

A Mideast smoke downtown

Arabian Knight Hookah & Coffee Lounge, which is open in the Place Marie mall at 53 N. Queen St., aims to create an authentic Middle Eastern experience and a chance to socialize in a relaxed atmosphere, said owner Thirgam Al-Hussaini.

The 1,500-square-foot lounge, featuring Middle Eastern instrumental music, Arabian floor cushions and U.S.-style sofas and chairs, is a chance to enjoy a Middle Eastern coffee shop while saving on airfare, according to Al-Hussaini's father, Ehsan. Among the lounge's authentic offerings, according to Ehsan, is Turkish coffee, which is strong and thick and best drank by the shot.



Owner Thirgam Al-Hussaini relaxes in the front-room lounge at the Arabian Knight Hookah and Coffee Lounge on North Queen Street. (Marty Heisey / *Intelligencer Journal*/New EraStaff)

Arabian Knight is starting with 11 flavors of hookah -- including strawberry, rose, coconut, watermelon and cinnamon. Hookah is a Middle Eastern method of smoking tobacco. It uses a device that looks like a lamp to heat flavored tobacco with charcoal and send it through water to one or more pipes, depending on how many are smoking. Thirgam Al-Hussaini said up to three people can fully enjoy a single hookah at once.

The lounge also offers Middle Eastern appetizers -- including hummus (a mashed chickpea dip with a sesame-seed paste, olive oil, garlic and lemon juice), baba ganoush (similar to hummus, with eggplant added) and falafel (spiced mashed chickpeas, formed into balls and deep-fried) -- and desserts, such as baklava (like the Greek version, only a little bit lighter and less sticky-sweet, Al-Hussaini said) and maamoul (date-filled cookies).

The lounge can seat 50 people, and has a large space in the back, either for a party of up to 15, or for smaller groups to share the space and get to know one another, said Al-Hussaini, a native of Najaf, Iraq, who came to the United States at age 4 and graduated from Lampeter-Strasburg High School in 2008.

Hours: Sunday to Thursday 2 p.m.-midnight; Friday to Saturday 2 p.m.-1 a.m. Phone: 824-4984

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