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# Food & Drink

Time Out reviews  
anonymously and  
pays for meals

London tried and tasted every week Edited by **Guy Dimond**



**Indian summary** The Irani cafés of Bombay inspired Dishoom's look, but the menu offers a much looser interpretation

## Reviews

# Dishoom

★★★★★

### Covent Garden Indian

The original 'Irani' cafés of Bombay were already anachronisms by the time I was frequenting them in the mid-1980s. Their charms were many, the main ones being low prices, varied clientele and a respite from the din and heat outside. They were originally set up by Persian immigrants in the early part of the twentieth century, and it was in places such as the Leopold or Kyani that, on city trips from my job just outside Bombay, I first discovered the joys of the falooda (a garish, rosewater-flavoured sundae) and sugary Iranian tea.

Dishoom in Covent Garden claims to be inspired by such Bombay cafés, and – by George – they've got the look right: marble-topped tables, tiled floor, high ceiling, bentwood chairs, wall mirrors, tinny music playing somewhere. They've even got the welcome sign of house rules, including 'all castes served'.

As I sipped my Thums Up cola, the taste transported me back 25 years. Except this is a far superior dining experience: there are no white-jacketed waiters flicking dirty rags, and I'm sure no Irani café ever had as much Design Intent going on as this one clearly has.

### Pau bhaji combines a toasted bread roll with spiced vegetable stew

But what's with this menu? Some parts of it are very familiar, such as pau bhaji, the Bombay street snack that combines a toasted Portuguese-style bread roll (pão) with a filling of spiced vegetable stew (bhaji). But the toast and butter, the sickly sweet Irani chai and the metal jugs of drinking water have

been replaced with things you would never see on Irani café menus, from chocolate fondant and smart bottles of wine to bacon and pork sausages.

Here are some of the stand-out dishes we discovered during our visits. The pau bhaji is spot on, as is its non-veg cousin, the keem pau (made with spicy minced lamb). The house black daal is rich and earthy, nearly a meal in itself when paired with breads or rice.

Less impressive are the biryanis, which Irani cafés are usually renowned for. Instead of the usual large pots, here the dishes are cooked in single-portion-sized vessels. The rice was also too dry and overcooked. On two visits the 'chicken berry biryani' – featuring barberries – contained chicken that was dried out, while the berry flavour was not discernible. And the roomali roti should be softer, not hard and chewy.

But there's much to explore on this menu, from conventional Indian grills and curries (the mattar paneer was

excellent) to seldom-seen treats such as the shaved-then-flavoured ice dessert called gola. There's even a drink called bhang lassi – but if you're hoping for the *cannabis indica*-laced yoghurt drink that's legal in some parts of India, you'll be disappointed, as this version's devoid of anything trippier than a dash of rum. So that elephant-headed god presiding over the entrance door is surprisingly real. *Guy Dimond*  
Dishoom, 12 Upper St Martin's Lane, WC2H 9EF (7420 9320). Leicester Square tube. 8am-11pm Mon-Fri; 10am-11pm Sat; 10am-10pm Sun. Meal for two with drinks and service: around £50.

### THE BILL

Food	£32
Drinks	£12
No service charge, cash tip	£5
<b>Total</b>	<b>£49</b>