



The interactive, state-of-the-art show kitchen at Azulia

GLOBAL GASTRONOMY

Azulia takes its patrons on a magical culinary journey like no other restaurant in Chennai. **By Bindu Gopal Rao**

Italy, France, Spain and Malta, to name a few countries. The restaurant also has an attached bar that offers a selection of some of the best international wine labels that can be paired with your food. And fret not, the chef and his team will guide and ensure that you have the best combination of food and drink.

You can be rest assured this will be an authentic experience all the way. The restaurant claims it uses a lot of imported ingredients that maintain the authenticity of the food including white bulgar, the Turkish spice powder yenibahar, zatar and sumak spice powders. While making southern Italian style pizzas, the eatery does not use much of Mozzarella cheese but instead goes in for Emmental cheese which has far lesser calories. Likewise, all its red meats are imported and lamb and pork chops come from New Zealand.

Azu means blue in Spanish and Portuguese, and the restaurant's name signifies the bright blue Mediterranean Sea. The inspiration is evident when you



Moussaka

TUCKED IN THE HEART of bustling Chennai is a little gem of a restaurant. Rated as one of the finest restaurants by the discerning, Azulia

takes you on a culinary journey like no other. This restaurant is unique in more ways than one, and there are several delightful moments in the course of a delightful meal. For starters, the menu card is large (with over 180 dishes) and looks more like a coffee table book. It comprises of carefully selected dishes from Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, Greece,



Risotto

see the blue wave pattern on the wall that greets you at the entrance. The contemporary interiors are swanky and spell luxury with Moroccan lanterns, glass mosaic ware and even traditionally dressed staff to add to the ambience of the Mediterranean. The tables have world-renowned Dudson crockery, Latavola cutlery and Schott Zweissel glassware. An interactive, state-of-the-art show kitchen that you can also step in is a great way to connect guests with the food. When I went in, I saw the team busy at work and also noticed that the kitchen though small was well organised. Separate sections to handle hot and cold mezzes, a separate area for the imported oven as well as a space to put the entire meal together ensures that the kitchen works with clockwork precision and helps the chef and his team dish out one delectable meal after the other.

If you are a first timer here, it is best to take the chef's advice since the menu is rather extensive and it is likely you will feel lost. Also this is one place where vegetarians will not feel left out. The establishment also caters to various preferences like vegan, lactose-intolerant and gluten-free. For starters there is an assortment of hot



Falafel



Haloumi



Sorbet

and cold mezzes on the menu that team well with the assortment of oven fresh breads. We tried some cold mezzes like the tzakziki (a mix of European cucumber, white onion, hung curd and cream with a pinch of dry mint powder and extra virgin olive oil), hummus (a chickpeaobased dip), Yaprak sarma or Dolmas (wine leaves stuffed with onion, sushi rice, raisin and pine nut and flavored with cinnamon), Moussakka Marakkech (aubergine and chick pea-based tangy tomatoey dish) and Mutabal (an Egyptian-style aubergine dip made with Suban aubergine, Tahina, garlic and pomegranate).

The hot mezze had a platter of falafel, fatayer and Bourak Bel Jibneh for the vegetarians and jawaneh for the non vegetarians. The Bourak Bel Jibneh is a Mediterranean-style cheese cigar roll made with Emmental, Halloumi and Feta cheese combined with onions, oregano and crushed pepper. Non-vegetarians can check out the Bourak made with deep-fried wings sauteed with garlic, lemon and coriander. The Manakish pizza made with the thinnest crust you can imagine with toppings of Zaatar, tomato, cheese, fresh mint and olives is hard to resist. Even the sautéed prawns are great, cooked to succulent perfection.

Other cold mezzes include the Haydari (from Greece, Cyprus and Turkey), made with soft cheese blended with garlic and flavoured with paprika and mint. The Saksuka (Turkey), a relish of eggplant, potato, mushroom, capsicum and onions with garlic-tomato sauce, tastes good by itself as well as with a piece of Kuboos, a bread commonly eaten in West Asia. The Badami Peynir, Turkish-style cheese balls rolled in flaked almonds, and served with an almond and basil pesto sauce tastes excellent and leaves a feel-good nutty flavour in your mouth. And for the health conscious try the Gevurdagi salad — rocket leaves tossed with cucumbers, pomegranate and walnuts that's light and crunchy and will certainly have you asking for more.