

## Food-loving oncologist and businessman get cooking

### Despite varied backgrounds, pair open Tamarind Bay restaurant in Harvard Square

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A large replica of Buddha graces the entrance of Tamarind Bay in Cambridge, Mass. Owner Vikas Kapoor says it projects the restaurant's inclusiveness.

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Cambridge, MASS. - It's not every day that one walks into an Indian restaurant and finds lobster or salmon on the menu, cooked fresh with herbs and spices like they do in homes across India.

This is just some of the unique fare found at Tamarind Bay, a new Indian bistro nestled in a basement in Harvard Square. With its rustic Indian look, muted colors and elegant décor, the chic and charming 55-seat eatery is the brainchild of owners Vikas Kapoor

and Ajai Kumar. Opened at the end of June, it fills the space occupied for more than 30 years by Casa Mexico, a highly successful Mexican eatery.

Kapoor, who is in his early 30s, came to the United States from the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh in 1987. He received a master's degree in business administration from Babson College and started Copley Technology Group, a software health care company, in 1998. Kumar, 51, is an oncologist from Bangalore who arrived here in 1975.

The two met several years ago through common friends and realized that, despite their varied backgrounds, they shared a common love for food.

They also recognized that there were hardly any restaurants that served authentic home-style Indian food in the area, they said. "To get a taste of fresh Indian food, one had to travel to New York or London," said Kapoor.

Added Kumar, "We wanted to change from a mom-and-pop kind of image to a more professional operation."

They opened Tamarind Bay in spite of their lack of formal training in the restaurant industry and apprehension by some family members.

Although there are three other Indian restaurants in the area, they chose Harvard Square "to provide an exceptional product in a competitive environment," Kapoor said.

The name "Tamarind Bay" is a mix of the Indian spice tamarind and Massachusetts' nickname, "the Bay State." The calming influence upon entering the restaurant is enhanced by a large and spectacular replica of Buddha that graces the entrance.

"Buddhism stands for universality, it cuts across all religions and castes," says Kumar. "We wanted to project a broad-based inclusive picture of what we do."

Indeed, the menu suits a wide variety of palates. It includes traditional dishes such as sheekh kabab, tandoori chicken and daal, as well as non-traditional entrees such as Konkani lobster, Faldhari kofta (raw banana dumplings in onion sauce) and Shabnam Purluft (button mushrooms stuffed with homemade cheese grilled in the tandoor).

And although there is no buffet available, customers can order a prix fixe for \$6.95 on weekdays and \$7.95 on weekends.

"We wanted to go back to basics and let Indian customers know what Indian food is really supposed to be," asserts Kapoor. "What others have done over the years is that they have Americanized dishes to such an extent that it is not authentic any more and we want to change that."

For that reason, Kapoor recruited executive chef Wali Ahmad from India. Ahmad worked for the Indian television show "Khana Khazana" under chef Sanjeev Kapoor, as well as for Imtiaz Qureshi, often considered the godfather of contemporary Indian cuisine.

In Ahmad's menu, food is not cooked by the "batch process" method, meaning one, two or three gravies do not make up the entire menu. There is no microwave in the kitchen to reheat food. Each dish is made fresh daily

and does not use artificial flavors, added colors or oil. Dishes that are not on the menu can be made to order.

Ahmad plans to introduce changes to the menu according to the seasons. A fall food festival is planned for mid-September where Indian dishes from one particular region will be available. Also in the works is a spice menu, where customers can buy spices and then try different dishes at home.

Both owners continue to work full-time at their other jobs, and Kumar spends most of his time in India developing new cancer centers and women's support centers in rural India. They do oversee operations, which are mostly handled by professional staff.

"Medicine and the restaurant business are both similar - they are both part of the service industry," notes Kumar. "We want to ensure we treat each person as a unique customer where everyone feels welcome."