

A Review: The Imperial Mandarin

-Grace Perry

As a “local,” I am satisfied with the simple things. All my life I have lived in this small town of Marblehead, Massachusetts. Just like anyone, I have certain places in Marblehead that I absolutely love. Places that I often escape to and places that have grown to be a part of my life. One of these places happens to be The Imperial Mandarin, otherwise known as The Mandarin, my favorite Chinese restaurant in downtown Marblehead.

About four years ago I decided to make the switch to The Mandarin, and let me tell you, I am so much happier. Although, we indeed have some really great dining options inside Marblehead, The Mandarin has been my go-to restaurant for a few years now.

I decided to give The Imperial Mandarin a try simply out of curiosity. My go-to restaurant is located on the top level of the Village Plaza. In my opinion, it has quite an awkward location. There really isn't much advertisement besides the sign out front. Therefore, I can see why many people do not know about The Mandarin or choose to dine elsewhere.

Although the Mandarin is awkwardly placed on the upper level of the Village Plaza, it has a great atmosphere. Right when you walk in, it feels as if you have just entered a completely different world. It is cheesily decorated with some interesting décor. But trust me, in the end the décor doesn't matter, the food served on your plate makes the entire restaurant. The food is simply scrumptious and very well priced. I love the Mandarin because I can get a lot of great food for a great cost. The house fried rice, peking ravioli and scallion pancakes, are my ultimate must haves. I have also found that they do not take forever to make their food; I have not waited more than 15-20 minutes for a meal, which to me, is perfect. I don't mind waiting, but I also love to eat, so the sooner the better.

On weekdays, the Mandarin can look to be empty. Yet, this is not for their lack of business, it is because of the layout of their restaurant. The Mandarin has a split restaurant, one area for close dining and another area for parties.

There is also a small quaint sushi bar and regular bar as well. Depending on whom I bring to The Mandarin, I usually sit in the farthest booth. I love being separated from other people also enjoying The Mandarin. This creates a really intimate atmosphere. In other restaurants, I sometimes feel like I am literally dining with the people sitting next to us, simply because the layout of the restaurant is so squished. At The Mandarin, I never have that problem. Sometimes, during the weekdays, The Mandarin looks too empty. You may even ask yourself, “How do they stay in business?” The answer is this, takeout and deliveries. Americans are lazy-Chinese-food lovers. And yes, the Mandarin delivers. See why I love this place?

Along with interesting decor and great food, I have found an abundance of great service. Because I visit so frequently, many of the waitresses recognize me as soon as I walk in. There is also never a waiting line, and I am seated almost immediately. This can be really great, especially when you are in a rush to eat. The servers always seem to be in a good mood, always friendly

with a smile on their face. If I worked at/owned a hidden gem of a restaurant, I would probably have a smile on my face, too!

Not only have I introduced friends to the Mandarin, I also have introduced many family members as well. And yes, they have also found a love for The Mandarin. Whenever my dad comes to visit from South Carolina, it is the first place we go to. You can find us catching up in the back booth eating fried rice and scallion pancakes.

Take it from my grandmother who recently went to the Mandarin with her fellow lady friends, she asked me: “What's the place called downtown above the laundromat?” I answered: “You mean the Mandarin, Nana?” She stated: “Yes! That place is UNBELIEVABLE!” So take it from my grandmother and me, go check it out for yourself. I promise if you walk in there with an open mind and an empty stomach, you won't be disappointed. Good luck, and I told you so.

Look out for more review articles written by Grace Perry in future issues of Headlight.

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