

FENNEL CREATES PERFECT MIX

Restaurant serves up high-class food without being overly formal



Jamie Wilde | Photos by Chris Sumner

When it comes to food, I tend to look for two main things – quality and flavour. Fennel Restaurant in Inverurie has both of these in absolute abundance. Based in the heart of the town, since 2006 this restaurant has been delighting locals and visitors alike with its tasty dishes that make the most of local, seasonal produce. Its food is high class, but that doesn't mean its prices are exorbitant or dining etiquette overly formal. Instead, providing decent value and a warm, friendly atmosphere is what this restaurant excels at – hence its top-tier customer ratings on the likes of Tripadvisor. Making the drive through to Inverurie for a first visit to the town, a friend and I eagerly awaited what Fennel had in store for us on a busy Friday night.

The venue

The first question on approaching the door of any good restaurant: Is it busy inside? A resounding "yes" was the answer to this. After being greeted warmly by our waitress for the evening, we were led to our table beside a colourful fish tank – a table with a view. But even better views were provided by the venue's elegant decor with plants and greenery, leather seats and subdued lighting and candles creating the perfect evening dining ambience. A large group table sat next to us and the niceties made for the young baby in the group by the staff were also a great touch. Food and drinks ordered after a quick menu browse and word of the evening's specials, our anticipation was through the roof. Thankfully, it was all we could have imagined and more.

The food

For starters, we opted for complementary flavours. The hot smoked salmon terrine, my choice, was perhaps my favourite of the night. Delicate salmon blended with smoky flavours from the charred corn salsa, sweetcorn puree and peculiarly tasty charcoal crackers – super! My friend's selection, the vegan bang bang cauliflower, brimmed with a sumptuous sweet and sour-style sauce and hot spices inspired by Korean cuisine. They certainly had a kick, but the cauliflower was beautifully cooked and there was plenty of room left to enjoy the mains that awaited. A flat-iron steak with peppercorn sauce and teriyaki duck breast made up our two main courses for the evening. It's safe to say that the peppercorn sauce Fennel's chef whipped up for this dish was of the highest order – instantly melting in the mouth and supremely indulgent, it was arguably better than the steak itself. The extra elements of smoked sea salt and chilli chips and a crouton with whipped bone marrow butter were nice additional touches, but that sauce... a glass of this on its own genuinely wouldn't have gone amiss! The teriyaki duck breast was definitely the most elegantly presented dish of the night. Two tenderly cooked breasts sat atop pak choi, sesame baby potatoes and classic fruity flavours from the orange and anise puree and a sharp mandarin reduction around the edges of the plate. While the teriyaki element of the dish wasn't completely obvious upon tasting, the marriage of duck and orange on this plate was divine. And with a generously large glass of red wine to wash it down with, every bite from start to finish was nothing but a joy. Not usually being the biggest fans of desserts, such was



The vegan bang bang cauliflower dish came brimming with a sweet and sour-style sauce and hot spices

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the standard of the food that we couldn't resist taking another peek at the dessert menu. The strawberry mille-feuille, a classic French pastry dessert, caught my eye while my friend was sold on the chocolate brownie cake special for the evening. Local strawberries packed with sweetness, balanced layers of rich cream and contrasting sharpness from the lime sorbet and balsamic reduction made this dish a real winner. The chocolate brownie cake was devoured before I could steal a bite, and a nod of contentment at either side of the table said all that was needed: what a meal.

The verdict

Our experience at Fennel was faultless from start to finish. Even better, at £78 for two three-course meals and a drink each, the prices were very fair given the exceptional quality of food on offer and we would've happily left a generous tip regardless. This warm and inviting restaurant is ideal for all types of occasions. From catching up with friends to birthday bookings or romantic meals, delicious dishes are plentiful here. I've already recommended the restaurant to several friends. After sampling it yourself, I'm confident you'll do the same, too.

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Tenderly cooked duck breasts sat atop pak choi, sesame baby potatoes and classic fruity flavours for a superbly presented dish



The flat-iron steak and peppercorn sauce were complemented by delicious desserts, and the dining atmosphere in the restaurant couldn't be bettered

