

# Egg Harbor Township gets spicy with The Nizam's Indian Restaurant

By PAMELA DOLLAH, At The Shore | Posted: Wednesday, October 15, 2014 11:15 am

The business card for The Nizam's Indian Restaurant in Egg Harbor Township makes this bold statement: "Owned and operated by the most experienced and qualified professional in Indian cuisine in South New Jersey."

Strong words. But quite possibly very true.

Syed Abbas, owner and chef of The Nizam's, has a vast amount of experience when it comes to cuisine. Abbas, who was born in New Delhi, received his Masters in culinary arts in Australia and went on to work for the Flight Kitchen of TajSATS Air Catering Ltd., a joint venture of the Indian Hotels Company and the market leader in airline catering. It was here that he received his experience in not only Indian cuisine, but multicultural, due to the exorbitant amount of international travelers.

When he moved to the States in 1998, he did a brief stint in the casinos and also worked as a financial advisor for a bit, but he eventually came back to his original profession — food.

"It haunts you back," Abbas admits.

The Nizam's opened on the Black Horse Pike in 2008. In this area where Italian food is still considered "ethnic," it was a much-needed and welcomed addition to the Jersey shore restaurant scene.

"We're very ethnic," Abbas says. "We haven't Americanized at all."

The menu at The Nizam's — a Persian word essentially meaning "manager," chosen because Abbas considers himself the "manager of food" — is primarily Mughal cuisine, connoting that the recipes came from Persia but were enhanced, as Abbas claims, in India.

"Biryani, tandoori — even kebabs — all came from Persia," Abbas, the father of three, remarks. "They are highly specialized dishes with rich textures, and we make sure they are done right."

About two years ago, Abbas completely renovated both the interior of the restaurant and the menu.



## ATS The Nizams

From left, The Nizam's host Shiv Patel and Chef/Owner Syed Abbas pose with some of the signature dishes offered at the EHT restaurant.

For the decor, he put in more comfortable seating and injected warm reds and golds on the walls and in the lighting and combined that with pretty pastels on the tables. Even the presentation of the food was augmented to be as pleasing to the eyes as it is the taste buds. For the menu he added many new items such as tangri kebabs (\$15.95), chicken cooked in a clay oven with special herbs and spices served with basmati rice; more seafood dishes such as shrimp karahi (\$16.95), shrimp cooked with Indian spices, onions, tomatoes and green peppers; and the very popular rack of lamb (\$21.95) cooked in a clay oven and marinated in yogurt with mild spices.

But perhaps the biggest improvement has been the addition of the glossary that's now included in the menu.

"We did it so people could easily understand the many different types of sauces," Abbas states. "Now they can clearly tell what curry is versus vindaloo or masala."

You will not see any canned or frozen products in Abbas' kitchen, and he tries to use as many organic products as possible, as well as utilize kosher meats because they do not use hormones.

The food options are diverse enough to have something for everyone. While chicken, lamb and goat are highly prevalent, Abbas has produced an entire page of his menu that's dedicated to all vegetarian and vegan items such as paneer makhani (\$13.95), cottage cheese cooked with tomato puree and butter in mild spices; eggplant bhurta (\$13.95), broiled eggplant sauteed with onions, tomatoes and herbs; or yellow dal (\$11.95), lentils in Indian spices.

Abbas knows that many customers cannot tolerate a lot of spice. That's why his servers are required to ask customers what level they prefer on Abbas' "spice meter."

"It's a heat scale from one to 10," Abbas explains. "And we rarely give a customer a 10 until we know them well enough and know that they want to go up from their last experience here."

Abbas chuckles at the fact that most of his customers who tend to go for the higher numbers on the scale are white Americans.

"Indians can't take the heat," he laughs. "I haven't seen one Indian person take the highest level yet."

Abbas, however, wants to assure customers that if they make a mistake and go too high on the scale to let their server know. They'll be happy to "mild it up" for you.

"Customers are spending good money — they need to be satisfied when they walk out of here," he says. "We want them to be happy."

Those happy customers consist mostly of locals with some repeated tourists and oftentimes even hungry patrons from as far as Cherry Hill, Philadelphia and Toms River make a special trip just to dine here.

As a contrast to the old-world rajasthani silk paintings hanging on the walls featuring Indian women

dressed in traditional saris, The Nizam's has a propensity to go modern when it comes to technology and music. Some of Abbas' repeat customers personally text him their orders on their way in to dine, and they recently introduced online ordering for takeout. As for the beats, The Nizam's plays only modern upbeat Indian music.

"It's all youngsters who work here," Abbas snickers. "If I put on sitar music or Ravi Shankar, it would give them a headache."