



Essentially South Indian

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By **RENITA CHE WAN**

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Photos by **S.S. KANESAN**

THE people behind this restaurant take the quality of the food so seriously that all the spices are flown in from Chennai, India.

There is no such thing as leftovers when it comes to Saravanaa Bhavan as they cook the dishes every day from scratch so you can be assured that the food is always fresh.

With more than 20 restaurants all over the world, one cannot deny the success that Saravanaa Bhavan has achieved since it started operating in 1981.



Just too good to miss: Pandian showing off the gigantic vegetarian paper thosai.

Saravanaa Bhavan is a restaurant offering South Indian vegetarian cuisine and it has successfully established itself in countries such as the United States, Canada, Britain, Oman, Singapore and, of course, Malaysia. It is today one of the world's leading restaurants that specialises in South Indian dishes.

What's even more interesting to note is that the prices are affordable and the restaurant also sells different kinds of Indian titbits.

Snacks such as Badhusba, Jangin, Dry Fruit Halwa, Wheat Halwa, Bombay Halwa, Chestnut Halwa, Milk Kova and Pistha Burfi are some of the delicious items that the restaurant offers.

Saravanaa Bhavan manager S. Pandian says that in Malaysia, they have three restaurants – in Bangsar, Jalan Masjid India and its latest branch in Petaling Jaya.



Vegetarian Chicken Briyani

According to Pandian, it takes a special cook to prepare these kinds of dishes because not any average Joe is able to prepare vegetarian dishes.

“That's why we brought one of our best chefs to Malaysia to make sure that the quality of our food is as good as what you get in India,” he says.

P. Suresh, a 27-year-old lad, is already a chief chef at the restaurant and has been working for Saravanaa Bhavan for seven years.

When asked why he chose to be a chef at a vegetarian restaurant, this is what he says:



Vegetarian Spring Roll

“See, in Chennai especially, the level of poverty is really high and we cannot afford to eat luxuriously.

“We know that when we eat almost anything, we might fall sick and that would require more money to spend on medicines.

“But to me, it is not something I feel sorry about because I’ve grown accustomed to it and it is true what nutritionists say about being a vegan, we are much healthier and fitter than those who are not.”

Suresh, who is the second youngest of four siblings, says that although he has a younger sister, he was always the one to prepare the meals when his mother went out to work.



Puri and Paneer Tikka Masala

“I don’t blame them for not helping out in the kitchen because it has always been my thing to help my mother out whenever it concerns cooking,” says Suresh.

In fact, becoming a chef has been his ambition ever since he saw how hard his mother toiled in the kitchen to come up with meals for the family, and at juggling her time between work and taking care of the family at home.

So at only 16 years old, he decided to leave school and concentrate on helping the family out by working at a restaurant that was willing to take him in.

“Luckily, a friend of mine who was already working in Saravanaa Bhavan suggested to the boss to hire me and after I went to see Pandian, he immediately took me in,” says Suresh.



Gobi-65 Lemon (Fried
Cauliflower)

The young chef went out of his way to give *Sunday Metro* a sumptuous treat by preparing 10 different dishes.

They were the Vegetarian Chicken Briyani, Vegetarian Pulao Rice, Mushroom Manchurian, Gobi-65 Lemon, Vegetarian Mutton, Vegetarian Chicken, Vegetarian Spring Roll, Puri and Paneer Tikka Masala, Banana Leaf Meal and Chapati with a side dish of fried cabbage.

“The Banana Leaf Meal and the Vegetarian Chicken Briyani are the house specialities and I do suggest them if customers ask me what they should order,” says Pandian.

Sure enough, the Vegetarian Chicken Briyani was truly delicious and it took the writer and photographer only some minutes to wipe clean the entire dish.

If you would like to try out these dishes, the address is No.7, 52/2, Jalan Sultan, Petaling Jaya. The restaurant is just beside Public Bank in PJ New Town.

For details, call 03-7954 2755.