

DINING OUT

Enjoy a taste of India at comfortable Priya

BY KEELY KALESKI WYGONIK
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Homey Priya offers a delicious respite from what I like to call "the sloshy days of winter." Owners Ravi Mandava and his uncle, Ramesh Kaza, are gracious, welcoming hosts, eager to please repeat and first-time customers. "Everyone appreciates the decor and the warm colors," said Mandava. "These windows resemble palace windows. Most of our chefs are family members."

If you've never sampled Indian cuisine, Priya offers an excellent introduction - a luncheon buffet with a wide variety of dishes to sample.

Priya
Where: 36600 Grand River Ave., (between Halsted and Drake roads), Farmington Hills, (248) 615-7700
Open: Luncheon buffet 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., dinner 5-10 p.m. Monday-Friday; luncheon buffet noon to 3:30 p.m. Saturday-Sunday; dinner noon to 10 p.m. Saturday, noon to 9 p.m. Sunday.
Menu: Indian cuisine
Reservations: Recommended for parties of six or more
Cost: Luncheon buffet \$7.95 per person Monday-Friday, \$8.95 per person Saturday-Sunday. Dinners \$7.95-\$16.95
Carry-out: Available
Credit Cards: All majors
Smoking: Allowed at the bar, but not in the dining area
Catering: On and off site. Meeting room for 40 people, banquets for up to 150 people
Troy location
72 W. Maple Road, Troy, (248) 269-0100
Open: 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday for lunch, 5-10 p.m. dinner; 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday, and 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday

Mandava. "We offer 16 items on weekdays and a couple of more on weekends. You can also order

from the dinner menu." Spacious and open, the building that houses Priya used to be a bank. The buffet is served upstairs, but there's also a dining room on the lower level and full-service bar area. Go ahead, order an Indian beer, King Fish-er or Taj Mahal. Or if you like mangoes, try a mango margarita or daiquiri.

A graduate of Michigan State University, Mandava moved here from San Francisco to open the restaurant with his uncle, he said. "We offer both southern and northern Indian cuisine."

Kaza left a career as an anesthesiologist to open the family's two restaurants. Like his nephew, he enjoys interacting with people and offering new menu items. "We're consistent in taste."

Lunch is a must if you're a newcomer to Indian cuisine, but



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL HENKIN

At your service: Rakesh Sharma, Satish Kumar, Ravi Mandava and Sukhdev Singh offer Tandoori Chicken, Tikka Masala and Dosa, all part of a Thali Dinner.

Mandava and his staff are happy to help you choose a dish you'll enjoy.

Looking over the extensive menu, Mandava recommends Vegetable Samosa - two crisp patties stuffed with potatoes and green peas; lemon chicken; and either the Tandoori Combo Platter or Tandoori Vegetable Grill.

The Southern dishes are served with "dosa" - crepes made with lentil or rice flour and served with hot and mild sauces. Mandava recommends

Masala Dosa, a crepe stuffed with vegetable curry.

There are many vegetarian entrees to choose from - all served with rice and bread. Navratan Koorma is mixed vegetables cooked in a creamy sauce with cashews, raisins, and spices. Palak Paneer is made with spinach and homemade cheese cubes with spices. Kadai Paneer, cheese cubes cooked with bell peppers in yogurt and sauce, is another frequently requested item.

If you're hungry for something spicy, order Chicken or Lamb Vindaloo, boneless chicken or lamb and potatoes cooked in a very spicy sauce. There's also Chicken Makhani, chicken cooked in a mildly spiced creamy sauce, or Chicken Tikka Masala, chicken marinated in yogurt with herbs and spices.

Indian-Chinese dishes are not something you would expect to find, but you will at Priya. "There's a lot of Chinese influence in Indian food," said Mandava. "We introduced these dishes two months ago and they've

been very well received."

Choose from Cauliflower Manchurian, Chili Chicken, Vegetable, Egg, Chicken, or Shrimp fried rice. Tandoori dishes are cooked in a clay oven with a blend of herbs and spices and served with curry sauce and naan, an Indian style oven-baked bread.

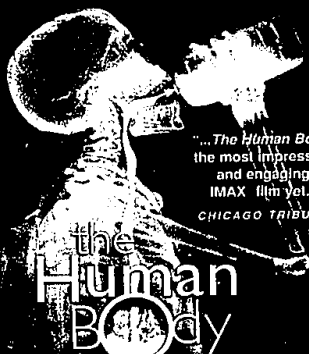
If you're thirsty for something different, consider Mango Lassi, a thick drink made with blended yogurt and mango pulp, or Chai, a traditional tea made with spices and milk. Finish your dining adventure with mango lassi, cream or rice pudding. The pudding is cooked with vermicelli and tapioca in milk.

Mothers get VIP treatment at Priya on Mother's Day. A special menu is offered every year. "It's a big thing for us," said Mandava. Thanksgiving dinner, although held on different days than the holiday, is also special.

Keely Kaleski Wygonik is assistant managing editor of features for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. She welcomes your comments and restaurant suggestions. She can be reached via e-mail at kwygonik@oe.hometown.com or by phone Monday-Wednesday-Friday at (734) 953-2105 or Tuesday-Thursday, (248) 901-2587.

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