



India via London to Crystal Cove

Since launching its local website and Facebook page a few weeks ago, **Tamarind of London** has logged countless emails and phone calls from diners searching for details about the establishment's first American restaurant.

When it debuts Monday at Crystal Cove Promenade in Newport Beach, Tamarind will be the rare Orange County dining establishment tied to an internationally acclaimed Michelin-starred restaurant. One enthusiastic yacht clubber with a hankering for the restaurant's lavishly presented slow-cooked curries and tandoori dishes already has reservations for three nights.

With hype like that, Tamarind knows the stakes are high to deliver amazing results.

"To say there's no pressure is lying," said Maneesh Rawat, Tamarind's general manager.

In Southern California, Tamarind expects to break new ground when it comes to Indian food by following in the footsteps



NANCY LUNA
REGISTER WRITER



COURTESY OF TAMARIND

Tamarind will offer classic dishes such as chicken tikki, above, braised lamb shanks and butter chicken.

of its flagship London restaurant.

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In 1994, Navin Khanna founded Tamarind out of frustration.

The wealthy businessman from India disapproved of the fine-dining Indian restaurants in London, where he routinely

Tamarind of London

What: The upscale Indian restaurant debuts Monday at Crystal Cove Promenade. The menu will offer classic dishes such as chicken tikki, braised lamb shanks and butter chicken. However, the chef plans to serve steak and seafood dishes prepared with an Indian flair.

Prices: Appetizers, breads, soups, salads and bar snacks: \$4 to \$13. Kebabs and main entrees: \$16 to \$29.

Happy hour: Daily from 4 to 6 p.m. at the bar only. Some wine and cocktails offered at \$6. No discount on bar food.

Size: 4,000 square feet; 144 seats

Hours: 5 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday. (Lunch and brunch coming at a later time.)

Address: 7862 E. Coast Highway, Newport Beach (at Crystal Cove Promenade)

Web: tamarindoflondon.com

INDIAN

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entertained high-profile clients. The lackluster options prompted him to create his own restaurant in the city's glamorous Mayfair district.

Tamarind would be everything he desired - an ultrachic interpretation of authentic tandoori dishes with impeccable decor and pampering service.

Seven years later, it nabbed a Michelin star.

Michelin-honored restaurants are considered elite - having been recognized by the guide's well-traveled critics for their top-notch food, wine list and service.

Today, Tamarind is considered a world-class Indian restaurant, having earned a Michelin star 11 times since 2001.

Khanna, a frequent Southern California traveler, is now ready to bring those gold-standard marks to Orange County.

He's spent \$3 million in cash to build Tamarind's sister restaurant in the posh Newport Beach center where hipster food concepts such as Javier's, Bluefin and Mastro's Ocean Club thrive. Tamarind has completely remodeled the 4,000-square-foot space once occupied by Sage on the Coast.

To celebrate the restaurant's West Coast debut, Tamarind is throwing a private Bollywood-inspired red carpet party Saturday night featuring costumed dancers, henna tattoo artists and Dhol drummers.



Rawat

Once inside, diners are in for a different kind of food experience - one that debunks myths about Indian restaurants.

Don't expect Christmas lights in the window, gold decorations or elephants on the wall. Instead, diners will see light mahogany tables, booth seating and contemporary light fixtures. The menu will be easy to read so diners know exactly what ingredients and spices are in each dish.

"Indian food is very mystifying. No one really knows what goes in it," Rawat said.

Rawat and executive chef Shachi Mehra have worked at top Indian restaurants across the country, including The Bombay Club in Washington, D.C., and Junnoon in Palo Alto. Both gave the Register an exclusive interview last week to explain their vision for the Newport Beach restaurant.

Mehra, who spent months honing her craft in India, said Tamarind will feature a mix of traditional tandoori meals and locally sourced dishes prepared with an Indian flair. For example, she plans to serve a steak kebab cooked in one of three bright red tandoor ovens - a focal point of the restaurant's exhibition kitchen.

"That's a big pleasant surprise for most guests because they are not expecting (steak) from an Indian restaurant," said Mehra, who trained at Tamarind's London flagship before designing the Newport Beach menu. "Part of creating the menu is to make it more accessible to people."



SAM GANGWER, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

A lamb stew, front, is accompanied by dal makhani, left, avocado raita and basmati rice at Tamarind of London's Newport Beach restaurant.



The main dining room at the new location of Tamarind of London is dominated by warm wood tones.

Other non-traditional dishes on the menu include steamed Prince Edward Island mussels and Masala crab cakes.

To be successful, Rawat and Mehra said Tamarind must be more than just a special-occasion restaurant in Newport Beach. That's why

nothing on the menu is more than \$30. The 144-seat restaurant will also have a daily happy hour, when a select list of cocktails and wines will be sold for \$6.

"We will get them in once, yes," Rawat said. "But to make them come back again and again, we will have to

Michelin's star system

The Michelin Guide employs full-time inspectors who anonymously visit restaurants to identify consistently high-quality establishments in 23 countries. To get a star is considered one of the highest of honors in the industry. One star indicates a very good restaurant in its category, offering cuisine prepared to a consistently high standard. A good place to stop on your journey.

A two-star rating denotes excellent cuisine, skillfully and carefully crafted dishes, with specialties and wines of first class quality.

Worth a detour.

A rating of three stars rewards exceptional cuisine where diners eat extremely well, often superbly.

Distinctive dishes are precisely executed, using superlative ingredients. The wine list features generally outstanding vintages, and the surroundings and service are part of this unique experience, which is priced accordingly. Worth a special journey.

Source: Michelin Guide

DID YOU KNOW?

Orange and Los Angeles counties are home to 27 top-rated Indian restaurants, according to restaurant consulting firm Fessel International in Costa Mesa. Royal Khyber in Santa Ana, Chakra in Irvine and Mayur in Corona del Mar are among them.

create an experience."

And, how will they know they got it right?

For Mehra, it will be the moment she catches guests taking their first bite. She'll look for eyes that light up with excitement and friends and family sharing food too good to keep to themselves.

"Whenever you see that moment, it makes your day. You did right," she said.

Tamarind opens Monday at 4 p.m. for happy hour and 5 p.m. for dinner.

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