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## BURLESQUE IN NEW ORLEANS

Winter  
Restaurant  
Guide


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# SWEET SUCCESS

by Burke A. Beyer **Sucré Gelateria**

I have always thought of New Orleans as a culinary wonderland. The diversity of our city has influenced a food style that creatively pulls the best aspects of cultural cuisine and brings them together in unique and tantalizing dishes. For savory delights, there is no better destination than New Orleans but, until recently, the city was noticeably lacking in the gourmet pastry and sweets department. Bread pudding, Crème Brulee, pralines, or Bananas Foster dominated menus, and although these recipes were masterfully crafted, it still seemed like the creativity was saved for the main dishes.

Noticing this discrepancy was English Chef Tariq Hanna. He answered the call of sweet teeth everywhere by opening pastry shop and gelateria Sucré with business partner Joel Dondis. Hanna began his career as a savory chef working in fine dining, catering, and even short order diners. Somewhere along the line it became evident that he was a pastry and chocolates prodigy, and he eventually landed a job as the first ever casino pastry chef at Mandalay Bay in Detroit. Before moving to New Orleans, Chef Hanna won the 2004 U.S. Central Region Pastry Chef of the Year and was runner-up for National Pastry Chef of the Year in the American Culinary Foundation competition. Hanna has also been in three shows for the Food Network, in *Pastry and Art Design Magazine*, *Bon Appétit*, and *Gourmet*. After opening Sucré in 2007, Chef Hanna was given the distinction of New Orleans Pastry Chef of the Year. Upon entering Sucré at 3025 Magazine St., it is immediately apparent that the honor was well deserved.

The first time I walked in the pastry shop Sucré, I was filled with a childlike glee, not unlike entering Disneyworld for the first time. While I am admittedly a sweet hound, I noticed that every person around me gazing through the display cases had the same unabashed grin as they carefully decided which delectable dessert to choose. This is no easy task, mind you - it took me a good twenty minutes to opt for a scoop of lemon curd gelato and a peanut butter parfait. I coerced my brother and his wife to get a few other things I was dying to try, and we took our seats, spoons poised and gleaming above our bounty. My sister-in-law hesitated ... "Geez, it's almost too beautiful to eat; I feel guilty." She had

a point - gold flecks glistened, glazed fruit shone, and dusted sugar sparkled like rare jewels; even the plates were decorated with chocolate nibs, toasted coconut, chocolate, and raspberry syrups, and cocoa powder in artistic designs. I took a picture with my camera phone, and then dug in. The parfait melted on my palate and in that instant, I knew that God existed, for surely this was what they meant by Manna from heaven. I may have even cried; nobody noticed though, as they were all buried in their dishes.

As I mentioned before, this experience bordered on the religious for me and I have faithfully returned to Sucré to meditate over such delicacies as the Cookie Bar, a ginger cookie cake with milk chocolate ganache and milk chocolate mousse, Lemon Raspberry Olive Oil Cake, Bluet, a lavender mousse with blueberry gelee, and the ever-popular Chocolate Caramel Cookie, affectionately called the B.A.C. (big ass cookie).

Chef Hanna has recently expanded his menu to include a savory lunch with such dishes as Chicken Pot Pie, roasted veggie sandwich on focaccia bread, and my personal favorite, Sesame Seared Yellowfin Tuna with wasabi cream, Roma tomatoes, and English cucumber on a soft batard (small baguette). Everything offered at Sucré is made on site, including the bread and chocolates. The pleasant and knowledgeable staff is candid and unpretentious. You may even be greeted by Chef Hanna himself, the most genial chef I have ever met. I asked him what his secret to success (and demeanor) has been, and he answered, "Luck."

"Dessert is easy to appreciate, and New Orleans residents have sophisticated palates. I put a lot of time and effort into my work, and when you spend that much time, the finished product should represent the labor and love that went into it." Hanna's work ethic and attention to detail have raised the bar on desserts in New Orleans and shown that the final course can be as innovative and inspiring as the entrees. While New Orleans enjoys the sweet smells of chocolate, pastries, and gelatos at Sucré, I feel confident that Chef Hanna and his staff will continue to enjoy the sweet smell of success.

