

Legend has it that rava idli (steamed semolina cake), one of Mavalli Tiffin Rooms's bestselling dishes, was **created in the restaurant's kitchens during the Second World War when rice was in short supply**



Abu Dhabi is getting a McGettigan's – Dubai's popular Irish pub – courtesy of Al Raha Beach Hotel. **McGettigan's AUH is due to open in the hotel at the end of April**



Idli, dosa, rice and all things nice

For an authentic taste of food from the South Indian state of Karnataka, visit Mavalli Tiffin Rooms, the 1924 establishment that opened a spot in Bur Dubai last week, says **Priti Salian**



"Thick, crusty dosas, tangy bisibele bhaat and freshly ground 'filter' coffee are nearly impossible to find at one place in the city," says the 39-year-old Vikram Maiya, who craved authentic Karnataka cuisine whenever he visited Dubai.

Maiya is the managing partner of Mavalli Tiffin Rooms (MTR), a popular Bangalore-based chain of restaurants with a branch in Singapore.

Call it craving or conceit, but his desire to find bona fide Kannada food in the UAE has resulted in the expansion of MTR to Bur Dubai, where a new branch opened on Friday.

Try the lunch thali consisting of 16 items and unlimited servings, all for Dh25

A question of quality

Set up for the first time in the Lalbagh area of Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka, in 1924, MTR is now an integral part of the city's heritage. Step into any of the seven branches there any day of the week and you'll find them doing brisk business.

In fact, the Dubai outlet will replicate the same model, and a band of veteran cooks has even been flown in to set up the kitchen here.

"Urad dal [black gram], a key ingredient in idli, dosas and vada [crêpes and deep-fried doughnuts made with fermented rice and lentil batter] will be sourced from Bangalore, along with the special masalas and coffee beans, which are all essential to good taste," Maiya says.

And perhaps the best thing is that MTR focuses only on Karnataka cuisine, without the popular Indian favourites such as butter chicken or lamb biryani.

The lunch special

Try the lunch thali (platter), consisting of 16 items and unlimited servings, all for Dh25.

A freshly prepared fruit juice is served before the meal and paan (betel leaf) to end it. In between, there are curries, salad, veggies, sambar, rasam and raita served

Mavalli Tiffin Rooms, which serves authentic Kannada cuisine, has branches in India, Singapore and now in Dubai.
Satish Kumar / The National

with puri (deep-fried dough discs) and several kinds of rice including pongal, bisibele bhaat, vangi bhaat and curd rice, in succession. Three sumptuous desserts are also served; two with the main course and one at the end.

● **Mavalli Tiffin Rooms opened at Al Tawhidi Building, opposite Apsara Super Market, Bank Street, Bur Dubai, on Friday. Open on all days except Mondays, from 7.30am to 10pm. Call 04 327 5909 or 056 206 7321 (prices are subject to change)**

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five things to try at MTR

- **Chandrahara**
Circles of sweet dough flavoured with saffron, folded over into triangles and deep-fried; Dh10
- **Rava idli**
Steamed semolina cakes; Dh11.5
- **Filter coffee**
Southern Indian-style brewed coffee; Dh6
- **Badam halwa**
Milk-based almond pudding; Dh8
- **Masala dosa** ▶
Potato-stuffed rice crêpe; Dh15



A taste of Tehran

Cafe Nadery, inspired by the legendary Tehran salon of the same name, opened in New York last year with the intention to provide a space for Iranians and non-Iranians to socialise and share ideas and art. **Jessica Holland** reports that the food is fab, too



On a recent Sunday afternoon in Cafe Nadery, the Iranian cafe and social space that opened last summer in New York's Greenwich Village, young Iranian-Americans were perched at the bar, thumbing through their phones, reading, Skyping on iPads and drinking glasses of Persian tea (refills are just a dollar; Dh3.7). A table of middle-aged patrons laugh raucously; elsewhere a young family and a couple play backgammon. Conversation can be heard in at least three languages.

Nadery isn't the first place to serve New Yorkers Persian food, but it's the first to do so while prioritising a lively, intellectual atmosphere over financial profit. Taking inspiration from its Tehran namesake, an icon of Iranian coffee-house culture where philosophy and art would be chewed over by literary luminaries in the 1940s and 1950s, the cafe hosts events almost every night. These range from oud and kamancheh recitals to poetry nights, art exhibitions, football matches, discussions in Farsi and even the Super Bowl.

"We are not looking to get people inside and then get them out so the next person can come in," says Nahzi Nikki, one of the 21-strong collective of shareholders who own the cafe. "Our philosophy is quite the opposite: to have a gathering place. That is why it will not necessarily be a huge business success, because that was never our aim. We are hoping to be a huge cultural success."

In addition to the events, this means providing books, newspapers and magazines; having fast Wi-Fi connectivity, plenty of power outlets for laptops, and an online subscription to *The New York Times*; and making sure everyone feels welcome to linger.

The food is a sophisticated mix of Persian and American fare, with several wholesome vegetarian options. A beet burger with

white cheddar and tamarind date chutney is popular, as is saffron ice cream and ash-e reshteh: a gumbo-style stew, fragrant with mint, fried onions, turmeric and the tangy, whey-like product kashk. A weekend brunch menu includes mimosas and medjool-date omelettes, while hand-blended tea comes in varieties that contain rose petals, cardamom, lavender and violets.

"Los Angeles has a lot of really good Persian food but New York really doesn't," says Robin Foroutan, a nutritionist who came to Nadery on a week night to eat at the bar

Jewel rice is flavoured with orange zest, dried fruit and cardamom.
Courtesy Shohreh Dorudi

and catch the Asghar Farhadi film *A Separation*, which was shown on two screens with English subtitles. "The restaurants that do exist are kind of formal."

Her companion, Nima Deaivari, is a lawyer who has his parents' names tattooed in Farsi on his inner wrists. "This place looked really cool," he says. "It has a nice, neighbourhoody feel to it, and the food's been really great. We're coming back on Saturday, with another Persian friend."

The head chef Shohreh Dorudi is the only member of the cafe's 21 investors to have experience in the food industry. The rest are professionals, business-people and academics. What unites them, Nikki says, is that they are all Iranian-American, and they all believe in cultivating a community.

"When we come together at the cafe, we will do whatever is necessary," she says. "We will wash the dishes, or clean, or be hosts, because we are doing this out of love."

Whichever measure of success is used, Cafe Nadery seems to be thriving. It was given the seal of approval by the *New Yorker* magazine recently, and celebrities have even been spotted at its tables.

A few months ago, a diner snapped a photo of the actress Susan Sarandon eating at Nadery, and posted it to the cafe's Facebook page. On seeing it, Nikki recalls with a cackle: "A chef asked the manager, 'How come you didn't tell me she was here? I would have made sure that everything was perfect.' And the manager replied: 'I didn't know you would be interested. If you're interested, Michael Douglas was here the week before.'"

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recipe

Jewel rice

By the chef Shohreh Dorudi

Ingredients

- 1 cup dried orange zest or 2 cups fresh orange zest
- 4 cups matchstick carrots
- 1/2 cup unsalted slivered almonds
- 1/2 cup slivered pistachios
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground saffron
- 1 cup zereshk (barberries)
- 1/2 teaspoon rosewater, optional
- 2 teaspoons powdered cardamom
- (The dried orange zest, rose water and zereshk can be found in Persian grocery stores)

Method

- 1 Place the dried orange zest in a small pot, pour over 2 1/2 cups water and boil. Drain and return

- orange zest to the pot. Repeat 3 times to take away any bitter flavour. Then drain and set aside.
- 2 Place orange zest, sugar and rose water, plus 1 cup of regular water in a pot. Cover the pot and cook over medium-low heat for about 30 minutes, until the juice becomes a thick syrup. Then add 1/2 teaspoon ground saffron, stirring occasionally for 2 minutes.
- 3 Remove from the heat, add cardamom, almonds pistachios, zereshk, carrots and mix well.
- 4 To serve, place a layer of rice on a serving dish, then a layer of orange zest mixture. Combine well and serve with chicken.