

It's Sicily season

Dave Lee visits Italian restaurant Mancia in Hull and says the cooking matches anything that can be found in Sicily, mainly thanks to its chef, Manny, but maybe the views don't compare!



FOR our family holiday last year, we went to Sicily. My kids are volcano nuts, so we did Naples and Vesuvius the year before and 2025 was the turn of Sicily and Etna. It's a rare thrill to climb these huge natural wonders, especially when – as happened to us while visiting Etna – they begin erupting. Luckily (or not, depending on how fond you are of being chased by lava) we were already on our way back to our digs when the major activity kicked off.

We were left with spectacular views of gushing magma flows and the occasional chandelier-rattling mini-earthquake as things calmed down again. It was a magnificent and memorable holiday but, given the family proclivity for chronic asthma, I'm mainly pleased that we came home from our trip alive and utterly invigorated.

It was partly the air, partly the scenery, partly the all-encompassing fascinating Sicilian history and partly – or possibly mainly – because of the food.

Anyone who knows proper Italian cuisine knows that the further down the country you travel, the more simple, hearty and robust the food becomes. By the time you reach 'the boot' the food is so simple, dishes rarely involve more than three or four ingredients. Surrounded as you are by farms and vineyards and the

sea, everything is bountiful and fresh and the least it's messed with, the better.

It's a relief, then, to find Hull's Mancia adhering strictly to the rules of Italian and, specifically, Sicilian cookery.

Mancia (pronounced 'man-cha' as in the Italian to eat) first opened a few years ago further down Newland Ave in a very small former shop unit. Without a license and with extremely limited space, they only served small plates of (mostly) daily specials. I really liked the place but only managed a couple of visits before it closed. As the lad who ran it – a Hull-born Sicilian called Angelo Romano – opened the excellent Santis round the corner on Princess Ave not long after, I assumed the closure was due to him upgrading to bigger things.

Then Mancia re-opened – sans Angelo – under the control of his cousin Manny Santoro, a Sicilian-born Hull lad, who gave up a profitable living as a plumber in order to follow his passion of cooking food from his home island. Mancia then relocated to larger premises further up Newland Ave and now we have two excellent Sicilian restaurants within walking distance of each other. I'm delighted because it means I can get my hands on a decent arancini whenever I feel the need.

The new Mancia still offers small plates but now has full mains, pasta and pizza selections (and a license) in addition. The internal décor

AUTHENTIC TASTE: Main picture, arrosticini, two healthy skewers of lamb and red pepper chunks, dripping onto a bowl of roasties with a fennel and radish salad; above left, polpette, ox cheek and pork shoulder meatballs served in a tomato sauce; below, a desert of cannoli.

maintains the same views of Etna and Catania painted in the style of local graffiti legend Skeg and the welcome is just as warm as it ever was. It's a light, comfy, friendly space, perfect for unhurried sessions of gustatory indulgence.

As with most Italian restaurants, the menu contains plenty for everyone but, here, many dishes are given a little twist to make them more suited to available local ingredients while abiding to strict Sicilian recipes. Only 28 years old, Manny has been hopping back to Sicily on a regular basis his entire life and is well-steeped in what is considered authentic and what has been tinkered with one step too far.

Opening dishes included a very welcome plate of polpette – succulent ox cheek and pork shoulder meatballs served in a deep, rich tomato sauce with a grating of pecorino – and cozze, which was a mussel, fennel sausage and fava bean stew that boasted the fattest, tastiest mussels I've faced off against for a good while. The broth tasted exactly like that I've sampled in Catania. Full marks for authenticity.

For mains, I went for arrosticini; two healthy skewers of lamb and red pepper chunks, perfectly grilled and left to drip onto a bowl of superb roasties littered with a perfectly matched fennel and radish salad. I'd had something similar in a tiny restaurant in a village called Presa on the north-east road up Etna. This take on the dish was, if anything, better. To be fair,

RATINGS	
Welcome	5/5
Food	5/5
Atmosphere.....	5/5
Prices.....	4/5



though, the place in Presa had much more pleasing views.

No less tasty and authentic was pork ragu. A short, twisty pasta called casarecce, smothered in a blood red pork shoulder and prosciutto ragu and topped with panagratto. Wherever Manny gets his pork shoulder from, it's superbly sourced and utilised with great skill. It's not easy to find a match for the amazing pork farmed on Sicily.



It's worth noting that we ate early on a Friday afternoon and Mancina rapidly grew, and stayed, nicely full. Despite it only being a few days into January, when everyone is skint and tired of eating, the restaurant was busy, buzzy and clearly enjoys excellent word-of-mouth.

For puds, we went simple – profiteroles and pistachio cannoli – delicious. With a couple of sides and a few bottles of Birra Messina, our bill came in at £145. I'll admit we slightly over-ordered, so I reckon two of you could have a really filling and memorable meal for around £120, which is good going these days.

As we've run out of Italian volcanoes to climb, this year my family and I are heading to Tuscany to sample the delights of Florence, Sienna, Modena and Lucca. As you'll know, the cuisine varies in every part of Italy, so I'm expecting slightly more refined and complex dishes this trip.

I'll wager, though, that everything we ate at Mancina will stand up to whatever we eat in whatever setting. Manny apparently has plans to open a fish restaurant next and, if it's half as good as his current operation, it'll be another primo place. No heading back to plumbing for that lad, not when he's representing his homeland so well via gastronomy.

Mancina Sicilian Bar and Kitchen, 158 Newland Ave, Hull, HU5 2NN. www.mancinakitchen.co.uk

PUB OF THE WEEK

by Dave Lee

Burns Head Inn, Patrington Haven



I'M afraid to say I can convey little certified information about the Burns Head Inn. This isn't due to lack of research on my part but because there is very little detail on the pub available. Believe me, I've looked. So, I've no idea why it's called Burns Head or when it was built or much else. But I can give you a few facts and a couple of intriguing rumours.

The pub serves a decent pint, has interestingly themed food days (I recently had Indian chicken dirty fries and I'm not ashamed to admit it), and boasts two beer gardens. One is out back and the other is across the road. It comprises a lounge/restaurant with a separate bar and games room. It serves two ever-changing real ales sourced nationally. That's it for facts.

Rumour one is that apparently, before the days when Sunk Island was reclaimed from the Humber, the 250-year-old pub was a riverside property. This makes sense. Despite the Burns Head now being a good couple of miles inland, Patrington Haven was (as the name suggests) a small inlet or harbour. Around 200 years ago, the beer garden across the road would, presumably, have been underwater.

The second rumour (for which I can find only scant but persistent reference) is that little-known beat combo The Beatles once stayed at the pub. Depending on the source, on one of their several trips to play Hull, they either slept in or visited the pub and either did or didn't enjoy a sing-along, in either 1963 or 1964. I find this story less convincing. Patrington Haven is a long way past Hull for a touring band to travel for either bed or booze. If the rumour is true and they weren't playing Withernsea or Hornsea the next day, then their road manager was a strategic incompetent.

The only way to discover if rumour two is true is if someone could ask Messers Starr or McCartney if they remember a boozy do about 15 miles to the east of Hull over 60 years ago. Anyone got their email address?

RATINGS

Welcome	4/5
Atmosphere.....	3/5
Drinks choice.....	5/5
Prices.....	4/5

*Burns Head Inn,
Main Street,
Patrington Haven,
HU12 0QJ.*