

Sweet and Spicy is one of many great restaurants in Brick Lane.



Nick Vadasz shares his love of Brick Lane - an area that has become synonymous with a British institution - the curry.

A curry too good to hurry

The vibrant red and green of the Bangladeshi flag flying on the breeze over Brick Lane looks striking. And it is on this breeze that I get a joyful reminder of why I love this area, as the seductive aroma of curry fills the air.

If anywhere in London reflects change, its Brick Lane, evident above the doorways of restaurants, cafés, shops and mosques. The Star of David still adorns a mosque that was once a Jewish synagogue, reminding us of past occupants of this ever evolving community.

I walk to Brick Lane from Liverpool Street and as I arrive dive excitedly into the flow of people moving gently to the echoing beat of Bengali and Hindi songs.

“Welcome to Bangla Town,” says my friend Shapna, as we go to the counter and gaze at the fine buffet of dishes

available. Shapna has lived in the area all her life and is especially fond of food at Sweet and Spicy. Originally a shop selling Bangladeshi sweets and snacks, it now offers a more comprehensive menu. We make our selection and head to a table in the small, friendly dining room.

“The meat, fragrant with cinnamon, cardamom and coriander, is tender and moist”

The walls are covered with a variety of historical sporting images – my eyes are drawn to several old cigarette adverts curiously featuring muscular Indian wrestlers who I imagine have looked out over diners since the restaurant first opened over 40 years ago.

I spoon some tamarind-rich bitter-sweet sauce over a plate of lamb biriyani and taste a generous fork full. The meat, →

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fragrant with cinnamon, cardamom and coriander, is tender and moist, while the rice is enriched with almonds, sultanas and subtle spices. Encouraged by the biriyani, I try other dishes. The dhal – yellow split peas cooked to a thick soupy texture – has a mild creamy flavour balanced with the punch of garlic, fresh coriander and red chillies, roasted in oil and added just before serving to create a heavenly aroma.

Next I devour a channa masala with enthusiasm, a dish Shapna says Sweet

The British love of curry

- There are more than 8,000 Indian restaurants in Britain, half of them located in and around London.
- They sell 23 million portions of chicken tikka masala each year.



and Spicy has served for as long as she can remember. Made of chickpeas braised in a robust rich gravy, the channa masala is very good, and despite a hot chilli background the peas don't lose their identity. The sag paneer is also good – a mild, well-balanced dish of spinach braised with garlic, tomatoes and Indian hard cheese.

Finishing my last sip of Mango Lassi,

a yoghurt drink blended with fragrant mangos, we head for the counter again – satisfied, but wanting more for later. We order a bag of pakoras – delicious deep-fried battered bundles of onions, cauliflower and potato seasoned with cumin and chilli and served with a spicy chutney.

For good value – around £10 a head – quality produce and reliably good cooking, Sweet and Spicy draws me back again and again. It is one of many great restaurants that helps make Brick Lane a jewel in London's proud crown of diverse ethnic food offerings. 🍛



Left: Tasty selections include pakoras.

Above: Diners at Sweet and Spicy are overlooked by posters of Indian wrestlers.

More Information

Sweet and Spicy, 40 Brick Lane, E1 +44 (0)20 7247 1081

Or try: **The Nazrul**, 130 Brick Lane, E1

+44 (0)20 7247 2505; www.nazrulrestaurant.co.uk

Established in 1971, it's one of Brick Lane's oldest restaurants, and loved for its fine cooking. It serves a mix of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi cuisine.

Sheba, 136 Brick Lane, E1

+44 (0)20 7247 7824; www.shebabricklane.com

Sheba serves exclusively Bangladeshi or Bengali dishes such as chicken or lamb cooked with shatkora – an aromatic Bengali lime from the Sylhet region, Bhuna Naga – meat curry cooked with hot Bengali chillies, and maach tarkari, Bengali fish cooked with garlic.

Nearest tubes: Aldgate East, Aldgate