is rightly busy.

Deserts are a refreshing moussey mango kulfi for Sharon, a subtly spiced ground rice pudding for me sprinkled with pistachio and almond. Then coffees, mint chocs and the chance to sit back and put the world to rights with Mujib while Indian contemporary chilled tracks play in the background.

What a great evening.

## ESSENTIALS

**What:** Stylish contemporary authentic Indian Restaurant with takeaway menu

**Where:** Coriander Lounge, High Street, Southampton SO14 2BR, 023 8071 0888

**Service:** Smiley and charming

**What's the damage:** Starters from around £2.95 (light lentil soup); mains from around £7.95; desserts from £2.25; 15 per cent discount take away orders