

## India Plaza: India Travels West

Written by Written by David M. Brown

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**Want the Taj, in Tempe? A touch of Indian culture in the Valley? India Plaza—“Where India Comes Alive!” offers this in a spectacular two-acre complex at 1872 E Apache Blvd. in Tempe—the largest Asian center along the METRO light rail route.**

Opened in April 2003 by entrepreneur Raveen Arora, the one-stop center for Indian food and culture includes the superlative Dhaba restaurant, the Dhaba Café, a food market offering Ayurvedic herbs and spices difficult to find elsewhere, a gift boutique (with mini Taj Mahals) and beauty salon. Arora plans to add a theater/auditorium museum—India House—to showcase art and artifacts of India and promote Indian movies, concerts, designers and other artists.

“With India Plaza, we want to bring India closer to expatriates, ASU students, working professionals and everyone who wants to know more about the world’s most populous democracy,” says Arora, whose wife Clara shares his vision for the center and love for India. “We have always wanted India Plaza to be known as a multicultural meeting place as well as a restaurant and market—a center for education and understanding.”



Since its opening in June 2008, Dhaba has become the centerpiece of India Plaza—an authentic Punjabi restaurant. Arora named it after roadside India refuges—“dhabas.” Hungry travelers look for these stops in even the most inhospitable places because they offer inexpensive home-style cooking.

Open daily for lunch and dinner, Dhaba features rich, multi-textured cuisine from one of the country’s northernmost provinces. At Dhaba, you’ll enjoy favorites such as Gulshan e Bahar, an assortment of vegetable pakoras served with house chutneys, Tikka Masala and Tandoori Chicken. An extensive vegetarian menu is also available.

Executive chef, Talwinder Dhaliwal is from Punjab. “He prides himself on providing a true homestyle cooking experience, avoids colorings, artificial agents and other additives,” Arora notes. The new sous chef, Manjit Hoti, is also a native of Punjab. Tony Fesianes, the operations manager, is a 30-year hospitality industry veteran who oversees service, wine selection and customer interface.



Recently opened, the adjacent Dhaba Café began in 2003 as a “chaat” center—the first in Arizona—serving authentic, heart-healthy snacks. “These street treats are iconic in India, with fresh ingredients and veggies; they serve as light meals that are tasty and wholesome,” Arora says. The café has a separate cooking staff that serves a diverse menu including Tokri Chaat—an assortment of crisp snacks served in an edible bowl/basket.

Dhaba Café also serves breakfast, including fresh-roasted coffees, natural black and herbal teas, freshly squeezed juices, baked goods, burritos and omelets. This begins at 6 a.m. daily and continues through 10 a.m. Dhaba Café and Dhaba are open for lunch, 11 a.m.–3 p.m., and dinner, 5–10 p.m.

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Dhaba is open for dinner Mon.–Fri., 5-10 p.m., weekdays, and Saturday and Sunday, noon to 10 p.m. The boutique and market are open approximately the same time as Dhaba. The market exudes an aroma of exotic spices, seasonings and oils and offers other items such as “Bollywood” movies—providing visitors a better understanding of India and its heritage.

“India Plaza has been built around the cornerstones of Indian hospitality and service,” Arora says. “We want to bring India home to everyone who knows her and to those who want to learn more about her.”

For more information, visit [www.thedhaba.com](http://www.thedhaba.com).