# Ramadan and Pancake Day collide in Southall's vibrant culinary scene



As the day approached for Ramadan to commence on 1 March, the atmosphere in Southall, a vibrant district in West London, was filled with rich fragrances and a communal sense of anticipation. Upon disembarking from the train at Southall station, one was greeted by the aromatic scents of saffron and cardamom permeating the air. The local Sikh temple, Sri Guru Singh Sabha gurdwara, served as a focal point where a queue formed at a stall selling malpura—small pancakes made from flour, semolina, and eggs—paired with steaming cups of masala chai. The atmosphere buzzed with men clad in thobes and women adorned in abayas, as they hurriedly balanced newspaper cones filled with food and drink.

Nearby, announcements echoed from the loudspeaker of Southall Central Mosque, signalling that there were 20 minutes remaining until the Islamic afternoon prayer, Zuhr. As Ramadan's onset drew nearer, a sign offered an invitation to Istaqbal-e-Ramadan, a celebration to welcome the holy month. Another notice indicated that Ealing Council would host a community iftar in recognition of International Women's Day. Moreover, Southall’s gurdwaras frequently extended offers of free vegetarian meals to individuals regardless of their faith.

The unique intersection of cultural practices in this area inspired a culinary exploration, particularly because this year, for the first time in three decades, Ramadan coincides with Pancake Day, or Shrove Tuesday, taking place on 4 March. While Ramadan is rooted in fasting, Pancake Day marks a moment of indulgence preceding Lent. As such, Muslim Londoners, while not traditionally recognising Pancake Day, often partake in the cultural aspects of enjoying pancakes, reflecting a broader shared ritual of breaking bread.

A significant stop on this culinary journey was Saravana Bhavan, a famed Indian vegetarian restaurant originating from South India. The restaurant was bustling as the author, alongside their husband, sampled dosas—thin, savoury pancakes made from fermented rice and lentils—along with idli, which are soft, pillowy rice pancakes served with chutney and sambar, a lentil-vegetable stew. The dishes held deep cultural significance and were reminiscent of family traditions from previous Ramadans.

Later that evening, the author ventured to Edgware Road, known as the Arab capital of London, with their friend Haala. Amid the light rain, the street buzzed with activity as patrons enjoyed café fare and delectable sweets. A visit to Diwan Damas, a deli famed for its Damascene sweets and ice cream, highlighted the popularity of qatayef—Middle Eastern pancakes typically filled with nuts, cheese, or cream—often savoured during Ramadan as a sweet treat after a day of fasting.

The next day, in search of further pancake experiences, the duo made their way to Green Lanes in Harringay, an area rich with Turkish cuisine. Here, they discovered Gözleme House, famous for its Turkish pancakes filled with various ingredients, lending a comforting warmth on a chilly weekend. Not wanting to conclude their explorations just yet, they ventured to Little Morocco in North Kensington, where they purchased Moroccan medjool dates and rghaif—flaky pancakes that are part of traditional Moroccan food culture.

As they continued their journey, the atmosphere was permeated with indications of Shrove Tuesday, with local establishments offering discounts on pancakes and shop displays filled with ingredients for homemade versions. As families across London prepare for Ramadan, many may unwittingly partake in culinary traditions that resonate across different cultures. This cross-cultural experience of sharing pancakes—whether it be dosa, qatayef, or traditional crepes—serves to illustrate the diverse tapestry of London's food scene as it embraces unity and shared moments, especially throughout significant religious observances.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.urdupoint.com/islam/southall-ramadan-calendar-sehar-aftar-timing.html> - This URL supports the claim about Ramadan starting on March 1 in Southall and provides detailed Sehri and Iftar timings for the area. It also highlights the cultural anticipation and preparations for Ramadan in Southall.
* <https://londonist.com/london/things-to-do/ramadan-eid-events> - This URL corroborates the information about Ramadan events in London, including the cultural celebrations and community activities during the holy month. It mentions events like the Ramadan lights in the West End and various Iftar gatherings.
* <https://www.srigurusinghsabha.co.uk/> - This URL provides information about the Sri Guru Singh Sabha gurdwara in Southall, which is mentioned as a focal point for community activities and cultural events.
* <https://www.saravanabhavan.com/> - This URL supports the mention of Saravana Bhavan as a popular Indian vegetarian restaurant, highlighting its cultural significance and traditional dishes like dosas and idlis.
* <https://www.diwandamas.com/> - This URL corroborates the mention of Diwan Damas as a deli famous for Damascene sweets and qatayef, which are enjoyed during Ramadan.
* <https://www.gozlemehouse.co.uk/> - This URL supports the mention of Gözleme House as a place for Turkish pancakes, highlighting the cultural diversity of food in London.