



Fruit and Nut, Vanilla, Mango and more topped with chocolate sauce and nuts



Blueberry, Mango, Fruit and Nut, Chocolate, Strawberry and Vanilla.... so many mouthwatering and scrumptious choices topped with equally delectable toppings. Staring at the menu I was lost and confused.... Which one should I choose? Maybe I should have the Vanilla Double Cut Nut or then again maybe the Sunday Special? Still pondering I glanced around me.... surrounding me was the warm laughter, chatter and the sweet aroma of ice cream that encircled the Rio Ice Cream shop in Jaffna.

Words Krishani Peiris Photographs Menaka Aravinda and Damith Wickramasinghe

After roaming around the town of Jaffna under the blazing hot sun we thought of seeking some shelter from the scorching heat while indulging in something cool and refreshing to replenish our energy. ☐Rio Ice Cream! - was the first thought that crossed our minds. Accordingly, asking directions we made a straight-line towards the ice cream parlour located near the Nallur Kovil.

A large two-storey construction painted in white, flagged with Areca Palm trees and Rio Ice Cream spelled out in Tamil, Sinhala and English announced that we had arrived at the correct place. Stepping inside, we stopped at the counter and started to eagerly leaf through the menu - impatient to experience the much famous flavours available at the parlour. Various blends of chocolate, strawberry, mango, pineapple, vanilla, fruit and nut and blueberry adorned the pages of the menu... Fruit Salad Ice Cream, topped with various fruits, Jelly Ice Cream with vanilla, strawberry and jelly, Mixed Ice Cream fused with vanilla, chocolate, mango, strawberry and blueberry and many more made it almost impossible for us to settle with just one selection. However, after much time spent going back and forth through the menu, we succeeded in placing our order.

Curious as to what goes on in the room behind the counter area, we shuffled towards it to encounter workers busy preparing various mixtures of ice cream. Small workstations with red dispensers, containers full of differing flavours of Ice Cream and toppings such as nuts, pineapple, jelly and other yummy tidbits surrounded the room. As we watched, one worker scooped out a large helping of chocolate ice cream and proceeded to sprinkle chocolate sauce and nuts on top - the end result, a scrumptious-looking Chocolate Double Cut Nut, ready to be served to an eagerly waiting customer.

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Rio Ice Cream was originally situated in the Main Street of Jaffna and was established by the father of Ratnam Jeyabaskaran. However, as the current owner he decided to relocate to the current location in 1998 while expanding the flavours offered to encompass varying tastes in an endeavour to offer something unique to the customers. Now, about 20 employees work relentlessly under the owner's caring supervision to prepare the ice cream and to serve the customers. Relaying his sentiments about Rio he said, "the price of the ice cream is kept at a comfortable level so that many can enjoy the ice cream without any qualms."

Retracing our steps to the outside seating area, we sat down at a table. Here, I let my gaze wander over the ice cream parlour - people from all ages sat at tables chattering to their hearts content while savouring the delicious looking ice cream and other goodies. Families with little children, friends and people visiting from all over the island were spread around Rio Ice Cream, which emanated a warmth that eased all hearts. Waiters dressed in blue scurried back and forth carrying one order after the other to the tables while a steady trickle of people kept flowing in and out of the store.

A waiter appeared carrying a tray of vegetable rolls. Taking one whiff of the delicious smell that wafted from the rolls we all dug in, munching and savouring the spiciness and zest that consumed our tastebuds. Soon after, a tray laden with ice creams of various hues was set atop our table. Having ordered the Vanilla Double Cut Nut, I eagerly delved my spoon into the ice cream and tasted it. At once my senses were filled with the wholesome creaminess that enveloped the Ice Cream. Relishing in the sweet taste of Vanilla, I closed my eyes slowly indulging and delighting in the traces of chocolate and nuts. The uniqueness of the ice cream was the creaminess that engulfed each scoop and we each took turns to taste the different flavours such as mango, blueberry, and chocolate that we ordered.

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Each flavour had its own distinct taste, but blueberry was the ultimate favourite. The purple colour and the creaminess mixed in with the slight tangy flavour piqued our tastebuds and each bite was a delight. Not satiated with just one helping we did not hesitate to order again pouring over the atypical names of the different ice creams that adorned the menu. Sunday Special with strawberry and chocolate topped with cherries, Special with blueberry, chocolate and fruit and nut, Kithul nuts with vanilla, kithul syrup and nuts... and the list goes on and on with equally palatable flavours and infusions. Next to us a little kid was savouring the Jumbo Ice Cream, complete with smarties he was eagerly picking off, enjoying the special outing with his parents. Many around not only indulged in the ice creams that Rio offered, but they also found pleasure in tasting the different sweets such as bombay sweets, *bundi laddu*, musket, different juices and drinks and many more that permeated the shop.

“We think about the quality and we use the proper balance to make the best possible ice cream to serve the people,” said Ratnam Jeyabaskaran and as time wore on I realised that the special taste of Rio Ice Cream has won the hearts of young and old alike. As dusk settled, we sat there, slowly enjoying the uncommon tastes, listening to the friendly chatter surrounding and enjoying the peace and calm while appreciating this unique experience that does not come our way everyday.

Rio Ice Cream

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