

Fullerton's Khan Saab: Awards for Halal Fare



BY **CHRISTOPHER TRELLA**

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45



Imran Ali Mookhi Founder, Chef Khan Saab

Khan Saab Desi Craft Kitchen in Fullerton offers one of the more unique, and acclaimed, culinary journeys in Orange County's restaurant scene, with a cuisine that's a mix of Pakistan, Indian and Afghanistan influences.

The restaurant has had quite the journey of its own: it opened in February 2020, a few weeks before the pandemic shuttered restaurants.

Fortunately, the restaurant survived the ensuing ups and downs, and is busier than ever.

The restaurant's success is due to Chef **Imran "Ali" Mookhi**, who has trained under numerous Michelin-starred chefs. His traditional Indian flavors have earned him recognition as Executive Chef at **Tamarind of London** in Newport Coast (now home to **A Crystal Cove**), **Tantra on Sunset**, and most recently **Tumbi** in Santa Monica.

Alcohol Free Bar

Khan Saab offers a halal menu that includes an impressive array of mocktails, a trend that's growing in popularity. The bar program, led by mixologists **Craig Nemeth** and **Ahmad Hosseini**, features craft mocktails alongside more traditional non-alcoholic beverages.

"When we opened, we were the only bar in California serving only mocktails, and the fourth in the nation," Mookhi said.

Mookhi is certainly the first in Orange County, and maybe Southern California, to create a concept like Khan Saab.

"I was born and raised in Pakistan, so why not come up with a concept and build a high-end restaurant," he said. "We came up with Khan Saab, and a menu where you get food from different regions. We have dishes from Afghanistan, from Pakistan, from India, and from Bangladesh. We focus on new street food but something different that no one has done."

Michelin Recognition

Coming up with the menu was challenging, Mookhi said. A lot of effort went into making seemingly simple dishes shine. The effort has paid off. According to the chef, patrons have been driving down from Los Angeles and San Francisco as well as traveling from other states. Of course, it helps that Khan Saab was recognized in the **Michelin Guide** with a **Bib Gourmand Award** two years in a row.

A significant portion of the menu at Khan Saab falls under the "Curry" category with dishes that range from classic Chicken Curry made with boneless leg, onion, tomato stew and Kashmiri chili to elevated options such as Shrimp Masala Curry which stews black tiger prawns with Goan onion, tomato and coconut masala curry.

The OCBJ Review

On my visit to **Khan Saab Desi Craft Kitchen** earlier this month, my server Sara expertly guided me through the menu and offered suggestions on their most popular items.

Upon her recommendation, I began with Sloppy Khan: keema pav wagyu beef chopped and spiced on gun-powder dusted pav. Essentially Chef **Imran “Ali” Mookhi**’s version of a sloppy Joe, these were not only fun to eat but flavorful without being overly spicy. After consuming both sloppy Khans, I told Sara I could eat these every day.

Next, she brought me Pani Puri, another Khan Saab specialty. This small puff pastry is filled with garbanzo, potato, onion and spiced mint. The four pastry balls are perched atop four small shot glasses filled with tamarind water.

“Pour the tamarind water into the puffed pastry and eat it in one bite,” instructed Sara. I did just that, and was rewarded with another fun, tasty dish.

The Sloppy Khans and the Pani Puri both came out on small carts with wheels, which added to the charm of the presentation.

My entrée, smoked beef kabob with top sirloin, yogurt, garlic, shallots and mustard oil with charcoal smoke, came out on a wood plank with a clear, smoke-filled dome on top. The dome was lifted, and the kabob appeared amid the smoke. Again, delicious, but I had one more dish to go.

The classic Chicken Curry came out in a large wok which revealed generous portions of boneless chicken leg swimming in tomato stew and Kashmiri chili. The flavors coated my palate and made me want to keep reaching for another helping, but by this time I was full so took the rest to go.

During my meal, I sampled a smoked Negroni mocktail made with Seedlip Spice 94, rose syrup and palo santo bitters. Like the kabob, it came out with a smoke presentation.

Khan Saab is open Monday through Friday 4 p.m. to 11 p.m., and weekends 2 p.m. to 11 p.m., allowing for a late lunch before the dinner crowd arrives.

Khan Saab Desi Craft Kitchen: 229 E. Commonwealth Ave., Fullerton, (714) 853-1081, khansaaboc.com

