



Eating in style

Bengaluru's Zafran is the choice destination if Lebanese cuisine tickles your palate. [By Bindu Gopal Rao](#)

IT TOOK ME well over a month before I headed to a rather long overdue dinner at Zafran located at the Park Plaza Hotel in Bengaluru. And I almost immediately knew that this was well worth the wait. As I made my way to the first floor where this new restaurant is located, I knew this was going to be an experience to cherish. The well laid-out restaurant done up in hues of creams, beiges and browns exudes a sense of understated luxury. High walls and large windows with an enormous strung chandelier in the centre of the restaurant and interesting décor elements like the frames on the wall add a character of its own to this space. Positioned as a Lebanese-Indian cuisine

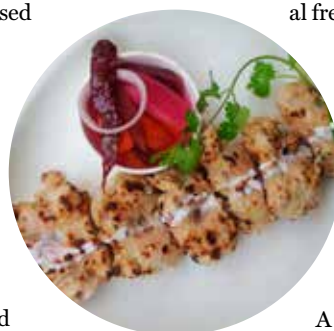
restaurant, Zafran is a one-of-its kind eatery.

The Lebanese menu comprises of a small selection spanning quintessential dishes like the Kibbeh (Chopped mutton with burghul), Sambousek (Char-grilled mutton with onions, stuffed in puff pastry and fried) and Fattoush (Mixed greens tossed with toasted pita chips, lemon, garlic, sumac, extra virgin olive oil and herbs). You also have the usual suspects like the Falafel (Mildly spiced patties made with chickpeas, parsley and scallions) and the Baba Ghanoush (roasted

aubergine mash mixed with tahini, garlic and olive oil) as well as Hummus (Chickpea paste with tahini, garlic, lemon juice and olive oil). After the meze, you are treated to a celebration of food from Amritsar to Lahore.

The Indian menu is laid out in a unique manner – based on the utensils used to cook them including the matki or the bhatti, the tawa or the handi, the karahi or the deg or the kund. Apart from going the traditional way in cookware, the restaurant also hand-pounds all its masalas that add a signature flavour taste to the food. The 60-cover restaurant also has an open kitchen and an al fresco section.

While I was here, the first thing I noticed was that the service was top-notch. I was even given a stool to keep my bag. A complimentary serving of shorba was a pleasant surprise and set the tone for what was to come. A basket of roasted papad and





fries (which was replaced as fast as it was consumed) as well as the mud tray with terracotta pots with delectable mint chutney with pomegranate seeds, pickled onions, gooseberry pickle, raw papaya pickle and a dahi tadka with mustard seeds and curry leaves kept us occupied till the food arrived.

The restaurant also serves a variety of liquors and wines that are paired perfectly with the food. Or else settle for their Ananas ka panna made with pineapple and flavoured with ginger or the wonderful watermelon mocktail. Executive Chef Amitabh Choudhary says, “We have kept the kitchen interactive and guests can actually request for their choice of spices or recipes which is made by the chef. We can also cook no-onion and no-garlic food on request.” Paying close attention to sourcing the various ingredients from locations across the country has ensured that the food here has a distinct taste.

From the Bhatti Se section, try the signature Raan-e-Istak actually named after Sous Chef M D Isthiyaq, a dish made from whole leg of mutton first marinated in home-ground masala paste for almost four hours, braised and then cooked in a tandoor over charcoal. If seafood is your calling dig into the Zafrani Jhinga made with grilled jumbo prawns with a hint of saffron sprinkled over with freshly pounded pepper.

Among the highly recommended starters are the Paneer Ka Khazana, made from saffron yoghurt marinated cottage cheese filled with seasonal vegetables and the Kishti Dilruba, potato barrels filled with spiced mélange of vegetables that are cooked to perfection and draped with cream. From Tawe Se tuck into the Mutterwali Tikki made with pan-grilled, dried fruits and nuts enriched, cottage cheese

filled, green pea patty.

The Ghia aur Rajma ki Gilawat is another signature dish, made with white marrow, and red beans. In Handi Se, a must-have is the Dal-e-zafran, a simple yet addictive black lentil preparation that is creamy and melts in your mouth. Rice dishes like Murg Dum Biryani and Mutton Khurma Biryani can be customised from the ‘Deg’. The Biryani is delicately flavoured and finished to perfection.

As Chef Isthiyaq says, “We have chosen

each of the dishes in this menu after much thought and deliberation to ensure that the signature dishes of the region are best-represented.” After a hearty meal, there is little place left for dessert but we managed to dig into the signature Zafrani Malai Ghewar garnished with seasonal fresh fruits, a Rajasthani speciality made of refined flour and sugar shaped like a honeycomb and Kulfi falooda made with home-made Indian ice cream flavoured with cardamom, served with pistachio and vermicelli. ■

The Big Boss’ Favourites

THE CHEF SHARES TWO RECIPES WITH OUR READERS

DAL ZAFRANI

INGREDIENTS

Urad Whole: 2 kg, Kashmiri Red Chili Powder: 40 gm, White Butter: 1,500 gm, Fresh Cream: 500 gm, Tomato Puree: 1,680 gm, Tomato Paste: 100 gm, Ginger Garlic paste: 100 gm, Salt to taste.

METHOD

● Wash the dal with salt 4-5 times. Boil the dal till it breaks. ● Strain the dal and rinse with plenty of water nicely. ● Transfer the dal to a heavy bottom patila and keep it on tandoor for the whole night. ● In the morning throw out all the excess water from the dal. ● Put in all the ingredients except cream.

- Cook till the dal becomes as thick as desired.
- Add fresh cream and serve.



RAAN-E-ISTAK

INGREDIENTS

Raan (baby lamb leg): 200gms, Ginger garlic paste: 20 gm, Shahi jeera: 1 tsp, Kashmiri red chili powder: 20 gm, Cardamom powder: 1 tsp, Mace powder: 1 tsp, Malt vinegar: 50 ml, Bay leaf: 6, Cinnamon sticks: 10 gm, Salt to taste.

METHOD

● Take the baby lamb leg, rub it nicely with ginger garlic paste and Kashmiri chilli and keep it for a little while. ● Put in cardamom powder and mace powder, mix them well and then put malt vinegar and keep for an hour. Braise it on very slow fire like on dum. ● Put bay leaf and cinnamon sticks while it’s boiling, take out the raan when it’s cooked. ● Remove the meat from the bone. Skewer and roast on grill. ● Cut and arrange the meat on a platter and serve.

