

BY DEGREES

Evoking the sights, sounds and tastes of South Africa



BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

Vacations usually end too soon—and have a tragic way of retreating from memory as soon as you return to the office. Hoping to recapture a recent trip to South Africa, I head to 10 Degrees South in Buckhead, which is billed on its Web site as “the only restaurant of its kind in the U.S.A., specializing in South African cuisine.” I’m newly educated in South African cuisine, so my objective is to verify the restaurant’s claim of authenticity.

The eateries I visited in Johannesburg and Cape Town boasted sleek, contemporary décor infused with a distinct sense of place through animal prints, folk art and earthy elements. 10 Degrees South achieves a similar aesthetic with brown walls, woven chairs, a twisted vine nailed to one wall and a traditional mask hanging on another. The minimal approach is tasteful and accurate.

South African cuisine is a fusion of the food of the African continent, with French, Indian, Portuguese, Dutch, German and Malaysian influences. Dishes feature native game, fish from the Atlantic and Indian oceans, seasonal produce and intoxicating spices. Having been impressed by the quality and sophistication of the country’s dishes, anticipation leaves my mouth watering.

As I scan the menu, my heart leaps upon seeing biltong as an appetizer. A cured meat—similar to beef jerky, but tenderer—it can be made from beef or game meats like kudu and springbok. The snack so captured my fancy that I’d considered sneaking some past U.S. Customs, but ultimately obeyed the law and

left my purchase on the plane. This newfound local source lived up to memory. Sprinkled with herbs, the presentation is fancier than what you’ll find while on safari in the South African bush, but the beef looks and tastes exactly right.

Boerewors is lean beef sausage served with a side of tomato onion sauce. The savory dish melts in my mouth and is spiced to perfection with enough heat to make it interesting without overwhelming the palate.

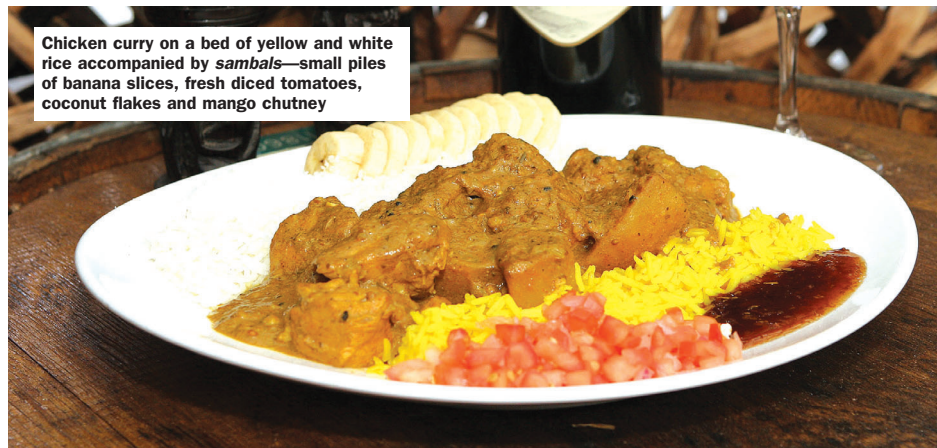
Calamari is a South African favorite. It’s typically served in wide strips, but 10 Degrees South cuts its squid into rings like most American restaurants do. It’s grilled and tossed in lemon butter or spicy *peri-peri* sauce made with the hot Birds Eye pepper. I opt for lemon butter and don’t regret the choice; it gives the tender meat a tangy edge.

The bar menu features many South African wines, beers and spirits. Since I’d visited Durbanville Hills and met the winemaker Martin Moore on a day trip from Cape Town, I start with the sauvignon blanc and switch to Shiraz for the main course. The wines balance fruit with spice and pair well with food, just as I remembered.

Cape Kingclip, the king of South African fish, makes a tasty fillet. The firm white flesh is generally free of bones and cooks into dense, large flakes. Here it’s grilled to perfection and served with a thickened lemon-butter sauce with rice and vegetables.



Boerewors (right) is lean beef sausage served with a side of tomato onion sauce, while biltong is similar to beef jerky.



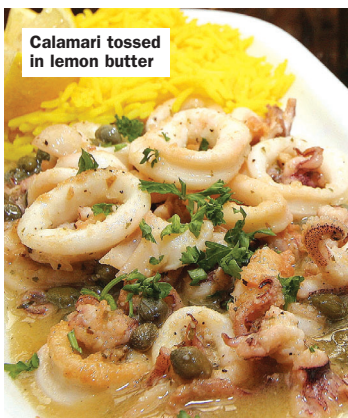
Chicken curry on a bed of yellow and white rice accompanied by sambals—small piles of banana slices, fresh diced tomatoes, coconut flakes and mango chutney

Though I didn’t sample curry while in South Africa, by this time I’m thoroughly convinced of the chef’s skill at authentically rendering the cuisine, so I opt to try something new. Chicken curry is served on a bed of yellow and white rice accompanied by *sambals*—small piles of banana slices, fresh diced tomatoes, coconut flakes and mango chutney to mix into the dish as desired. A few bites transport me to Trinidad, where I’d eaten similar curry wrapped in a roti, bread as thin as a tortilla. Of course, the connection makes perfect sense given the history between Africa and the Caribbean.

Amarula Cream Liqueur makes for a yummy dessert. The second-largest selling cream liqueur in the world, its base is the *marula*, a juicy, thick-skinned fruit from the mango family about the size of an apricot. *Marula* trees grow only in the subequatorial open plains of Africa, so sipping Amarula is an exotic treat.

The single disappointment is the bread. In South Africa, each basket was an adventure, with surprises like coconut, sweet potato, pumpkin and rose petal breads (to name just a few) served with various dips and spreads like hummus and olive oil. In contrast, the restaurant serves two warm single-serving white loaves with cold butter—good, but standard fare.

Still, in its quest to replicate South Africa in Atlanta, 10 Degrees South exceeds expectations. And what could be better than a culinary adventure without the jet lag? **SP**



Calamari tossed in lemon butter



10 Degrees South

4183 Roswell Road
Atlanta, 30342
404-705-8870
www.10degreesouth.com

Hours: Dinner, 5:30–10:30 p.m., Mon.–Sat.
Reservations: Yes
Dress code: Dressy casual
Cuisine: South African, global, international
Alcohol: Full bar
Cost: \$30 and under
Credit cards: American Express, MasterCard and Visa
Outdoor seating: Covered porch, weather permitting
Parking: Valet