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Spice of Life

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Nizam's in EHT offers up true, un-Americanized Indian cuisine



Blink an eye, and you'll miss it. Nizam's Authentic Indian Cuisine is set on a busy stretch of Black Horse Pike, tucked just beyond a super-Wawa in EHT. So be prepared to hit the brakes. This place is worth the search, and worth the stop.

As the name asserts, Nizam's serves serious Indian cuisine—the real stuff, not an American parody. That means fewer heavy creams and other sweeteners. It means a light but sure touch with the garden of spices (curry, coriander, turmeric, cumin, saffron) typical of Indian cooking. It also means very little natural fat; if you go easy on the rice and bread—which, admittedly, is hard—chef and owner Syed Abbas says you can lose 10 pounds in a week, dining from his menu.

Unfamiliar with Indian food? That menu may take some explaining. Depending on your preference, the cordial hosts at Nizam's may recommend spicy chicken vindaloo over mild chicken korma, lamb pasada over raan kebab. They are happy to explain the difference between bhatura and pakora.

On my first visit to Nizam's, as the guest of an enthusiastic friend, we ordered a thali, an impressive sampler tray with mini-servings of six entrees and dessert. Made by special request, thali is not always available, but it's a great way to try a little of this and that, from the peppery chicken chili to the goat saag with spinach and ginger to the simply scrumptious aloo gobhi (this entrée with cauliflower and potatoes in a mild piquant sauce is my favorite).

Second time at Nizam's, we tried shrimp bhuna: saffron-imbued basmati rice and plump shrimp sautéed with bell pepper, onions and tomatoes (\$15.95). It was lively in the mouth, yet mild enough to warrant a little salt. We also had lamb chops Masala (\$15.95). The virtually unadorned chops are prepared with herbed yogurt, onion and a hint of lime, says server Ali Choudry: "It's very plain. Nothing on it, no butter or marinade, and it doesn't touch any oil. It's very healthy, and unbelievably tasty."

Don't like spicy food? No problem, says Abbas.

"People have a misconception about Indian food, that it's so hot it will leave your eyes watering," he says. "We add the heat as you like it, from zero, being quite bland, to 10, being the hottest."

The most requested dish here is the Tandoori chicken, dressed in yogurt and herbs and cooked in a clay oven. The jug-shaped ovens take hours to heat; when the temperature reaches 16,00 Fahrenheit, the tandoor can bake bread in less than a minute.

Nizam's has been open 11 months, and its reputation continues to build. Abbas, who studied in Delhi and worked for Taj luxury hotels before coming to the U.S., hopes to introduce more South Jerseyans to the exotic delights of his native food.

The lunchtime buffet, made fresh daily, is just \$9.95. It's a big draw. "Word of mouth is growing," Abbas says. "We are the only people in the area serving authentic Indian. I want everybody to come and try it."

Chef's Corner

Nizam's Rack of Lamb

INGREDIENTS:

8 medium chops, halved
1/2 cup yogurt or sour cream
1 tbsp. ginger garlic paste to taste
1/4 tsp. cloves
1/4 tsp. each black & green cardamom
1/4 tsp. mace powder
1/4 tsp. nutmeg
3/4 tsp. cumin powder
3/4 tsp. coriander powder
1/4 tsp. red chili powder, or to taste
1/2 tsp. roasted poppyseed paste
lemon juice & fresh mint leaves
salt and pepper

Apply salt, pepper, lemon juice and ginger garlic paste to chops and set aside for 30 minutes. Mix remaining ingredients (except yogurt) and divide into two portions. Apply half to the meat and add remainder to the yogurt or sour cream, then use as a marinade. Refrigerate the marinated meat for two hours.

Preheat oven at 375 degrees. Bake chops for 30 minutes. Remove and drizzle with olive oil or butter and a few drops of lemon juice, then bake for 10-15 minutes.

Garnish with red onion slices, fresh lemon and mint leaves. Serve with fresh garden salad and Naan (Indian bread).

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