

WINE & DINE

FOOD REVIEWS

Red, hot and cool

Cosmopolitan-style Indian eatery Zaffron Kitchen takes on food-mad Katong

ZAFFRON Kitchen is an Indian restaurant with a difference. For starters, its cheery decor looks more suited to a British gastro pub, with printed tiled floors, orange walls and brushed wooden chairs. There's also a spacious children's play area with a delightfully big playhouse that's a welcome addition for families with children. As one of my friends pointed out, it's nice for parents to be able to sit close to the play area and eat in peace while the children tear around it.

In the six months since it opened, Zaffron Kitchen has already garnered a firm following — and that's a feat in itself since the stretch along which it is located is saturated with eateries that boast their own long-standing clientele.

The one downside here is the parking situation, which has only worsened since the food-fabulous mall 112 Katong opened across the street last month. So if you drive, your best bet is to come here at off-peak hours. Luckily the restaurant serves an all-day menu.

Like most Indian restaurants, the menu here is rambling. We started with papadam (\$\$4) and papdi chaat (\$\$6), the former fresh and crisp, one variety made in the tandoor and the other deep-fried. Both were good spurs for the appetite, dipped in sweet mango chutney.

The papdi chaat (\$\$6), a typical street-side snack in India, was a canape layered with texture — fried dough wafer at the bottom, sweet yoghurt and mint sauce on top, sev (vermicelli crisps) and tamarind sauce sprinkled in between. All it lacked was a hint of sweetness to balance out the sour notes.

Chicken biryani (\$\$11) is served dum style, its vessel tightly lidded with a sheet of pastry so the ingredients cook in its own steam, their flavours mingling happily together. When broken into, the steam emerges in a fragrant puff, the contents nuanced in its spicy complexity — there is a tender chicken thigh lightly bathed in curry gravy and a whole hard-boiled egg hiding beneath the perfumed rice.

This alone is a satisfying meal for one, or a nice carb to share as you spoon over hot, gravy-laced dishes like kadhai jhinga (\$\$8.50), rich with fresh prawns, tomatoes and onions and stewed to a spicy lusciousness, or khatti meethi gobi (\$\$8.50). In the latter, cauliflower is first



Zaffron



Chicken biryani



Dessert

deep-fried to ensure the vegetable retains its bite as it braises in a sauce of garam masala, paprika and fenugreek.

There is a host of meats and fish from the tandoor, which while good are not mind-blowing. They also dry up rather quickly if you're the sort to linger over your food. Naturally there are naans, among which the one worth trying is the kashmiri (\$\$6.50), which is studded with chopped dates, green apples and nuts. This goes well with the galaxy of spices that suffuse the other dishes, lending a sweet edge to counter all that heat.

ANNETTE TAN

Zaffron Kitchen

Where: 135/137 East Coast Road

Tel: 6440 6786

Opening hours:

Daily 11.30am to 10.30pm



Tandoori platter