

FAMILY DINING

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Upper Qube, Unit 1/125,
Metrocentre

DINING with children, as any parent knows, can be a tricky affair. But as soon as you find a family stable, then it's hard to break free from the norm.

So as we stood in the Metrocentre, with an hour to kill before the Tooth Fairy film, the kids made a beeline towards the nearest Italian.

However, we noticed a new restaurant in the Qube.

The first Rice Flame Bar and Grill restaurant opened in Manchester's Piccadilly Gardens in 2005.

It offers rice dishes based around Moroccan, Thai, Japanese, Caribbean and South American cuisine.

We sat down in the ultra-modern restaurant which has huge benches to sit on or intimate tables of four and two.

The wooden tables have glass tops which cover intricate patterns, made with rice, naturally, and there are open-plan kitchens where you can see the chefs hard at work.

There's even a video camera to capture your meal being prepared.

Everything is minimalist, except the portions.

The menu is extensive and aims to offer dishes from the traditional Jamaican jerk chicken to an exotic Thai red curry.

All of the main dishes are combined with a choice of rice or rice noodles from across the globe. You might try Indonesian coconut rice or Thai stick noodles.

Interestingly, all food is made without monosodium glutamate (MSG) or artificial flavours.

There is a great selection of meat, fish and veggie dishes and soups for starters.

To share we tried the Thai fish cakes made with lemongrass, chilli and spring onion.

Served with salad and a chilli dipping sauce, they were very moreish but quite spicy so more to adult taste than children's.

The kids, however, gave the thumbs



ULTRA-MODERN The Rice Flame Bar and Grill restaurant



FUSION OF FLAVOURS One of the many dishes served up at the Rice Flame Bar and Grill restaurant in the Qube

It's hip to be square in dining at the Qube

up to the Thai prawn crackers and the Thai deep-fried coconut prawns, certainly the star dish of our meal.

We also sampled some deep-fried risotto balls which were delicious and their light flavouring combined well with the deep-fried rice and tomato sauce.

All the starters were very good and left little room for the main dishes.

However, I tried the jambalaya with prawns, chicken, chorizo, tomatoes, onions and peppers. It offers spicy and rich flavours and was very pleasant.

From the wok-seared rice dishes, the other half went for the Mongolian lamb. This was a huge plate of sizzling lamb with fresh vegetables, Chinese egg fried rice and a savoury sauce. The dish was a great mix of textures and flavours and he was very impressed.

The children's menu has five dishes although all of the main meals are available in children's portions.

Cha Han is wok-fried rice with eggs, peas, baby corn, spring onion and mushroom. Chicken can be



The kids, however, gave the thumbs up to the Thai prawn crackers and the Thai deep-fried coconut prawns, certainly the star dish of our meal.



QUICK WORK The wok-fried rice dishes were fresh and tasty

added too or the little ones can try chicken noodle soup.

In the spirit of trying something new, our eldest sampled the beef with noodles which was made up of thinly sliced beef steak, flat rice noodles, spring onion, Chinese leaf and beansprouts. He really enjoyed it and was beaming that he used his chopsticks.

The youngest took some convincing so she settled for the chicken and potato wedges.

Both kids' meals came with fresh salad and they were a happy duo.

A brief rest between courses was essential. The place was starting to fill up with lots of other families and couples out for a bit of shopping or film entertainment

Then we sampled the desserts. There are six in all, all hand-made daily by the chefs.

My chocolate fudge cake served with cream was served up on a giant plate, and would easily have fed the four of us.

The kids shared a New York cheesecake served beautifully with a few fresh strawberries. The cheesecake was a deliciously sweet experience and became history in moments. We had a great time and we all tried new dishes. The other half enjoyed his rice beer to help things along.

If you want a solid kitchen, excellent service and friendly staff that welcome the little ones, then this is the place for you.

FACT FILE

Address: Upper Qube, Unit 1/125, Metrocentre, Gateshead, NE11 9XY

Tel: 0191 493 2131

Open: From Monday to Saturday, noon-10pm, Sunday, noon-9pm.

First impressions: Smart and modern open-plan restaurant.

Welcome: Friendly, chatty staff, smartly dressed.

Style, design and furnishings: Very swish and clean.

Cuisine: Diverse cuisine includes dishes such as Jamaican jerk chicken, Thai red curry, South American

jambalaya, Chinese crispy shredded beef and Indonesian nasi goreng to name but a few.

Drinks: You can choose healthy options such as aloe vera juice or pomegranate and raspberry green tea, as well as an excellent range of wines, Champagnes and beers.

Service: Attentive and efficient; staff were knowledgeable or happy to check foodie questions with the chef.

Value: The restaurant offers good value. Children's main meals are £3.99 and adult main courses start from £6.99.

Disabled facilities: Fully accessible.