

**L**IVING in London definitely has its perks and one of them has to be the fact that it is one of the most exciting places for eating out. The diversity of cuisines and the quality of the food is outstanding. But how wonderful would it be if you could put a whole selection of London's top restaurants in one area and have a sampler of all their signature dishes. Well luckily for us that is exactly what we did last week! We were invited by a friend to go to an event called 'Taste of London' which, in the last few years has brought together London's finest restaurants and the capital's most famous chefs. This year, 40 of London's most prestigious restaurants gathered in Regent's Park to prepare and serve a stunning selection of their dishes over a four day celebration.

Known as the 'jewel in the crown' The Regent's Park covers 410 acres and like most of the other Royal Parks, Regent's Park formed part of the vast chase appropriated by Henry VIII who used it as a hunting ground, which he considered to be a stimulating ride from Whitehall Palace! It is also the largest grass area for sports in Central London and offers a wide variety of activities, as well as an Open Air Theatre, the London Zoo and many cafes and restaurants. I could not have chosen a more perfect day to be out and about and it was wonderful to be able to soak up the sun and feel the warm breeze caress my face. A bit of a rarity in London. As I walked down the designated path towards the entrance of the food fair, I could not help but smile to myself. It was an absolutely gloriously sunny day and Regent's Park was the ideal venue.

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# Taste of London

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world cheeses and a whole myriad of cooking products. The system they had set up was quite useful as one had to buy food vouchers which they called crowns and one crown was equivalent to 50 pence. As you went to the various stalls, you had to pay with the crowns for the different items of food which were all individually priced. I think most of us could hardly wait to embark on this culinary expedition. I had

already a fair idea of which restaurants I wanted to try out and to be honest if we were given a choice we could probably have spent the whole day there sampling the mouth watering dishes. But sadly not only was there a time constraint, I guess our stomachs would probably only be able to cope with a certain amount of food. I think we really did have a case of our eyes being bigger than our stomach!

Our first stop was at the restaurant stall called Benares whose owner and chef Atul Kochar had just been participating in a televised competition called The Great British Menu, against several other top chefs to win the honour of cooking for Her Majesty's 80th Birthday. Having made it to the top seven finalists, he missed out on the opportunity in the final round. However the extent of the praise that was showered on him by the panel of judges, especially on his mastery in the usage of spices was lavish. He seemed to have found a perfect balance of British cooking and Indian spices. After this kind of accolade, we had to try out his dishes for ourselves. I chose a fish dish in a coconut sauce served with coconut rice. It was delicious --- the blend of spices was extremely subtle and was a far cry from the standardised fare you get at your typical Indian restaurant.

The compound was bustling with people and the look on the faces of the people as they tasted the different dishes was worth watching. Some had their eyes closed almost in reverence to the