



## Lassi with Lavina

*...for the Global Indian Woman*

### | Hot New Indian Restaurants: Tulsi

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BY LAVINA MELWANI ON JANUARY 23, 2011

## 12 Things You Didn't Know About Tulsi

What strikes you on entering Tulsi is the sheer lightness of being – floating white shamianas, basil green accents and mirrored walls. It's not your traditional Indian restaurant with the elephants, silk drapes and ornate touches – this is India dealt out with a showering can rather than a shovel, and the food is just as subtle, with a melange of regional dishes and a touch of fusion.

### 1. Two Chefs for the Price of One, or is it three for the price of one?

It's a Trinity: Tulsi is a sangam of not one, not two but three noted chefs – Hemant Mathur, founding co-chef of Devi, Dhandu Ram the tandoor specialist, and pastry chef Surbhi Sahni (who is Chef Mathur's wife). Hemant Mathur and Dhandu Ram met as young apprentices at the famed Bukhara Restaurant in New Delhi. They have several of their much loved dishes at Tulsi: Mathur's tandoori prawns and lamb chops; and Ram's Kakori Kebabs and Family Naan.

### 2. India transported by Ship to New York

Vijay Rao, a co-owner along with chefs Hemant Mathur and Dhandu Ram, is a diehard movie buff who says he got inspired by the big floating tents in the desert scene in 'Jodhaa Akbar'. He wanted those but bleached them of all color to give a subdued Indian ambiance. "I'm an urban Indian-American and this is the way I wanted to portray India," he says. Rao worked with an India-based design team to capture the look and vibe of today's urban India, incorporating textures, art and artifacts, from mother-of-pearl to porcelain tiles. All the furnishings right down to the Jaipuri trellis mosaics were transported from India to New York by ship, and juxtaposed in Manhattan.

### 3. Basil Green is the Navy Blue of India

No bright Indian shades here. A color palette of subtle cream and beige hues, with touches of basil green, as well as fabric coverings suggestive of peacock plumes, along with the floating cream shamiana enclosures. For those who don't know Hindi, Tulsi means holy basil and is pronounced "tool-see." It's a venerated plant in Hindu mythology.



*Shrimp-Crab stuffed Pappadums.*

### 4. NY's First Indian Woman Sommelier.

Wine Director Priya Singh is one of the few Indian women in the wine industry (Alpana Singh is the pioneer in this) and has compiled a concise yet intriguing list of wines from smaller producers in Austria, Germany, France, and the U.S. She plans to add selections from boutique wineries in India later this year. She has focused on lesser-known varietals that complement and enhance the nuances of Indian cuisine. She suggests Gruner Veltliner from Austria like *Brundlmayer 'Kamptaler Terrassen', Gruner Veltliner 2009*, (which she says is a wonderful start to the meal with the Shrimp & Crab Stuffed Pappadum) and Crus of Beaujolais like *Domaine Chamonard, Morgon 2008* for a dish like Tandoor Grilled Lamb Chops.

### 5. Handcrafted cocktails by Nirupama Srivastava

Nirupama Srivastava of the Bay Area's Sakoon and Amber creates cocktails made with fresh ingredients like lemon basil, freshly toasted and ground Indian spices, housemade sour mixes and syrups, and super-premium spirits. There's *Aveda Lemon Drop* (Square One Organic Vodka, lemon basil, ginger, brown sugar, lime juice) and *Kamasutra* (Don Julio Tequila, X-Rated Fusion, tart cranberry soda, fresh sour mix, aphrodisiac popsicle).

## 6. Tandoori Wild Boar Chops flown in from Canada

Ever tried Tandoori Wild Boar Chops? That's Hemant Mathur's specialty. Many Indians could not have tried wild boar chops but Mathur gets them from Canada and dresses them up in traditional spices, in the way it is in some parts of India. Other specialties include Bhuna *Rabbit*, *Goat Rogan Josh*, *Duck Moilee*, and *Pistachio Chicken*.

## 7. Tulsi Dal simmered and simmered and cooked for 13 Hours.

Dhandu Ram's Tulsi's Dal is the traditional house dal. Most restaurants serve this urad dal cooked in the regular way but Dhandu Ram likes to cook it for thirteen hours, slowly simmering and evolving into a creamy texture. Talk about patience! We should all be as mellow as this dal.

## 8. Hooray for Vegetarians

Vegetarians often get stepchild treatment with lots of fried snacks and few healthy options. when they go out for meals. Here veggies, I'm happy to say, get some offbeat special dishes including Masala-Stuffed Baby Eggplant, Paneer Tomato Ka Khat (Indian cheese in tomato-onion curry), Gobi Takatin, and Roasted Pesto Portobello Mushroom – paneer-stuffed, served over a semolina cakes with a tomato-fenugreek sauce. You meet many old Indian favorites but dressed up in new flavors and styles.

*Tulsi chaat cart serves the street foods of India.*

## 9. Chowpatty in Manhattan

Street cart chaats like *Punjabi Pani Puri* are prepared tableside and in the bar/lounge from a wooden trolley. While drinking a chilled beer you can get these bites right at the bar: *Tandoori Aloo*, *Shrimp Kati Roll* and *Achari Chicken Tikka* to name a few.



## 10. A taste of Tibet at Tulsi

Tulsi also has a Tibetan chef whose specialty is making Tibetan momos with fillings of lamb, chicken and spinach, and Portobello mushroom fillings, all served with a chili hot sauce. These delicious momos are a popular street food in Delhi, and give a nice regional touch to the food.

## 11. Desserts Lite from Pastry Chef Surbhi Sahni

After a heavy meal who wants a heavy dessert? Pastry Chef Surbhi Sahni has always been aware of this, and takes a lighter approach to desserts at Tulsi, exploring new ways of building layers of flavor: There's *Dal Chinni Shahi Tukra* served with cardamom cream and candied cashews. Other desserts include *Ginger Panna Cotta* with poached pears and Campari gelée, and *Pistachio Cake* with passion fruit buttercream and kulfi. At lunch she serves *Fruit Parfait* made with garam masala yogurt cream, macerated berries and pineapple cake.

## 12. Tulsi's Naanwiches for lunch

If you want to go casual and eat fast food that's cooked slow, try naanwiches with Mathur and Ram's tandoori offerings and other fillings, such as with tender chicken malai kebab with bell peppers, tomatoes and raita. This is from the "Chaat & Choose" Prix-Fixe Lunch (a chaat, choice of soup and a naanwich or salad for \$20). In February Hemant Mathur plans to introduce the seven course Chef's Tasting Menu.

*Tulsi Tandoor Aloo*

