

A SLICE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN



Ray's Café and Pizzeria adds a European touch to the Mumbai suburb of Bandra



Slucking into a slice of pizza we look around us with interest. We're sitting in the courtyard of Ray's Café and Pizzeria, a casual but chic eatery in the Mumbai suburb of Bandra, and quite frankly, we are enchanted. Bandra is home to innumerable little eateries but the cheerful yellow walls and street lamps that surround us make a truly attractive setting, and we look forward to the rest of our order with relish.



Owned by Rashmi and Hemant Mehta, this little eatery, so reminiscent of street side European cafes, serves a fine selection of pizzas, salads, burgers and sandwiches, coolers and desserts. It's a casual neighbourhood place that attracts regular customers who come not only for the food, music and ambience but also the personal touch that the Mehtas manage to give it.

"The place is named after our son Rehaan, who we call Ray," says Rashmi as she ensures we are comfortable, and stops to chat a bit. "It took us three and a half months to transform a 127-year-old structure, which looked every bit its age, into what it is today," she adds. "We wanted to keep the old charm with the courtyard and the wooden rafters inside. I wanted a Sicilian feel, hence the street lamps and yellow walls. I made the mosaic tables myself!"

The Mehtas, who have travelled across the world, and lived in California for three years, seem to have come home to a venture that is close to their heart. "I come

from a family of hotel and restaurant owners," says Rashmi. "So though Hemant is a computer systems engineer and I have degrees in fashion design, we decided this is what we want to do. We had opened a pizzeria in Mumbai 15 years ago after which I used to supply snacks to various nightclubs. Then we moved to the US where our son Rehaan was born."

Rashmi and Hemant both have a very hands-on approach to the café and feel no qualms about helping out the staff if needed. She admits, "We find that serving tables and doing chores like wiping tables clean is just a job and see nothing wrong with it. We believe in dignity of labour, something even our own son can't understand. He often says, 'Mom, stop cleaning the table - that's not your job!'"

It is this personal touch that ensures that the food coming out of their kitchen is well made and appreciated. Rashmi, who has taken short courses in cooking in Mexico, Phuket and California, assures us, "Our food is typical of a street side cafe/pizzeria anywhere in the US or Europe. The dough and tomato sauce is made fresh everyday."

Meanwhile we had been working our way through some crisp salads and pizzas grilled to perfection, and were quite replete after a satisfying meal. Warm and inviting, Ray's Café and Pizzeria is the perfect stop for a light meal if you're in the area – and if it gets too warm there's a little air conditioned section where you can cool off.

For those who don't live in Mumbai, here are some recipes that the Mehtas shared with us. Create your own Italian experience at home!