

WESTERN

Mahlzeit: Fantastisch German fare... in Myanmar

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The Germans are good at many things: cars, beer festivals, World Cups, punctuality. They're also the masters of hearty – albeit lifespan-slashing – food. So, when I heard about Yangon's only German restaurant Mahlzeit, visions of smoked meats and pickled cabbage had me salivating in expectation.

If you were expecting a Bavarian bier house with *dirndl*-clad Heidi lookalikes and oompah music, Mahlzeit may come as something of a surprise. The sleek interior is uber-modern, almost uncomfortably so, and the few attempts at homey charm do little to disguise the fact that you're dining in a plush office block.

What Mahlzeit lacks in *lederhosen*, however, it makes up for in authentic, home-cooked cuisine. The menu offers a variety of German specialties, including pork belly with *schupfnudeln* (potato fingers) and sauerkraut, *flammkuchen* (a south German dish similar to pizza) and schnitzel. While we tuck into a selection of homebaked breads – another thing Germans are good at – I order the goulash soup (K8000) to start. It being a traditional Christmas dish in my family, and the only thing I am able to cook well, I consider myself something of an authority on goulash, and this traditional take on the classic dish more than lives up to expectations: the rich paprika broth, with its distinctive flavor of caraway seeds, is *gemuetlichkeit* (coziness) in a bowl.

For mains, I opt for the braised beef roulade (K18,000): moist, tender rolls of beef stuffed with bacon and onion and served with spaetzle and red cabbage. The substantial dish is the epitome of rustic German cuisine: rich, meaty and satisfying. The apple-braised cabbage is a perfect union of sweet and sour, and is so delicious I have to stop myself from eating it all in one go. Far from a bit-part, the thick, nectarous gravy takes centre stage, lending a final wallop of flavour to an all-star production. My German guest orders the allgaeu cheese *spaetzle* (K10,000), a kind of soft egg noodle commonly found in southern Germany and Austria. It's a heavy, cheese-laden dish that will delight carb-lovers.

After ingesting about 10 months' worth of saturated fat in 10 minutes, what I really want for dessert is cardiac rehabilitation. Funnily enough, this isn't on the menu, so I order the *kaiserschmarrn* ("Emperor's mess") instead, and by the time it arrives I've made a miraculous recovery. The fluffy shredded pancake (K8000), topped with rum-soaked raisins and almonds and served with a plumb puree, is a stomach-busting denouement to the meal, but oh my, is it a fine one.

It wouldn't be a German restaurant without German beer, of course, and Mahlzeit has five imported Oettinger beers on the menu (K4500). There is also a selection of German wines available, and I even spotted some brightly coloured shots being served, if that tickles your metaphorical pickle.

It probably doesn't need mentioning that service is efficient and timely – this is a German-run restaurant after all. But the staff are also warm, friendly and hospitable, going out of their way to ensure we enjoyed our meal, without being intrusive.

With a meal for two with wine coming in at just over K72,000, it's not going to be the cheapest meal you eat this week. But consider the fact that many of the ingredients for these specialty dishes have to be imported, and the bill might be easier to stomach. Besides, as they say in Germany, "*zufriedenheit geht uber Reichtum*" ("contentment is worth more than riches"). And, albeit at the expense of a few years off your lifespan, you're certainly going to leave Mahlzeit feeling content.

Mahlzeit

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Perfect for... casual dinner with (German?) friends

FBWT star rating: ★★★★★