

DINING OUT: Middle Eastern banquet at Tanoreen

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BY HEATHER J. CHIN AND HELEN KLEIN |

The legend of Tanoreen's exceptional food has spread far and wide, from the pages of the *New York Times* to lifestyle magazines in London hotels. But for all the droves of salivating tourists who arrive on weekends to her restaurant, owner and chef Rawia Bishara counts her neighbors as among her favorite visitors.

That is because the long-time Bay Ridge resident, mom and business owner, who runs the establishment with daughter Jumana, continues to be guided by her original vision of a restaurant that provides authentic and honest Middle Eastern cuisine, not far removed from what her own mother used to make by hand from fresh ingredients.

For example, the cold meze platter (not on the menu, so ask) is a delight to all the senses, its colorful array of a dozen vegetable-based appetizers (between \$2.50 and \$7 a la carte) tantalizing the palate with items as familiar as Hummus, Baba Ghanouge and rice-stuffed grape leaves and as homey yet unique as Mhammara, a rich red pepper purée mixed with walnut chunks and enhanced with pomegranate molasses; a refreshingly cool cauliflower salad drizzled with tahini; and a lightly tart mound of sautéed dandelion greens garnished with tiny curlicues of frizzled onion.

The hot appetizer platter (another off-the-menu special) also offers a savory spread of flavors and textures - Falafel that are soft-on-the-inside, crisp-on-the-outside; Lamb Kibbee that is a masterful dish of spiced chopped lamb that is breaded then deep fried; and Sambossek, which are like vegetable empanadas, whose soulful filling contrasts delightfully with the dough exterior.

Fatoush (\$8, small, \$10, large, extra for feta cheese) is also a win, the quintessentially Middle Eastern salad spiked with lemony sumac, mint and parsley.

Entrees include Spinach and Beef Stew (\$16) served alongside a savory mix of rice and vermicelli - comfort food with a twist provided by a squeeze of lemon and a dollop of coriander - and Chicken Fetti (\$18, \$24 made with lamb), which is shredded chicken bathed in a tart yogurt-tahini sauce and garnished with toasted pita shreds atop a bed of rice and vermicelli.

Whether you are dining alone, are on a date or are celebrating a big occasion, don't forget to try the offerings of the well-stocked bar, as Tanoreen's bartenders create signature cocktails to go along with their range of liquors and non-alcoholic beverages.

The Pomareen (\$10) smells and tastes strongly of the "fruit of the gods," while the Pistachio Martini (\$11) is a strikingly translucent lime green concoction of vanilla bean vodka, hazelnut and fruity apple flavors. But it is the Nazareth Sunrise (\$10) - named after Bishara's birthplace in Palestine - that captured our attention. We loved the combination of pear vodka, fresh orange juice and rose flower water, which tasted as beautiful and sunshiny as it looked.

At this point, whether you are hungry or not - and you probably won't be - you simply have to make room for dessert, especially the house specialty of Knafeh (large - \$12), comprised of cheese enveloped in shredded filo, glazed with honey, sprinkled with chopped pistachios and baked fresh upon order so that it is piping hot when served. It's well worth the 20-minute wait.

Tanoreen is one of those rare restaurants that both deserves the accolades bestowed upon it and never seems cowed by all the attention. So make sure to stop by, whether for a relaxing sit-down meal in the bright and beautifully decorated dining room or for a take-home order from their deli counter around the corner. You'll be glad you did.

Tanoreen

7523 Third Avenue

Brooklyn, NY 11209

718-748-5600

Free delivery in Bay Ridge. Catering and parties available.

Saturdays from 10:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.

Sunday from 10:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Tuesday through Friday from 10 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.

Weekend brunch available

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More about **Tanoreen**

- **ARTICLE:** DINING OUT: Taste of Bay Ridge is a grazer's heaven
- **IMAGE:** Rawia Bishara brought a platter of hot appetizers to the table.

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