

Hartford Courant

BARGAIN BITES

Many Choices At Bombay Olive

November 06, 2008 | By - DANIELA ALTIMARI

www.bombayolive.com

West Hartford's old IHOP has been reborn as Bombay Olive, a handsome new restaurant specializing in Indian, Nepalese and American cuisine, with a smattering of Persian, Italian and Asian dishes thrown in for good measure.

Even though the region already has several top-notch Indian places, we were eager to check out this newcomer and its far-ranging menu. Besides a bountiful lunch buffet and an expansive dinner menu, Bombay Olive serves breakfast with a South Asian twist.

The look: The exterior retains much of its faux-Swiss chalet appearance, but inside, the generic International House of Pancakes decor has been replaced with a more sophisticated vibe. The copper-color hammered-metal ceiling casts a warm glow. Wooden tables and chairs are stained a deep cherry, and Tiffany-style lamps provide a dash of color. A gleaming Buddha sits near the front, as if welcoming every patron.

The vibe: Part upscale ethnic restaurant, part neighborhood breakfast joint. At lunch, patrons line up for the buffet, and throughout the day, Bombay Olive does a brisk takeout business.

The eats: The Indian, Nepalese and Persian specialties get high marks; the American, Italian and Asian sides of the menu were less successful. At breakfast, many of the standard omelets and egg dishes come with a side of nicely spiced chickpeas and fluffy, feather-light bread called bhatura. Our friendly waitress compared it to fried dough, but it's much tastier. Instead of the bottomless cup of coffee, try a steaming mug of milky chai tea.

The lunch buffet featured many choices from across the globe. On the day of our visit, they included zingy tandoori chicken; savory saag paneer (spinach sauteed with onions and cubes of firm, homemade cheese); a wonderfully spicy Indian potato dish studded with whole chili peppers; crunchy vegetable fritters; and an array of tempting chutneys and sauces.

If that had been the extent of the offerings, we would have left stuffed and happy. But Bombay Olive goes much further - too far, in fact. The buffet table also held flaccid french fries, so-so sweet-and-sour chicken, edamame and a fairly conventional salad bar. The regular menu is even more of a mish-mash, with everything from pizza and panini to pasta and pot stickers. There's also Cape Cod clam chowder, Greek salad, New York sirloin steak and Chilean sea bass. The jet-lag-inducing variety doesn't work.

The prices: The \$3 breakfast special is a deal, but most of the more imaginative and substantial breakfast dishes are \$7 or \$8. The all-you-can-eat lunch buffet is \$8.95. Both are good bargains. Dinner entrees are a bit pricier: Indian specialties hover around the \$12 mark; burgers are \$9 or \$10, depending on the toppings; and the American combos range from \$10 for fish and chips to a budget-busting \$26.95 for the 12-ounce New York sirloin.

The verdict: Stick with the Indian side of the menu, and you'll be happy.

The particulars: Open daily for breakfast from 7 to 11 a.m.; buffet lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.; dinner from 3 to 11 p.m. Full bar and plentiful free parking.