

Savour flavour of shredded roti

By Casey Neill

Kothu roti from PiqNiq Hut is building a loyal following.

The Sri Lankan stall moved into Dandenong Market about two years ago and introduced diners to the shredded roti dish.

Nirosh Munasinghe explained that kothu originated in the eastern part of Sri Lanka.

"I think it's spread all over the world now, including India and Malaysia," he said.

"They call it different names. They've created their own flavours."

The PiqNiq Hut version features vegetables, egg and roti bread. "We even have wholemeal or the wheat flour bread," he said.

"We have gluten free ... and there's another thing that we use called string hoppers. It's like rice noodle.

"It's made out of rice flour and steamed in a

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round shape. We can use that or we give another option with rice.

"Basically, it's done with roti, but we created these type of things so more people could enjoy them."

The base is mixed with one of four variations of meat curry on a barbecue hot plate while diners wait.

"The chicken curry, we have three different variations," Nirosh said.

The standard chicken curry has a medium heat. The devilled chicken is spicy.

"It is descended from Chinese menus. We've modified it for the Sri Lankan palate," he said.

Then there's butter chicken, which doesn't have any chilli.

"That is not a Sri Lankan one, but it's a modified butter chicken for the Australian palate," Nirosh said.

"It was modified by my business partner Vijay (Sivaraj) from the Queen Victoria Market.

"He had been running a restaurant called Drums Cafe for the past 21 years.

"He got the Lord Mayor's award this year.

"He's the one who created this butter chicken.

"People love it. Sometimes, even Indians love it!"

The goat curry, though, is the most popular.

The roti is chopped on the hot plate before being stirred through the curry.

"It's the original way of doing it, the authentic way of doing it," Nirosh said.

"We chop it with a blunt metal tool. That folds the flavour into the roti.

"Apart from all the meat curries, we make a mixed vegetable curry that has five or six vegetables in it.

"We buy the vegetables from the Dandenong Market itself."

The dish is served with a swirl of yogurt and mint on top, to help those who might have overreached on the heat.

"The yogurt always neutralises the spiciness," he said.

When PiqNiq Hut arrived at the market, people hadn't encountered the dish.

"Now I can see, people come asking for kothu roti. They even know the name," he said.

Nirosh partnered with Vijay about four years ago to serve up Sri Lankan cuisine at festivals.

The Dandenong Market stall evolved from there.

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