



A RAMADAN FOOD WALK



Savouring the traditional cuisine of Hyderabad, Sandy and Vyjay walk the street leading to the iconic Charminar to have a taste of the various food served through the night during the holy month of Ramadan



Sabka kheench rahe ho, mera bhi kheencho. The words made us turn around. A boy stood there with an angelic smile, pointing at his shiny wares of trinkets. He was asking us to click his photograph too as he observed us trigger happy guys clicking away. That smile and the innocence of his face somehow seemed to epitomize the purity and sanctity of the holy month of Ramadan. The auspicious month commemorates the first revelation of the Quran to the Prophet Mohammed.

We were in Hyderabad doing a food crawl along the street that led to the Charminar. This was our first experience of Hyderabad during the month of Ramadan and it was nothing short of a revelation in itself. During the month, the nights seem to literally get transformed into day as vibrant night markets come up after sundown across Hyderabad. The entire city of Hyderabad reverberates with the vibes of pulsating activity but the charm around the streets and alleys around the Charminar is on a different level altogether. The streets glitter with the sheen of the famous Hyderabad bangles and colourful footwear vie with vibrantly hued clothes for your attention. But the aroma of thousands of kebabs and parathas wafts through

the air reminding you that food is the showstopper of the night.

Hyderabad, the land of the Nizams is the home of an exotic cuisine that has evolved into a fine art over the centuries. It is a fascinating blend of the best of Turkish, Mughal, Arabic, and local Telugu cuisine. Ramadan is the month during which one can get a taste of some of the dishes like the famous Haleem which are reserved exclusively for this period.

Haleem is a stew that was introduced to Hyderabad during the reign of the Nizams. Local spices fuelled the evolution of what is today famously known as Hyderabad Haleem, the first non-vegetarian dish to receive the Geographical Indication Status (GIS) tag in India. Hyderabad Haleem is traditionally prepared by cooking meat, pounded wheat, lentils, ghee, dry fruits with spices on a Bhatti or mud kiln for about 12 hours!

Thousands of outlets spring up in the city of the Nizams during the Ramadan month and serve Haleem. But a few of them pull in crowds like a lodestone with their bowls of Haleem which cost about ₹160 for a single serve. In our food crawl we visited three restaurants that whip up the best Hyderabad Haleem in the city. These were Shah



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Ghouse, Pista House, and Shadab, all at a walking distance from the Charminar.

The first Haleem pit stop was Shah Ghouse. The night was still young but the Haleem was flowing briskly, the staff moved around with alacrity serving the customers while a few were packing the Haleem in plastic containers with clockwork precision. Apart from the Haleem which hogged the limelight, the restaurant also sold desserts like Kaddu Ki Kheer, Qubani Ka Meetha, Double Ka Meetha, and others.

We were greeted by a brilliantly decorated Pista House which was the next stop on our food walk. The Cafe, like all others, had extended counters on the street which was teeming with people eager to get their dose of the exotic dishes that lined up the counters. The place seemed to be a sea of green with the staff turned out in smart Pista green dresses. A mammoth screen captured the images around the restaurant. Young boys served the Haleem and some desserts which looked temptingly irresistible. The outside of the Pista House was a buzz of activity as we made our way inside and were met with mind boggling array of bakery products which included a variety of cakes, pastries, sweets, and the most delectable looking cookies.

"This outlet has been there, ever since I was born, so it must be definitely older than me," said a staff member at the Matwale Doodh Ghar where we had stopped for something to cool off with. This is another popular watering hole of Hyderabad which serves mouth-watering glasses of Lassi topped with sinfully rich cream. Another speciality of the Matwale Doodh Ghar is the Falooda, a dessert that originated in Persia and came to India in the 16th century and was later



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given a Hyderabadi twist by the Nizams who made it their own.

We slowly made our way towards the Charminar, where nestled in its shadow stands the Nimrah Cafe & Bakery, very close to the historic Mecca Masjid. The Nimrah Cafe & Bakery is an iconic landmark of Hyderabad and has been catering to the taste buds of locals and visitors alike for more than five decades. A cup of Irani Chai with some Osmania biscuits while standing outside the Nimrah Cafe, gazing up at the facade of the Charminar is almost de rigeur when in Hyderabad.

We walked past the Charminar and made our way towards our last stop of the food walk which was Shadab, a restaurant with a history that can be traced as far back as 1953 from when it had its humble beginnings. Shadab is known for its Haleem and, of course, the famed Hyderabadi Biryani which can be relished in the environs of its restaurant which has a vintage look.

A meetha paan that simply melted in the mouth drew the curtains on our Ramadan food walk. The aromas and flavours lingered as we drove back towards the Novotel Hyderabad Airport where we were staying. The innocent smile of a small boy selling his wares beneath the Charminar continues to haunt us as we relive the experience of the Ramadan food walk in the land of the Nizams, Hyderabad. **FE**

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