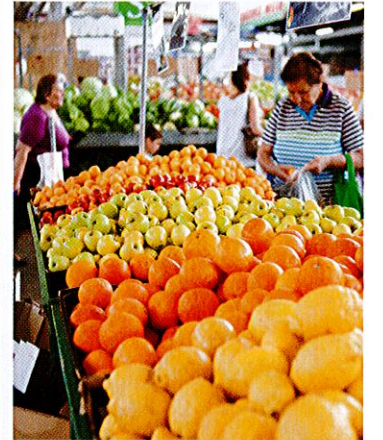




◀◀ **Amritsari Sweets & Indian Curry Cafe**  
The counter inside this North Indian cafe houses a colourful display of sweets, including Bengali *cham-cham* (far left) *gulab jamun* (fried milk balls in sugar syrup) and *kaju katli* (cashew fudge). Also, try its *samosa channa* (potato-stuffed samosa with chickpea curry, coriander, onion and tamarind), a 'snack' that easily feeds two. 72 Foster St, (03) 8772 5506.



▶ **Lakshmi Vilas**  
Local workers crowd into this simple cafe at lunchtime for inexpensive vegetarian South Indian food. Two of the specialties are *vada* and *iddli*. Both are made from lentil flour, but the former are fried while the latter steamed. They're torn up and dipped in *sambhar*, a coconut-based sauce, and chutney. Shop 5, 31 Pulteney St, (03) 9793 7726, lakshmilivas.com.au.



◀◀ **Dandenong Market**  
Fruit, vegetables and flowers, stalls selling takeaway food and exotic wares from all over the world line the aisles of one of Victoria's oldest markets, which has recently undergone a \$26 million redevelopment. William Wallace specialises in Indian and Asian fresh produce. Open Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. Cnr Clow and Cleeland Sts, (03) 9701 3850, dandenongmarket.com.au.



◀◀ **CJ's Indian Restaurant**  
While many of Dandenong's eateries are low-key cafes, Francis and Sheila Joseph run this North and South Indian fine-dining restaurant just a short walk from Little India's main thoroughfare. Choose the *thali* (left), a platter featuring a combination of dishes – some that you may never have encountered before – and try the lamb pepper masala. 1/24 Langhorne St, (03) 9793 9797.



◀◀ **Indian Bazaar**  
Folks come from all over Melbourne to stock their *masala dabba* (spice tin) in this aromatic store filled with bags of lentils, rice, snacks and spices, bottles of oil, packets of pappadums, cans of ghee and desserts (according to Himanshi, almost no one makes their own these days) and a range of Indian beauty products. 5a/77 Foster St, (03) 9794 7010.



## In the neighbourhood DANDENONG, MELBOURNE

Before he arrived in Australia in 1989, Harry Singh lived in Punjab, one of the northwest states of India. These days, he's the proprietor of Indian Bazaar, a large grocery store he bought in 1996 in Dandenong's Little India. On his shelves are every spice, pulse and kind of rice you could possibly imagine. There are no tins of baked beans here; instead you'll find heat-and-eat *saag paneer*. At the back of the store, there are freezers of samosas and shelves of Bollywood films.

"Between 65 and 75 per cent of my customers are Indian," he says. "The rest are Afghan, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan. The spices used in all the foods are the same, they're just used differently."

Although Harry has only been behind the counter for 15 years, Indian Bazaar was one of the original Indian stores to arrive on Foster Street. Today, the busy thoroughfare is lined with stores filled to the brim with aromatic spices and authentic ingredients, brightly coloured saris, and statues of Hindi deities. Then there are the *udupi* (cafes) and restaurants serving the flavours of India's many different regions.

"The City of Dandenong has the largest Indian community in Australia," Himanshi Munshaw-Luhar explains over *masala chai* at Amritsari Sweets. "Indian people first came to Australia in the 1800s as domestic staff, sugar plantation workers and camel train riders. At the 2006 census, there were around 235,000 Indians living in Australia."

Himanshi moved to Melbourne from Mumbai six years ago and started Masala Trails, a walking – and eating – tour of the community (she also conducts culinary tours of India; visit [beaconholidays.com.au](http://beaconholidays.com.au)).

At this first stop, she introduces Neeru Tamber, owner of Amritsari. Neeru explains the array of colourful sweets in the store's cabinet, and offers a bright orange *jalebi*, a deep-fried pretzel-shaped morsel that's dipped in syrup and often served during celebrations.

Like Harry's, Neeru's family is originally from Punjab. "Many people from Punjab enter the food industry when they move overseas because they were farmers," Himanshi explains.

The next stop doesn't involve eating. Shahid Syed is the owner of Roshan's Fashions (69–71 Foster St). "We were the first Indian fashion shop in the area," he explains. The former architect pulls out *shalwar kameez*, the long shirts worn by men and women over pants, and extravagantly embroidered saris and *sherwanis* (men's wedding suits).

"In 1994, when we first opened the shop, the whole street was vacant," says Shahid. "In the past six years, this has really become Little India, and in 2006, Dandenong Council officially called it that."

While Foster Street is the focus of the Indian community, there are other outposts throughout Dandenong. We lunch at Lakshmi Vilas on Pulteney Street and Himanshi offers insight into Indian food: spices came from Greece and Egypt, Arab traders brought coffee more than 1500 years ago and, remarkably, the Portuguese brought potatoes and tomatoes to India only about 400 years ago. As we tuck into *masala dosa* (pancakes with spiced potatoes), it's hard to believe that such a cornerstone of the cuisine is a relatively new addition. It's been an enlightening (and delicious) visit to Melbourne's Little India. ☺