

EATING OUT

Fit for a king

Ashoka restaurant fulfills Indian couple's dream

BY ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

With about 60 different languages spoken in metro-Detroit households, we've gained the richness of a broad spectrum of cuisines from this ethnic diversity.

Indian cuisine is but one of them. Late last December, Revena and Bharath Reddy opened the newest Indian restaurant Ashoka in Troy. Revena explained that Ashoka is a king's name and that her family owns three restaurants and one hotel with this name in her native land.

Opening Ashoka is the fulfillment of her dream in the United States.

To open Ashoka, Bharath, an employee of EDS at the General Motors Tech Center, secured a builder's license. With the aid of subcontractors, two buildings in the Century Plaza were remodeled and made into the attractive Ashoka with its regal, traditional colors of burgundy, gold and black.

Accents of mahogany, reminiscent of Indian rosewood, deepen the richness of each table and booth, upholstered in a fabric with coordinating colors imported from India.

Wall art depicts a typical Indian village scene of yesterday along a border, while paintings bear reference to the influence of kings, emphasizing the name Ashoka.

To manage the couple's restaurant, Revena resigned her job as a Daimler-Chrysler senior systems analyst.

"I prefer people to computer

Ashoka Indian Cuisine
Where? 3842 Rochester Road (north of Big Beaver in Century Plaza), Troy. (248) 889-7070.
Open: 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Sunday, 5-9 p.m. Friday and 11 a.m.-3 p.m. and 5-10:30 p.m. Saturday.
Menu: Specializes in Moghul plus South and North Indian cuisine.
Cost: Dishes served Thali — a South Indian traditional meal which includes choice of entrée, a vegetable curry, dal, sambar, raita, rice, naan and dessert average \$10-17. A la carte (served with naan and soup) are, in general \$2 less.
Reservations: Accepted.
Credit cards: All major.
Details: No alcohol; no smoking; all items take-out; and catering. All dishes customized to desired spicing level.

logic," she said. "I wanted to work with my own creation and proudly bring the food culture of India to this area."

She does with the aid of her executive chef Ran Sing, who for 18 years worked as a chef in the five-star restaurant at the Taj Continental in Delhi.

Sing is aided by four other chefs, one responsible for making house-made breads and cooking in the restaurant's two Tandoor (clay) ovens.

A second chef specializes in Indian-Chinese dishes, an aspect that makes Ashoka truly unique because no other metro-Detroit restaurant is doing it.

Because of its proximity to China, Indianized Chinese cuisine is famous in India and Ashoka aspires to make it well-known here.

A third chef prepares all the appetizers and South Indian dishes while two other chefs have responsibility for everything else.

What is Indian cuisine? A combination of subtle tastes, where each fragrant spice makes an impact on the dish as a whole. Blending and preparing fresh spices daily for the various dishes is centuries-old and indispensable art of Indian cuisine.

At Ashoka, this art stems from the four corners of the country with specialties from Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad to street fare and home-style Tandoori cooking, and on to sophisticated foods of Mumbai.

The traditional buffet is served at lunch, but with a heightened emphasis on freshly-prepared.

Order the Tandoori Chicken. It will be served on a sizzle platter rather than buffet style. The naan (bread) will be fresh from the Tandoor.

If you are a pro at ordering Indian cuisine, you will be overjoyed at the prospect of choosing from more than 100 dishes and 10 breads, all prepared on premise.

If you'd like to discover the intriguing flavors of Indian cuisine, here are the most popular among appetizers: Cut Mirch, a chili bajji (battered, spiced and deep fried) with chat masala, onions and lemon; Vegetable Samosa, mildly spiced with chat masala; Chilli Chicken, shredded



Mouth watering: Revena Reddy displays an Indian dish, chicken biryani, at the Ashoka Restaurant she and her husband, Bharath, own in Troy.

boneless chicken kicked up in a snout of hot chilies.

The most popular South Indian specialty is Masala Dosa, a crepe stuffed with vegetable

curry. In Indian cuisine, a "curry" is any vegetable or meat which is prepared as a dish complemented by bread or rice. Indian cuisine is vegetarian friendly. Among the top vegetable specialties are Palak Paneer, spinach

and home-made cheese cubes, and Maharashtrian Style Farsi Bhaji — green beans cooked with freshly-grated coconut.

Chicken, lamb and seafood dishes abound, but I suggest heading straight for the category Shane-E-Tandoor and try Chicken Tikka or Hyderabad Kabab roasted in the special clay oven. Your experience can be rounded out by a juice or lassi (prepared with yogurt) and finished

with dessert such as Rasamalai, cheese dumplings in a creamy syrup topped with pistachio, or Kulfi, a traditional Indian unburned ice cream.

Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about dining, food and wine for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave her a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864.

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Michigan Culinary Food & Wine Extravaganza, 6:30-10 p.m. Tuesday, March 7, Mac & Ray's Restaurant, 30875 North River Road, Harrison Township, \$95 per person. Proceeds support the

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■ Fat Tuesday Dinner at Five Lakes Grill, 424 North Main Street, Milford, (248) 684-7465. 6:45 p.m. Tuesday, March 7, \$46 per person plus tax and gratuity. Wine package available at \$29 per person.

Chef/proprietor Brian Polcyn will prepare a five-course dinner with foods from traditional Mardi Gras celebratory areas such as New Orleans and the Caribbean. Sommelier Ron Edwards has selected the "fat" wines specially chosen for the wine package.

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