

PEOPLE

All About *Chocolate*

We visit AYSHA AL HASHIMI'S
chocolate haven in Jumeirah

“i

t all started with a pregnancy craving!” laughs Aysha Al Hashimi, beginning the story of how she started popular Jumeirah chocolaterie and café, Cocoville. “Since childhood I have had a passion for home-made, gourmet chocolates stemming from summer holidays in Europe with my family, and when I was pregnant I had an especially strong desire for freshly-made chocolates and couldn’t find them anywhere in Dubai.” Aysha found a 3-month chocolate making course in London’s Notting Hill neighborhood, but, six months pregnant, negotiated her way into completing the class in just one month. “My husband told me, if you don’t do it now you never will,” Aysha recounts. That’s all the encouragement she needed, and off to London she went.

Luckily for all of us, Aysha’s passion for chocolate didn’t disappear post-pregnancy. What started as a small-scale chocolate-making venture for friends and family quickly grew into a legitimate business, as word spread about Aysha’s chocolates and gourmet brownies. “I wanted to keep working even after I had my children, and my chocolate business was a creative outlet for me,” she describes. Eventually Aysha left her marketing job at an international bank and set out to establish her chocolate empire.

Aysha decided to establish a storefront independently, and at first found a space on Beach Road from which to produce and sell her tasty treats. However, she soon realized the demand outgrew the capacity of the store, and in January of this year relocated to a refurbished villa in Jumeirah 1. Cocoville is cozy chic, with white exposed bricks and copper finishing echoing the villa’s previous occupation as a home. A melted chocolate motif reappears throughout the display area and sitting space, while mismatched chairs, marble tabletops and warm lighting invite guests to linger over a cappuccino or marshmallow-topped hot chocolate.

Cocoville’s dessert menu is creative, with most recipes the products of Aysha’s trial and error. Anyone with a sweet tooth will delight in the chocolate slabs, truffles, hot chocolate sticks, and chocolate flutes, which Aysha



describes as her answer to the discontinued childhood favorite of every Emirati, Fanfare chocolate wafers. Another best seller are her brownies, which maintain a fudgy chocolate center and solid exterior. Aysha creates seasonal flavors of brownie bites to keep up with food trends, but keeps the original brownie recipe a secret by preparing the batter herself — none of the Cocoville staff know the winning combination!

Café-goers flock to Cocoville, inspired by Instagram and Snapchat posts depicting the delicious delicacies. Perhaps the most famous on social media is Aysha’s cocoa pod, a giant dessert large enough to feed four. A chocolate case in the shape of a pod is brought to the table, and molten chocolate poured on top prompts the smoking pod to eventually melt and collapse, revealing a mix of brownies, ice cream and cotton candy inside.

In her Jumeirah location, Aysha has expanded the menu to include breakfast and light bites, without losing focus on Cocoville’s sweet theme. Outdoor seating is available in the winter months, and Cocoville will set up a tent outside to offer majlis-style seating for Ramadan. She is introducing new desserts and chocolates incorporating traditional flavors for the holy month, encased in festive packaging. Anyone visiting the boutique can watch hampers of Cocoville’s offerings being gift wrapped in beautiful boxes, bows and ribbons, not just for Ramadan but also for birthdays, baby showers and weddings.

Aysha sources most of her ingredients from Europe and never compromises on quality. She incorporates fair trade chocolate into her products, giving Cocoville an ethical touch. Though she is looking into introducing sugar-free additions to the menu for those who are health-conscious, she is unapologetic about her gourmet creations. After all, everyone needs to splurge once in a while — and there’s no better place than at Cocoville. www.thecocoville.com

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ETHAN MANN

Interior views of Cocoville and the boutique’s delectable chocolates

