



RESTAURANT REVIEW

The majestic taste at Taste of Lanka

On the midpoint of Road 19/A, Banani - the last left turn before getting on the Banani Bridge from Banani Road 11, there is a straw thatched extension reaching out on the footpath. The adjacent walls are graced with black and white thematic paint work - making it hard to miss.

All these make up the exterior of Dhaka's first Sri Lankan restaurant- Taste of Lanka. As the doors open and welcome you, the first thing that will catch your eye is a nearly five feet tall glistening brass lamp adorned with a rooster. The contrasting ambience between the warmly lit restaurant and the grey streets creates its own distinctive atmosphere as the visitor steps in.

It was just past twelve thirty in the afternoon as I sat down with the owner and head chef - Riffat Guruge (née Afroze), to know more about this one of a kind restaurant. With a capacity of 45 diners the restaurant has turned one year old this year and it is all thanks to her tireless drive to let the people of Dhaka have a taste of Sri Lankan cuisine.

Let's start with your inspiration, also putting it a bit bluntly- Why Sri Lankan Cuisine?

I will just say it first that my husband Nalaka Guruge, is Sri Lankan. I love cooking and wanted to make the dishes he likes, as he cannot eat much of our Bangladeshi dishes.

I have been to Sri Lanka quite a number of times, specifically Galle - that's where all the Dutch Forts are, and the food is very spicy there.

I learnt everything there is in Sri Lankan cooking from my mother-in-law. I did not think it could be enough to open a restaurant, but eventually I got good at it and finally braced myself to open one.

As for why Sri Lankan cuisine, well there are so many people in Bangladesh who go to Sri Lanka and end up with a bad food experience. My idea was to introduce or re-introduce people to tasting real Sri Lankan cuisine.

Speaking of the cuisine, are you opting for fusion or going all out with authentic cooking?

Authentic, my cooking is meant to be as close to the real dishes as possible. Starting from the Hoppers, to the curries, everything is made as you would find in Sri Lanka. We have this Grandma's Special Crab Curry- it's

just as spicy and succulent as the locals there have it.

I go as far as to get all my cooking ingredients from there - the peppers, fenugreek, cumin, coriander, turmeric, cinnamon, and definitely the curry leaves - everything you can possibly think of that makes a dish truly Sri Lankan!

What is the most common thing that customers ask, especially the first timers who have never had anything from Sri Lanka?



(Laughs.) Most of the first time diners ask if the cooking is done with coconut oil. We can assure that all cooking is done with vegetable oil, coconut milk is used for the gravy of some curries and shredded coconut is the base of sambols - but not coconut oil. Then of course we get asked about how spicy the food is. Our dishes are generally quite spicy, but there is always the option for a less spicy version. Since everything is made fresh daily, we can offer a milder spicy version as requested.

I understand you emphasise on everything being fresh here, definitely it affects the taste of the food and adds to the Sri Lankan flair?

I would say it all comes down to how good the ingredients are. For meat and poultry, we get them delivered daily. Our fish, prawns and crabs are sourced directly from Cox's Bazar. I never was one for cooking food and putting it in the refrigerator.

To maintain the same quality of taste in every dish, here at the restaurant, we maintain the simple thought of providing the best possible flavours from Sri Lanka.

Your décor adds a certain charm; the personal touches are definitely visible!

right now there are no plans for expansion. But we do offer delivery services within Banani, Gulshan and up to Baridhara DOHS.

Finishing the formal talk we got down to the food part. The best sellers for Taste of Lanka are quite a handful (or rather mouthful)

HOPPERS

Bowl shaped crepes (thinly made ruti) made out of rice flour and coconut milk, available in plain or with a poached egg in centre.

SAMBOL

These can be compared to relish or Bangladeshi bhorta and are eaten with the Hoppers. A variety are on offer. Pol Sambol has freshly grated coconut as base with chilli flakes. Seeni Sambol uses onion as the base with sugar and spices. Chilli Onion Sambol is the hottest among the sambols.

GRILLED PRAWNS

Prepared with house marinade, these are the perfectly cooked prawns you hear about on competitive cooking shows.

DEVILLED BEEF

Chunks of spicy beef prepared in a sweet and savoury base of capsicum, onions and carrots.

HOUSE-MADE COCONUT ICE CREAM

This speciality ice cream is only available in Taste of Lanka and is an excellent end-of-meal dessert to wash away the fiery after-tastes!

It's not just the taste of the food, the presentation itself stands out on its own. The little circles of chilli placed on the Sambols, the perfect little bowl-shaped Hoppers, the slight angle of the pile of grilled prawns --all are waiting to be the next relished snap on a foodie's camera roll!

Dhaka now has one more destination to add to her growing eateries and restaurants, and this one happens to be authentically Sri Lankan.

Are you looking for a palate cleanser, apart from the Chinese and Indian delicacies? Then do mark Taste of Lanka as one of your next food destinations. The frosted glass window with the lion awaits your arrival.

By Iris Farina

Photo courtesy: Taste of Lanka

