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NOT FOR SALE SEPARATELY

Kung Fu and slapstick on my kitchen table

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BENIHANA

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Meal for two: Rs 3,500

Epicuria, the spanking new food court at Nehru Place metro station, has done wonders for this dreary commercial space. Not only has it made the grey facade of a rather busy commuter stop a sight for sore eyes, thanks to some wonderful landscaping and art installations, it has also become an oasis of gastronomic delights, with some of the best pubs, restaurants and bakeries in town opening up shop here. The latest to join their ranks is Benihana, the world-famous Teppanyaki restaurant, which debuted in India



A chef at Benihana

about two months back.

Benihana's reputation precedes it. I've met enough people whose eyes light up and say "I love that place!" when the name is mentioned. So we went in with unreasonably high expectations; and were not disappointed. Everything from their cocktails (do try the Benihana

punch for a suitably long-lasting buzz camouflaged very efficiently in benign-tasting tropical juices), to the yakitoris (skewered chunks of chicken or meat, combined with spring onions and a subtle teriyaki sauce), sushi (although I blasphemously cannot digest raw fish, the attendants were kind enough to

bring us a cooked crab and salmon variety; earning them extra brownie points for hospitality), and tempura (king prawns marinated in a mildly spiced batter and fried) made us ask for more.

At Benihana, eating out takes on a whole new meaning. Sure, we're now familiar with the concept of entertainment and food being clubbed together, but this is a whole other ball game. In the Teppanyaki section of the restaurant, situated to the left of the rather huge space done up in hues of black and red, every table comes equipped with a huge hot plate and grill. And the chef comes equipped with knives, spatulas and a sense of humour. He chops, fries, sautés, cracks eggs and jokes, flirts with the ladies at his table, chit-chats about cricket and wine with the men, and if you aren't yet convinced he must be wrapped up and installed at your dinner

table back home, he will juggle his knives and spatulas for good measure.

Of course, he serves you a fulfilling meal, too; be it the absolutely drool-worthy Hibachi vegetables, or the Japanese onion soup that is light enough to not kill your appetite, or the garlic fried rice. All this comes with a choice of meat, chicken, three kinds of fish (of which the sea-bass absolutely takes the cake) and prawns. For dessert, we recommend the cheesecake dumplings — which are sizzling fried momos stuffed with cheese and biscuit — accompanied by vanilla ice cream, chocolate and strawberry sauce. It suffices to say that Benihana reinvents Japanese cuisine to suit a global palette and revives the concept of community dining like few others in the city. Our only complaint: What took you so long to come to India?