

Mina is a major delight

Authentic Lebanese dishes right down to the coffee with cardamom at the end

If you're on the look-out for a restaurant that's a bit different from your ordinary pizza place or local curry house, there's a small place on Crwys Road that could be right up your street.

Mina has been doing business as Lebanese restaurant for around four years, although it was open under the same name as a popular cafe before that. It's in the heart of student land, but the clientele on the Saturday night we visited – a mixture of couples and larger groups – were well-behaved and didn't look very "studenty" to us.

food review
with Jonah Webb



MINA LEBANESE RESTAURANT
43 Crwys Road, Cardiff
Tel: 029 2023 5212.
Food served: Daily, 6pm to 11.30pm

There is plenty of free parking on the side streets off Crwys Road in the evenings, but you could also hop off a bus very near the restaurant if you go



AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE Mina restaurant's exterior at Crwys Road, Cardiff.

by public transport.

We weren't entirely sure what Lebanese food was, but expected something vaguely Middle Eastern.

We weren't disappointed. In fact the whole meal seemed like it was really authentic (the chef is Lebanese and so are the other kitchen staff), right down to the choice of Arabic coffee with cardamom or mint tea at the end of the meal. We even had a very decent bottle of Lebanese red wine called Clos St Thomas (sounds more Welsh than Middle Eastern) for a reasonable £10.50. I don't know why we were surprised to find that the Lebanese make good wine – after all, the country is on the Mediterranean, just like Italy and France.

We weren't entirely sure of how we should order so went for a selection of mezzas (starters) to share as you would do with Spanish tapas. And we threw in a main course to share at the same time. Being vegetarian there was more choice than usual – our choice of dishes reflects this – but the menu has plenty to cater for all tastes. We went for mutabal



manager Biar Darwish and, right, the kitchen.

PICTURES: Richard Swingler ©

(chargrilled, chopped aubergines mixed with olive oil, lemon juice and tahini) and battata harra (spicy potatoes with tomato).

We also ordered some tiger prawns, falafel and tabouli. And dolma, a main course of vegetables, rice and Arabic spices wrapped in vine leaves.

All the dishes were around £4 to £5, except for the dolma which was £7.50.

There was quite a wait for our food to arrive, but we were happy tucking into the red wine and could see the restaurant was busy – which we took to be a good sign.

My partner couldn't resist the pudding – a traditional Lebanese sweet quite similar to the Greek baklava with layers of filo pastry, honey and pistachios.

And we were both impressed with the drinks to round off the meal – I especially liked the cardamom in the Arabic coffee. The mint tea (not to be confused with peppermint) was literally made by infusing some fresh mint in boiling water with an Earl Grey teabag.

All in all it made for a good-value meal in a place that has a bit of individuality about it and a good, buzzy atmosphere.

THE BILL

Tabouli.....	£3.75
Mutabal.....	£3.95
Battata harra.....	£3.95
Tiger prawns.....	£4.20
Falafel.....	£3.75
Dolma.....	£7.50
Lebanese red wine, Clos St Thomas.....	£10.50
Lebanese sweet.....	£3.50
Arabic mint tea.....	£2.30
Arabic coffee.....	£2.50
Total:	£45.90

☐ The Echo visits anonymously and pays for its own food



EXCELLENT CUISINE Diners sample the atmosphere at Mina and, above, a wide range of drinks are available amid the Middle Eastern decor.

ON THE MENU

COLD MEZZA (ALL SERVED WITH ARABIC BREAD)

◆ **Hummus**
favourite. Mashed chickpeas with tahini sauce, garlic, lemon juice and topped with olive oil, £3.75

◆ **Moutabal (v)** Blended charcoal grilled aubergine with garlic, Tahini (pure sesame oil) and lemon juice served with olive oil, £3.95

◆ **Fattoush (v)** A mix of lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber, spring onion, fresh mint and parsley and toasted Arabic bread tossed with olive oil and lemon juice, £3.75

◆ **Lebanese Salad (v)** Fresh mixture of lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber, spring onion, fresh mint, parsley and dressing, £3.75

HOT MEZZA (ALL SERVED WITH ARABIC BREAD)

◆ **Mina Meat Balls**
Delicious little spicy meat balls served with our unique sauce, £3.95

◆ **Warak Enab (v)** A healthy mix of rice and vegetables, wrapped with pickled grape leaves then cooked in natural juices, £3.75

◆ **Kubba Lamb** and cracked wheat shell filled with seasoned minced lamb, onion and roasted pine nuts, deep fried, £3.85

◆ **Jawaher** Marinated chicken wings with oregano and spices then grilled on charcoal, £3.50

◆ **Lamb Couscous**
Served in a traditional plate, bed of couscous topped with mixture of tasty vegetable and tender cubes of lamb, £9.95

◆ **Mixed Grill Kofta**, chicken and lamb cubes served with rice, salad and grilled tomatoes, onions, green and red peppers, £9.95

◆ **Char-Grill Sirloin Steak**, £9.50

◆ **Grilled salmon steak**
Salmon fillet char grilled, served with our tomato sauce, herbs and salad, rice, £9.95