

News monitored for: Yum! Restaurants



CHEF'S TABLE 48 HOURS

After three years of relentlessly treating friends and family alike to an expert taste of pasta, SUSMITA MUKHERJEE's meeting with an Italian chef changes her approach to food completely and gives her a great reason to flaunt it

DAY ONE 8 AM: DAY OF SUNSHINE

A good night's sleep ensures high levels of energy and that's exactly what I need for the long day ahead. At about 10 am, it was time to head to Muraban Road, next to the landmark Sterling Cinema. Setting into one of the front seats at the venue, I prepared to learn about the myths related to cooking the perfect pasta at Masterclass as the event is also called by the Italian chef. "Why do we add salt to the boiling water before we add the pasta?" asked Chef Luca Ciano. "So that the pasta does not stick to each other," I replied. "A common myth," he smirked. "The starch coating on the surface of a good quality pasta will not let it stick to another piece so if the pasta you cook is sticking then it has lost its starch coating and will not taste as good. The salt, we add to the water for the most basic reason, for taste," he replied while dexterously mixing the components of a sauce for the pasta he was preparing.

"Why do we heat the pesto sauce before adding it to the pasta?" he shoots at the audience again. "To enable to mix better with the pasta," replied another audience member. "If anyone of you heats the pesto sauce before adding it to the pasta, please stop doing it. There is no need for it. The pesto sauce is pre-cooked and needs to be added to the pasta and the hot pasta is enough to help it blend. Cooking the pasta with the sauce or heating the sauce will only rid it of aroma and flavours."

"Who's going to help us make the dough for the pizza?" he asks while Arjyo Banerjee, Pizza Hut's head chef, shares the right hand movements to spread the dough as a base for the hand stretched thin crust pizza.

Apparently, we, in India, despite our love for cooking and eating Italian cuisine haven't got it quite right. "The habit of Indians to boil or cook every ingredient of the sauce and not understand the virtue of the right oil is a major concern when it comes to Italian style of cooking," says the chef, waving a bottle of extra virgin oil vehemently at the audience.

"In India, I've seen people have pasta as an entire meal while in Italy, pasta is only a part of the meal and is served with the anti-pesto, a slice of the pizza and the dessert which balances the meal," he added. "It is incorrect to say that pasta is a fattening meal," pausing to admire the glow return in the many faces looking at him. "When taken in a reasonable serving along with its right accompaniments it is actually a very healthy diet." The meal was served to the audience along with a rose, white and red wine to suit the serving.

'Who says pasta is a fattening meal?'



Chef Banerjee with Chef Ciano

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— CHEF BANERJEE

5 PM: GETAWAY TO GATEWAY

Stumbling out into a surprisingly dry Mumbai evening, it was the best decision to take a journalist friend along to see the Gateway of India. Walking along the cobble paved way amid hundreds of other tourists waiting for the sunset, a cup of cutting chai brought back the sweet taste of reality in me. The rest of the evening was spent in the more useful indulgence along Colaba's fashion street. Ah! Liberation from money never felt as nice!

11 PM: BACK TO BEDFORDSHIRE

Sprinting on high heels across Mumbai for a day was not such a good idea after all. I manage to pull my aching calf muscles into

bed with me, despite their threats to fall off with a promise of switching to my newly bought flat footwear for the next day. The sound of the "city that never sleeps" recedes to the background as I fall into a deep sleep.

DAY TWO

9 AM: MORNING SURPRISE

Still reeling from the information overload from the previous day, I wake up to the realisation of the fact that I want to try the suggested tips on my own before I can take them seriously. Bags have been packed and I'm on my way to a friend's place to treat them to the authentic taste of Italian pasta.

11 AM: MULUND BOOM

I buy the suggested garnishing and basic essentials for the pasta along the way to my friend's place. Once there, I waste no time in finding my way into the kitchen and making myself at home there. I bring the water to a boil before adding salt, first, and the pasta to it as I learnt the previous day. Instead of letting the pasta to cook on one side, I regularly break the boil with a sieve, pulling out strands of my fettucini to test the feel as Chef Banerjee had shown. On the other side, I prepared my regular white sauce with black pepper and looked happily at the still canned bottle of pesto sauce which I had not added to the sauce I was preparing. When the pasta reached the right consistency, I sieved it and kept it aside in a large container. Added the white sauce to it and coated a proportionate amount of the 'unheated' pesto sauce. Voila! By the looks it seemed as if the chef had managed a miracle in me but the ultimate test was pending. My friend's family willingly offered to conduct the same. Minutes later, I was taking a polite bow before the family for my extraordinary preparation. And thus, Chef Ciano and Chef Banerjee managed to rescue a reckless Indian cook from a mythical culinary experiment with the gift of a true Italian delight.

7 PM: HAPPY HOMECOMING

Well-fed and rested, I stopped at a departmental store to pick up a few more bottles of the extra virgin olive oil and balsamico for the homecoming party back in Delhi on the way from the airport.