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From Halal Carts to Michelin Stars: Muslim New Yorkers Are Hungry for More

On Ramadan nights in New York City, the day begins as the sun sets for hungry Muslims eager to break their fast with coveted halal dishes. Every year, the holy month sees city streets bustling with growling bellies in search of a table at a date-night-worthy halal restaurant.

Up and down city blocks, there is no shortage of classic halal carts, or new-age halal fried chicken spots. In fact, many people often associate the term “halal” specifically with that staple platter of bright orange chicken served over perfectly seasoned rice and drenched in thick, white sauce. But when it comes to upscale halal experiences, the number of options start to dwindle. And for a true fine-dining experience, Muslims have to fight a battle to snag a reservation at one of the few restaurants that serve halal meat.

In recent years, the halal food industry in North America has rapidly grown. According to a [report](#) from Renub Research, the market is expected to be valued at \$226 billion, a significant jump from \$100.11 billion in 2024. The same report puts the Muslim population in the U.S. at 3.5 million, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations reports [800,000 Muslims](#) in New York City alone. As the Muslim population grows, so does demand for more halal food options.

Yet, a fully halal fine-dining establishment, meaning no alcohol or pork, and all certified meat, doesn't exist in New York City.

Muslim diners often take to online forums like [Reddit](#) in search of suggestions for high-end halal spots, but they're consistently met with the same few options. These suggestions are of restaurants that either serve halal options alongside a non-halal menu, or serve a fully halal menu with alcohol available. Oftentimes a post from a curious diner sparks threads of complaints about the lack of options.

Taufiqur Rahman is trying to make the search easier. He created [Halal Mappers](#), a website that features more than 1,400 verified halal restaurants from all price points. As a restaurant-goer, Rahman found himself pinning halal eateries on his phone, so he decided to expand this onto an interactive map with small green dots to represent restaurants across the tri-state area.

Rahman regards halal fine-dining as a rarity, but through his research, he's seen that existing restaurants are noticing “there's a market that they can tap into...and they're doing that by sourcing halal meats.”

However, these nicer restaurants, like CUT by Wolfgang Puck, that offer a few dishes with halal meat are often not enough for observant Muslims. For them, a fully halal menu without alcohol or pork and halal certified meat — or better yet, halal certification from a third party — is far more appealing.

Despite not being Muslim, as a Palestinian, Bothaina Saleh, who resides in Washington Heights, has an understanding of the halal food scene in the city. The 33-year-old stood outside Ayat East Village on a recent evening in Ramadan, eating a date that the restaurant offered patrons waiting for a table. Saleh mentioned [ilili](#), a Lebanese fine-dining restaurant with locations in NoMad and Midtown, which accommodates its Muslim customers by taking requests for halal meat with prior notice.

But what seems like a considerate option is often buried within the folds of a website. “You have to kind of search through it or...hear from a friend, that, hey, this restaurant, their meat is from Creekstone,” Rahman says, referring to Creekstone Farms Premium Beef, an upscale halal meat supplier.

Partial halal menus and halal meat upon request are thoughtful accommodations, but they still miss the mark.

Sameen Choudhry, a former contributor to the popular halal food blog [Muslim Foodies](#), says she has noticed the halal dining scene rapidly moving a step up from fast food, but not so much fine-dining. She remembers receiving requests for recommendations for date-night restaurants. “With the younger crowd, I do think that there is a higher demand for fine-dining,” she says.

The overall success and spending power that the newer generation of Muslims enjoys has fueled aspirations for things that may have seemed out of reach to their immigrant parents. Rehmat Sakrani, a 27-year-old food content creator, says the driven attitudes of her generation “allows us to have the time and demand for experiences like these.”

Despite the growing demand, the restaurant industry is trailing behind. In the city, restaurants like [Bungalow](#) and [Musafer](#) are ahead of the game, serving menus with only halal-certified meat. But, like most fine-dining restaurants, they serve alcohol too.

Bungalow, in the East Village, is a highly recommended high-end option. The cascading flowers on its entrance invite you into a modern Indian restaurant, decked out in South Asian decor, with an all-encompassing cultural ambiance. It features a carefully curated, fully halal menu by Michelin-star Chef Vikas Khanna. Jimmy Rizvi, owner of Bungalow (and several other halal restaurants), doesn’t consider it to be fine-dining, despite it being colloquially recommended for the category and an extremely sought-after reservation. Rizvi instead calls it “upscale casual.”

While maintaining a halal menu, Bungalow does serve alcohol, as do many nicer halal restaurants. This choice has long been contentious in the Muslim community; many refrain from dining at such establishments, while others choose to ignore it. To serve alcohol prevents a restaurant from receiving a halal certification, which may drive some eaters away. However, alcohol is a critical financial component for restaurants; [21%](#) of sales for restaurants in the U.S. comes from alcohol, according to the National Restaurant Association.

To stay above water, although it may upset some, executives say halal restaurants must provide alcohol to bring in revenue. A restaurant is setting itself back without a sleek bar with a backdrop

of rows and rows of bottles. Rizvi says that the bar at Bungalow allows it “to be successful in New York City...where your cost of the design, your labor is very high, your rents are high.”

Mayank Istwal, corporate executive chef of Musaafer, says his restaurant feels the same pressure. The Tribeca location is the second outpost of this elegant Indian fine-dining restaurant, with the original Houston branch holding a Michelin star. Together, its grand arches, stunning decor, and a fully halal menu transport every customer to India.

Like Bungalow, Musaafer relies on alcohol sales to maintain its costly location. Without their cocktail program, Istwal says, the restaurant would “not survive at all.” But, he assured that Musaafer does provide non-alcoholic specialty drinks as well.

Alcohol ensures a broader client base. It’s a necessary complement to the dining experience for the majority of Americans, so to leave it out would hurt an eatery’s popularity.

Regardless of the shortcomings, existing high-end halal restaurants are taking a big step for the halal food industry.

Over time, South Asian and Middle Eastern cuisines have been associated with simplicity through their over saturation in the fast food halal scene. Rizvi says his concept for Bungalow was to reframe Indian food by creating a refined experience that exudes South Asian hospitality.

Saleh feels that the parameters for what makes a restaurant fine-dining are subjective, and it’s difficult to find a “place that serves halal food that an American would call fine-dining or a non Muslim halal-eater.”

Echoing a similar sentiment, Rizvi explains that there is a stigma around ethnic food that automatically excludes it from the fine-dining industry, and this may be preventing a halal breakthrough. He notices hesitation from customers to pay higher prices for ethnic food, but he rebuts this, saying cultural food “is the most laborious food.”

Any cuisine, not just from Muslim-concentrated regions, can be served with halal meat. The options available for Muslims now essentially feel like elevated home-cooked meals.

Muslim customers want to try new foods, too. “We want proper halal steak, halal Italian, or halal tapas with a nice ambiance,” Sakrani says.

To be an absolutely halal restaurant in New York City, Rizvi believes “may be financially impossible.” But this doesn’t have to limit halal fine-dining. Halal food is on the rise across the country, and Istwal believes it’s only a matter of time until more restaurateurs catch on.

“That’s a new wave,” he says, “it’s going to pick up really soon.”