Curry Leaf: The Sri Lankan Restaurant at the Hilton Colombo

Posted on



Curry Leaf, a truly Sri Lankan experience in the heart of Colombo

The batter sizzled as it slumped into the oil, metal clattered at the kottu station, a hopper was artfully tapped off the pan and the aroma of curry filled the air. The Curry Leaf at the Hilton Colombo is indeed a melting pot of Sri Lankan Cuisine.

Words Keshini de Silva | **Photographs** Menaka Aravinda and Vishwathan Tharmakulasingham

The iciness of the damp, rainy evening disappeared when we entered Curry Leaf that was bathed in a warm glow.

Tunes of the Sithar and Serpina complemented the tangs promised by

mouthwatering aromas in the air. Structures with palm thatched roofs held by rope wrapped poles, all huddled in like a village. From the décor, to the music and home-grown feast, we were entreated to a truly Sri Lankan experience.

Upon our approach, a lady in the traditional reddai hattey (cloth and jacket) made the oil dance as she dipped a kokis mould into the hot pan. She was surrounded by traditional Sri Lankan sweetmeats including a fresh batch of crunchy *Karapincha* (curry leaf) Kokis, a fitting welcome.

The main dining space provides an open and outdoorsy ambience ideal for their buffet feast. As we sat facing the fountain, dishes of fried *handella*, chickpeas and bite-sized wadai were served. Crunching into a crispy *handella* while enjoying the soothing flow of water, now that is an unforgettable experience.



The homely atmosphere at the Curry Leaf

The cuisine served at Curry Leaf is stirred around a single concept; to provide diners an opportunity to encounter all corners of Sri Lanka. It is a goal realized by their dream team chefs; Sous Chef Amila who specializes in Island cuisine from the Island’s South and Junior Sous Chef Saba whose expertise lies in Northern Sri Lankan fare. Chef Amila believes that the true soul of Southern food lies in the homely rustic, village kitchen. From Matara himself, he endeavors to recreate for the diners the nostalgic flavours of his childhood, ‘his grandmother’s cooking’. One of the chef’s favourite preperations is the Matara Polos Ambula, a vegetarian dish that will surprise you at first bite. Chef Saba, learned his art in the North and

nurtured his skill through overseas stints, especially at hotels in the Middle East. For Chef Saba nothing represents the exotic spices of the Northern Peninsula better than the gleaming, mouthwatering Jaffna Mutton Curry that will soak up a buttery Naan and the *Karawa Kool,* a hearty, palatable seafood soup with cuttlefish being the star.

Yet, that’s not all that is served here. As you dine at the Curry Leaf your plate will be filled with ample servings of classics such as Brinjol Pahi, Kehel Muwa with tempered cashew, string hoppers or much-loved street food like kottu and even mini vegetable rotti.

The heart of the spread here is the Seafood Market. On crystal-like ice, the freshest catch from the ocean beckons your attention. You merely point at your choice of seafood and tell the chefs just how you want it prepared; with a pleasant nod they will comply, persevering to create the best version of the dish. If you are too overwhelmed with choice, merely ask for a recommendation; everyone here is ready to help. The Seafood Market is also part of the Curry Leaf buffet, however if you wish to try the Jumbo Prawns or Mud Crab there will be a supplementary charge. And try you must, as the Jumbo Prawns curry and Kochchi Chili flavoured Mud Crab are lasting flavours that will surely make your little taste buds tingle when you remember your experience in tropical Sri Lanka.


The Chefs: chef Saba and Amila

In a little hut outside, dainty hoppers blossomed in a *thatchiya* (pan), its thin edges in the shape of petals. In another was prepared intriguing Beetroot Hoppers, now that's something you do not come by everyday. It is testament to the innovative energy at Curry Leaf, where while the team does strive to serve guests authentic flavours, a contemporary spin is added at times to keep things lively.

In a matter of hours, at Curry Leaf, you will be transported on a culinary adventure throughout the country. It is a voyage that will keep you coming back for more; and on each visit you will relish a new experience.

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