

HOW NOT TO DO A FOOD REVIEW



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I'll be honest, this was supposed to be a "How to Do a Food Review" article. However, halfway through I realised I have no qualifications whatsoever that would justify my writing such an article. What I do have is a varied palette, a whole lot of food knowledge gained exclusively by watching Masterchef Australia, and a dash of common sense. Since the latter is something I have discovered lacking among quite a few food reviews, I have decided to take it upon myself to spread some much needed information.

When it comes to food reviews, possessing proper knowledge about what you're eating and how it is supposed to taste is crucial. For instance, I don't think any Bangladeshi would take it well if a foreigner had fuchka from one of our famous stalls and went on a tirade online about how hot it was, or if they had perfectly cooked *sheekh kabab*, but said it was overcooked, simply because they expect meat to be pink. Similarly, here are a few common areas where we falter when we irresponsibly review food.

"RAW" STEAK

Steak places are regularly at the receiving end of unfounded criticism. When it comes to steak there's a few things we need to get straight. Firstly, everyone gets to have their own preference of how they like it cooked. Secondly, before going to a proper steak place, you should get some basic understanding of rare, medium rare, medium, medium well, and well done steak. If you order a rare steak thinking it's uncommonly good, then you are the only person responsible for your displeasure at the redness of the meat. Lastly anyone grossed out by the prospect of someone

eating a "bloody" steak should know that the red liquid that seeps out of steak isn't even blood. It is myoglobin. Google it. Also, contradicting what I said at first completely, if you like the atrocity that is a "well done" steak, please order chicken.

AUTHENTIC CUISINE

Most restaurants here tend to cater to Bengali palettes when it comes to food, but the problem usually arises when it comes to trying foreign food. Very few places in Dhaka serve truly authentic foreign cuisine, but those that do sometimes get quite a lot of flak for their flavours.

Authentic Italian or Chinese cuisines suffer here. Italian cuisine doesn't use the same range of spices that we use locally. There are more herbaceous flavours involved, which come across as extremely subtle when compared to our big, bold chilli centric flavours. In fact, since we eat so many big flavours all the time our taste buds actually get desensitised to subtle flavours, especially for someone who has been indulging in one too many Naga burgers. I'm not saying one type of cuisine is superior to the other, nor am I saying that eating spicy food is wrong in any way. However, if you are used to a lot of spice or salt in your food, you should have enough self awareness to refrain from calling a perfect rendition of alfredo pasta "bland".

When it comes to Chinese in Bangladesh, I'm no cuisine purist, and I absolutely love Bangla Chinese. However, no one can deny that it is as different from Chinese cuisine as a hairdryer is from a wok. The Chinese palette is vastly dissimilar to ours, and therefore when we eat some real Cantonese or Mandarin cuisine, it is highly likely to taste funky to us. That doesn't necessarily mean that it's bad and it certainly doesn't deserve a one star review devoid of

comments that will hurt a restaurant's ratings simply because someone didn't know what they were walking into.

NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION

Speaking of reviews devoid of comments, we have arrived at the most important aspect of what not to do when putting up a food review, especially a bad review, which is, not leaving an explanation for your review. If I see a one star rating on a page, I want to know why they've rated it so. Was it bad food, unreasonable prices, or horrible service? And if it was horrible service or bad food, what exactly did people not like? These questions are vital to understanding whether it is a valid criticism of an eatery or whether this reviewer is in blissful ignorance.

On a slightly unrelated note, simply because I've got you here, if you are one of those people who go to fancy restaurants in groups of ten or fifteen, take a million pictures, order a single coffee for the whole group, and then complain about the servers seeming impatient for you to leave, do message me explaining how you managed to get rid of every last shred of self-respect you had.

PRICING

Lastly, and I know I'm stepping into the lion's den by bringing this up, but we have to talk about pricing. There's a common line of thought that I like to think of as Bangali-father-logic, which goes as such: "If I can get a full litre of ice cream from the corner shop for 150tk, why would I pay 400tk for a scoop?"

Regardless of the ice cream being subjectively better or worse at a fancy restaurant, something people have to realise is that when you dine at a fancy restaurant you aren't only paying for the raw materials in the food. You're paying for the ambience,

you're paying for the promise of hygiene in their kitchen, you're paying for the qualified waiting staff, and you're paying for the experienced chef they brought in to be able to perform the complex techniques required to cook your desired dish to perfection. You're also paying for the right to be able to complain about things not being up to scratch, i.e. you are entitled to send food back if something is actually wrong with it. Therefore, while comparing the food at a fancy restaurant to that at your usual hangout spot is perfectly fair, comparing the prices of food at the two places is not.

There does exist a level beyond which prices become ridiculous, and we can always comment on whether a particular joint is worth it. However, we have to realise eating out at those places is a luxury that no one is forcing us into. Knowledge about restaurant menus is widely available these days, so there's really no basis for being taken in unawares anymore. Moreover, some extremely expensive places such as certain hotel restaurants are actually priced as they are because that increases their demand (Veblen goods anyone?). They become akin to status symbols. There will always be a demand for such places, so I'd say, save your energy from commenting on the price of food there.

In conclusion, here's a piece of wisdom that applies to food reviews, but is generally good advice for life as well: if you aren't sure about your knowledge on the topic, it is a good idea to learn some more before throwing your uninformed, and possibly unfounded, opinion out into the world.

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