

## A Taste of Maryland Heights *by Sara Berry*

### Spice Up an Ordinary Day with a Visit to Priyaa

As we saw at the popular International Festival held at the Maryland Heights Centre in February, our community is a diverse one, made up of residents from many different nationalities and backgrounds. As a result, we can enjoy a number of wonderful, authentic ethnic restaurants without straying too far from home. Priyaa, an Indian restaurant located in a shopping center at the corner of Dorsett and McKelvey roads, is a star in this category, offering south and north Indian cuisine seven days a week.

Priyaa is a family-owned business, and it shows in the gracious, attentive service its patrons receive. All of the servers seem to have a genuine interest in making sure that guests are well taken care of. When my guest reviewer, Leslie Tepen, and I arrived for dinner on a Wednesday evening, we were immediately seated and served glasses of water, which the server kept constantly filled throughout our meal.

As we looked at the menu, many of the items were unfamiliar to us, but most had a short description next to them, and for those that didn't, our server was happy to answer our questions. I decided to try a mango lassi with my meal, which the server described as sort of a mango shake made with yogurt. I love mangoes, and the drink did not disappoint. It was thick and creamy, with a perfect balance between sweet and tart flavors. I would visit Priyaa again solely based on the merits of this unusual offering.

The menu is divided into three main categories: curry (a dizzying selection of curries, including chicken, shrimp, lamb and vegetarian varieties), tandoor (skewered meats marinated in spicy yogurt sauce and baked in a clay oven) and biriyani (vegetables or a choice of meat cooked with curry sauce and spicy basmati rice). Most of these selections consist of several courses, although they may also be ordered a la carte. Full din-

ners are served with sambar (a thick lentil vegetable soup), rasam (a thin, spicy tamarind soup), raita (a sauce made from yogurt, spices, cucumbers, onions and tomatoes), poori (puffed bread), papadam (a lentil wafer), rice



*Owner Srinivasarao Yerragunta stands ready to greet guests in Priyaa's lobby. The restaurant's colorful decor lends an exotic feel to the meal.*

pilaf, sweet or hot chutney and dessert. If this sounds like a lot of food, it is. Most of the servings are fairly small (each soup dish probably holds about half a cup), but there's a good chance you'll still end up taking some home. This approach allows diners to sample a variety of different Indian specialties for one very reasonable price (generally between \$10-16).

This was Leslie's first time trying Indian food. As a vegetarian, she chose the vegetable masala, a curry entrée made with mixed vegetables cooked in spicy sauce. "Experiencing something

new was interesting," she said. "I was pleasantly surprised."

On the other hand, I had eaten Indian food on several occasions. I ordered lamb, mainly because it appears so rarely on most run-of-the-mill restaurant menus. The lamb curry consisted of tender chunks of meat cooked in a rich, slightly spicy sauce. While several of the side items were too spicy for my rather bland tastes, the large variety of accompaniments made it very easy for me to still enjoy a hearty, filling meal.

The dessert that came with our meals was another specialty unique to Indian cuisine: gulab jamun, a ball of fried dough served in a flavored sauce. The dough was soft after having soaked in the sauce (a thin, fragrant syrup that tasted faintly of lemons), and the serving provided a light, not-too-sweet finish to the spicy meal.

In just about everything they do there, Priyaa stands out from a typical restaurant meal. It offers a great change in pace from the typical side dishes (no Caesar salads or baked potatoes on this menu), and the extraordinary service makes you feel like an honored guest. Combine that with the Indian music playing in the background and the rich colors of the exotic wall hangings and plants that decorate the dining room, and Priyaa delivers a one-of-a-kind dining experience you won't find in any chain restaurant in St. Louis.

#### **Priyaa**

1910 McKelvey Road  
Maryland Heights, MO 63043  
(314) 542-6148

#### **Hours:**

Monday-Sunday: 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m.  
Lunch Buffet: 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m.

#### **Smoking Policy:**

Priyaa is a nonsmoking restaurant.

#### **Price Range:**

\$3.50 (appetizers) -\$15.95 (full meal)