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English Composition 1

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A Taste of the Desert

Sahara is a Moroccan and Lebanese restaurant located in Denver, Colorado. It has been in business since 1993. It was created by Chef Jihad as "a warm space where the healthy comfort food we grew up on could be introduced to and shared with Coloradans" (Sahara). Since the initial opening, they were also able to open a second location which I had the opportunity to visit. Sahara provides a delectable experience most would enjoy.

Due to its location in a strip mall, the restaurant has a rather bland outward appearance, but that impression is left at the door as the inside is quite tastefully decorated. Warm yellow walls with tapestries enclose a cozy dining room. Most of the tables are covered with clean white cloth and paper. However, those that are not covered have intricate wooden designs carved into the surface covered by a glass top. Sahara also used interesting music to create a nice ambience. The music seemed to be traditional Middle Eastern music from the restaurant's origins, complementing the decorations to create a pleasant Moroccan atmosphere.

Sahara's food comes with some intriguing traditional flavors. The Shawarma, for instance, comes as a large plate of chopped meat and saffron rice. The Shawarma and Kabob entrees are available with beef, chicken, or lamb. The meats, seasoned with various Mediterranean spices, are already quite tasty on their own. However, they can be enhanced by adding, to one's preference, the side of tahini sauce served with the meal. Overall, the meal was quite satisfying.

Sahara's kabobs of various types of meat are comparable to other similar Mediterranean restaurants, like Crave-Kabob. Although somewhat ironically, Sahara has more kabob on the plate than Crave-Kabob, even if the total amount of food is similar. The savory meats, each with slightly different seasonings, made for a delightful adventure.

Hummus is a crucial part of a Mediterranean restaurant's experience; Sahara's Hummus passes this test being remarkably smooth with some Mediterranean spices adding a slight kick.

A staple appetizer of many Mediterranean restaurants is the Falafel. Sahara puts up a strong showing with generously sized Falafels. However, their size is only one of the factors in their favor, as they were also quite tasty. The crispy outer crust gave a nice crunch to contrast the soft interior.

For those with dietary restrictions, Sahara has a surprisingly robust selection. Most of the menu is gluten-free. Much of it can also be made lactose free. There are even a few vegetarian and seafood dishes available. As it can often be a struggle to find edible food for those with restrictions, Sahara's wide variety can be a breath of freedom.

Despite the restaurant's many gluten-free options, there is one place where the ball is dropped. Unfortunately, Sahara only has two desserts, a walnut or pistachio Baklava. However, I will not take points off for that as it seems they once did have a gluten-free option, but no one ordered it, so it was eventually removed from the menu.

While it is becoming a more common practice to have QR codes linking to an online version of the menu, Sahara relies on this too heavily, with this being the only way to view the menu. Sahara does have free Wi-Fi for their guests. Regardless, if someone is unable to access the online menu for some reason, for instance, if they are out of battery, have security concerns, or simply do not have a smartphone, there is no paper menu available to patrons.

In part due to visiting at a non-peak hour, the service was surprisingly swift and attentive. The food was served perhaps more quickly than I have ever seen outside of fast food. The waiter was personable and accommodating when we asked for changes to the appetizer. The staff was swift to clean. When another patron left, their table was cleared and reset within minutes.

The overall experience was about what you would expect from walking in and taking a look around. The food was tasty but not overly so. It was filling but not a glut of food. With an average of about 20 dollars per entree, the price was in line with other similar restaurants in the area but perhaps a little overpriced for what was received. Sahara fills the niche of a higher-end, casual restaurant with table service and interesting food.

Work Cited

Loubna, et al. "Sahara Restaurant." *Sahara Restaurant*, www.saharadenver.com/