

PERFECT
BITE



In Bengaluru's Persian Heaven

*A relatively uncommon cuisine, Persian fare is unique in its own right. And Bangaloreans are a really lucky lot to have one of the best Persian restaurants in the country right there in the city, says **Neha Malude**.*

Stepping inside The Persian Terrace is like walking into a world where time suddenly slows down to a gentle pace as opposed to Bengaluru's always-in-a-hurry tendency. Located inside Sheraton Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway in Malleshwaram, the restaurant is dimly lit with translucent, coloured glass lanterns that are a trademark of all things Middle Eastern. There is a soft buzz as strains of mellifluous music flow over the gentle breeze and the pleasing clink of cutlery resounds throughout the place. The decor mostly comprises of mahogany brown Rattan chairs and sofas and cream furnishings punctuated with coloured cushions here and there, unassuming yet elegant.

As your eyes take in the surroundings, the word that comes to mind is 'romance', what with the al fresco seating, the lanterns and the open skies with twinkling stars. So, if you are planning to pop the question or celebrate a special anniversary, there is no better place in Bengaluru to do so. As we were escorted to our table by the staff, the unmistakable aromas of grilled meat wafting in set our appetites in overdrive. Though some might say that Persian cuisine is more or less the same as Lebanese, Greek or Turkish food, the fact is that the latter are influenced by it. The use of pomegranates, raisins, herbs, saffron and nuts is characteristic of Persian food.



We started off with a vegetarian meze platter, both hot and cold. We were served Kashk e Bademjan (roasted eggplant, yogurt, onion, garlic and herbs), Tabuleh (chopped parsley, tomato and cracked wheat drizzled with extra virgin olive oil and lemon juice), Hummus (chickpeas paste, garlic, lemon juice, olive oil and sesame seed paste) and Baba Ganouch (roasted eggplant, red and green capsicum, onion, garlic, fresh mint, lemon juice and extra virgin olive oil). The meze was served along with bread, both soft and hard. The Hummus was a no-brainer, of course. Sometimes, the easiest yardstick to judge a restaurant's food is to taste the simplest dish. If a bakery gets its vanilla cupcake right, you can be sure that the rest will be good too. Although an easy preparation, the hummus was our yardstick and it was fantastic. Creamy and richly flavoured with the sesame seed paste and olive oil, it was hard not to keep eating it. The Tabuleh was fresh and zingy, thanks to the abundant tang of lemon juice and the Kashk e Bademjan, bang on.

The hot meze platter comprised both vegetarian and meat. The Falafel, deep fried patties of chickpeas with parsley and sesame seeds was served with Tahina sauce, a common accompaniment. Anything deep fried has to be good, right? And this was no exception. The falafel was hot and its crispy

We also tried the stew with another kind of rice dish, Pilaf, which comes garnished with saffron and barberries that not only lend it a piquant taste but also make for gorgeous presentation

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

Chicken Soltani, Vegetarian Meze Platter

A close-up photograph of Mahi Kebab, featuring skewers of marinated grouper fillet, charbroiled with baghali (fava beans) and zerehshk (dried berries), served on a flatbread with fresh herbs and a tahina sauce. A text box in the top left corner reads "PERFECT BITE".

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texture was perfect with the cold Tahina sauce. While you are trying Iranian, it would be a gastronomic sin of astronomical proportions (see what we did there?) not to try kabobs. Ask for Mahi e Kabob, a skewer of marinated grouper fillet, charbroiled with baghali (fava beans) and zerehshk (a type of dried berry that is used in traditional Persian cooking, also called barberries). The fish was very soft and the grilled charred bits added that extra texture. On similar lines was the Joojeh e Kabob, where the tender chicken is enveloped by the strong flavour of saffron. The kabobs are very delicately seasoned so they are not like your usual Chicken tikka up north that is spicy and full of bold flavours, but are equally delicious.

Before we move on to the mains, a word about the service, which was splendid. Every person on the staff is attentive and knowledgeable so if you are new to Iranian food, feel free to ask the chef or your server for recommendations. Since the stews especially caught our attention, we requested for Ghemieh Bedanjan, a Persian stew of meat, eggplant, dried limes and yellow split peas served over a bed of plain rice and saffron rice. That might sound simple but the complexity of this dish lies in the dried limes that provide a distinct sour taste as well as the use of 'advieh', a spice mixture used in Persian cooking that typically consists of cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, nutmeg, cumin and turmeric. Our only gripe with this was that it was a tad too sweet but this is a dish full of warmth and comfort. We also tried the stew with another kind of rice dish, Pilaf, which comes garnished with saffron and barberries that not only lend it a piquant taste but also make for gorgeous presentation. It is said that Iranians use these dried red berries to signify that life isn't always sweet and that some times, one faces sourness too. A beautiful thought, no?

Speaking of beautiful things, we were now craving for the sweet part of the meal. We asked for Kareem e Zaferan, a flan made with saffron and dates with flavoured syrup drizzled on top. The dates turned this dessert into a rich, sweet experience. But the revelation arrived in the form of Om Ali, a traditional Arabic sweet that is, we would say, a fancier cousin of bread pudding. Originally an Egyptian dessert, Om Ali is delightfully creamy and the mushy texture is offset by crunchy pistachio nuts with a sprinkling of cinnamon that gives it another dimension. We were officially in Persian heaven. It was a rather strenuous bit after that meal, getting up and walking away but not without looking back one final time to take it all in again — the lights, the stars and the aromas.

FROM TOP:

Mahi Kebab, Kabsah Rice,
Mohalabia

A photograph of Mohalabia, a traditional Arabic sweet, served in a red bowl. It is a creamy, custard-like dessert topped with sliced almonds and a dusting of saffron powder.