



WHERE NORTH AND SOUTH INDIA MEET

Evergreen serves up the best of both worlds.

BY MELISSA BEARNS

The first thing you notice when you walk through the door of Evergreen is the incredible smell — the aroma of savory spices, roasting meats, baking breads and simmering vegetables completely fills the air.

Owner Meer Ali Shaik and his family moved to the U.S. in 1990 from India and opened the Corvallis restaurant six years ago on Third Street. They have outlasted a number of other Indian restaurants in the area — no surprise given that both the food and the

service are excellent.

If you can get past the wide-openness of the dining area, which lacks the close, intimate feeling that makes smaller restaurants feel cozy, you'll be able to enjoy some of the other funky items that decorate the large room.

Retro chandeliers hang from the ceiling, colorful decorations give Evergreen a festive vibe, and wood paneling along the walls adds visual warmth. Traditional Indian pop music plays in the background, loud enough to add ambiance but not so loud that it interferes

with conversation.

With a \$7 lunch buffet and moderate prices for dinner entrees (\$9-\$11), Evergreen is clearly a favorite of Corvallis residents from students to business people. On evenings when other restaurants have already shut their doors and hung out the closed sign, Evergreen stays open — seating the last table at 9:30pm seven days a week. You can literally walk in at 9:29 and they'll seat you with a smile.

Unlike many Indian restaurants, which either offer dishes from the north or the south

but not both, the menu has a wide variety of dishes from the two regions.

The vegetable samosa is one of the best I've had with a light flaky crust and a perfectly-spiced, juicy filling. While it's worth the extra \$2 for the full meal option, which includes a number of tasty little side dishes, fluffy nan and dessert, a few of the sides didn't live up to my entrée, lamb kurai.

The cabbage was the best side dish, well-cooked and mild, but the lentils were too mushy and lacked flavor. The raita was delicious with onions, tomato and peas along

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with the yogurt and cucumber.

The cuts of lamb were high quality and melted in the mouth. A big fan of spicy food, I was a bit disappointed that the traditionally fire-hot dish created barely enough heat to require a sip of water.

Shaik said he's had to tone down the spiciness of the food to keep customers coming back. "At first we had a lot of people who felt that the food was too hot," he said. So if you like spicy food, make sure you specifically request it.

Another excellent choice is the tandoori chicken, served sizzling and steaming at your table with sautéed vegetables. Again the meat is tender, juicy and high quality, not to mention delicious. It's served with a slightly spicy, tomato and cream based sauce that adds just the right amount of zip.

The beer list includes some great local microbrews and of course the traditional Indian beers, Taj Majal and King Fisher. I recommend either as a nice complement to your meal.

Save room for dessert and if you've never had it, the mango kulfi is an incredibly flavorful mango ice cream spiced with cinnamon, cardamom and a few others. It's light, refreshing and delicious. The gulab jaman, fluffy, sweet, fried dough shaped like a donut hole and served in rose syrup, were warm, an added bonus.

If you're looking for a great meal late, a restaurant with good service where you can get in and out quickly, or just wonderful food, Evergreen is the place. ■

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