

Dine

SPECIAL PROMOTION



TURKISH DELIGHTS

Paul Panayi takes a trip to the middle-east, courtesy of a restaurant in Melbourne's south.

This hidden gem, Arabesque, is tucked away on a small side street in Elsternwick. I was first struck by the ambience of this place, with its mix of modern and the traditional. One is immediately impressed by the warm colour tones and excellent use of Middle Eastern décor. As with the décor, the dulcet tones of *Café del Mar* are interspersed with more traditional Middle Eastern Music. The overall effect was rather like being on holiday somewhere on the Mediterranean.

On arrival I was warmly greeted by the floor manager, Ergun, whose enthusiasm and hospitality made me quickly feel welcome and completely at ease. While I waited for my partner who was running terribly late, I enjoyed a number of excellent Middle East-inspired cocktails – each more delectable and refreshing than the last. These were original and eclectic refreshments inspired by Middle Eastern flavours; rose, orange-blossom and melon to name but a few.

As my other half was now hideously late, I took it upon myself to baton down the hatches and 'sample' some of the top shelf *Raki*, which I hadn't seen for many years. *Raki* is a Turkish unsweetened anise drink that is popular throughout the region, similar to the Greek *ouzo*. *Raki* is the Turkish national drink, and usually served with chilled water and ice. When 'Mister I'm-always-thirty-minutes-late' arrived at last, we were treated to what

can only be described as a true Sultan's Banquet.

The menu contained a number of *a la carte* and banquet options; each more sumptuous and delicious than the next. A quick perusal of the menu showed a strong Turkish influence in the food on offer, but some Moroccan, Mediterranean and other Middle Eastern influences as well.

We started out with a variety of dips and freshly made Turkish breads. The dips were smooth and creamy, rich and tangy, ranging from a subtle *babaghanoush* (eggplant), *tarama* (caviar), to a spicier *bieber* (capsicum). These also came with

a side of pickled vegetables, which gave a nice acidic piquancy to the start.

Quickly following on the heels of the dips were delectable offerings in filo pastry including spinach and feta triangles, and spicy lamb cigars. By this stage the Raki had set in, and the food was the perfect accompaniment to the beginning of this sumptuous feast. Did I mention that the stuffed vine leaves and char-grilled quail were also heavenly?

The mains we sampled included: North African-style prawns; succulent lamb cutlets with a delicious sumac crust; marinated grilled salmon steaks done in

Moroccan spices; and the Sultan Lamb Claypot of tantalizing lamb morsels lightly seared and served with pearl cous cous topped with a herbed haloumi and eggplant béchamel sauce, cooked for three hours. A Must! We also tried a fabulous grilled spicy *soujouk* sausage and the grilled beef *kofta* were juicy and delicious.

By this time we had eaten so much we didn't think we could entertain anything else – however the Turkish Delight ice cream, served with extra Turkish Delight was impossible to resist. I think this was perhaps one of the nicest ice creams I've ever had. There was also some baklava treats, which I couldn't resist with my Turkish coffee. These finished the meal beautifully, and by this stage I had eaten so much, I needed to be carried out of the restaurant.

This is the perfect place for a group of friends to get together over the Sultan's Banquet. The food was magnificent, truly authentic, and delicious at every turn. The service provided by the staff, particularly the floor manager, was fantastic, and the staff made you feel like a VIP from the moment you walked in, to when you left or rolled out in my case. The quality of the food, the splendid presentation, and great service all added to what was simply a wonderful evening.

I don't understand why *Arabesque* is not well known by Melbourne's dining public. It is infinitely better than the likes of *Maha Bar and Grill*, and to my taste and value for money wins hands-down over *Press Club* any day. I implore you to take yourself, take your partner, take your friends and enjoy Melbourne's own Turkish Delight, before the secret's out!



ARABESQUE MEZE BAR & GRILL

Address:

Shop 1, 1-3 Carr St, Elsternwick

Phone:

(03) 9523 1108

Website:

www.arabesquerestaurant.com

Cuisine - Middle Eastern

Open

Tues - Sun 6pm - 10pm

Wed - Fri 12pm - 3pm

Prices

Trio of Dips	\$18.50
Entree (Meze)	\$7.00 - \$18.50
Mains	\$26.00 - \$29.50
Banquet	\$27.50 - \$60.00 pp
Dessert	\$6.50 - \$8.50

Cards

AX, MC, V, DC, Eftpos

Wine

Succinct selection of well priced Australian, New Zealand and European wines, beer and spirits.

Seats

Approx 65

Proprietor

Fahrettin Elmas