

Grace Dent reviews Chutney Mary: just the right mix of capacious, candle-bedazzled, art-strewn and Bentley-visited

Grace Dent has an early Indian summer at a relocated Chutney Mary



Cavernous enough to try for a walk-in: the beautiful Chutney Mary

Despite Chutney Mary sounding much like the rude nickname of an amorous Branston Pickle production-line employee, it is also the appellation of one of London's most genteel and respected Indian restaurants. It will, however, always make grown people giggle. Chutney Mary is up there with the Oxo Tower and Dirty Dicks as 'venues it is literally impossible to invite a person to and get a straight answer the first time'.

For the past 25 years, Chutney Mary has been the pride of New King's Road, but now it's upped sticks to St James's Street near Green Park. The move has no doubt displeased the SW10 set. It must have been glorious, after two samosas, one Afghani chicken tikka, a naan, a salted caramel kulfi and an amble through the wine list, to have been within waddling distance of one's chaise longue. But now Chutney Mary has taken its high-end Indian offerings to a bigger, grander setting.

Many of the Chelsea-era Mary's signature dishes, including the green curry, have remained, but there are new temptations, such as sautéed Cornish crab in chilli butter and lobster biryani. The kid biryani is comfortingly devourable, albeit fiercely spiced.

The Saturday night St James's-era Chutney Mary set were mainly letting their chauffeurs worry about how they came and went. As I arrived, smart families, chic tourists and no riffraff were warmly greeted by a handsome bloke in a feathered turban manning the door.

Inside, the dining room is irrefutably stunning. It's rare in London that I feel even vaguely underdressed — more is more being my mantra — but the all-new Chutney Mary is just the right mix of capacious, candle-bedazzled, art-strewn and Bentley-visited to make one suddenly regret not slinging on better diamonds.

Still, I'm glad I toughed out these insecurities, as Chutney Mary was worth adding to the little black book. The problem with fellow high-end Indian dining haven Gymkhana on Albemarle Street is, quite plainly, that there are no bloody problems with Gymkhana on Albemarle Street. This is why it won a Michelin star and now there are never any tables left.

I walk past Gymkhana often, my eyes drilling furiously on the merry, forward-planning guzzlers sat in its window eating Chettinad duck dosas and tandoori guinea fowl. Hell — for the restaurant nerd — is other people with more finely tuned iCals. Don't even start me off about the queue at Taiwanese steamed milk bun emporium Bao on Lexington Street, which is hectic by 5pm. Who are these people? Why do they torment me?

So hooray for Chutney Mary, now in the West End, sporting a dainty cocktail list featuring Rangpur Gimlets and Mango Mojitos. It's cavernous enough to try for a walk-in, there are two large private dining rooms in the basement and large tables in the main restaurant to cater for family gatherings, client dinners or other things where someone else will pay.

Obviously, all these imported paintings and sumptuous antique tables filled with glassware and altar candles don't come cheap. We managed to spend over £150 in under 90 minutes, ordering abstemiously, which is sinful I know. The venison samosas in their wafer-thin cones were unforgettable. A side of Bombay aloo wasn't much to write home about, but I'll overlook this as the butter chicken was remarkable. The sweet carrot and cardamom soufflé with pistachio ice cream was the stuff of dreams.

Service is a little full-on, but that's to be expected. And at dinner time the restaurant is completely non-child-friendly — under-tens aren't allowed in after 8pm — which is favourable because although yours are beautifully mannered, all the others are savages. But this clientele won't have trouble funding childcare. I treated myself to an Uber Lux home.

It was exactly that sort of night.

Chutney Mary

2 cocktails £25

1 guinea fowl kebab £11

1 venison samosa £11

1 butter chicken masala £18.50

1 kid gosht biryani £26

1 Bombay aloo £5.50

1 kachumber raita £4

1 Grüner Petra Unger £39

1 carrot soufflé £8

TOTAL £157

73 St James's Street, W1 (020 7629 6688; chutneymary.com)