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The Tiny Turkish Bistro That Could

AYSE'S



Without getting into the many reasons, nobody *likes* strip malls. Some people, like me, hate them. Now having said that, if there's anything that can assuage me, it's Ayse's (pronounced /EYE-shuhz/), the precious, elegant and tiny Turkish restaurant on the dark side of Courtyard Plaza, where the 30 paces between it and the Subway sandwich shop is the difference between faceless franchised generia and a homemade, Old World culinary heaven.

We're talkin' 'bout pilavs; boreks; tender stuffed peppers; potato kofte; lentil salads; yogurt soup; criminally underpriced desserts like traditional puddings and tiramisu. In short, all the delights of Asia Minor made fresh on the premises by who else? Ayse, of course, who also explains what exactly "Kadayif" is, then takes your order, barks at the kitchen help, and brings it out to your little table when it's ready.

Her rotating menu of specialties (you can request a favorite item two days in advance) features some of the most flavorful dishes in town: never too spicy or bizarre, never less than "Mmmmm, wow" to the palette. Like Thai food, Turkish recipes break new ground in sour and sweet, firing off taste buds mom's meatloaf will never know.

In fine European fashion, Ayse's is open for lunch and dinner, but closed in the hours in-between. Also bring some green because it's "cash only." No commerce going on here.

It's amazing how dining at Ayse's makes one forget they are in a strip mall. The pleasant, relaxing atmosphere has flair and intimacy. Without being uncomfortable, the tables are close together and so there are few secrets between guests, everyone eyeing the next dish Ayse presents from the kitchen.

In short, the delightful and urgently recommended Ayse's has everything strip malls themselves do not: class, personality, adventure, and romance. Don't let the location get between you and Ayse's homemade wonders. —Todd Spencer