



(Left) Bu Ahmed's alley
(Above) An early breakfast

Noodles, Chuckles and Tradition

By Christina Fernandes

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Ever tried it Bahraini style?

There is indoor seating at Bu Ahmed's restaurant. I wish someone had told me this before I froze myself stiff having breakfast in a Manama Souk alley on a cold January morning. It was worth it though.

The restaurant is tucked away between the Gulf Pearl Hotel and the Abdulaziz Mosque off of Government Avenue near Bab al Bahrain. You won't find any fancy decorations here, just neat rows of simple wooden benches and tables.

"I started off with one shop, but now my restaurant spans the entire alley," says Bu Ahmed proudly. He has been filling Bahraini's stomachs since he moved here from Iran 48 years ago.

"I came here during the rule of Shaikh Salman, the current king's grandfather," he says.

Relaxing Affair

Eating at Bu Ahmed's is a relaxing affair. You will be taken care of by two servers, a baker, a cook, the restaurant's very own butcher and of course Bu Ahmed himself, who oversees everything from behind his table from five o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night every day.

"My busiest time is from eight to nine in the morning, especially on weekends," he says.

The crowd is mostly made up of men in *thobes* quietly enjoying their food and having the occasional chat and chuckle with Bu Ahmed. You may also encounter the milkman walking in to deliver his goods in two huge metal jugs.

Bu Ahmed's cook conjures up quite an array of dishes. Try his *balaleet* (sweet vermicelli noodles spiced with cardamom and topped with a fried egg) or, if you like it more savoury, go for *mahyawa* (bottled liquefied anchovies mixed with butter and spread on *khubuz*, the traditional bread). For those of the Indian persuasion, there's dahl with bread and if you don't feel like being adventurous, you can simply stick to *khubuz jubin* (processed cheese on bread). Carnivores will be pleased to learn that there's also lamb curry, kidneys, *kheema* (mince meat), tikka, lamb chops and other grills, all cooked freshly every day in the traditional Bahraini way.

Memorable Meal

While an opulent brunch buffet in a five-star hotel or continental breakfast in a chic café is enjoyable, your first meal of the day at Bu Ahmed's is in a league of its own. It's not only the tasty treats that should draw you to this place, but also the knowledge that you are doing something you could

only do in Bahrain, an experience that makes you feel truly connected.

Amid the ever-transforming urban sprawl of Manama, it is somehow comforting to come to a place that has stuck to the essence of its existence and continues to serve its patrons much as it has done for almost five decades — and Bu Ahmed's friendly face helps to start your day off right. ●



Milkman



Balaleet