

NING

92-94 OLDHAM STREET,
CITY CENTRE

TEL: 0161 238 9088

AVERAGE COST PER HEAD
£7.95 FOR BUFFET LUNCH
(WITHOUT DRINKS)

STYLE

KICK-ASS CANTEEN

BEST FOR

MAKING LUNCHTIME LAST
TILL DINNERTIME

MM VERDICT ★★★★★

Ning hits the right note



"This dish made our mouths water just looking at it and beat my idea of a Chicken Korma hands down."

Canteen – The word just makes me think of school, or even a workplace serving rubbish food, and being crammed in with people you would really rather not be. But on a sunny May afternoon, a colleague and I decided to check out a restaurant that changed my mind on canteens.

Ning, the newest eatery on Oldham Street, calls itself a canteen-cum-café-cum-restaurant and it really works. Sometimes you don't want to go to a "proper" restaurant for lunch; you want to go somewhere that isn't the local sandwich bar but isn't over the top either. The equilibrium between style and substance at Ning is perfectly balanced.

We were shown to our table by the proprietor (which seems to be all too rare these days) and he was happy to go through the wine list with us. They don't have pages and pages of wines but they have carefully selected the very best to accompany the style of cooking that they offer. I opted for the Pinot Grigio and my friend went for the Chardonnay, and both drinks were quality offerings delivered in oversized goblets, which was a touch that I really liked.

To kick off the lunch, we opted for a selection of samosas, spring rolls and Malaysian soup, which was a beautiful, spicy dish featuring a fusion of spice and stock. We were also offered duck wraps, which is the only thing I found a little odd, but that's not to say it was wrong – just not something that I have encountered before in a Malaysian establishment.

Before we moved on to the meat dishes we were lucky enough to be treated to a teaser from the evening A La Carte menu, with Malaysian style Chicken Korma. This dish made our mouths water just looking at it and beat my idea of a Chicken Korma hands down. The moist,

perfectly cooked chicken was complemented by a spicy, coconut-tinged sauce, which was both plentiful and delicious.

Another dish we tried was the Dhal curry. This was ideal for all authentic and wannabe vegetarians, nicely balancing lentils, aubergine, carrots and potatoes. I am not a big fan of vegetables but these were delivered in such an appealing way that I was tempted. To my surprise I really enjoyed them and finished the lot.

Despite being fit to burst, we then moved back to the buffet for Beef Rendang (beef slowly cooked in coconut milk, lemon grass and chili) and the Chicken in chili and tomato sauce. Considering this was a buffet, the quality of the food on offer was unbelievable.

Walking back to the table I asked about the décor and was told that the back wall I had been admiring was papered with a design exclusive to Ning. If you looked closely enough, you can see the company logo intricately festooned in there. Nice touch.

I really cannot rave about Ning enough. It is, in my opinion, probably one of, if not THE, best Malaysian restaurants that the city has to offer. Everything, from the settings to the service to the quality of the food, is handled with class and the proprietors have clearly put in a lot of time and effort to make it what it is. Put their details in your mobile phone, get your friends to meet up for lunch there, guilt-trip your partner into taking you. Whatever excuse you can think of to go, just do it. It's still a bit of a secret at the moment but I have a feeling that, come October, Ning will be getting a mention at the Food and Drink festival...

Phil Sherrington.

