

Curators of Curry

Delhi Palace Expands Its Indian Cuisine

By Gamin Summers | Photos by Josh Biggs



Dishes at Delhi Palace are stepping up local Indian Cuisine offerings.

In the past decade, the cuisine in Flagstaff has evolved to include a wide array of ethnic food choices. A half-dozen Thai restaurants, new sushi bars and even a Peruvian restaurant bring various shades of flavor to the scene, along with the multiple Chinese, Mexican and Italian restaurants that fill out the dining possibilities.

But few cuisines offer the burst of spice, aroma and diversity of palate-tempting textures and flavors as Indian food. Our mountain town has hosted Indian food places for a number of years. The Delhi Palace, located near Wal-Mart, has long brought quality Indian offerings to Flagstaff, but the new owners are working to step up the menu.

Raman and Harwinder “Bobby” Ahuja have elevated Delhi Palace, with restaurants in Flagstaff and Sedona, to a higher level of authentic Indian cuisine and dining pleasure. The brothers’ combined talents — Raman’s business sense and Bobby’s kitchen skills — make their first foray into the dining world a smart and delicious experience.

The door of the restaurant opens into a blast of enticing aromas and a bright interior of peach-colored walls, one of which displays a soft, muted mural of the Taj Mahal and surrounding countryside, a feature of the previous restaurant. Much of the original menu remains, yet the recipes are decidedly different and reflect Bobby’s experiences working in Los Angeles area Indian restaurants, in addition to his commitment to the food of his homeland, Punjab in northern India. He came to the United States when he was 16; Raman when he was 19.

The palak paneer, a traditional dish of spinach and cheese, is rich, heavy and reflects the dark, earthy nature of the green more distinctly than I remembered. Chicken tikka masala combines tender chicken with a thick, buttery sauce of tomatoes, onions and peppers which, despite its richness, is surprisingly delicate and abundant enough for sopping with fresh garlic naan.



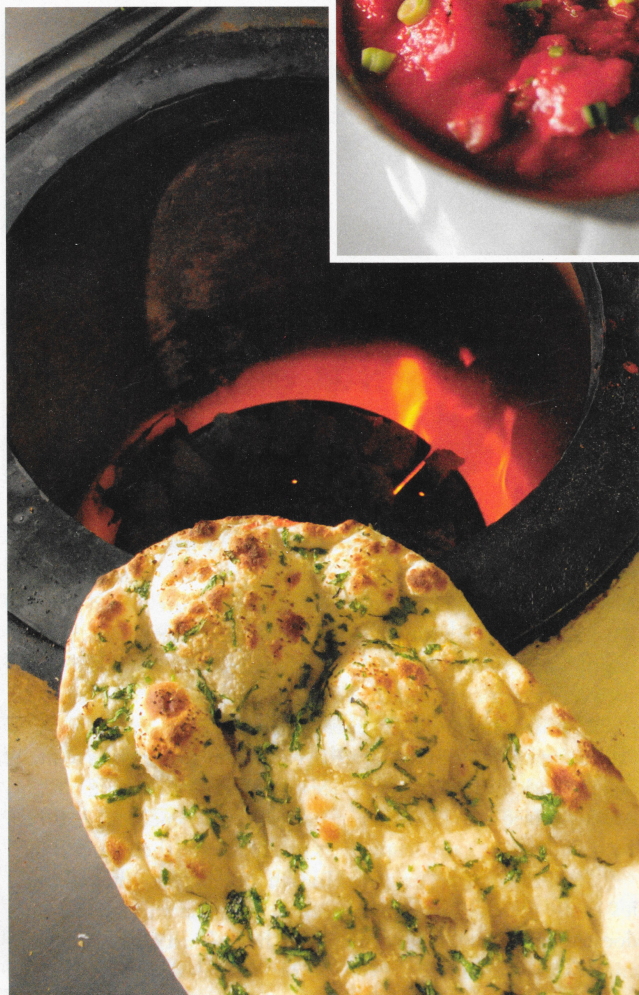
Naan, a soft, thin Indian flatbread, is made by plastering round disks of dough to the side of a tandoor — a cylindrical earthen oven using charcoal and high temperature to also produce flavorful meats. Tandoori Chicken is marinated in lemon, yogurt, paprika and other spices, then lowered into the oven on metal skewers to create the tender, smoky, deep red taste sensation.

Cumin, coriander, ginger, garlic, cinnamon, cloves and cardamon are some of the familiar spices Bobby combines to make an authentic Indian curry, noticeably superior to a store bought, Americanized curry powder or paste. Raman encourages diners with trepidations about spiciness to experience their restaurant.

“Some people haven’t tried Indian food because they’re afraid it’s spicy,” Raman said. He asserted that the variety of spices doesn’t necessarily make dishes spicy hot — just deeply flavorful and sense-awakening.

"Some people haven't
tried Indian food
because they're afraid
it's spicy."

-Raman Ahuja



The daily lunch buffet provides a great opportunity for sampling Delhi Palace's offerings. The previous owners' spread involved familiar favorites regularly, but the Ahujas wanted to mix things up.

"We now have over 30 items to choose from," Raman said. "More vegetables, fish, lamb kabob, expanded salad bar, more sauces and chutneys." Favorites are still available — Tandoori Chicken, colorful rice, raita (Indian yogurt) and brown, crispy Samosas — deep-fried vegetable fritters perfectly accented by tart, sweet tamarind sauce. Bobby adds new creations to the buffet daily, some of which have included Mango Chicken, Chicken Jelfarazi and Reshmi Chicken Tikka with mint and yogurt.

Desserts include Kheer, Indian rice pudding with subtle sweetness, pistachios and a smooth, milky texture; and the ever-popular Gujrab Jamun, rice balls in a light, scented syrup. Another option is offered daily, such as Burfi, a cake-like mixture of sweetened condensed milk, almonds and cashews.

Alvin's

(Fine Dining Without The Attitude)



featured in the June issue of
Mountain Living Magazine

*Alvin's knows
that times are hard.*

Come check out our new reduced price menu.

Same great quality & taste.

Best Prime Rib
Saturday Night
10-12 oz \$19.⁹⁵
12-14 oz \$21.⁹⁵
in Flagstaff!

Offering a wide variety of wines

Sunday Brunch Buffet

10 am to 2 pm Every Sunday
\$14.95 adult • \$8.95 child (12 and under)

Carved Ham
Omelets made
to order
Weekly Chef's Special
Chocolate Fountain

Fruit
Pancakes
French Toast
Bacon
Sausage

Gravy and Biscuits
Breakfast Potatoes
Country Mashed Potatoes
Complimentary Glass of
Champagne

Come check out our

*Happy Hour
Appetizer Special*

from 3-7 pm

5200 Cortland Blvd.

Located behind Randal's Fine Meats

928.526.2797

Reservations Recommended



In addition to tamarind sauce, other meal accompaniments tantalize the palate with rare flavors, textures and surprises that break away from the bland. An imported, exotic pickle mixture includes turnip, small limes, lotus stem, caper berry, cranberry and mango. Mint chutney with plenty of cilantro and the bite of jalapeno cleanses the palate. Raita cools with its mild creaminess. And papadum, crispy Indian wafers with cumin seed, add a crunchy, chickpea enhanced option for scooping rich, chunky sauces.

Some less adventuresome diners might be worried about all the unusual names and spices. They might be afraid to step into a less Americanized Indian restaurant and explore the palate-expanding tastes. But one trip to the lunch buffet and one whiff of the food will be all the encouragement most people will need.

Delhi Palace brings a new flavor of Indian food in northern Arizona with what you would expect from exotic origins — intense flavor, vibrant color, mouth watering aromas and a beautiful setting. And there's something else: a venture beyond the norm into creative, experimental dishes by Chef Bobby, and a commitment to having everyone experience Indian food and culture. 🏔️