

# Six of One: Shawarma and the City

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## 6. aRVhee bakes

I firmly believe that every day you should get a little treat, but as a Filipina, I get an especially intense lust for breads that are sweet but not *too* sweet. It's fortunate, then, that I stumbled across aRVhee Bakes, a little Filipino bakery tucked away in the back of Nag's Head Market just off Holloway Road during a desperate attempt to satiate my craving. Rows of colourful buns, which owner Romel bakes fresh daily – accented with flavours like coconut, pandan and ube – line the small storefront. Elsewhere, there are traditional breads like pandesal, sweet bread rolls, pan de coco – plump buns filled with shredded coconut – and Spanish bread, an oblong-shaped treat stuffed with sweet breadcrumbs. Like many people, Romel got into baking during the pandemic, but unlike most of us, he took his passion a step further, first supplying friends and family before opening aRVhee Bakes in December last year. Since then, he's been luring in passersby with his baked goods: the pan de coco is a fan favourite.



The storefront and showcase of goods.

Given how well-priced the buns are (£1.80 for a four-pack of pandesal!), I usually buy as much as I can stuff into my tote bag. However, the one thing I can't leave without is his ube ensaymada, a soft pastry filled with ube paste, topped with a generous portion of grated cheese and more ube paste. The fluffiness of the bread, sweetness from the ube and sharpness from the cheese make for a well-balanced bite. Thanks to places like Mamasons and Panadera (and social media), modern Filipino desserts have enjoyed more than a moment in recent times, and aRVhee should also be on everyone's radar for its affordable, traditional bakes.



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Eyes on the ube ensaymada.

During my most recent chat with Romel, he told me that he and his wife Venus (the V in aRVhee bakes) will soon roll out savoury fare like caldereta, the hearty goat meat stew. I can't help but fantasise how warming it'll be to mop up a bowl of that with his fluffy pandesal during these grey, rainy autumn days. **Hanna Pham**

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