

# Bengal Sage Winchester

Written by Emma Caulton



I had an inkling that Winchester's Bengal Sage was going to be a feast; I'd been very impressed a couple of months ago when I'd eaten at sister restaurant Bangkok Brasserie. Currently Indian cuisine is reinventing itself, becoming increasingly varied; in the local area that's partly due to Bengal Sage restaurateur, Miff Kayum. I believe his well-lauded Tiffin Club in Southampton was the first Indian restaurant in the area that emphasised its use of fresh, local produce.

He went on to open Bangkok Brasserie (his wife is Thai) in Winchester in 2009. It proved so popular it rapidly outgrew its St George's Street venue moving to larger premises in Jewry Street last year, when Miff took the opportunity to open Bengal Sage in the St George's Street premises.

He's weaved his magic yet again combining local produce with Indian flavourings and his own creations inspired by his travels. The result is an eclectic menu that's a long way from the typical Indian restaurant.

Bengal Sage, tucked under the overhang of the Casson Block, is understated smartish – a scheme of cream, bamboo and saffron with white linen tablecloths and organically curved white dishes and bowls.

The classic Indian pre-dinner nibbles of popadums and relishes are top notch: fresh, crisp popadums, a terrific sour pickle and perhaps the best mango chutney I've had – soft melting chunks of mango in a not too sweet sauce (very



different from the usual glutinous serving). My friend Liz and I can't resist washing this down with a very palatable Indian sauvignon blanc, La Sula, that's fruity with a slightly spiced finish. Who would have thought India would produce such a well-rounded wine?

Starters include the lightest onion bahjiis with a tang of fennel seed, piping hot chilli crab cakes that taste as clean as a sea breeze and a fruity chicken chatt on a soft puri. Mains are a glorious parade of colours and flavours including a slow-cooked Broughton water buffalo bhoona that's a comforting dish with real warmth and depth and is Liz's favourite. I am dazzled by Goan king prawns pungent with saffron, curry leaves and mustard seeds, Kerala seafood in a rich tomato broth, marinated chicken anjali in a lemon grass and lime sauce that's a fusion of Thai and Indian, and minty Lamb Suruchi, a favourite of the Indian cricket team. Outstanding side dishes include flaky saffron rice, lemon and garlic stir-fried wild mushrooms,

traditional tasty parata bread and excellent roasted sweet potato in rich coconut milk and pistachio sauce.

Dessert is both clever and delicious: homemade apple and cinnamon samosas with local artisan vanilla ice cream (Jude's) and a lovely caramel sauce. It's an Indian version of apple strudel, but as desserts aren't listed on the main menu diners could miss this treat. Bengal Sage – definitely a couple of words to the wise.

## ESSENTIALS

**Where** Bengal Sage, St George's Street, Winchester SO23 8AH, 01962 862173

**What** Impressive non-traditional Indian restaurant with subtle spicing and locally sourced produce

**Service** Charmed and enthused by Shah Kayum's welcome, service and knowledge

**What's the damage?** Starters from £2.95, mains from £8.50