

Los Angeles Times

What's Goan food? Go to this El Segundo restaurant and find out

By Linda Burum | December 15, 2015



A plate of Goan food, including ambot tik, piquant curried fish fillets, from Mandovi Indian Cuisine in El Segundo.

The lunchtime rush at Mandovi Indian Cuisine draws crowds from El Segundo's high-tech corridor along Sepulveda Boulevard near LAX. Swift turnover keeps the all-you-can-eat buffet dishes fresh, but the familiar northern Indian comfort food it offers isn't the restaurant's true *raison d'être*. Mandovi specializes in one of India's most admired cuisines — that of Goa, the coastal southern Indian state facing the Arabian Sea, which was ruled by the Portuguese until 1961.

Regrettably, Goan food is all but unknown in the United States. But last year, Mandovi's owner, Joseph DSouza, a longtime restaurant business veteran from Goa, hoped to

change that. Converting a former Mexican cafe, he hung dramatic black and white drawings of Goan fishermen and added white table linens and a full bar.

The result is a sort of unpretentious Raj-in-the-tropics backdrop for the lush seafood-and-coconut dominated cooking that mingles Portuguese and south Indian elements.

The dishes are accented with tart tropical fruits and the hot chiles that Portuguese traders introduced to India. There are garlic and chile-cloaked *peri-peri* shrimp and piquant curried fish fillets, *ambot tik* (which means sour and spicy-hot), both local favorites in Goa.

Coconut has many guises in the cuisine. Steamed clams in their shells swim in a light coconut milk broth. Meaty tiger shrimp with okra pods in a creamy spice-laden coconut curry is a dish reminiscent of Thai flavors. Goat *xacuti* involves ground coconut flesh blended into the braised meat juices, infused with cardamom and cloves. *Xacuti* is one of the region's tour de force creations; it may also be a vegetarian dish with mushrooms and potatoes.

Order the chicken tikka if you insist, but you may want to branch out with the *gallina chicken cafreal*, a spice-rubbed, grilled chicken.

As a nod to Goa's lively street food vendors and cafes near the Mandovi River, there are crusty potato cakes stuffed with savory lamb called Mandovi *ferry kheema* chops. The Miramar *sev papdi chaat*, a salad-like concoction topped with crunchy garbanzo-flour noodles, is fun to customize with all its accompanying chutneys and condiments. To drink, *chatpatta nimbu pani*, a black-pepper-spiked lemonade, is curiously refreshing.

The only true Goan item on the dessert menu is *bibinca*, a multi-layered coconut custard served in slices. A more intriguing choice might be *kokum*. It's the juice of a bright, scarlet fruit, related to the mangosteen, known for its medicinal properties. Think of it as the perfect *digestiveo* to end a luxurious Goan meal.

150 S. Sepulveda Blvd., El Segundo, Unigt G, (424) 220-7115, www.mandovila.com.

<http://www.latimes.com/food/dailydish/la-dd-goan-food-20151214-story.html>