

Class and quality in all areas

THE BELL INN

Bell Lane, Fetcham KT22 9ND.
Tel: 01372 372624

A world away from your average pub or even gastro-pub, this stylish restaurant within The Bell Inn, just awarded and published in the AA Pub Guide, boasts class and quality in both cuisine and setting. It's the venue for weddings, Christenings and funerals and the choice of couples and friends appreciating a gourmet chef experience on their village doorstep.

I am not surprised to learn that the rich purple and burgundy brocade covered dining chairs, modern chandeliers, over-table lamps and impressive decor are similar to the up-market restaurants in Florida that Penny and Mark Thornton have previously established.

But after many buoyant years with three restaurants in the USA, one time policeman Mark and his wife and daughter opted to be closer to family and friends and returned almost two years ago.

Their decision to take on the ailing Young's premises was easy once they'd viewed the good OFSTED reports and taken a shine to the area.

It was a challenge - involving much re-furbishing and converting of the building, doing away with loud music, and bringing in Tim Frith, one of the best chefs in the south east to provide diners with quality eating using simply the best ingredients available.

Much of the produce they use is British free-range including beef and pork and eggs. English chicken is farmed to ensure high standards of animal welfare and environmental protection. Vegetables and fruit are also sourced in Britain where possible.

What's more Mark is a qualified sommelier, whose cellar boasts some worthy vintages.

However it is the couple's welcoming and friendly personalities that made us, (and presumably other diners) feel so much at home in such a short time.

We looked out on the pretty little garden as we chose from the main menu, and noted there's a



great lunchtime choice too.

We went straight into a main, dispensing with a starter in favour of anticipated pudding.

My choice was seabass fillet which was poached to perfection and served on a bed of chunky saute new potatoes and crushed spinach in a thin and flavoursome sauce. It was real treat and every bit was consumed with relish.

My companion's main was a delight too, the generous chicken breast, snowy, white and tender with small slices of spicy chorizo adding a zip to the dish. Saute potatoes and spinach only added to the pleasure. A second clean plate.

From a range of desserts we stayed with tradition and chose

the homemade individual apple pie which was seriously melt-in-the-mouth. Mine was served with cream while my friend opted for custard. Not too much sugar in the apple and a butter rich thin pastry case made this a great choice.

Sunday roast is a popular affair with a choice of roast beef, roast lamb, roast pork and roast chicken with all the trimmings. Needless to say bookings have been coming in for Mothering Sunday and Easter.

Although the Thorntons are not directly involved in the cooking, leaving it in the capable hands of Tim and his team, their daughter Amelia does like to help out having recently jumped ship

from working for Gordon Ramsay to the kitchens of Marco Pierre White.

And while we're name dropping, there are a number of local well-known faces who also dine at The Bell including certain Chelsea players, coming over from Cobham.

It's a far cry from the old pub where 40 odd years ago on summer nights we would sit out the front and sip a lager and lime before tottering on 4 inch heels to the Village Hall and Mabel Hallett's 'Beat Dance'.

Times have changed and while you can still get a more than decent pint here (they're celebrating St Georges Day!) The Bell Inn has evolved in so many

delicious ways clearly noted by its inclusion in the new AA Guide.

Justifiably pleased with the accolade Mark said: "It took us a very long time to climb back up and to have this has been the icing on the cake for the team here."

Check it out, you won't be disappointed.

Patsy Payne

At a glance

Rating: ★★★★★
Food: English/European
Price for two without drinks: £40.80
Vegetarian choice: Good
Parking: Own car park or side streets



A hidden gem inspired by Goan cuisine

THE BANANA LEAF

7 Lower Addiscombe Road,
Croydon, Surrey, CR0 6PQ. Tel:
0208 688 0297.

TUCKED away in Addiscombe is a hidden gem of an Indian restaurant.

Although The Banana Leaf looks like a classic South Indian restaurant - one look at the menu showed us the chefs had combined classic curries with unique blends of spices and a sprinkling of Goan inspiration.

Deciding what to choose for your starter is almost as difficult as picking your main as the menu is bursting with unusual dishes.

From mouth-watering South Indian specialities to the traditional favourite curry house dishes the extensive menu caters for everyone.

It is even helpfully broken

down into regions and spiciness so practised curry house diners to novice patrons can make sense of the dishes.

I decided to go for the traditional Sheek Kebab whilst my partner went for a Lamb Tikka.

Arriving impeccably presented the dishes didn't let us down in taste either - each had been uniquely flavoured and the meat was succulent and perfectly cooked.

Washed down with a traditional Cobra beer our waiter whisked our dishes away and brought us the triumph of the meal - our mains.

The Banana Leaf imports its spices and traditional ingredients all the way from India so every dish has another dimension to taste, not found in most Indian restaurants.

I plucked for a Goa Prawn Masala which was a true taste of

India - perfectly cooked prawns served in a thick delicately flavoured sauce with a spicy kick.

My companion went for a mixed Tandoori grill which dramatically arrived still sizzling on its hot dish.

With lamb, chicken and prawns this dish was gorgeous, the seasoning of each item on the grill was perfect and almost too much for one person.

The naan bread was freshly cooked and made to perfection.

This restaurant boasts a unique approach to cooking which is different from many similar concerns. Here the chefs cook their meat and sauce for every dish, uniquely seasoning every meal so personal taste can be met.

This definitely showed in our meals - everything tasted fresh and was exactly how it was described on the menu - an

unusual blend of taste, texture and spice.

Our waiters were attentive and both dishes beautifully presented.

Even on a Thursday evening the restaurant was full, which shows how popular it is with local diners - so I would advise booking early, particularly towards the end of the week.

And trust me, after a meal at The Banana Leaf other 'Indian' restaurants will not taste the same again.

Lucy Buckland

At a glance

Star rating: ★★★★★
Food: Indian
Price of meal for two without drinks: £30.50
Vegetarian choice: Good
Parking: Side streets

