

TOP EATS



Britain's prime contribution to world cuisine, deep-fried fish in batter (usually haddock or cod) accompanied by chunky fried potato chips has had a home in Ho Chi Minh City since in the form of JJ's Fish and Chips since 2013. Starting out as a street stall in Bui Vien, JJ's now has its first "chippie" restaurant in the city.

Jamie is one half of JJ's, and he explains that fish and chips has been a lifelong love affair for him. He was born in the UK, was brought up in Germany and has always craved that famous taste of his birth country. When he first moved to Ho Chi Minh City he found that there was no shortage of

places to eat seafood, but nowhere that specialised in this particular dish.

Situated on Ton That Dam in District 1, close to all the expat bars, Jamie and business partner Jacky opened the restaurant in November as a natural progression from their street stall. "People wanted a physical location to eat rather than on the street," says Jamie. And so the current incarnation of JJ's was born.

Formula

With the decor, Jamie and Jacky have stuck to the tried-and-tested formula of chippies up and down the British Isles. The walls are a tasteful blue to represent the sea, and

the wooden tables give the effect of being made from a ship's bow. Goldfish greet you on the front desk, perhaps pleased to be swimming in water rather than in oil.

"We pride ourselves on being authentic and as close to the real fish and chips you would get back home," says Jamie. The chips are thick, a world away from the stingy offerings of withered French fries that Jamie says are commonplace in Ho Chi Minh City.

Bringing fresh cod over from the North Sea is not possible, so Jamie chose local sea bass — which does a good job of replicating the texture and taste of cod or haddock.

JJ's Fish and Chips



PHOTOS BY MIKE PALUMBO

The 110g sea bass and chips (VND135,000) is JJ's signature but a larger portion is available, too (VND220,000). I chose the sea bass to be beer-battered but it is also available in bread crumbs. The batter is crispy and the fish is pleasingly moist. With a lashing of malt vinegar and a sprinkle of JJ's own mix of chip-shop salt seasoning, these fish and chips will certainly please traditionalists.

Dunkin'

It wouldn't be fish and chips without a side order of mushy peas and curry sauce, and I order one of each for chip dunking (VND30,000). The mushy peas are

reassuringly radioactive looking (a good thing, by the way), and the curry sauce has a pleasant kick to it, which is often lacking from bland offerings in the UK that treat curry sauce as an afterthought. For added authenticity, you can even wash your meal down with a mug of Yorkshire tea, a brand drunk in Northern England.

Fish and chips is still an exotic dish in Vietnam, and Jamie tells me the restaurant has attracted expats and tourists, as well as a steady stream of curious locals and Anglophiles.

Fish and chips is obviously JJ's primary focus, but the restaurant also offers alternative dishes including scampi and

chips (VND135,000) and sausage and chips (VND110,000). The latter borrows from Jamie's German heritage in the form of a deep-fried *bratwurst*. A vegetarian option is planned, and Jamie says it will be fish made from tofu, which sounds intriguing.

JJ's have done a great job in recreating the famous dish halfway around the world from its heartland. This traditional English staple has found a home in Ho Chi Minh City, and perhaps all that is missing at JJ's is a salty sea breeze. — *Thomas Barrett*

JJ's Fish and Chips is at 130 Ton That Dam, Q1, HCMC, tel: 01262 909077 