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Review: Bring a Crowd to Enjoy South Korean Cuisine at Bely Zhuravl

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The pork soup Sunde Guk Bap was a little lacking in spice, but full of rice.

Upon entering Bely Zhuravl (White Crane), one of the few South Korean restaurants in Moscow, it was encouraging to see several groups of Koreans happily tucking into various dishes.

The restaurant's exclusively Korean menu is vast and includes meat- and seafood-based mains, dumplings, soups, noodle pots and bibimbap, the well-known signature Korean dish of mixed rice topped with vegetables, sliced meat, spicy and soy sauces and often an egg.

My fellow foodie and I decided to split four different dishes and, given the size of the menu, deciding on what those four dishes would be was no easy task. Eventually we ended up with an excellent sampler of Korean cuisine, including chicken in an almost Chinese-style sweet and spicy sauce with vegetables and rice and eight large pork dumplings served with a spiced and delicious dipping sauce.

At first glance, the prices at Bely Zhuravl seem rather high — mains average 850 rubles ($16) — but the portions are enormous. Small plates of various appetizer salads were also part of the deal, including an interesting mix of cabbage, steamed vegetables, thinly sliced root vegetables and, my personal favorite, lettuce dressed with a creamy fish sauce and topped with crunchy nuts.

The chicken was on the bone and very tender, the pork dumplings much meatier than your average pelmeni and the baked pork with Korean spices (850 rubles) tantalizingly sweet.

The only real issue in an otherwise very pleasing meal, was the "spicy" pork soup. The dish was enormous, again, with a good amount of rice, but the proportion of meat to rice was very poor, and despite having specifically asked the waitress to make it extra spicy, the whole dish was nearly flavorless. For a restaurant that prides itself on its use of varied spices and seasonings in the true Korean tradition, this was an unexpected disappointment.

The restaurant itself is simply decorated, with comfortable soft chairs arranged around the free-standing tables in the center of the room, and several booths for up to six people sectioned off on both sides of the room. The waitress was perfectly happy to move a table into a more central space despite our small number (two) and continued to be attentive and respond quickly throughout the meal.

Two hours after arriving, however, it was safe to say that my friend and I were both happily full and had thoroughly enjoyed the varying delights of our meal. Bely Zhuravl is an accommodating, light, large restaurant which despite its size has notably fast service, flavorsome food — but be forewarned that a meal here may require days of fasting afterward.

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