

Home-cooked Malaysian favourites in Sydney

By ZIEMAN
zieman@thestar.com.my

Owner from Penang finds niche offering banana leaf concept and Asian staples in Australia

THE appeal of Amma's Modern Kitchen in Toongabbie, in the suburb of Sydney, Australia is not only in its delicious food. The charm has enticed Malaysian tourists and locals alike, who are full of praise for the exotic food.

Like any true Malaysian, founder and owner Amy Ramachandren, 39, craved for home-cooked food when she first arrived in Sydney some 10 years ago. But when the longing became too much, Amy decided to open a restaurant.

Although there are a few Malaysian restaurants around, Amy wanted the Malaysian-Indian food with a South Indian twist. The only place she could get the fix is at Kammadhenu Restaurant in Homebush, cooked by Sandra Ponniah.

"I miss my kind of food, so while working as an Account Receivable @ Order Processing Clerk at a public-listed logistic company in Sydney, I started planning to set up the Malaysian-Indian restaurant," said the businesswoman, whose real name is Tamilarasi.

Since she used to run a fish-head curry and crab masala restaurant back home, Amy knew how to set up a restaurant. And so, she called Auntie Ponniah and her brother, Devan Vallipuram to start Amma's Modern Kitchen in Homebush, Sydney.

"I chose the name Amma, which means, 'mother' in Tamil. There's nothing like mum's cooking and you just miss it wherever you are and that's how I want the taste to be," said Amy who now operates her restaurant at Aurelia St, Toongabbie in Sydney, Australia.

The place, which caters for 60 people, serves Malaysian curries, South Indian and Sri Lankan street food, freshly made *paratha*, *roti canai*, *murtabak* and also Chinese-Malaysian staples. She opened her restaurant in 2015.

The front of the restaurant is a takeaway counter with various curries, deep-fried snacks like vegetable/lamb/chicken rolls, chicken scotch eggs, *masala vadai* with chutney, *ulundu vadai*, fish cutlet, chicken/fish patties and Indian sweets.

During weekends, customers can look forward to salmon fish-head curry with okra and tomatoes.

"Our curries are different as we don't use coconut milk but they're still creamy. Red Snapper fish-head curry is also popular among Malaysians and Singaporeans. Our cooks are well trained and able to whip up good stuff in the kitchen," said Amy who used to be an accounts manager for Karpal Singh & Co.

Their banana leaf concept together with the other 'must-have' Malaysian dishes like nasi lemak, mamak mee goreng, Penang char kuey teow, satay, rojak, mee rebus, ABC, cendol and briyani are also a hit with customers.

"It's not easy to be popular overnight especially to be recognised as the first Malaysian-Indian Restaurant in Sydney.

"Thanks to the word-of-mouth



Amma's Modern Kitchen started in 2015 in Sydney, Australia



The chicken satay.

promotion, which has drawn more customers from Sri Lanka, China, Singapore, Philippines and Indonesia. Our merged kitchen concept - Take Away & Dine-in is also a hit among locals," said the mother of three children, aged 13, 15 and 17.

Amy hopes to put all the special items in the daily menu and available on all days, so as not to disappoint anyone.

"I also prefer to hire Malaysian staff and chefs to ensure the authenticity of my Malaysian food. Currently, I have three Malaysian students as service staff and three Malaysian chefs including myself.

"The ingredients are sourced from the Asian groceries near my house and also in Sydney, which has the biggest market. Some of the stuff is imported from Malaysia.

"At times, we have to substitute certain ingredients but we try to do that sparingly. Only if it gives similar quality because we don't compromise on the quality of food," said Amy, who bought some banana leaf-designed plates during her recent trip home.

Due to popular demand, Amy

hopes to expand Amma's Modern Kitchen to a chain restaurant.

"We get a few big groups sometimes but because of the lack of space, we have to turn some of them down. And this happens mostly on weekends. We hope to get a bigger place and introduce more variety on the menu.

"Only then we can start thinking of opening the second branch. Making Amma's Modern Kitchen a chain is my ultimate dream and hopefully we can make it the first drive-through Malaysian restaurant in Australia," she said.

Over the years, the place has been a meeting point of sorts for Malaysians.

"You get Malaysians all under one roof here. They get to know each other and exchange phone numbers while waiting for the food to be served.

"I feel blessed whenever my customers say they love coming to my restaurant. We are in no competition.

"Our food is like what our mothers would cook at home. I want to reach people's heart through my food," said Amy who was born and raised in Mount Erskine, Penang.



Amy says her ultimate dream is to open the first drive-through Malaysian restaurant in Australia.



The Vegetarian Nasi Lemak is special in its own way.

She spent her teenage life in Sungai Buloh and Bangsar among other places, as her father worked with KTM Berhad.

Despite her success, Amy still thinks fondly of home.

"I love and miss Malaysia. I try to come back at least once a year. My recent trip was last January after a four-year gap. I spent a month back home this time.

"But how I wish I could spend more time there. Then again, that would be impossible as it can affect my business," said Amy whose daily mantra is; whatever the mind of man can conceive and believe, it can achieve!

Singapore tv

Channel 5

6.00AM: Antique Road Trip
7.00: First Look Asia **9.00:** The Dr Oz Show **10.00:** Classical Destinations **10.30:** JML TV Home Shopping **11.00:** The Ellen DeGeneres Show **11.50:** Hairy Bikers' Asian Adventure **1.00:** Wheel Of Fortune **1.30:** Tanglin **2.00:** Oh Carol! **2.30:** Talking Point 2017 **3.00:** The Dr Oz Show **4.00:** Phua Chu Kang Pte Ltd 7 **4.30:** Koji Cooks **5.00:** The Ellen DeGeneres Show **6.00:** Hollywood Profiles : Angelina Jolie **6.30:** Just For Laughs Gags **6.45:** Walking With Dinosaurs (Movie) **8.30:** Tanglin **9.00:** News 5 **9.30:** On The Red Dot **10.00:** The Flash **11.00:** The Flash **MIDNIGHT:** Tanglin **12.30AM:** Survivor **1.30:** The Flash **2.30:** The Flash **3.30:** Hairy Bikers' Asian Adventure **4.30:** Classical Destinations **5.10:** The Dr Oz Show **6.00AM:** See tomorrow's schedule

Channel 8

6.00AM: Right Frequency **6.30:** Wonderful World **7.30:** Hello Singapore Highlights **8.00:** Mightiest Mother-In-Law **9.00:** Morning Express **9.30:** 118 **10.00:** Focus **10.30:** The Amorous Lotus Pan **NOON:** The Best Of Eat Already? **12.30PM:** Just For Laughs Gags Asia **1.00:** News 8 At One **1.30:** Life - Fear Not **2.00:** Chicken Stew: Tales From The Salted Egg Temple **2.30:** Schemes Of A Beauty **3.30:** Golden Age Talentime **4.30:** A Place Called Home **5.30:** The Truth Seekers **6.30:** Hello Singapore **7.30:** 118 **8.00:** Body SOS **8.30:** Frontline **9.00:** Mightiest Mother-In-Law **10.00:** News Tonight **10.30:** Food Moments **11.00:** Sign **MIDNIGHT:** Swordsman **1.00AM:** Memories Of June **2.00:** Turn Of The Tide **4.00:** Love **6.00AM:** See tomorrow's schedule

Suria

3.00PM: Juxbox Ekspres **4.00:** Menantu Sepuluh Ribu **5.00:** Rumi & Jawi **6.00:** Skwad Cilik **6.30:** Makan Expose **7.00:** Seindah Takdir Cinta **8.00:** Berita **8.30:** Misi Beta **9.00:** Kerana Kasih (Malay/Local Telemovie) **11.00:** Bongkar **11.30:** Berita **MIDNIGHT:** Healthy Lifestyle **1.00AM:** Close

Okto

9.00AM: Junction Tree **9.30:** The Rainbow Bus **10.00:** Zack & Quack **10.30:** Disney Sheriff Callie's Wild West **11.00:** Mike The Knight **11.30:** Pocoyo 1 & 2 **NOON:** Junction Tree **12.30PM:** The Rainbow Bus **1.00PM:** Zack & Quack **1.30:** Disney Sheriff Callie's Wild West **2.00:** Mike The Knight **2.30:** Pocoyo 1 & 2 **3.00:** Junction Tree **3.30:** The Rainbow Bus **4.00:** Babar **4.30:** Vic The Viking **5.00:** Spongebob Squarepants **5.30:** The Adventures Of The Young Marco Polo **6.00:** Geronimo Stilton **6.30:** Origami Samurai **7.05:** Super 100 **7.15:** Great Eastern Hyundai S.League 2017 (Tampines Rovers Fc Vs Home United Fc) **9.30:** The Football Review **10.00:** Italian Serie A (Genoa vs Internazionale) **MIDNIGHT:** Omnisport **12.30AM:** Close

Vasantham

3.00PM: Anjaraipetti **3.30:** Oor Kuruvu **4.00:** Kalyaani **4.30:** Guru Paarvai **5.30:** Sabaash Seriyana Pohthi **5.30:** Mat YOYO **6.00:** Suryaputhri (Malayalam) **6.30:** Suryaputhri (Malayalam) **7.00:** Mighty Raju **7.30:** Chhota Bheem **8.00:** A for Anbu **8.30:** Tamil Seithi **9.00:** Indian Beat **10.00:** Tamil Talkies: Chembaruthi (Movie) **12.30AM:** Tamil Seithi **1.00AM:** Close