

Café Français by Pourcel: Exquisitely French

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View from the alley: The chic and casual ambience

Michelin Starred Chefs, the Pourcel brothers fell in love with Sri Lanka on their very first visit to the country and the thought to open an authentic French bistro where no other existed seemed fitting. One and a half years later, Café Français by Pourcel opened its doors as the first of its kind.

Words Prasadini Nanayakkara

Once they had set sights on an ideal location, one that was frequented by pedestrians, months of meticulous planning ensued to bring about a restaurant that was about more than fine dining. The Pourcel brothers envisioned a place to discover and indulge in French cuisine in ease and comfort. As a result, a high-end bistro-style French café sits today in casual elegance along the cobblestone alleyway down Park Street. Its authentically French beginnings are impressed upon guests on entering; its interiors furnished with French décor and covered with framed photographs of Paris, celebrated actors and singers of the country. The lounge space is furnished with stylish high back wing chairs for plush comfort while stools and chairs are set outside for an alfresco experience.

The Café is all about discovering and indulging in authentic French cuisine fit for the seasoned connoisseur, all the while unwinding in casual comfort. It is devoid of the austerity of fine dining, and instead infused with a friendly and upbeat atmosphere, particularly on Friday evenings and weekends when the café is busiest. Diners can pick their preference from alfresco, lounge or the more mellow interior spaces whether they are looking to grab a quick meal or dine in privacy and comfort. To convey its congenial nature, chic and stylish interiors are complemented with rustic touches like meticulously hand-cut tiles. Moreover, obliging staff members are ever-ready to explain the items on menu for those unfamiliar with French cuisine.

The cuisine is the main focus at the Café Français by Pourcel, with textures, subtle flavours and careful presentations combining to offer a culinary journey to diners. At

Café Français, dining is not simply about indulging the palate but an emotional and sensory experience, as is made evident from the meticulous detail and care in the preparation of its complex dishes.

A popular stop for breakfast, the Café opens its doors at 8:30 in the morning for those regulars who wish to enjoy freshly baked croissants and pain au chocolat or even eggs the way they prefer, be it scrambled or eggs benedict. Past breakfast time, a tapas menu is available at the lounge bar throughout the day, while an à la carte and set menu is offered for lunch and for dinner. Patrons can expect finesse in preparation with only fresh produce used for each dish. Seafood is a specialty at Café Français, offering a celebration of flavours and textures with prawn ravioli, grilled sea bass, grilled calamari with lemon confit and the full fresh lobster grilled in its shell—which is one of the most popular recipes of J & L Pourcel around the world—amongst the choices. All in all menus encompass cuisine with complex and contrasting flavours and myriad textures typical of French food. For the novice dining here it is about getting acquainted with dishes and their names. For instance Pissaladière Tart is a traditional dish from the south of France—a pastry covered in caramelised onions, anchovies and grilled calamari.

A famous French dish and a favourite amongst customers is the Beef Tartare, a combination of raw beef tenderloin specially brought down from Australia, capers, gherkins, mayonnaise and tabasco amongst its rich combination of ingredients prepared into a terrine. Desserts are also specialties here and Café Français is already famous for its vanilla and chocolate giant profiterole, while the lemon tart is a light and airy traditional favourite.

Apart from the cuisine, there are special events such as ‘Mademoiselle’, which takes place every Friday evening from 7 to 8pm, where ladies are invited to indulge in a traditional evening and choose from a list of homemade cocktails. Evenings are indeed the best times at Café Français, when its atmosphere comes alive with diners easing into the late hours. Another event that hopes to spark an annual tradition is Symphony Evenings held on Sundays, where classical music is played as the background music for dinner.

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