



Press Cutting

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Pinttopint

*Our guide to the best British pubs. This week: **The Prince Alfred**, Little Venice, London*

This is one for a shivery day in the capital, when a roaring fire and a warming pint are the perfect conclusion to a brisk canal-side walk.

Little Venice is one of London's more euphemistic neighbourhood names, but the cluster of stuccoed terraces next to the Regent's Canal has charm if you don't look beyond to the looming Westway overpass and the adjacent mansion blocks of Maida Vale.

The area is curiously under-served by classy pubs and restaurants, with a preponderance of sports bars and character-free chain outlets. But there is an exception.

The Prince Alfred is a Victorian gem, the exterior a riot of frosted glass and decorative tiling, the interior divided by extensive panelling into a cluster of small snug-rooms, each with their own access to the bar.

The stuccoed ceiling is gorgeous and the fireplace a magnet for walkers recovering from a bracing autumnal stroll along the towpath.

Purists would have the bar unadorned with lager pumps, but this is a pub, not a museum, and the range is cosmopolitan and buttressed with bitters from Young's and Charles Wells, and Young's Double Chocolate Stout. The wine list is knockout, with more than 20 available by the glass, including prosecco and the house champagne (£7).

Bar snacks are pricey but first-rate: a pint of prawns at £7, a plate of charcuterie, grana padano and olives £10, a baked camembert with slivers of toast £11. These are supplied by the same kitchen that serves the Formosa Dining Room alongside the bar, an airy space (once a pool hall) now decorated with large-scale sepia prints of canal-side life and offering a menu somewhere between gastropub and smart neighbourhood bistro.

All of this is good, and because it is good it can get busy, and noisy, but a modicum of discipline and forward planning could produce an ideal central London day out, if the air is brisk and the drizzle holds off.

Start with a stroll along the canal to Regent's Park and back, which should take no more than an hour or so, then aperitifs with your party in a cosy cubicle, and a hearty roast lunch with a good bottle of wine, followed by a glass of Muscat, port or tokay by the fire to send everyone off into a deep slumber.

Neither the wallet nor the constitution could stand such punishment on a regular basis, but this is a destination pub, a place for special occasions – and fans of Victorian architecture.

Andrew Baker

● The Prince Alfred, 5a Formosa St, London W9 (020 7286 3287; www.theprincealfred.com)

Mandate, Hogarth & Penrose combined

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