



Voyage of discovery at Charlton's Kasturi

It's hard to decide the biggest standout feature of Kasturi Indian restaurant - the food or the flow of stories proffered by uber-charismatic owner, Bashir Ahmed.

Today, Bashir can lay claim to an impressive back catalogue of achievements, which include running the biggest chain of Indian restaurants in Europe, an award-winning curry house in Aldgate and being the youngest famous guitarist in Bangladeshi history. Yes, really.

However, it wasn't always plain sailing for India-born and Bangladesh-raised Bashir.

As I tucked into the delicious chilli pudina murgh – chicken in mint, coriander and chilli sauce, Bashir's favourite dish and unlike anything I've ever tried at an Indian restaurant – I asked the restaurant owner to tell me how he ended up in London.

"OK then," he grinned conspiratorially. "Let me tell you my story. Coming to London was always my dream."

A 22-year-old Bashir landed in Heathrow on October 9 1974, a head full of hopes and dreams. He didn't get far, though. With just £35 in his wallet, he didn't get a visa and was abruptly decanted back to

Holland on a KLM flight.

Was he scared? "A little. But you always find a way, don't you?"

Touching back down in Amsterdam, he jumped in a taxi with the aim of "finding anyone of Asian heritage."

£32 later, he commanded the driver to stop, with just £3 left in his pocket. He roamed the streets looking for someone to help him and luckily, found a man from Bangladesh who let him live at his house.

Bashir turned this smidgen of good fortune into huge success, moving rapidly from waiter to restaurant manager to restaurant chain owner in a few short years.

Fast forward to 2001 and with two children studying at London Universities, Bashir decided it was time to make a second – this time, successful – attempt at Heathrow security.

He spend fourteen years creating award-winning curries at Aldgate before setting up Kasturi in Charlton.

Kasturi's aim is to redefine the Indian dining experience. In the UK, we all know Indian restaurants for korma and vindaloo but Bashir wants to bring something far more authentic to the British pallet.

The dishes found here are derivative of the cooking style in found in the North West frontier of India and are a fusion of Indian, Afghani, Pakistani and Iranian delights.

Spice is Kasturi's signature and secret weapon. All spices are bought whole and crushed up by hand on-site at the restaurant – just like natives do in the mountainous regions of northern India.

The result? An exciting and lively flavour experience.

"There are more Indian restaurants in London than there are in Delhi and Bombay combined. Setting up an Indian restaurant here is like trying to sell ice to an eskimo – which is why we're trying to do something different," said Bashir.

The menu still has a few Indian restaurant staples – tikka, jalfrezi and biryani – but Bashir urges his customers to throw caution to the wind and try something they might not have heard of before.

"It's challenging to do this but we have confidence in our innovative dishes," said Bashir.

I let Bashir choose what I would eat and in honesty, it was one of the best meals out I've had in a long time.



Left to my own devices, I may have erred on the side of caution and gone for an old favourite like a madras and that would have been a shame – I would have missed out on something completely new and delicious.

Go to Kasturi and try something you've never heard of before – you'll be glad you did.

Kasturi

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www.kasturi-restaurant.co.uk

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|-----------------|-------|
| FOOD (1-5) | ★★★★★ |
| AMBIENCE (1-5) | ★★★★★ |
| VALUE (1-5) | ★★★★★ |
| DISABLED ACCESS | YES |
| DISABLED TOILET | YES |
| BOOKING | NO |

THE DAMAGE

| | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| Kebab-ke-karishma | £13.95 |
| Chilli pudina murgh | £9.95 |
| Rajasthani bhindi | £3.95 |
| Saag paneer | £4.95 |
| Dal-dera ismail khan | £4.95 |
| Special pilau rice | £3.95 |
| Garlic naan | £2.95 |
| TOTAL | £44.65 |