

The View review

Rosemary Staal
reckons a curry buffet is just the ticket



The Balti House • 139 Fisherton Street • Salisbury • SP2 7DT
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One of the drawbacks of being away from home is the return: it is nearly always to a kitchen bereft of food and with hungry mouths to feed.

This was the prospect facing me after I spent two days in London. It was all very well indulging in a spot of hedonism to relieve the January gloom but hard reality awaited me. As South West Trains carried me homewards, I pondered on what I could possibly rustle up for supper for me and D. The situation was especially acute since D had been left to cope on his own for 36 hours and there was the strong likelihood he'd be weak with hunger. Hunter-gathering is not in his genes.

With the situation beyond dire, we agree to knock our hunger problem on the head with a visit to The Balti House, not far from the rail station in Salisbury where D has picked me up from the Waterloo train.

We've wanted to come here since it opened last year, keen to discover how it fits in to the



flourishing Asian food scene in the cathedral city. What tends to be categorised as 'Indian food' has always gone down a treat in Salisbury and with so many outlets there is never a danger of aficionados being denied their plateful of spice 'n' rice.

One of the restaurants that offers Indian cuisine many, many notches above the standard fare is Anokaa, deservedly a hot-ticket destination for, shall we say, 'those with the more discerning palate'. It is very, very wonderful and one of our all-time top ten favourites.

I mention Anokaa, which is in Fisherton Street in Salisbury, because The Balti House a couple of hundred yards west, is its kid brother. Solman Farsi, who owns them both, is a man of considerable energy and vision, with his finger very obviously on Salisbury's pulse.

Here at The Balti House he has picked up on one of Anokaa's winning attributes – its lunchtime buffets, which pack 'em in alongside the à la carte diners. So at TBH it is all about the buffet, an 'extravagant buffet', as it likes to describe it, which is currently offered at £8.95 for three courses between Sunday and Thursday, and £9.95 on Friday and Saturday.

The idea of a buffet is not really that you eat as much as you want until you can't move, but the possibility is always there and D, after his home-alone privations, seems ready to give it a go, especially as it all looks so inviting.

The buffet section is in a small room off the two main eating areas (one of which has seats for the takeaway customers) and it's all very

convivial with smiles and pleasantries exchanged with fellow diners as we crowd around the DIY serving counters.

We help ourselves, first of all, to a small plate of starters each – consisting of many of the usual suspects like onion bhaji, samosas and chicken tikka – and then it's time for the serious stuff.

There are various chicken, lamb and prawn dishes, three veggie options, including Bombay potato, as well as naan breads, popadoms and pickles. D can hardly believe his good fortune and at one point actually pauses to remark that he must have been very good to deserve all this. 'It isn't *all* for you,' I remind him.

I treat myself to a helping (OK, a generous helping) of Punjabi Baigoan, which is aubergines stir-fried with sesame, roasted coconut and chickpeas in a tamarind sauce with coriander.

There's fresh chopped pineapple to follow, which we both have, or rice pudding with sultanas, which is probably called something far less prosaic, but that's what it is.

How TBH serves up such good food in such pleasant and comfortable surroundings for the price I simply do not know. For value for money it takes some beating and, by the look of our smugly satisfied faces as we emerge into the winter night, I can only think it is just as well we don't live too close to Salisbury or getting a hearty fix of South Indian delights at TBH could become a habit hard to break.

Our three-course meal for two, excluding drinks, cost £19.90. V