

Jewel of the crown

by: SCOTT CHERRY
1/25/2008 12:00 AM

Kolam Innovative Indian Cuisine offers dishes from both northern and southern India

Kolam Innovative Indian Cuisine offers diners a scintillating taste of that faraway land, whether it be from one of its aromatic lunch buffets or from the lengthier dinner menu.

Most East Indian food we encounter on this continent is of the North Indian variety, featuring elaborate meat preparations, rice pilaf and velvety sauces. South Indian food includes more steamed dishes with rice, vegetables and seafood.

Both employ a wide variety of curries and complex uses of herbs and spices, and both can be found on the Kolam menu. Kolam also offers Indo-Chinese and Chinese wok dishes, but we stuck with the traditional Indian fare on a recent weeknight visit.

A co-worker, who spent some formative years in the region, and his wife accompanied me. He said the quality of the naan – the tandoor-oven baked flatbread – usually is a tipoff to what to expect.

Our naan (\$1.45) at Kolam seemed average at best, but in this case, it did not portend the melody of flavors that was to follow.

Perhaps we should have followed the lead of the restaurant's "signature" naan (\$2.45), stuffed with finely mashed fruits and nuts.

It was wonderful, with a honey-like flavor sweet enough to serve as a dessert instead of an appetizer. Three of us shared a chicken tikka appetizer (\$4.95), which featured five pieces of moist, red-tinted chicken that had been cooked in the clay oven. It came with a light-green, mellow mint sauce.

We chose another "signature" dish, Chettinad-style lamb curry (\$9.95), for one of the entrees. Chettinad is a South Indian style of cooking that incorporates many herbs and spices, and is spicy hot. If it's not hot, they say, it's not Chettinad.

In our dish, the tender chunks of lamb were bathed in a dark, reddish-brown sauce that delivered different levels of flavors as it passed across the tongue, starting with a taste akin to American chili. It was hot, too, but not so much that it sent us scrambling for water glasses.

Chicken saag (\$8.95) featured chunks of chicken cooked with spinach in a mild cream sauce that showed a little spiciness on the finish.

Both the lamb curry and chicken saag came with a choice of flavorful, saffron-tinted basmati rice or naan. We paid a little extra to have both.

Grilled lamb chops (\$14.95) came on a platter that also included rice pilaf dotted with peas, naan, palak paneer (spinach and homemade cheese in mild spices), yogurt sauce

and a nice mint chutney.

The four tender chops had been dipped in a spicy batter and cooked in the tandoor oven. We shared a tasty mango lassi (\$2.45) for dessert. It had the consistency of a milkshake or smoothie and the flavor of fresh mangoes.

When we returned for photos and an interview the next week, we took stock of the weekday buffet, which included mixed vegetables pakora, naan, rice pilaf, mixed vegetables khorma, chicken masala, chicken tikka masala, chicken in madras sauce, meatball curry, deep-fried catfish, tandoor chicken and a salad station. We were told the weekend buffet has additional items.

A children's menu offers a choice of chicken nuggets or a corn dog, each with fries and a drink for \$3.95.

Kolam serves no alcoholic beverages but has chai tea, iced tea, soft drinks, South Indian coffee and sweet or salt lassi (yogurt drinks).

Raja Mohan is the lead cook and said he is a partner in the restaurant with Kishore Masilamani and Senthil Gopal, who acts as maitre d'.

Mohan said they came from India to the United States about 15 years ago and for the past eight years worked at Gopuram Taste of India restaurant in Oklahoma City.

The 55-seat Kolam is simply decorated with pictures of India, glass-topped maroon tablecloths and artificial flowers in glass vases. What appears to be a drivethrough window actually is a pickup window for call-in orders.

KOLAM INNOVATIVE INDIAN CUISINE

4844 S. Memorial Drive, 270-1445

Food: East Indian

Price: \$5.95 (idli – three rice cakes) to \$14.95 (lamb chops masala); weekday lunch buffet, \$7.95; Saturday-Sunday lunch buffet, \$9.95

Credit cards: All major

Hours: dinner, 5-10 p.m. seven days a week; lunch buffets, 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday-Sunday

Food: ***

Atmosphere: **

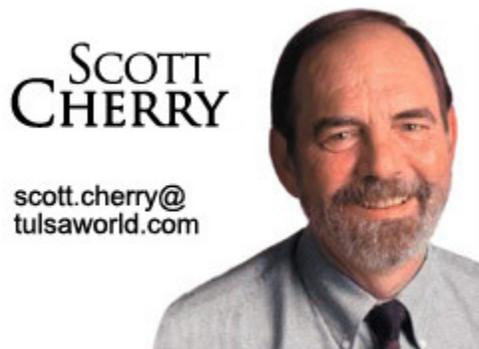
Service: **½

(One is fair, two good, three very good and four excellent.)

Associate Images:



Grilled Lamb Chop (top) and Tandoori Chicken from Kolam Innovative Indian Cuisine.



Copyright © 2008, World Publishing Co. All rights reserved

 [Return to Story](#)