

The Business

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No Shit

According to a new U. of C. study, the city's biggest arts organizations are the domain of rich, educated white people.

By Deanna Isaacs

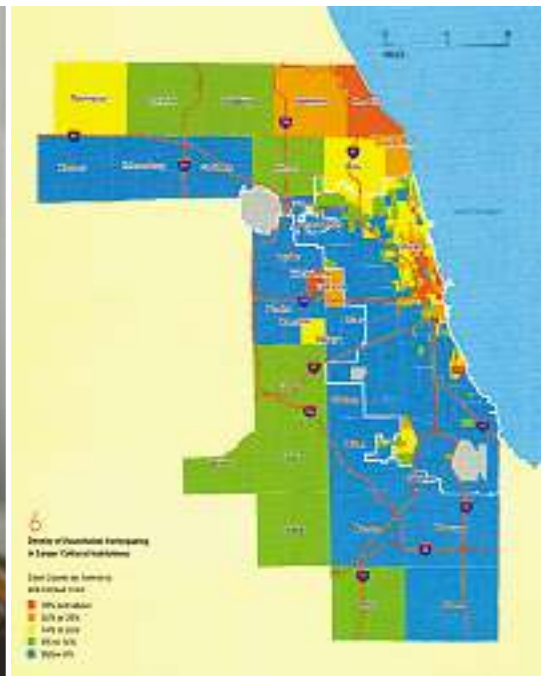
“You already know this”—that’s what National Opinion Research Center vice president Colm O’Muircheartaigh had to say about the initial conclusions he was drawing from an assortment of eye-popping maps at last week’s presentation of a study about local “cultural participation” at the Cultural Center. Funded by a \$128,000 grant from the Joyce Foundation and conducted by the U. of C.’s Cultural Policy Center, the study analyzed information from Chicago’s 12 largest cultural institutions to find out who’s benefiting from them. The Joyce Foundation wanted to know whether attempts to engage diverse audiences were working, and the researchers said they needed a baseline before they’d be able to figure that out. “Now,” said O’Muircheartaigh, as the audience squinted at a kaleidoscopic parade of red, orange, yellow, green, and blue shapes in dizzying recombinations, “we’ve got numbers for it.”

On their way to making Chicago the first major city with a cultural participation map, the researchers collected 1.4 million electronic records from the dozen big institutions for 2004. The institutions were chosen according to the size of their budgets (\$8 million was the minimum) and ranged from the Art Institute to the Joffrey Ballet. The researchers tracked 600,000 participating households in the 14-county metropolitan area and sliced and diced that information with data from the 2000 census. And here’s the main thing they found out: it’s mostly about money. The best predictors of participation in the city’s large cultural institutions are education and income level. Wealthy neighborhoods along the lake on the city’s north side and in the suburbs (New Trier Township, along with River Forest to the west) turned out to be the hot spots. Those are also areas with relatively few African-American and Latino residents. The city’s cultural participation map and its racial and ethnic distribution map turned out to be inverse images of each other.

In this geography, red is the flag of high activity, blue the opposite. Looking at Cook County, a wide river of blue sweeps up from the southern sub-



Area magazine’s Daniel Tucker; “Density of Households Participating in Larger Cultural Institutions”



JIM NEWBERRY (PORTRAIT)

urbs to the northwest and turns left into Elk Grove and Schaumburg. (It looks like everything but the North Shore could float away without a blip in attendance at, say, Lyric Opera.) In the city the near north and west sides, Lincoln Park, and Hyde Park glow crimson, while nearly everything else to the south, west, and northwest is bathed in blue. The authors note that participation rates are low throughout the metropolitan area, but “consistently lowest in areas with large percentages of African-American or Latino households.” Since the cost of a midlevel day pass to the Field Museum, for example, for a family of four is at least \$75 (including parking but not lunch), and the map of African-American and Latino population is nearly a match for the map of low-income distribution, that’s not surprising. But here’s where eyebrows in the audience did go up: when researchers compared similar socioeconomic groups, they found that African-Americans were less likely to participate than whites and Latinos.

Income aside, the authors conclude, “We find an association between the percentage of African-American residents in an area and unexpectedly low arts participation.”

Museum of Science and Industry vice president Valerie Waller, offering a response to the research, said she sees evidence of the lack of diversity nearly every time she eyeballs the crowds on the museum floor. She thinks communication, price, hours, and transportation are factors that could be addressed, and says it may be more realistic to focus on turning orange areas to red, rather than trying to stretch for the blues. The mapping project also included limited research on 49 smaller cultural organizations, including some geared to specific ethnic groups. (Nearly 500 such organizations were invited to participate; all but the 49, perhaps lacking data, failed to respond.) The researchers found that many of these smaller entities are tapping audiences that have little overlap with the participants at the big organi-

zations. For those folks and a lot of others, the daunting dozen—those pricey, tax-supported, mostly lakefront playgrounds for the affluent and the tourists, with their displays of Girodet and performances of Shakespeare—may just be off the map.

Map Quest

Daniel Tucker, editor of the new biannual arts-and-activism tabloid *Area*, says he felt conflicted as he watched the mapping presentation. “I wanted them to come out and make policy recommendations,” he says, “but on the other hand I was thinking, Don’t say anything more, because of the limitations of their study. We can’t rely on those kinds of institutions—fine-art museums and symphony orchestras and ballets—to make up the map of meaningful cultural participation in Chicago.” Even among the smaller organizations studied, he says, places like community centers, storefront galleries, and cafes were left out—“places that are mean-

ingful in communities that are disengaged from the large institutions or don’t have access to them.

“Historically there’s a lot of power in who gets to make up maps,” Tucker adds. “There’s a danger when cultural policy makers turn out dramatic maps that seem to suggest stark contrasts between people’s engagement with culture. It can be misleading. I don’t fault the mapmakers, but it’s about this form and its power to influence. I’m fascinated with the potential of what they’re trying to do, and happy they’re doing it. But what it inspires for me is more of an interest in the unmappable components, relevant things happening across the city. Are there ways to represent them?”

Area’s offering an alternative in the form of a blank pullout map of Chicago in its current issue. Readers can fill it in with locations they think are significant, then submit it for inclusion in an online archive, a planned book, and upcoming exhibitions, including one that opens at Polvo gallery in Pilsen on April 28. **D**

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Restaurants

Listings are excerpted from the Reader Restaurant Finder, an online database of more than 3,000 Chicago-area restaurants. Restaurants are rated by more than 2,200 Reader Restaurant Raters, who feed us information and comments on their dining experiences. Web ratings are updated daily; print listings reflect the most current information available at publication time. Reviews are written by

Reader staff and contributors and (where noted) individual Raters. Though reviewers try to reflect the Restaurant Raters' input, reviews should be considered one person's opinion; the collective Raters' opinions are best expressed in the numbers. The complete listings and information on how to become a Reader Restaurant Rater are available at www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder.

R

Wine and Dine

More Beer With Your Sag Paneer?

A few years ago I wittlessly brought a few beers to Salam, a Middle Eastern storefront on North Kedzie. The host, a man with impeccable manners, politely pretended that city law prevented us from drinking there. "Also," he added casually, "it's against our religion."

Oh. Right. Long story short: water never tasted so good.

Bringing your own bottle is a practice so established in Chicago that a place without a liquor license is commonly assumed to allow it. But on Devon Avenue, where restaurants are as likely to be Muslim-owned as Hindu, the situation is more complicated. Chopal Kabab, for example, doesn't have a license because the owner follows Islamic dietary precepts forbidding alcohol. Bhabi's Kitchen doesn't have a license because it *wants* customers to bring in alcohol. Sometimes it seems easier just to order a mango lassi.

That's a shame, because given the heat and complexity of Indian food the perfect match isn't always sweetened yogurt. To find out what it might be, I took a party of friends to Udipi Palace, a BYO and vegetarian Indian restaurant, along with so many bottles we were booted to a bigger table.

To many palates, Indian food is best with beer—there's even a specific style for it. In the 18th century, beer shipped from England to expatriates in colonial India kept going bad en route, so brewers upped the alcohol content and the hops, both of which act as a preservative. The result, lively and sharply bitter from the extra hops, was christened IPA, or India pale ale. The style's now wildly popular with American craft breweries, which hop their beer far more than their European counterparts: if the IPA didn't already exist, American brewers would have invented it.

The only problem is that intense bitterness actually accentuates heat. If curry can't be too hot for you, IPAs are ideal, fanning the flames even as they refresh in a brisk and rather fierce way. But the American IPAs we tried—from Goose Island and Michigan's New Holland Brewing—obliterated the food. An IPA from Samuel Smith was a happier pairing: less hoppy than the Americans, showing a restraint that's typical of British ales. Its malty sweetness blended well with the addictive *chaat papri*, crispy bits of fried dough drizzled with yogurt and tamarind chutney.

We brought several types of wine that have been touted as accompaniments for Indian food: something sparkling (for its cleansing bubbles and shadow of sugar), something sweet (to tame the heat), and something red and fruity (for people who want red wine no matter what). Our sparkling, a Champagne-method Blanc de Blanc from Lawrence Mawby, a superb northern Michigan winemaker, was alive and yeasty by itself but more mundane with the chaat and tandoor-roasted eggplant: like a kinder-



Chaat papri and dosai at Udipi Palace

gartner sent off to school, it went, but not willingly. Gewurztraminer is often paired with Indian food because its "exotic" notes—lychees and mangoes are often cited—supposedly complement the cuisine. Ours, a 2003 Wurtz-Weinmann Spatlese from Germany, highlighted the coconut flavor in the *avial*, a vegetable curry, but laid down on top of the other dishes and didn't get up. We weren't any more successful with our red, a 2001 blend from southern France called Dominis M. It was delicious alone, but after a bit of spice wines become schizoid: with the curry, Dominis M's taste was suddenly very similar to that of a cheap jelly doughnut.

We remained happiest with the Samuel Smith IPA and a wheat beer, Kloster Weizen, a Bavarian-style

weiss from Wisconsin's Capital Brewery. Creamy and elegant, the weiss made the chaat and the curries even better, while the carbonation lightened the weight of the food, preparing the palate for still more curry and chaat.

At meal's end we finally hit upon a match for the American IPAs: dessert. I've always found *gulab jamun*, those fried, syrup-soaked milk balls, cloying to the point of inedibility, but the sweetness was tempered by the bitter edge of the IPAs. In turn, the gulab jamun made the IPAs taste richer and smoother. It was suddenly clear we'd discovered the secret history of beer and Indian food: IPAs were actually invented just to make gulab jamun palatable. —Nicholas Day

To B or Not to B

Indian and Pakistani restaurants where your bottle's welcome, or not.

Ambala Sweets

2741 W. Devon | 773-764-9000

\$ INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | ALCOHOL FREE

With marble floors, mirrored walls, and glass doors with gold handles, Ambala feels like an upscale department store. Sitting tidily in its front window are stacked squares of green pistachio *barfi*, a milk-based dessert with a fudgelike texture. Other traditional sweets are heaped on the long, gracefully curving counter inside, under immaculate plastic domes. The counter workers give out samples hand over fist, chatting with customers in Hindi, Urdu, and English and happily providing explanations to the uninitiated. "This is number one. This is very fast selling," says one, proffering a chunk of *habshi halwa*—a sticky brown treat made with milk, wheat flour, and cashews. It has the consistency of an underdone brownie, and, like many Indian desserts, tastes alarmingly sweet to the unaccustomed palate. The store carries several variants, including *gajar halwa* (made with carrots) and *anjeer halwa* (with figs). *Pera*, a doughy orange confection, is prepared with dried milk and cardamom, colored with saffron, shaped into small patties, and sprinkled with chopped pistachios. Some of the sweets are even more elaborately fashioned: imarti look like crullers dyed orange, while the saffron-flavored fritters called *jelebi* resemble raw pretzels. *Suterfeni*, fried threads of sweetened rice flour flavored with saffron, is meant to be doused with milk and eaten out of a bowl. Nearly all of the desserts are sold by weight, and a large sign on the wall lists the prices per pound, most of them between \$5 and \$8. Ambala sells savory treats too, including Ambala Mix, a blend of puffed rice, peanuts, cashews, potato chips, and raisins; a spicier version called *ferrari chevda*; and *dalmoth*, a mix of thin dried noodles, brown lentils, and cashews. There are several tables, with seating for about 30. **Anne Ford**

Arya Bhavan

2508 W. Devon | 773-274-5800

F 8.0 | S 7.7 | A 5.8 | \$ (13 REPORTS) INDIAN/PAKISTANI, VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | LUNCH: SUNDAY, FRIDAY, SATURDAY; DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | BEER & WINE, BYO

☀☀☀ Cheerful pink napkins decorate the tables and colorful Rajasthani crafts (which are for sale) brighten the walls at Arya Bhavan, which means "our home." But the main room is dominated by a 20-foot buf-



Samuel Smith India pale ale, Lawrence Mawby Blanc de Blanc

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Restaurants

fet, which on the weekends (and weekdays in summer) is laden with all-vegetarian curries, sweets, appetizers, rice, salad, and cooling raita. Along with traditional favorites like *chana masala* (spicy chick-peas) and *mutter paneer* (peas and cheese) are original creations by chef Jay Shef, a realtor by day. One of his best is the addictive *undhia*, a complex curry of eggplant, sweet potatoes, and plantains. Appetizers include the always popular potato-stuffed samosas and spicy veggie cutlets. The satisfying *uthappam*, pancakes topped with tomatoes, onions, and cilantro, are made to order at one end of the buffet and disappear quickly. Ordering from the lengthy

menu allows one to try Indian specialties ranging from a delightful south Indian *avial* (vegetables cooked with coconut, yogurt, and chiles) to Kashmiri curry and rice. There are 15 types of bread, many of them tandoori-oven baked. Beer and wine are served, but you can also BYO for a corkage fee of \$3 per person. **Cara Jepsen**

Bhabi's Kitchen

6352 N. Oakley | 773-764-7007

F 7.9 | S 8.0 | A 6.5 | \$ (8 REPORTS)
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS |
OPEN LATE: TILL 11 EVERY NIGHT | BYO

Once a humble storefront, Bhabi's

Food (F), service (S), and ambience (A) are rated on a scale of 1-10, with 10 representing best. The dinner-menu price of a typical entree is indicated by dollar signs on the following scale: \$=less than \$10, \$\$=\$10-\$15, \$\$\$=\$15-\$20, \$\$\$\$=\$20-\$30, \$\$\$\$\$=more than \$30. Raters also grade the overall dining experience; these scores are averaged and **A**s are awarded as follows: **AAA**=top 10 percent, **AA**=top 20 percent, **A**=top 30 percent of all rated restaurants in database.

Kitchen has been swanked up to become one of the more pleasantly appointed Indo-Pak restaurants around Devon (prices have risen accordingly). Mr. Syed, the owner, is a genial presence; ask him what's good and he'll passionately regale you with a stream of talk for as long as you'll listen.

This time around he recommended *haleem*, beef simmered for many hours with wheat and lentils and sprinkled with fried onions, an intriguing combination of flavors and textures. Butter chicken comes bathed in a mild tomato broth suitable for less adventurous palates. There are a good

number of vegetarian offerings, among them biryani (also available in fish or meat renditions) and *sarsoo ka sang*, a puree of broccoli rabe sparkling with explosive ginger chunks. Syed orchestrates meals so that tastes won't blur; for instance, *bagarey baigan*, an eggplant dish, is cooked in a hummuslike sesame sauce also used in the fish curry, so we were advised not to order both together. Two of Bhabi's signature dishes, naan with onion, garlic, and green pepper or with pistachio and mixed fruit (almost a dessert), could make a meal all by themselves. Bhabi's Kitchen is BYO, to keep spirits high and the bill down. **David Hammond**

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\$
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: TILL MIDNIGHT EVERY NIGHT | ALCOHOL FREE

The exceedingly friendly Ali Khawaja appears to have sunk a lot of naan into his new restaurant on the sleepy eastern end of Devon Avenue's Indo-Pak strip. The room is crammed with elaborately carved and painted tables and high-backed chairs, and the walls are bedecked with Pakistani handicrafts. Khawaja traveled the homeland to procure. Khawaja, who owns another restaurant in Los Angeles, grills zabiha halal meats, and he's not afraid to see what sort of guts you're made of. Intestinal armor comes in a bowl of raita and (in an odd nod to an altogether different cuisine) a velvety egg-drop soup, meant to be spiked with abundant bottles of soy and Louisiana hot sauces. The standards—lamb, goat, beef, chicken, and seafood—are aggressively seasoned and marinated, grilled or stewed, then served beside a pile of rice to stanch the flames; critters found less frequently on Devon include yogurt-marinated quail and veal steaks. There are only a few concessions to plant eaters—dal, okra, mixed vegetables, and a buttery and luscious pureed rapini. Khawaja named the place Chopal, which means "gathering place," and it's hard to discount his enthusiasm for the venture's party potential when he sits you down on the large woven bench in the front window and fires up the four-foot brass hookah. **Mike Sula**

Gandhi India

2601 W. Devon | 773-761-8714

\$
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 11 | FULL BAR

Open since 1981, Gandhi India is one of the older eateries along Devon, and the wood-paneled interior certainly shows the corner spot's age. The menu features standard fare, and while I've had some adequate meals here in the past, a recent visit suggests the food has slipped into mediocrity. The white meat in the grilled chicken tikka was exceptionally dry, and a piece of dark meat was rubbery; the entire dish was underseasoned. While the chunks of meat in the *bhuna gosht*, a lamb curry, were wonderfully tender, the thick, tasty gravy carried unseemly puddles of oil. Both entrees were stingier with the meat than you'll find at local competitors. If you're not picky, Gandhi might do in a pinch, but why bother when there are better options only doors away? **Peter Margasak**

Ghareeb Nawaz

2032 W. Devon | 773-761-5300

\$
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: 24 HOURS EVERY DAY | CASH ONLY | ALCOHOL FREE

Named for a benefactor of the poor, Ghareeb Nawaz has a reputation as an oasis for cheap and freshly made home-style Indo-Pakistani food. One of the few spots on Devon open for breakfast, it offers inexpensive *paratha* (griddled wheat flat-bread) filled with egg or *aloo* (seasoned potato) and *halwa puri*, the traditional Pakistani breakfast, three crisp, puffy fried breads served with lightly sweetened *sooji halwa* (a semolina pudding) and curried potatoes and chickpeas; for \$2.50, it beats the hell out of McStyrofoam. Biryani here is among the best in town, and the thali are

an amazing deal: \$4.35 gets you a veggie combo with a choice of bread (chapati, paratha, or naan), a generous portion of rice, an *achar* (pickle) of some kind, and servings of four or five dishes such as chana masala, dal, aloo palak, and bhindi masala; meat thali are a scant 50 cents more. Veggie kebabs are deliciously dense disks of potato, chickpeas, egg, and spices, though the beef shish kebab suffers from too much filler. Samosas, meat- or potato-filled triangles of pure snacking pleasure, are, at 50 cents each, an addiction I'm prepared to indulge. You order at the counter here, and the restaurant's two brightly lit rooms are spartan, but there's cricket on the TV in season and a prayer room for the devout. **Gary Wiviott**

Hema's Kitchen

6406 N. Oakley | 773-338-1627

F 7.8 | S 5.3 | A 5.1 | \$ (24 REPORTS)
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | BYO

Hema Potla is a cherubic grandmother from Hyderabad, India, who makes her own yogurt, chutneys, marinades, and sauces here daily, roasting and grinding different combinations of spices. About two dozen aromatic dishes are served, ranging from a very spicy chicken or lamb vindaloo (in a sauce of vinegar, coconut, curry leaves, and a lot of red chile powder) to a tamer but no less tasty *dal dahkni*: yellow lentils cooked with tomatoes, lemon juice, and hints of cumin, curry, mustard, and garlic. The spinach and lamb combination *sag gosht* is quite popular, as are Potla's *biryani*, dishes of basmati rice cooked with various spices and a choice of lamb, chicken, shrimp, or vegetables. After being outed by WTTW's *Check, Please!* Hema's went from being a quiet, well-regarded secret to a weekend mob scene, inspiring Potla to open a second restaurant at 2411

N. Clark. The restaurant's still BYO with no corkage fee. **Paul Schoenwetter, Rater**

Hyderabad House

2225 W. Devon | 773-381-1230

\$\$
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: 24 HOURS EVERY DAY | RESERVATIONS NOT ACCEPTED | CASH ONLY | BYO

Hyderabad House is a home away from home for cabbies who want to shoot pool, watch Bollywood musicals, and grab some good grub before beating it back to the beaded seat. Even if you don't drive for hire you'll enjoy the subcontinental food prepared for hard-to-con customers. Here are some savory creatures, all halal: lush mutton in a thick sauce is frequently seen on the changing menu board, as is chicken lagan in a fluorescent magenta-colored sauce. *Dhai ki kadi*, a delicious vegetarian dish, is wheat gluten in a blindingly yellow curry. Along with generous helpings of fresh griddled naan you get a lot of rice here, and that's a good thing—sops are essential with the tongue-tickling sauces. To drink try Limca, lemon-based Indian cola, or BYO. Sometimes there's a man offering *paan*—a potent mix of fennel, betel leaf, and herbs—which makes a pleasing, stomach-settling wrap to a meal. HH shares a parking lot with an auto repair shop, so you have to weave your way around the never-been-pimped beaters to get to the front door; once inside, though, you'll find good-hearted folks and worthy south Indian chow. **David Hammond**

Indian Garden

2546 W. Devon | 773-338-2929

F 7.2 | S 6.3 | A 6.7 | \$\$ (19 REPORTS)
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | FULL BAR

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Hot & Sour soup with straw mushrooms, tomato, seasoned with lemon grass, citrus leaves and fresh limejuice. chicken, tofu or vegetables 3.50 (shrimp 4.00)
- Tom Kha Soup**
Coconut soup with straw mushrooms and tomato spiced with galanga root, citrus leaves and fresh limejuice. chicken, tofu or vegetables 3.50 (shrimp 4.00)

Noodles

- Chicken, Beef, Tofu or Plain Vegetable (Shrimp 8.00)
- Pad Thai**
The most famous Thai noodles dish!
Stir-fried thin rice noodles with cabbage, bean sprout, egg and crushed peanuts. 6.50
- Pad See Eiw**
Stir-fried wide rice noodles with egg, broccoli and sweet soy sauce. 6.50
- Lard na**
Fried wide rice noodles topped with broccoli in delicious house gravy. 6.50
- Pad Khee Mao**
Stir-fried wide rice noodles with basil leaves, carrot, green beans, baby corns, tomato and hot pepper. 6.50
- Crazy Noodles**
Stir-fried wide rice noodles with egg, carrot, bean sprout and snow peas. 6.50
- Thai Rice Stick**
Stir-fried rice noodles with Chinese broccoli, egg and sweet soy sauce. 6.50
- Golden Noodles**
Stir-fried egg noodles with egg, carrot, snow peas, straw mushrooms and Chinese broccoli. 6.50
- Garlic Chicken Noodles**
Tasty egg noodles with bean sprout and crushed peanuts topped with delicious sautéed garlic chicken. 6.50

Curry Dishes

- Phuket Noodles**
Stir-fried spinach noodles with curry, napa cabbage, onion, carrot, bean sprout and egg. 7.00
- Panang Curry**
The most popular Thai curry served on crispy wide rice noodles. 7.00
- Chicken Coconut Curry**
Golden noodles with chicken in tasty coconut curry, sprinkled with onion and crispy golden noodles, served with cucumber salad. 7.00
- Rice Dishes** (includes steamed rice)
- Beef and Broccoli**
Sautéed beef with broccoli in oyster-garlic sauce. 7.00
- Chicken 'n Rice**
Sautéed chicken, baby corns, onion, snow peas and straw mushrooms in delicious mild gravy. 7.00
- BBQ Pork & Rice**
BBQ pork and steamed broccoli with ginger gravy. 7.50
- Spicy Basil Leaves**
Sautéed with fresh basil, straw mushrooms, onion and hot pepper. chicken, beef, tofu or vegetables 7.00 (shrimp 8.50)
- Rama Special**
Sautéed chicken topped with peanut sauce, garnished with steamed broccoli. 7.50 (shrimp 9.00)
- Ginger Chicken**
Stir-fried chicken with sliced ginger, bell pepper, straw mushrooms, baby corns and onion in delicious bean sauce. 7.00
- Cashew Chicken**
Stir-fried chicken with cashew nuts, pineapple, snow peas, tomato, onion, bell pepper and dried hot pepper. 7.00 (shrimp 8.50)
- Garlic sauce**
Sautéed with fresh garlic and white pepper, garnished with steamed broccoli. chicken, beef, tofu or vegetables 7.50 (shrimp 9.00)
- Fried Rice**
Thai fried rice
chicken, beef, tofu or vegetables 6.50 (shrimp 8.00)

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menu, cooking, and ambience, which they find a notch above the neighborhood norm. "I would gladly abandon all other foods in my life and subsist solely on the garlic naan," says one. Many praise the food's freshness and the masterful use of spices—the kitchen doesn't shy from heat. There's a nice selection of drinks, including Flying Horse and Kingfisher beers, and a \$9 lunch buffet offered daily. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

Jewel of India

2401 W. Devon | 773-465-3269

\$\$

INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SUNDAY, MONDAY, WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED TUESDAY | BYO

On West Devon, where you can't go a block without passing half a dozen Indian or Pakistani restaurants, it takes a bit of extra effort to get noticed. Jewel of India has snagged a prime piece of real estate (right on the corner of Devon and Western) and recently renovated, but it's really hoping to make an impression with a unique take on Asian cuisines: Indian-Chinese fusion. Skip the unfused Indian and Chinese stuff—the Chinese dishes are standard ones like chow mein and Szechuan chicken served without inspiration and with too much oil; the Indian food, while better, doesn't surpass what you'll find at any neighboring eatery. But when the two cuisines are mixed, Jewel of India shines. The chile chicken stands out,



What do all those R's mean?

We believe that a restaurant can be more or less than the sum of its parts, so apart from rating Food, Service, and Ambience, Reader Restaurant Raters are asked to give a score for the overall dining experience. These overall scores are averaged and R's are awarded as follows:

RRR	top 10 percent
RRR	top 20 percent
RRR	top 30 percent

of all rated restaurants in our database

A restaurant can have high scores for Food, Service, and Ambience without receiving an **RRR** rating; a restaurant may have unspectacular ratings yet still possess an unquantifiable something that our Raters feel deserves recognition.

with fragrant and unusual spices, and the Manchurian beef is lightly bathed in an "Indian-Chinese gravy" reminiscent of both curry sauce and five-spice powder. **Leonard Pierce**

Moti Mahal

2525 W. Devon | 773-262-2080

\$

INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | FULL BAR

It's one of the older establishments along this busy stretch of sari stores and Indian groceries, and unfortunately little effort has been made to hide the age; the carpeting is matted, the furniture weathered, and the lighting dim. The food is standard—nothing too different from its neighbors and not a lot to get excited about. Service is extremely attentive, since the dining room is rarely full. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

Mysore Woodland

2548 W. Devon | 773-338-8160

F 7.3 | S 6.6 | A 6.0 | \$\$ (10 REPORTS)

INDIAN/PAKISTANI, VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | BYO

At Mysore Woodland, which is named after well-known restaurants in India (the Mysore Woodland in Westmont is run by the same family), there are no fewer than 14 types of the house specialty, *dosa* (thin light rice crepes), including a masala dosa, stuffed with potatoes, onions, and spicy

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chutney, and a massive paper dosa. Other specialties such as *pongol*, a sweet rice dish, and *uppuma* (savory cream of wheat with nuts and vegetables) are right on the money. But the best deal is the Mysore Royal Thali, a complete meal served on a large round stainless steel platter dominated by a pile of aromatic basmati rice, the staple of south Indian cuisine. The accompanying army of small dishes includes dal, sambar, vegetable curries, spicy pickled mango or lime, dessert, pappadam, chapati, and thick, creamy curd, which is traditionally eaten last. The dinner portion comes with soup (try the spicy lentil mulligatawny) and a trio of deep-fried appetizers. The Woodland's signature dessert is *paysam*, a comforting pudding made of vermicelli noodles, milk, honey, raisins, and cashews; there are also spicy masala chai and creamy Mysore-style coffee for after the meal. Service is decent, and Bollywood music plays softly in the background. **Cara Jepsen**

Original Kababish of London

2437 W. Devon | 773-973-0225

\$
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: TILL MIDNIGHT EVERY NIGHT | ALCOHOL FREE

This Chicago branch of a popular family-owned UK chain (not to be confused with Kababish on Orleans) turns fresh meats and vegetables into delicious Indian dishes, some done the old subcontinental way and others London style. They use ground beef that's so lean it comes out as fluffy as rice; most dishes are accompanied by a simple salad with great cucumber dressing. London street signs and maps of the world decorate the walls of the little storefront; there are no frills, but the plates are elegant, neat, and quite cheap. There's no BYO here—alcohol is prohibited for religious reasons. **Ann Sterzinger**

Ravi Kabob House

2447 W. Devon | 773-381-2400

\$
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SUNDAY, MONDAY, WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED TUESDAY | OPEN LATE: WEDNESDAY-MONDAY TILL 11 | ALCOHOL FREE

In the sea of Indo-Pakistani restaurants along Devon, Ravi Kabob House sinks under the surface without fanfare. The menu has the usual subcontinental offerings—dals, tikka, and tandoori preparations as well as biryani with vegetables, lamb, chicken, or goat—but execution is lacking. The *chapli kebab*, a ground beef patty heavily flecked with coarse, dry coriander seeds, tasted oddly like a veggie burger; vegetable biryani, chile chicken, and a beef kebab were all grossly overseasoned. Dal masala was both mealy and swimming in ghee; the naan (plain, sesame, garlic, or cheese stuffed) were respectable without being inspirational. Ravi Kabob House does have its fans. The best I can say about it, though, is that the mango lassi makes a good palate cleanser. **Rob Lopata**

Sabri Nehari

2511 W. Devon | 773-743-6200

\$
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: TILL MIDNIGHT EVERY NIGHT | ALCOHOL FREE

The Sabri family have hit upon a nice hook for their Pakistani eatery: they've gone

country. Not that there's anything downscale about the spacious, walnut-accented dining room; it's just that their menu forgoes the kingly pretensions of other Devon Avenue restaurants in favor of solid, unfussy food drawn from the cuisine of Pakistan's working class—called "frontier style," it blends fresh vegetables and simmered meats with copious herbs and spices. For adventurous diners the menu lists a "masterfully agitated" pasanda kebab and *maz nihari* (brain stew). Even familiar fare like the samosa packs surprises: in place of the pastry's usual thick, crunchy batter the Sabris use a light, crackly crust that's almost like phyllo dough. **Leonard Pierce**

Sher-A-Punjab

2510 W. Devon | 773-973-4000

F 6.6 | S 6.3 | A 5.0 | \$ (6 REPORTS)
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | BYO

The buffet (lunch is \$7, dinner \$9) at this otherwise nondescript Indian restaurant continues to bring in the fans. One Rater comments, "The famous Indian buffet at this Devon storefront isn't the prettiest, but the spread is delicious and the piping hot bread and tandoori chicken brought straight to the table are worth the price alone." Aside from the well-seasoned, juicy tandoori dishes, the *karhai gosht* (huge, tender chunks of lamb in a thick tomato, garlic, and ginger puree) and the shrimp biryani are well worth a try. Flatbreads like paratha and naan come with a variety of fillings: garlic, minced lamb, and broccoli and cheese. To wash it all down, masala tea is warm and soothing, or you can BYO. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

Sukhadia's Snacks & Sweets

2559 W. Devon | 773-338-5400

\$
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SUNDAY, MONDAY, WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED TUESDAY | ALCOHOL FREE

This tiny corner store, the first Chicago franchise of a family-run chain, is a feast for the eyes. Two huge display cases are filled with Indian sweets in all colors and shapes: orange ground-almond cookies, cashew flour and fig paste tubes, and deep-fried pink rounds of chickpea flour. Homemade cheese balls come soaked in sweet syrup (*ras gulla*) or swimming in creamy milk and garnished with saffron and pistachios (*ras malai*). Beyond these cases is a counter where Indian fast food is served—*lilva kachori* (deep-fried rounds of green peas and chiles), *khaman* (square cakes of savory chickpea flour colored bright yellow), and *patra* (taro leaves rolled with ground chickpeas and pungent spices). Dishes are served with *poori* (deep-fried wheat bread) and two tasty sauces: a spicy cilantro-jalapeno one with ginger and mint, and one of sweet-and-sour tamarind. A variety of crunchy, salty mixes of spiced nuts, sesame sticks, and other snacks are available by the pound. Ask for the laminated card with pictures and descriptions if you find the selection overwhelming. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

Tiffin

2536 W. Devon | 773-338-2143

F 7.7 | S 7.5 | A 7.7 | \$\$ (29 REPORTS)
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | FULL BAR

Raters find Tiffin cleaner and more refined

than many of its neighbors on Devon. Service is a little more attentive, and the dining room is spacious and attractive, with wood-paneled walls and windows onto the kitchen. Tandoori menu selections such as chicken and lamb are tops. The \$8 lunch buffet (\$10 on weekends) maintains high quality with frequent hot refills. Says one Rater, "Consistently terrific food, excellent service, and even a nice wine list round out a great dining experience." **Laura Levy Shatkin**

Usmania

2253 W. Devon | 773-262-1900

\$
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: TILL 11:30 EVERY NIGHT | ALCOHOL FREE

Looking to reinvent Usmania as a place for Pakistani fine dining, the owners shuttered the divey former location and recently reemerged across the street in new digs with exposed brick columns, copper bas-relief, and leather-bound menus. Apparently the chichi environs appeal to the locals—at a recent lunch the huge dining room was packed. The Indo-Pakistani menu features the standard offerings, but the execution far surpasses standard issue. The meats in the creamy butter chicken and mutton biryani were unexpectedly tender and moist; the bihari kebab, a dish often served at weddings and other celebrations, was like a better, bolder version of gyros; the spicy chana dal was a clear standout. Breads—we tried the naan and an onion kulcha—were the only disappointment. Where were the third-degree char burns one comes to expect? **Kristina Meyer**

Viceroy of India

2520 W. Devon | 773-743-4100

F 7.5 | S 6.7 | A 6.5 | \$\$ (11 REPORTS)
INDIAN/PAKISTANI | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | FULL BAR

"Prices are more expensive than most on Devon," says one Rater, "but the texture and flavor of the dishes is worth it." With its neon lights and huge crown-shaped sign, this place is easy to find, and Raters agree it's also pretty easy to get a seat here. They praise the food (one calls it as good as Tiffin's), though they have their gripes: the small size of the naan portions, difficulty communicating about levels of spiciness. A carryout counter in the front serves a slightly different (and cheaper) menu. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

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