

EatingRichly.com suggests you **preserve avocados for a year by mashing them up and freezing them**. The process is pretty simple: peel and pit the avocados, mash them up with a little lemon juice, then seal the mash in an airtight plastic bag in the freezer. They should keep for a full year



BiCe at Hilton Dubai Jumeirah Resort and The Walk is relaunching its brunch spread. The modern Italian restaurant prepares salads, mains and desserts to order, which will be served at the table. Brunch on Friday is from 1pm to 4pm for Dh295 and Dh395 with selected beverages



Homestyle cooking

In India, home-run catering businesses are becoming the preferred option for takeaway food. **Priti Salian** reports

For many Indians, celebrating an occasion means calling friends and family home for a feast of the choicest food and drinks. And a large number now trusts home-run catering businesses more than well-known restaurants for food takeaways and deliveries. The reason for this shift in choice is more than pure economics. Fresh, hygienic, made-to-order food often cooked by the lady of the house herself and personalised services make these home-based caterers the preferred choice. We introduce you to a few of India's most popular catering businesses run from home by Muslim women and ask their loyalists what they like about them – besides their lip-smacking homestyle food.

Huma Ali of Colonnade Caterers

The Bangalore-based Huma Ali is busy in her kitchen all day, but if a customer drops by for a pickup, she asks with a smile: "Why don't you stay back for a cup of tea?" "It is the rapport I've built with my customers that makes my work so interesting," she says. It has also given her devoted customers.

Setting up a catering business was something Ali, 48, had not dreamt of before marriage. She barely ever visited the kitchen in her mother's home but she picked up a lot of tricks from her mother-in-law. Appreciation and encouragement from family followed, which led her to start a catering business serving continental food out of her home. "I always wanted to have something to call my own which would fill my days and give a purpose to my life," says Ali. At the same time, running a home-based business gave her the option of working from home, which suited her. Today, after 20 years, Ali is a specialist at Indian, Chinese, Burmese, Thai and Mexican cuisines besides biryani, which remains her most popular dish.

Dolly Fatehi of Dolly's

This 72-year-old Iranian married a Bohri Muslim and picked up tips and tricks of typical Bohri cooking early in her married life. But it was only in 1997, after she left her full-time corporate job and a food critic coaxed her to use her cooking skills for business, that Dolly Fatehi opened up her home



Above left, Anisa Siraj's son Mohammed Saad shops for fresh fruit at the Russel Market in Bangalore. Right, Anisa Soraj cooking at home. Photos by Subhash Sharma for The National

kitchen for orders. Fatehi is known for her prawn pulao, dhansak, khichda, Bohri kababs and green tikkas all around Colaba in Mumbai, where she lives. When asked why her food is so popular, Fatehi had a prompt reply. "I'm very careful with my cooking. I wash the meat myself, prepare fresh spices regularly and even remove the oil the chicken leaves before sending out a delivery." Fatehi's food is non-greasy and preferred even by the health conscious. "What we cook for others is what we eat ourselves," she says.

Anisa Siraj of Anisa's Kitchen

"If you want to experience the flavour of your grandmother's food, you will love what we serve," says Anisa Siraj, who is extremely popular for the authentic Kutchi Memon food that she rustles up for food lovers in Bangalore. Siraj, in her 50s, began working out of her home 30 years ago with the support of her husband. Now her sons, Yassir and Saad, have joined her, too. "My cooking packs tips from my mother who taught me how to



Kishwer Khan in her kitchen.

cook and motivated me a lot when I first started out," Siraj says.

Kutchi Memon cuisine is a delicacy and not freely available in India, which makes it all the more desirable for those who have tasted it. Siraj's Memon dum biryani, shikampur, khichda, warqi samosas, kheema naan, Madina roti and paayas are stuff people swear by, though she also deals in continental food. "We have a lot of corporate customers, too, who order our food regularly for its authenticity and unique taste," she says.

Shabeena Naseem of Shabeena Naseem's Kitchen

Shabeena Naseem's kitchen is open all day and produces one of the best biryanis in New Delhi. However, when Naseem, 54, started her home-catering business in 1994, it was because of her passion for cooking and motivation from her family. Little did she know that someday her patrons would include the who's who of the city. "I learnt to cook from my mother and am now carrying her heritage forward," she says with pride. Today, her daughter Sahar is running a culinary school in her name to do the same for her mum.

"There's a different combination of spices in each of our dishes which gives them a unique taste. We take no shortcuts in our cooking," Naseem says, adding,

this is what has earned them their faithful customers. "We're also known for the quantity we serve. Our portions of biryani are good to feed 10 people," says Naseem. Her specialities include shammi kebabs, mutton korma, chicken kofta and Shabeena's special eababs, among others.

Kishwer Khan of Mrs Khan's Biryani

Kishwer Khan was in Class 7 when she cooked biryani for the first time under her mother's guidance. "My father was so happy with my cooking that I became the official biryani cook of the family for all gatherings," says Khan. After marriage, one of her neighbours who had tasted her biryani asked her if she would take a small party order and Khan agreed. Since then, Khan, who's now touching 50, has added delicacies such as pepper chicken, fried fish, chicken kebabs and desserts such as muzaffer and carrot halwa to her repertoire. Hers is a family-run business where she is assisted by her husband and two sons, Umar and Sabran, who take care of everything from delivery to serving food the correct way. Khan likes to cook everything herself and ensures that the ingredients that go into her food are absolutely fresh and clean. "My food is light on the stomach, which is what adds to its popularity," says Khan. "No one complains of heaviness even after consuming big portions."

customer speak



Javed Shariff, centre, enjoys food from Anisa's Kitchen with his daughter Sanam and son Ejaz at his home in Bangalore.

The loyal customers who keep coming back for more

"Naseem has worked out the perfect balance between meat and rice in her biryanis. Her food appears to be cooked with care and she maintains the taste we love, each and every time." **Ashish Mohanty, New Delhi, Shabeena Naseem's customer**

"Ali's food is authentic and fresh. The flavours are unique and the food is not too oily or too spicy." **Tara Anand, Bangalore, Huma Ali's customer**

"Siraj serves original, superb quality, Kutchi Memon food in Bangalore, which I often carry along to Dubai as I've yet to find anything to match its taste there." **Roshanara Sait, Dubai, Siraj's customer**

"Fatehi's homestyle Bohri food is immensely popular with my family and friends. It is tastier and more economical than any top restaurant." **Anuli Katakam, Mumbai, Fatehi's customer**

"I trust Khan's cooking completely for its wonderful taste and hygiene. She has never made me wait for my orders and her service is very personalised thanks to the family's involvement." **Habeebae Kirmani, Bangalore, Khan's customer**

"Siraj serves the best Muslim food in Bangalore. Her recipes give the taste of grandmother's food which no restaurant can ever serve." **Javed Shariff, Bangalore, a customer**

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Delivery workers load cooked food for clients in Bangalore.