

Reports of foodies driving from Dubai to Ajman for a meal have reached my watchful ears...

...my immediate thought was “Who in their right mind would do that?” - what with so many fantastic restaurants in Dubai...

...but then the suspicion surfaced: “Hmmm, it must be something really special to voluntarily traverse the Sharjah traffic jungle just for a bite to eat on the other side!”

And so I followed the trail to Gawalmandi restaurant, and I was rewarded with exceptional Pakistani food!



“Look, Abbu - another foreigner who thinks he knows about Pakistani food...”


Admit it, the thought did come to mind, didn't it! Well, true I am a foreigner, but my family was blessed with the charms of Pakistani cuisine since I was a child, and in 18 years in the UAE I have not only had the good fortune of sampling very many Pakistani restaurants, but good friends native of the country have enjoyed introducing their favourite homemade dishes, delighting in my ability to handle the spices - so, let's say I'm a foreigner who can recognize a good tasting Pakistani dish: fair enough?

So, was the trip to Ajman worth it?




Casual Dining at Gawalmandi Restaurant in Ajman









Absolutely YES!



Payaa



Gawalmandi

Lahore is globally known as the heart of Pakistan. It is Pakistan's second largest city after Karachi and is widely considered the country's cultural capital. The heart of Lahore itself is the Walled or Inner City, a very densely populated area of about one square kilometer. Founded in legendary times, and a cultural Centre for over a thousand years, Lahore has many attractions to keep the tourists busy. Apart from the presence of Historical Buildings, Wahga border and Gardens of Mughal era, Lahore is famous for its food all around the globe. The famous Gawalmandi Food Street is a traditional mark for years. The Gawalmandi Food Street is located near the Laxmi chowk, amidst many historic buildings including Bansaana-wala bazaar, Landa bazaar and Mayo hospital. Pakistani Desi Food is the specialty of this Food Street. The tourists from all around the world are eager to visit Lahore and explore the unique culture of Lahore. The culture includes the hospitable traditions, Kashmiri-Persian Architecture, Mughal buildings but above all the taste of Lahori food filled with spice and unique aroma. Some of most preferred dishes are Chicken Tikkah, Gosht Karahi, Fried Fish, Biryani, Murg Cannay, Dal Gosht, Paye, Mutton Boti Kebab, Murgh Handi and Tandooris. Desserts include Fallodah, Shahi Tukra, Firni and a lot more. For vegetarians there is a wide range of kebabs, pakoras, samosas and a lot more. The Gawalmandi Food Street houses a number of restaurants and local eateries. Every evening it emerges as one of the busiest streets in the city. It is always occupied by people, starting from dawn till late night. As it is said for New York that the city never sleeps, same goes for Lahore. The place is open twenty-four seven. It is regularly visited by the local people as well as tourists travelling to the city. The wide variety of food items available in the Lahore streets remains unparalleled. Time certainly hasn't diminished the relevance of what Spanish priest Fra Sebastian Manrique wrote some 400 years ago of the city steeped in history, "there are a great many shops, or more properly speaking, kitchens in which are sold meats of various kind..."



Casual Dining at Gawalmandi Restaurant in Ajman

Gawalmandi is a humble restaurant. It is tucked away and in a back street - either opened by someone with an astounding lack of sense of direction or by someone confident enough to believe that the delicacies served are powerful enough to lure diners in from afar.

And the latter is definitely the case.

The restaurant dining area is small, but the kitchen is large - immediately showing where the right focus is.

And it is cheerfully decorated.



Also with a delightful hand-painted mural:



But here comes the food!

The chicken arrives in a large cast-iron pan, straight off the fire, and that alone should make one nod in appreciation - traditional cooking methods call for traditional cooking utensils, and the venerable open cast iron pan (the karahi) has been the utensil of choice for generations, as it manages the heat wonderfully, especially for slow-cooked dishes that are left to simmer and consolidate the flavours - such as the Murgh Karahi.

(The half portion shown below!!! I imagine a couple of normal portions will feed half a cricket team!)





Casual Dining at Gawalmandi Restaurant in Ajman

Just one look at it and you know this is going to be delicious! The sauce is dense, utterly flavorsome, and the chicken meat is so tender, almost falling off the bone if you just look at it.

And then comes the bread...



Such care went into the preparation of a simple flatbread - would you believe the same care has gone into the dough, and the baking?

Absolutely - this is the best bread I have had the privilege of receiving at a restaurant table.

Try it and tell me I'm wrong.



I also tasted the chickpeas - Daal Chana Fried - also excellent: smoky foundation, creamy, then the spices come through: again, an unpretentious dish, but one with a history dating back thousands of years, and, in fact, one of the earliest legume crops.

Maybe our Gawalmandi cook can trace his ancestry to 5,000 years ago, where in the area where modern day Lahore stands, proudly in the Punjab region of Pakistan, people were growing and cooking Bengal gram (this type of chickpea). Because he sure knows how to tease out an amazing taste!

In fact, as a side note, Pakistan boasts archaeological finds from way back in the Stone Age, from the Lower Paleolithic, which began about 3.3 million years ago - so 5,000 years of delicious cooking is nothing on that scale.

In modern terms, Lahore Fort is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and Gawalmandi Food Street is a brief walk

copyright Paolo Rossetti, ask first for reproduction of contents (text, photos, etc.) - prosett@weekenduae.com

south, an area immensely popular for food - and now extending as far as Ajman by this wonderful restaurant, proudly sharing a unique cultural cuisine, with genuine recipes and without compromise.



And yet, meal completed, fully satisfied and satiated, and unable to finish, all that goodness came to a mere 37 dirham.

Ask me again why people would drive to Gawalmandi restaurant in Ajman...

