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Breaking fast in Sahara

Gerald Chuah

HIDDEN from the hustle and bustle of Jalan Bukit Bintang in Kuala Lumpur is an Arabian oasis.

The Sahara Tent in Fortuna Hotel in Jalan Berangan is one of the few restaurants in the city which offers authentic Middle-Eastern cuisine.

On stepping into the premises, guests feel as if they have been transported to an Arab country as they walk through a Moroccan arch, past palm trees and fountain in the courtyard.

Inside, one hears Arabian music while fabric settees and hanging ornaments create a cosy, Middle-Eastern feel.

Restaurateur and managing director Ala Sahih is an Iraqi-born New Zealander who has been in the culinary business for the past 16 years. He has two successful outlets in New Zealand.

He brought his operations to Kuala Lumpur two years ago to cater to Middle-Eastern tourists, who make up 80 per cent of his diners.

The popularity of the outlet has spread through word of mouth and now attracts many VIP guests, embassy officials and politicians.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi are among the VIPs who have visited the outlet.

Sahara Tent recently won the Culture, Arts and Tourism Minister's Special Award from Datuk Kadir Sheikh Fadzir for promoting tourism in Malaysia, putting it among one of the top restaurants in the country.

With the peak tourist season from July to September just ended, Ala is gearing up for the fasting month of Ramadan by bringing back his sumptuous buffet dinner.

It offers three soups, a variety of vegetables and salads, a choice of breads and four types of rice - beriani, tomato, kuzi and white.

For the main course, there is a generous choice of meat and vegetable dishes including spinach, potato and beans.

The highlight is Kharouf, a tender, succulent roasted whole lamb marinated in a special concoction of spices.

Grilled fish and a variety of chicken and prawn dishes are also available.

Complete the great meal with speciality dessert like Ladies Navel, an interesting concoction made from juicy apricots stuffed with almonds and simmered in honey, and Aphrodite, a Greek favourite made from shredded pastry strips with semolina and pistachio filling glazed with honey.

Sahih said it is an Arab tradition to have meals late, and it is common to find guests strolling in for dinner from 9pm onwards, and packing the place for the rest of the night. Food is served until 2am.

After a satisfying meal, one can stroll to the open courtyard for a smoke on the sisha water pipes at only RM10, refillable throughout the night.

Those who want to take home a souvenir can also visit the souvenir shop, which offers everything from jewellery boxes, rugs and ornaments to decorations.

Among the interesting items available are framed Quranic verses, handicraft, leather apparel, Arabian CDs, oil-based perfumes, incense and Arabian soft furnishing.

For the breaking of fast during Ramadan, yoghurt and dates will also be served. The buffet includes chilled soft drinks, coffee or tea. Guests can

also buy dates and dried apricots imported from Tunisia.

For Muslims, there is a surau available for prayers.

Sahara Tent is open for lunch from noon to 5pm. The buffet dinner is currently served from 7pm to 10.30pm on Friday and Saturday only. It will be available every day during Ramadan. The Ramadan spread is priced at RM35 for adults and RM17.50 for children under 12.

For inquiries and reservations, call 03-2144-8310.

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