

NEWPORT BEACH

Independent

"For Locals, by Locals"

TABLE FOR TWO

East Comes West at Tamarind

"Tamarind of London is opening in Crystal Cove Promenade," I told Stasha last month.

"Tamarind of London!" exclaimed Stasha. "The famous Indian restaurant?"



BY
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"That's the one," I stated. "Crystal Cove is the first U.S. location for the Tamarind brand."

"Chris, do you know what this means? It's so exciting! Tamarind's Executive Chef Alfred Prasad

is the youngest Indian chef ever awarded a Michelin star—at just 29 years old," Stasha enthused. "Under his culinary direction and expertise, Tamarind continues to be honored with the top restaurant awards, year after year. It will be interesting to see how Tamarind distinguishes themselves here in the US."

"Well, we've been invited to sample the menu and innovative cuisine. But the cuisine is not the only intrigu-

ing aspect of Tamarind of London," I continued. "I've been reading up on the restaurant's new Executive Chef, Shachi Mehra. She was born in India and raised in America, so she should have an interesting take on Indian food."

"What else have you learned?" asked Stasha. "I'm really curious."

"Apparently, she's been working with Chef Prasad to develop the new menu, which integrates seasonally fresh and sustainable foods from local farmers, ranchers and fisherman with classic Indian recipes. Oddly enough, Chef Mehra originally wanted to become a doctor."

"What made her change career path?" wondered Stasha.

"She was always interested in food, and managed to get a job working in the kitchen of one of the East Coast's premier chefs, Bruce Johnson. It turns out, her passion for the culinary arts was greater than her interest in medicine. She eventually plied her culinary skills at some of the finest Indian restaurants in the country, including New York's Tabla & Bread Bar, the Bombay Club in Washington, D.C., and Palo Alto's Junnoon."

"I think a visit to Crystal Cove is definitely in order," Stasha stated.

Walking through the door, we could see that Tamarind of London's main emphasis was its exhibition kitchen, complete with three large tandoor ovens. Chefs could be seen through the large glass wall - that separates the kitchen from the dining room - roasting meats and baking naan.

The main dining area (which seats nearly 100 guests) includes private booths, traditional tables, and a large communal table. The Garden Room



Indian culinary tradition meets fresh local ingredients at Tamarind of London, whose first US location is at Crystal Cove.

(which seats 50) features retractable walls, an herb garden, and fire pits. Between is a large bar serving cocktails plus 50 wines by the glass.

Much of the menu revolves around small plates, although there are plenty of main entrees, many with kebabs hot out of the tandoor ovens.

We tried the spice-crusted seared scallops, some tandoori dishes, and other house specialties. We agreed that this was no ordinary Indian restaurant—quite extraordinary, in fact—and that the dishes did indeed integrate Indian and Californian flavors in a way that married tradition with modernity. We also agreed we needed to return and sample more dishes from the extensive menu.

For more information on Tamarind of London, visit www.tamarindoflondon.com.

Cirque Dining

Seems like everyone—including us—is heading to the Kodak Theatre in Hollywood to take in the new Cirque du Soleil show, IRIS, whose movie theme is perfectly matched to its location.

We thought we'd combine the show with a dinner that matched the IRIS ambiance. We started with cocktails at The Grill on Hollywood, which opened 10 years ago in the same

center as the Kodak Theatre. The Grill is old school Hollywood with a deco-influenced design. Large black and white posters of movie stars from Hollywood's Golden Age decorate the walls of the bar.

The décor also matched Stasha's 1930s-inspired outfit, including a headpiece she made out of old 35mm movie stock.

After our cocktail we walked next door to BoHo, the first and only gastropub in Hollywood. I ordered a beer tasting flight, while Stasha enjoyed a glass of red wine.

We decided to sample some of BoHo's signature items, and ordered Roasted Brussels Sprouts, Truffle Fries with house made aioli, house-made Sausage Pizza, and a Nicoise Salad.

The huge basket of fries came decorated with parmesan cheese—a decadent delight. The Brussels Sprouts were served in a pool of sauce with pickled red onions and bacon lardon. The pizza was perfect and served piping hot, while Stasha's healthy entrée option—the Nicoise Salad—came loaded with seared ahi.

Satisfied, we strolled to the Kodak Theatre. The show itself is non-stop eye candy and perfect for anyone with ADHD—there's so much going on, it's impossible to catch everything. From the creative costumes and props to the eye-popping special effects to the classy cirque-style acts, IRIS certainly upholds the Cirque du Soleil tradition while offering a unique spin courtesy of its Tinseltown motif.

IRIS info: <http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/shows/iris/default.aspx>

Dining info: <http://hollywood-andhighland.com/shop-dine/restaurants>