

A passage to Little India

Whether your local Indian restaurant knows you by name or your familiarity with the subcontinent's cuisine comes solely from Trader Joe's frozen chicken tikka masala entrées, **Melting Pot Food Tours** aims to broaden your Indian food horizons.

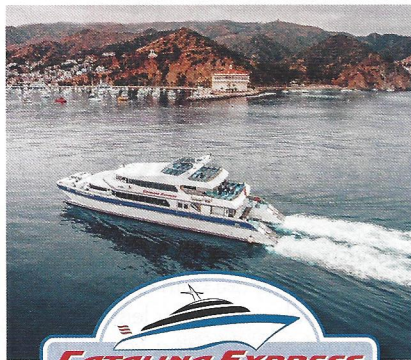
The SoCal-based outfit's new tour of Artesia's Little India traipses and tastes its way around the neighborhood's bustling Indian and Pakistani businesses along the enclave's main drag, Pioneer Boulevard.

—Eli Ellison



See our visual tour at AAA.com/eats.

Here's a peek at a few stops:



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The Pioneer Cash and Carry market, bright with

fresh produce, exotic spices, and a rainbow of imported ice cream, has everything home cooks need to create a meal fit for a raja. Led by jovial chef Farhana Sahibzada, my tour group sidles up to the on-site bakery counter. The dreamy, fluffy slices of pineapple and mango cream cake send us swooning, and we're amazed to learn all the pastries, from carrot cake to strawberry mousse, are made without eggs, to meet the requirements of Indian vegetarian diets.

Crisp white tablecloths set the scene at **Ashoka the Great**, where we stop for a buffet lunch of traditional fare. Chef Farhana tips me off to one of her favorite combos: mixing the curry chicken with *saag paneer* (creamed spinach). Sopped up with warm, pillowy naan and washed down with an ice-cold Kingfisher beer, lunch barely leaves room for the hand-made *burfi* and *peda* (Indian milk fudge) treats we sample down the street at **Jay Bharat Sweets café**.

Celebrity customers Madonna and actress Freida Pinto (*Slumdog Millionaire*) know **Sona Chaandi** is the place to procure flowing saris, bejeweled dresses, and intricate henna tattoos. Family-owned **Bhindi Jewelers'** enormous marble-floored space sparkles with enough 22-karat bling to make Goldfinger himself drool.



The 3.5-hour **Little India tour** is \$89 per person and includes food. Reservations are required. (424) 247-9666; meltingpottours.com. Tours of other SoCal locales, including Old Pasadena and East L.A., are also available.