



CLOSE TO HOME: Jewel of Himalaya Lights Up the Restaurant Scene in Harrison

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By Paul Hicks



There's always someone to watch over diners at Jewel of Himalaya.

What ideas come to mind when you read the word "Himalaya"? If your thoughts include Mt. Everest, Sir Edmund Hillary, or Tenzing Norgay, then you are likely to appreciate the distinctiveness of the new restaurant called Jewel of Himalaya. Located in the small shopping center at 385 Halstead Avenue in Harrison, its Nepalese-style cooking features many dishes that bear a close resemblance to the cuisines of India, but are generally milder, allowing diners to savor the subtler flavors.

Nuru Sherpa, owner of the Jewel of Himalaya in Harrison and its sister restaurant of the same name in Yorktown Heights, explained what makes their cooking distinctive: "Our food is very light; we don't use spices

as heavily as Indians or as much oil as the Chinese. It is mostly dairy- and grease-free, and cooked usually with garlic and ginger without sodium and MSG in order to bring flavor from the vegetable and meat ingredients."

At dinner on our first visit, we were guided by some recommendations in a review that appeared recently in The New York Times Metropolitan section. For appetizers, we chose a combination of beef and vegetable momos, delicious steamed dumplings that are apparently the favorite comfort food in Nepal. Another good choice is veg pakoda, a mix of vegetables and mashed potatoes deep-fried in a tempura batter.

Our entrées that evening were mutton korma, cooked in a cashew, almond, and yogurt sauce, as well as a chicken curry. They were accompanied by flavorful Basmati rice and hot naan bread, along with spicy radish pickles and sweet chutney for condiments. An alternative we did not try is the Nepali thali, a platter with small bowls of various meat and vegetable samplings.

For dessert, the rice pudding proved a good choice, but the star of the meal was the Himalayan kulfi, a frozen pudding made of a puree of mango, pistachios, and other delectable ingredients.

There is a short but good selection of wines and beers, and to top off the meal, we had mugs of Himalayan chai. It is prepared with cardamom, cloves, and other spices, which fortified us for the cold winter weather awaiting us.

We went again on a Sunday to have the buffet lunch, which is served Tuesday through Sunday (they are closed on



Nuru Sherpa, owner of Jewel of Himalaya

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Mondays). The wide range of choices change from day to day and include a number of vegetarian dishes. Our favorites on that occasion started with the glazed dal (lentils) and included chicken saag (cooked in a creamy spinach sauce), mixed vegetables makhini in a nutty sauce, beef with fried noodles, and steamed mustard greens. The choices on the buffet are clearly labeled, but the helpful staff is happy to describe the ingredients and degree of spiciness, which are also explained on the menu.

Part of the charm of Jewel of Himalaya is the pleasing décor and tranquil atmosphere, which includes soft background music that is characteristic of the region. The owner, Nuru, wants his guests to have an opportunity to learn about the life and cultures of the Himalayan people in addition to enjoying their cuisine.

For those who are interested, documentary films of the Himalayan area are streamed silently on a large television screen. Relaxing after lunch, we watched part of a film about the caravan of people and yaks that treks annually across high mountain passes from Tibet, carrying salt to trade for grain with farmers in Nepal. Coincidentally, we had recently watched a dramatization of the same experience in an award-winning film called "Himalaya."

Nuru and his family come from the same town in northern Nepal as Tenzing Norgay, the famous mountain guide who accompanied Sir Edmund Hillary in the historic first ascent to the summit of Mount Everest. Before coming to the U.S., Nuru attended the school founded by Hillary in a Sherpa village located at an altitude of 13,000 feet close to Everest.

A visit to Jewel of Himalaya is likely to be the nearest most of us will come to that extraordinary part of the world. For times, reservations, menus, take-out orders, and prices, call 630-7921 or visit www.himalayaharrison.com.



A copper bowlful of Himalayan curry

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