

We all know that dining out in Riyadh lacks one essential ingredient, but there's little point in harping on about something we can do nothing about. Don't let it stop you however from going out at all. Riyadh positively bristles with a choice of places to meet and eat, some are just excellent, others in a class of their own.

Newest offering from The Inter-Continental Hotel is 'The Verandah'. Executive Chef Jean-Luc Amann has blended the best of Californian style with some tempting Far Eastern specialities. The atmosphere is as good as the food, the decor and crockery chosen to complement the colourful presentations. The unusual menu is inexpensive and a three-course meal can cost as little as SR80. Other gourmet delights may cost you a little more. The menu is regularly updated and I've yet to find anything I didn't thoroughly enjoy. If you're feeling adventurous, this is just the place to try something new. Access to the restaurant is easiest via entrance gate 12 at the complex, which is the Health Club entrance where ample parking is available. Tel: 465 5000 ext. 4149 or 4121 for reservations, and book early, it's very popular.

North along the highway, the Sheraton Hotel has extended its offering with 'La Piazza', essentially a Tuscan country style menu prepared by a genuine Tuscan Chef. Dine under a twinkling ceiling in a courtyard setting and while you muse over the menu, nibble away on the bread sticks with labneh and pesto and the chopped olives that are very morish. Whether you choose the pasta (which is homemade), the pizza (the seafood with anchovies is delicious) or the outstanding Il risotto della Piazza, try to include the extensive anti-pasta table as your appetiser. Soup lovers will find the 'Old Fashioned' has a flavour of its own whilst the Tiramisu to finish is one of the Chef's specialities. Although the setting is open plan, there are a few quiet corners if you need a little extra privacy. Next door at the 'Al Bustan', theme nights continue as usual except during Ramadan. Tel: 454 3300 to reserve a table at either venue.

With Olivia's and The Shogun already well established as two of the best restaurants in town, one could easily be forgiven for assuming the Hyatt would rest on their laurels. Not so! The new and luxurious Al Mubarakiah wedding hall can cater for up to 500 persons sitting down to dine in glorious golden splendour. This time of year however is the perfect time for smaller parties to sit out on the terrace at Olivia's and enjoy the inspired collection of Mediterranean and Italian dishes in a truly unique setting. Heinz Kohler, the Head Chef has recently recruited a new man for Olivia's and his Lobster with spinach spaghetti is magnificent. Ramadan arrangements at the Hyatt are taken care of in the Sukahriah, also up on the fourth floor leaving the flagship restaurants to their usual program all be it during the evenings only. Tel: 479 1234 to reserve a table at any of the Hyatts restaurants.



Jean-Luc Amann
Executive Chef at The Inter-Continental Riyadh
but who will be moving to Muscat in December

Outside of the main Hotels, one of my favourites is the L'eclose / Furusato combination on Tahliia Street. A range of differently priced International menus and the Japanese selection are supplemented during Ramadan by a special buffet. So popular has the oriental offering become that plans are afoot to include a Sushi Bar in the New Year. Tel: 465 7648 for reservations.

If a lunch time bite is what you're after, don't forget Cafe Can also on Tahliia Street. Its competitively priced menu offers exceptional value for money and the friendly staff do their best to accommodate your preferences.

Almost opposite Euromarche on Takassussi is the Shadows Internet Cafe. Frequented by local teenagers in the evenings who seem to use the Chat Lines more than most, it's less busy during the day, when you can surf away whilst you snack.

For the Travellers amongst us, Jeddah is often just a one day trip. If you find yourself overnighing however, check out Olives on Falesteen Street. Another Italian flavour restaurant in a pleasant setting. The prices are a little on the high side, but it's reckoned by the ex-pats to be one of the best in town for that extra special evening.

For genuine good food at good prices stick to Happy Days Diner now on the corner of Tahliia & Medina Road. Owned by a Jeddah BBG member, the food is good, the portions just right and the prices quite acceptable.

OUT ON THE TOWN