Shri Vani Vilas for pure Indian vegetarian fare

Posted on
Clockwise from left: Jumbo naan, kadai paneer, paneer butter masala and stuffed capsicum

The pleasantly overwhelming aromas of ‘pure Indian vegetarian food’—as they call it—ushered us into the Shri Vani Vilas, which was buzzing with activity. For over five decades, this restaurant has been the only one of its kind in Colombo, serving the freshest of Indian fare to connoisseurs who keep returning for a taste of true indulgence.

Words Hansani Bandara **| Photographs** BT Images

The restaurant was founded in 1956 by Shri Subba Rediyar, and a decade later the operations were taken over by Shri Subbaraman, which turned a new chapter in its journey. Since then it has served thousands of customers, marking a firm presence in the industry. And what began as a humble establishment is today one of the most popular restaurants in Colombo. Busy waiters hurrying themselves to tables with large plates of steaming dosa, vadai and pots of curries, the constant clatter of tea

making, action-packed counters, and people either eagerly waiting until their food is served or eating away with enthusiasm, are some of the morning scenes at Shri Vani Vilas. Nestled amidst the urban landscape of Messenger Street, it is hard to miss, with the newly renovated façade of two storeys. Ground floor houses the Shri Vani Vilas restaurant, dedicated for Indian vegetarian cuisine. The restaurant can accommodate up to 90 guests in one sitting. There are also separate sweet and juice counters serving an array of Bombay sweets and fresh fruit juices.

The upper floor is reserved for Vijaya Vani Restaurant—also part of Vani Vilas—which is for fine dining, and can seat up to 72 guests. Quite contrary to Shri Vani Vilas, Vijaya Vani exudes a calm and quiet ambience complemented by light Indian instrumental music playing in the background throughout the day. An interesting features are the table mats, which have activities for children such as connecting the dots and finding the way through the maze. This was a novel idea to keep youngsters occupied until their food is served. Apart from authentic North and South Indian fare, Vijaya Vani also serves vegetarian Chinese and Sri Lankan cuisine.

One look at their menu and you are spoilt for choice, given the plethora of dishes that takes one on a unique gastronomical journey. However, true to the name it has been given, as the ‘Dosa King of Sri Lanka’, the restaurant’s most popular dishes are predominantly the Dosas, which are inclusive of Ghee Dosa (the most popular dish), Masala Dosa and Family Dosa. Apart from these, Chilli Vadai, Paneer Butter Masala and Butter Naan are also some of the most preferred dishes amongst the guests. The Assorted Platter—an assortment of mushroom, paneer, capsicum, potatoes and pineapple served on a steaming sizzler plater—is a popular dish served at Vijaya Vani. Fried Ice cream and Elaneer Payasam (tender coconut payasam) are some of the interesting dessert options to try.

The restaurant takes pride in promoting vegetarianism—a concept that is gaining rapid popularity in today’s world, as a healthier option of eating. Quality is a way of life at the restaurant and it is also one factor that has significantly contributed to its reputation. All ingredients and spices are sourced directly from India, while Ghee is specially brought down from Holland. The food is freshly prepared to order and no dish is kept for more than three hours. It is these strict quality standards that they adhere to that has been instrumental in earning them their loyal customer base who have patronised Shri Vani Vilas for generations.

It is amazing how decades of experience has made them maestros of what they do.

Hardly any food is wasted since the staff, by instinct know the exact amount of food that is needed to be prepared for either the morning or afternoon shifts. As such, this dedicated team is an integral part that forms the Shri Vani Vilas family. Having started the home delivery service recently, in future they are looking into initiating a system of online orders as well.

An ardent fan of Indian fare, I loved the experience I had at this age old restaurant, which continues to treat its patrons to a unique experience.

256 & 258, Messenger Street, Colombo 12
Tel: (+94 11) 243 1382
info@srivanivilashotels.com