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## FOOD

BY TODD SOUTH



Haveli Indian Cuisine & Bar recreates the opulence of an Indian mansion with ornate decorations, crystal centerpieces and a dance floor.  
PHOTO/ALLISON YOUNG

## Spiced up

In India, a *haveli* is a fancy mansion or temple. Recently opened Haveli Indian Cuisine & Bar aims to deliver that vibe, with life-size figures of Indian revelers, ornate decorations, golden flatware, crystal centerpieces and a disco-lighted dance floor. A full bar is available to help you adjust to the explosion of color and sparkle. Though they offer a lunch buffet (\$11.99), my dinner companions and I had arranged for a *prix fixe* meal of dishes chosen by the chef (\$25 per person). Service was prompt, despite occasional moments I'd chalk up to being "lost in translation." (I've included *à la carte* pricing for the dishes we sampled.)

Things started off with a green lentil soup (\$6.99) loaded with chopped garlic and scallion. It had a lot of body, and the seasoning was robust. This was followed by fish *pakora* (\$11.99), chunks of mild white fish marinated in ginger and garlic, battered in spiced gram and rice flour, deep fried and served with fresh tartar sauce. The bright red nuggets were lightly crispy and tasty with or without the dill-forward tartar sauce.

Tandoori chicken (\$15.99) marinated in yogurt and spices, baked in a *tandoor* oven and garnished with fresh onion and cilantro was much saucier than the dry, pink stuff to which I'm accustomed. It reminded me of chicken *tikka* and presented me with the choice of trying to gently pry meat off the bone, or just embrace the mess with teeth and fingers. Regardless, it was well worth the trouble.

A dry salad of lettuce, green olive, red onion, tomato and hot pepper (\$6.99) was included to complement the curried dishes that followed. I added a little *raita* as dressing (a yogurt, herb and vegetable condiment). Plain *naan* flatbread (\$2.99) and garlic *naan* (\$3.99) were provided,

great for sopping up all the delicious sauces. It was pillowy and crisp—the perfect gateway drug for anyone new to Indian cuisine.

Our saucy dishes served with a side of long-grain basmati rice included *aloo gobi* (\$9.99) with curried potato, cauliflower and other veggies; goat curry (\$15.99) featuring chunks of bone-in goat simmered in garlic, ginger, thyme, onion, hot pepper and spices; *sahi paneer* (\$11.99) cubes of fresh cheese in a thick gravy of cream, tomato and spices; and *murg makani* (\$13.99), a.k.a. butter chicken, in a tomato butter curry sauce. The veggie dish was fairly mild but enjoyable, and the goat was very good. The meat fell off the bone, and the sauce was balanced and hearty. If you enjoy lamb, you'll love this goat dish. I like cheese in any form, but the simple *paneer* was just a sidekick to its excellent cream sauce. However, the winner was the butter chicken—among the best I've had.

Finally, shrimp *biryani* (\$15.99), a big pile of rice with saffron and other spices, bell pepper, pea, carrot and some impressively large, seasoned prawns buried inside. The shrimp were big enough to eat with fork and knife, and the rice/veggie combo was fragrant and ridiculously plentiful. I added the *makani* and *sahi* sauces to this with great effect. Even if you're avoiding carbs, this is a must have. After all this, we were too pleasantly full for the variety of dessert enticements available. Maybe next time. □

## Haveli Indian Cuisine & Bar

287 Los Altos Pkwy., Sparks, 451-7469  
Haveli Indian Cuisine & Bar is open from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Learn more at [haveliindiancuisine.net](http://haveliindiancuisine.net).