



The Birthday Boy

Mandala celebrate their tenth year in style...

the best thing about a Polish winter? Cranking up the body's central heating with a thick, fiery curry. That, to me, is the definition of bliss. Granted, by Polish standards it's been a moderate winter, but on the day the *Insider* visits Mandala fate intervenes: snow piles down in unforgiving heaps. The streets are a whiteout. Coming in from the cold, entering Mandala is a glorious sensation: the air heavy with aromatic spices, twangy music and the general buzz and babble of a busy restaurant. Immediately, the body and soul switch to 'defrost'.

I need to be honest: Mandala has not always beeped brightly on my radar. Put bluntly, it reminded me of the kind of curries I used to scoff as a student: tasty but basic. However, change is in the air: celebrating their tenth year on the market, Mandala have had a strategic rethink that's seen the overall quality given a boost: no more cutting corners, no more skimping on the ingredients. It's the break a chef like Prakash Tiwari deserves.

If there were doubts before, they're dispelled the moment the starters begin landing: a steaming shrimp soup warms the bones, and is partnered up by a selection of solids – a paneer tikka masala, a leafy garden mix salad and a mountain of crisp and crunchy okra that's steadily picked apart. Mains don't disappoint, either. Opting

for an indiscriminate approach, we've ordered a series of curries to share: a luxuriously creamy mutton methi malai wins blanket approval, while the chicken tikka masala is declared a classic in more ways than one. But with the weather deteriorating outside, we're conscious of the need for heat – out comes the vindaloo, a dish characterized by its blitzing big spices. It's enough to bring the gentler ones amongst us out into a sweat.

Mopping up duty is assigned to a selection of breads, all of which are perfect: a garlic naan that's reassuringly buttery, a minty pudina parantha and a flawlessly soft missi roti. Surveying the battleground of plates and dishes it's been a feast of almost obscene proportions. That none of us feel swollen and bloated is a testament to Mandala's new direction – everything tastes fresh and light with none of that groaning, heavy feel so often associated with this cuisine. And yet, most importantly, it's a meal that's achieved exactly what we wanted: bestowing on us a warm glow in which to wallow. Polish winter? Bring it on. (AW)

Mandala

ul. Emilii Plater 9/11 & ul. Etiudy Rewolucyjnej 9,
mandalaklub.com