

RESIDENT

recommends

WORDS Sue Dando



Sea Bass main course.

I am ashamed to admit that I have never been to a Turkish restaurant before and, despite working in Ipswich, didn't realise Alaturka existed until very recently. It is tucked away on Great Colman Street, moments from the Regent Theatre (evening service begins at 5pm so it is perfect for a pre-Theatre dinner). It has been open since 2011 and is owned by Turkish entrepreneur Sennur Kaya and run to exacting standards by her daughter Semra.

As a Turkish food beginner I arm myself with two friends, Gill, and Ayten, who happens to be from Istanbul and therefore has the job of being our guide for the evening. I ask her what to expect and she looks at me like I have two heads.

"Have you tried Greek food?" she asks quizzically.

"Er, yes. Many times..."

"Well, it's exactly the same...only better." Oh.

We begin with a platter of Meze to share. It is an enormous plateful of hot and cold traditional Turkish starters and includes: *soslu patlican*, a delicious combination of fried aubergine, green peppers, fresh tomato sauce, garlic, and onions; *kazir*, a salad of crushed wheat, parsley, spring onions, mint, and chopped walnuts in a lemon dressing; *cacik*, a *tzatziki*-like combination of yoghurt, cucumber and dill; *kalamar*, beautifully cooked squid in a light, lemony batter (and thankfully not a bit chewy); and *falafel*, which Ayten announces to be "one of the best *falafel*'s I've ever tasted. In the world." She also salivates over the homemade humus, and on this I concur as I am a bit of fan of the chickpea and garlic experience - it is thick, smooth and wonderfully creamy.

We eat all of this with *Raki*, the 41% proof national Turkish drink traditionally served with Meze. It tastes similar to pastis, and is served in a beautiful iced bath to keep it cold. When mixed with a little chilled water, it turns a milky white colour which gives it its popular name of "lion's milk" or "milk for the strong". It is smooth, intense and will blow your socks off.

We share our mains, trying the *Alaturka spesiyal*, an Anatolian dish of marinated cubed lamb, chicken, and spicy lamb mince cooked over charcoal and served in a rich, home made tomato sauce over little cubes of pitta bread. It is topped off with a dollop of creamy yoghurt and a swirl of that lovely tomato-y sauce again. The flavours are wonderfully rich, lightly spiced and so tasty I could finish the lot off myself. Fortunately, my friends know how much of a glutton I am so would not have

Alaturka Spesiyal.



Turkish delight and tea.



Inside Alaturka.

been at all surprised if I had scoffed the lot... but there was the levrek to try as well - pan-fried sea bass served on crushed potatoes and with a gorgeous balsamic, mint and garlic dressing... and then the kuzu guvec, a subtle, spiced lamb casserole served in a clay pot. So I didn't gorge on the spesiyal. Decorum prevailed and anyway, dessert was yet to come.

Just enough room for stuffed apricots then, each one bursting with home made sweet cream and half a walnut soaked in honey syrup. We eat them with Turkish tea served in the prettiest ceremonial tea cup and saucer imaginable, and a plate of Turkish Delight. It's a heavenly end to what has been a feast of an evening.

And there's belly dancing every other Saturday - it's a date.

♣ Alaturka, 9 Great Colman Street, Ipswich IP4 2AA. Tel: 01473 233448. alaturkadining.com



Stuffed apricots.