

Kids Welcome: Tanoreen

Posted by Aya Tanaka, February 15, 2011



[Photos: Aya Tanaka]

Tanoreen

7523 Third Avenue, Brooklyn NY 11209 (at 76th Street; map); 718-748-5600; tanoreen.com

Kids' menu: No

Kids' Amenities: High chairs

Best Dishes for Kids: Sambossek, mini pies, hummus, rice pilaf, lentil pilaf, yogurt

Cost: appetizers \$5.50-10, entrees \$16-18, desserts \$5-12

The ride to Bay Ridge might be long for some New Yorkers, but if the destination is Tanoreen, the much praised Middle Eastern restaurant in Bay Ridge, the effort is plentifully compensated. Chef Rawia Bishara produces food that is well-balanced and perfectly executed, and despite the bountiful portions of the entrees, the delicate harmony of spices and textures produces an indulgent restaurant experience that lingers in your memory without weighing in your stomach.

We were late for our 6:00 reservation on a Saturday night, but our host swiftly accommodated us on a table in their sun room. When we arrived the customers were mostly large families with kids, and as we left two hours later, they were older and younger couples on dates, and a few singles tables. Service was well informed and cheerful at the table. The three of us were seated at a large and comfortable four-seat table—a great setup since the food came fast and plentiful as soon as we ordered.



The cauliflower salad (\$6.50) featured battered and fried cauliflower transformed into a surprisingly delicate dish, tossed with lemon, tahini and parsley; the slight tartness of the dish comes from pomegranate molasses. The hummus (\$6), hearty with lemon and olive oil, was probably the lightest hummus I've ever had.

The mujadara (\$6), or lentil pilaf, was made with French lentils, cooked al dente, and vastly outnumbering rice—perhaps a bit short on the caramelized onions as well. My daughter is not too keen on lemon or parsley (complicated aversions to have in a Middle Eastern restaurant) so she really enjoyed the lentil dish. The sujok (\$8), described as "Armenian dried meat," was a garlic-heavy hard sausage, and came in a slightly spicy pepper sauce that my husband and I enjoyed.



The sambosek (\$9)— deep-fried pockets of dough filled with lamb (or vegetables)—were the second hit with my daughter, who skipped the wonderful cilantro-basil sauce, and deconstructed the pockets, devouring the minced lamb first, then the

fried dough. Meanwhile, we were delighted by the eggplant napoleon (\$9), a stack of two deep-fried eggplants interspersed with babaganoush and atop a tomato-basil chopped salad. The crispiness of the breaded eggplant provided great contrast to the light, cold and creamy babaganoush, and the tomato salad in turn contributed acidity.



Our last dish was a mixed grill (grilled chicken, grilled lamb, and kebabs) with rice pilaf and chopped salad (\$18). As we waited for it, Chef Bishara came out to the dining room to make sure her customers were satisfied with their meals. I had the opportunity to ask her what she thought would be a good dish for children, and she recommended we order the house-made yogurt to go on top of the rice pilaf (and if everything fails, chicken fingers with fries appear on the menu, too).

The meats were as expected, lemony, well-seasoned, and perhaps a little dry. The rice pilaf, made with vermicelli noodles, alongside the tomato-cucumber chopped salad and pickled cabbage, contributed with a nice, moist balance to the meats. In all its glory, the mixed grill was perhaps the least interesting dish we ate at Tanoreen. But Chef Bishara was right about the yogurt and rice: my daughter ate all her yogurt rice and proceeded to dip everything else in the leftover yogurt, too.



The signature dessert at Tanoreen is Knafeh (\$12), a baked sweet cheese atop phyllo dough and topped with rosewater and pistachios, but it requires a ten-minute wait for baking time, and it was getting late. Thus we opted for a Harissa (\$12) (no connection to the North African pepper paste!), a semolina and coconut cake soaked in rosewater syrup and topped with pistachios. The cake took its texture from coarse semolina, its scent from coconut, and its density from the rosewater syrup. The pistachios were a welcome crunchy addition to a great end of the meal. My only regret was to have to share—isn't that what we tell our kids to do?

When you go to Tanoreen, the best bet is to practice largesse—order widely, try many dishes, and take the leftovers for a Tanoreen redux the day after (despite us ordering quite a few dishes for our dinner, there were many more items on the menu that we wish we had tried, such as the baked eggplant, the kibbie, the grape leaves, and more). Most of the people I saw leaving the restaurant were carrying doggie bags.

About the author: Aya Tanaka teaches French literature and critical thinking in and around New York, and takes every opportunity to introduce her daughter to new tastes, at home and in restaurants.

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