



**Say it with a song**

A recent addition to her collection is the musical bundt. Prachi uses the Spotify app to find and print out the QR code of the song on edible paper, and places it on the cake as a garnish. All one needs to do is scan the code using Spotify, and the song will begin playing on their phone. A full-proof way to tell someone that you love them, with their favourite song.

# Bundt bandit in town

NAAZ GHANI

If you are an avid traveller, you'd know that apart from soaking in the breathtaking sights and sounds, treating your taste buds to local flavours creates a healthy appetite for an immersive experience. But how good does a local delicacy have to be to trigger a switch in careers? We asked Nungambakkam resident Prachi Agarwal, who couldn't stop drooling over bundt cakes, during one of her trips to Germany. So delectable was this memory that she decided to spread some bundt love to Chennaiites by setting up The Bundt Bakehouse in December 2019.

Bundt cakes are doughnut-shaped cakes that can either be a dazzler for breakfast or offer a sweet ending to your meal, or even keep you cosy at tea-time, she says. But knowing that the Indian palate loves its savoury as much as sweet flavours, Prachi introduced both versions.

**Sweet beginnings**

While completing her Chartered Accountancy course in London in 2018, Prachi travelled across Europe, treating her tastebuds to untried desserts. "The first time I had a bundt cake was at a cafe in London, and I immediately became a fan, as the texture was also unique. I also sampled different flavours of strudel, pies and breads. My personal favourite was the goulash—a soup of meat and vegetables, seasoned with spices," she recalls.

Prachi returned to Chennai in late 2018 and worked here as a CA for a year, before starting her venture. "I wanted to stand out in the market. When I researched about the dishes being offered by restaurants and chefs in Chennai, I realised that al-



though a few bakeries and restaurants sell bundt cakes, there were no exclusive outlets. I knew it would be a niche market and there would be takers. I also didn't want to offer what was already in the market," she explains. Curious to expand her boundaries, she browsed the Internet for ideas. A few months of trial and error, and she had the perfect recipe.

While initially the bundt cake was the only item on the menu, soon, Prachi began experimenting with different flavours and sizes. "I realised that apart from birthdays and functions, people rarely buy a cake. I wanted to offer a variety of flavours to my customers but the

larger bundt cakes restricted experimentation. That's when I bought smaller bundt cake moulds and began offering boxes of four cakes of different flavours," she shares.

The smaller cakes even allowed Prachi to expand her understanding of blending flavours, which eventually led to some crowd favourites like the neon orange. "The customer reviews for our orange cake were positive. I began receiving more orders for that flavour as soon as I rolled it out in July," she says.

**New flavours**

Bringing in the ceremonial joy of Raksha Bandhan, she added the rose-flavoured bundts in August. "The mini bundt cake boxes became a crowd favourite that season.

At one point, I had to prepare 12 boxes of mini bundt cakes and five 1-kg bundt cakes in one day. It was the highest number of orders I had received till then," she shares enthusiastically.

Soon, Nutella, sprinkles, cinnamon, lemon, pistachios, strawberries and coffee flavours were added to the menu. "This business has pushed me to explore and come up with original recipes," she says, adding that her current fascination is creating savoury bundts. In July, she tested her first focaccia-topped-with-pesto bundt cake that later found a place on her menu. "I didn't know if people would like a savoury cake. When my family and friends tasted it, they were all praises. It gave me the confidence to try out something new," she says. To her surprise, this became many of her customers' favourite companion for evening tea. Inspired, she then created garlic and rosemary bundt cakes.

With such variety in texture and flavours, Prachi's bundt cakes are sure to have our faces tucked in some sugary goodness.

*The cakes are priced between ₹400 and ₹700 and are delivered via Dunzo and Swiggy. For orders, visit: @thebundtbakehouse on Instagram, or call 9566246234.*



# At home in Maroma

As the virus-riddled world finds ways to co-exist with the threat, Dravidian Hotels launches Maroma Suites in Chennai to cater to few and select clients

KANNALMOZHI KABILAN

If there's one thing to learn (besides the many primary ones) from countries that have dealt with the coronavirus to great success is that the answer is not in shutting down everyday life indefinitely. While we're several steps away from the controlled abandon we see in some parts of the world, there's some respite at hand as the hospitality industry picks up on this mantra and runs wild with it. Given this turn of events, 'the middle of the pandemic' is about the best time for Dravidian Hotels, in association with Temple Tree Hospitality, to launch their luxury boutique hotel — Maroma Suites — in the city.

Set in Palavakkam, 300 metres from the Neelangarai beachline, the hotel offers the ideal getaway as city-zens crave. With just 12 suites horse-shoed around a minimalist swimming pool, Maroma provides luxury on a cosy and intimate level. With COVID-19 concerns still in the air, it is this feature that allows the hotel to be able to easily assure enviable levels of hygiene and sanitisation.

"We were ready for operations before COVID-19 broke out. Now, we don't know when this is going to end. In these times, people want to stay at a place that is not like a regular hotel; they prefer a place that has a home kind of a feel. And the response we had at the two-month trial run was very good. That's when we decided we'd open it up for the public," narrates Annamalai T, managing director of the hotel group.

**How suite!**

Maroma holds up the promise of being 'like a home' with their carefully curated interior spaces. The Queen's Suite — the largest in the hotel — is all of 600 sq ft big; almost like a small studio apartment. Yet, every room treats you to laid-back opulence, be it in the enormously comfortable bed, a minimalist work station, the rocking chair positioned by the French windows or the patio-like arrangement for the personal balcony. Travelling to the city for a months-long project or stopping by on your circuit tour of the south, they seem to have everything you'd

want for that and everything in between.

Despite the comfort and care on offer, the organisation is quite aware of the extra mile they'd have to go to reassure the customer of all things safety. And they have much to their advantage to keep their word too, it seems. "Our property — wherever we are — doesn't have 50 or 100 rooms; all of them are boutique hotels. For example, we have the Hotel Anantha Heritage in Puducherry. It has only ten suites. It's a heritage property built in 1967; the rooms are very spacious, the number of staff working there is very limited and there's no one you'll be bumping into unnecessarily. Maroma would be along the same lines. It's very easy to keep a small boutique property more cleaner than a 500-room property. Even the post-COVID parameters are easy to adhere to," he explains.

Every day, the rooms will be changed twice — everything from the linen to toiletries. Once a suite is freed up, it will be completely sanitised and let to rest for an entire day before being made available for the next guest. Given that their occupancy is at 30-40 per cent right now, this can be done quite easily, points out Annamalai. The dining area will be restricted for the hotel guest for the time period, he adds, just to make sure they do not open themselves up to unnecessary risks. Even here, all the utensils will go through the warmer to be sterilised before being put to use again. All staff will be appropriately decked up in masks and gloves while at work, he shares. While guests are advised against making use of the swimming pool enclosed within their property, a time-sharing system would be put in place for those interested, says the plan.

Their way of service is already proving to be quite successful, says Annamalai. In Puducherry, their hotels rank among the first two on popular travel websites like TripAdvisor and Booking.com. Here, at Maroma too, people who got to experience the hotel during the trial run are eager to be back, he shares.

While Dravidian Hotels, in a successful collaboration with Temple Tree Hospitality, offer the same comforts and luxury in places like Puducherry, Au-



Dining area



Pool and lounge



(Third from left) Annamalai T, managing director of Dravidian Hotels with guests at the launch | DEBADATTA MALLICK

roville, Kodakanal and Yelagiri, it's gearing up to launch similar boutique hotels in Munnar and Wayanad too. In the meantime, the Maroma awaits your indulgence.

*Suites are available from ₹3,384 (exclusive of taxes) for two adults for one night. Available for booking at all popular booking sites.*



**MOTHERSHIP**

# CODE RED: DO WE NEED MORE SCHOOL-GOING CODERS?

Is anyone else being followed around the Internet by a certain company that's peddling coding for kids? I'm sure I've never clicked on any of their ads, and yet, wherever I go, there it is: Online coding classes for kids! Grade 1-12. One of the ads show a bunch of White, blonde kids lying in the grass in a semi-circle looking joyous. Why? Because they'd just cracked For loops in Python? I finally succumbed to the stalking ad and clicked on it

this morning. I was taken to a website that greeted me with the words 'Kickstart your kid's journey to create the next billion-dollar idea of the tech world!' I scrolled down a little and was told: 'Your kid could be on the next flight to Silicon Valley, USA!' Ummm... who is sending their children on a 24-hour, trans-Atlantic flight in the middle of a pandemic?

Oh, but look, the one-of-a-kind programme sends hand-picked passionate early coders

to Silicon Valley to meet scientists from <insert giant tech company name>. Well then, I suppose that's a good reason to board a long flight and risk COVID-19. One package includes 'Lifetime Access' and 'Space Tech' for a little over a lakh. What is space tech? And lifetime access to what?

Entering their website is like falling down a rabbit hole of anxiety-inducing jargon. Don't you want your child to be the next Mark Zuckerberg? Umm...



MENAKA RAMAN

@menakaraman

The writer's philosophy is: if there's no blood, don't call me

have y'all watched *The Social Dilemma*? Does the world really need more coders who are going to create the next big app that takes all our data and sells them to the highest bidder. I thought AI was a terrible

idea when I watched *Terminator-2* as a 12-year-old, and yet here we are, 28 years later, and AI is writing amazingly soothing meditation mantras for the Internet (Sample: Think about the ancient proverb: To some people «nude beach» means «where lovers go to die».)

While I was smugly judging those parents who had signed their toddlers up for the advanced level 'Tech Evangelist' programme, my nine-year-old came up to me and asked if he

could spend some of his left over birthday money on Fortnite v-bucks. Sure, I said. Five minutes later, my phone pinged to let me know that my card had been used to purchase fake, multiplayer game money. I don't want to calculate how much of their inheritance my children are forking over to the founder of Fortnite. And then it hits me! Hey, what if my kids make the next multi-player game that makes children mindless zombies and turns parents into pe-

nurious nervous wrecks? What if all that fake, multiplayer game money flowed into my account as reverse inheritance? (I made that up. It's the money kids grow up and pay parents for putting up with them.)

I asked my kids if they'd like to become coders and create the next big game. They said no before I could even finish asking the question. Do you think they'll let dogs sign up for the course? Woody has a lot of free time.

