Volunteer organizations are unique entities bringing individuals of like-minds and varied spirits together in an endeavor to champion an interest or purpose. Some causes are specific, others broad in scope. The mission of Sister Cities International is specific: “Promote peace through mutual respect, understanding & cooperation - one individual, one community at a time.” The accomplishment of this task is infinite in its possibilities as a recent board meeting discussion of the subject proved. How do we wish to reach out to our sister community of Mumbai and share her cultural treasures with our local one? For the past few years our modest fundraisers have enabled us to send an annual contribution to medical clinics there. Locally the Little India Tour and Diwali dinner celebration has given L.A. residents a taste (literally) of life in our sister city. Now we would like to increase our interaction with both communities. The conversation about the myriad of directions was lively, exciting and sometimes frustrating as we pondered new and expanding possibilities for the organization. It was quite like dining in an Indian restaurant – so many tempting dishes and time only for a single meal! The one conclusion we could all agree upon was the need to Grow our affiliation. For the first time since its reorganization, LAMSCA (saved and held together by our indomitable Mira Advani-Honeycutt) we will be seeking to create membership, inviting interested lovers of Indian culture to share our efforts, expand their horizons & bring their talents to our widening circle of peacemakers. We hope you’ll join us as we explore and cultivate multitudinous facets of cultural harmony.

-Lane Maser, President
Millions of Mumbai-ites enjoy the city's street foods that are consumed all day long -- as snack items, lunch or even dinner.

Known as Chaat or Snacks these dishes are sold in small shops or by street vendors.

So we asked West Hollywood's Flavor of India restaurant to whip up some Mumbai chaat goodies.

Please join us for lunch to taste the delicious morsels of

street foods of mumbai

Dishes include: bhel puri, dahi puri, chicken chaat, vegetable samosas, potato tikkis, fish pakora, lamb frankie, dhokla, baingan salad, onion bhaji, assorted chutneys, Neemo's exotic ice cream and chai.

Paired with Napa and Sonoma wines

June 8, 2008

12 Noon to 3 P.M.

Price:

$35 per person

includes wine

Flavor of India

9045 Santa Monica Blvd

West Hollywood CA 90069

Plenty of street parking

Free meters on Sunday.

Entertainment: Bollywood dancing and Henna painting.

Space limited: Please R.S.V.P. to: David Salazar: @ 310-600-5025 or
dcsalazar@ca.rr.com
The moment the car pulls into the gated compound of Ayurvedagram Heritage Wellness Center, I whisper to myself “I’m in heaven.” Hammocks swing lazily in the gentle breeze and an air of serenity permeates the fragrant garden lush with coconut and papaya groves. Keralite wooden cottages surround the grounds filled with over 100 species of herbal and rare medicinal plants.

The retreat is located in Southern India, on the outskirts of Bangalore, a city noted as the nation’s Silicon Valley. I am here to experience the seven-day Panchakarma (body-purification) treatment. This is not my first time, I’ve visited this retreat several times for weekend visits since it opened in 2000. What makes this center so special is the series of Ayurvedic massages and therapeutic treatments administered in authentic Kerala style. The variety of synchronized massages are given, utzing different techniques, some with warm oils, others with hot milk or pouches filled with medicinal herbs. All the oils and herbs are blended specially to suit individuals and their specific treatments.

So what exactly is Ayurveda? The centuries-old tradition of wellness stems from the Vedic civilization of India and is derived from the Sanskrit words ayush for “life” and veda for “knowledge.” Literally meaning knowledge of life, Ayurveda accepts the principle that everything in this Universe is made up of five basic elements - space, air, fire, water and earth. While the structural aspect of the body is made up of these elements, the functional aspect however, is governed by the three biological forces or the Tridoshas - Vata (space and air), Pitta (fire and water) and Kapha (earth and water) - that are present in every cell, tissue and organ of the body. In a healthy person these biological forces are balanced, but the daily stress of life plays havoc with our bodies and upsets this balance.

And that’s where the therapeutic powers of Ayurveda - through special massages, herbs, combination of vegetarian diet, yoga and meditation help to realign the balance of the five elements and the Tridoshas to help restore the body to optimum health.

My seven day body purification treatment included two massages a day in a combination of oil, dry herbal powders or hot milk massages. Some treatments included steam bath as well. The daily schedule also included three 45-minute sessions each of yoga, meditation and pranayama (deep breathing), morning and evening walks around the garden and herbs and tonics specially prepared for me. The vegetarian diet ranged from an elaborate fruit platter for breakfast and for lunch and dinner,a 3 course meal of soup, salad and delicious vegetables cooked in herbs and spices. I did not go hungry!

The beauty of the body purification treatment is this - the few pounds that I lost in that week, I have not gained back since I got back to Los Angeles, in spite of eating everything here. And according to the doctor at Ayurvedagram, this wonderful change has occurred because my body is starting to regain its balance and regularize its metabolism.

www.ayurvedagram.com

AYURVEDAGRAM, A heavenly retreat
By Mira Advani Honeycutt
Green Coconut Chicken Curry

3 pounds medium-sized chicken thighs
2 cups cilantro leaves (1 bunch)
2 jalapeno chiles, seeded and coarsely chopped
¼ cup peeled ginger root, cut into chunks
¼ cup garlic cloves (about 8)
Water
1 ½ teaspoons Indian brown mustard seeds
¾ teaspoon ground coriander

Remove the skin and excess fat from the chicken thighs and set aside.

Combine the cilantro leaves, jalapenos, ginger, garlic and 1/3 cup water in a small food processor and process until pureed. Scoop this paste into a bowl and set aside.

Using a spice grinder, grind the mustard seeds to a powder and set aside. Combine the coriander, chili powder, turmeric and salt in a small cup.

Heat the oil in a Dutch oven or other large heavy pan. Add the cumin seeds and ground mustard seeds and cook until they crackle. Add the onions and cook until golden brown, which can take as long as 20 minutes. Stir often to keep them from burning.

Add the cilantro paste and sauté for 5 minutes on medium heat. Add the ground coriander mixture, then the coconut milk and cook, stirring, for 5 minutes.

Add the chicken and ½ cup water. Cover and simmer until the chicken is cooked, about 45 minutes.

Makes 4 servings.

Barbara Hansen is a member of the board of the Los Angeles Mumbai Sister City Affiliation and produces the website www.tablesconversation.com about food, wine, travel and recipes.
Heat the oil in a Dutch oven or other large heavy pan. Add the cumin seeds and ground mustard seeds and cook until they crackle. Add the onions and cook until golden brown, which can take as long as 20 minutes. Stir often to keep them from burning.

Join the Los Angeles Mumbai Sister City Affiliation’s Official presentation screening of Shot in Bombay

Saturday, April 26th - 9:00 PM

ArcLight Hollywood

http://www.indianfilmfestival.org/movies08/shotinbombay.html

2008 Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles (IFFLA) runs April 22-27 at ArcLight Hollywood

Now in its sixth year, the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles (IFFLA) is the first and largest festival in North America devoted to promoting a greater appreciation of Indian cinema by showcasing films about India and the diverse perspectives of the Indian Diaspora. This year's edition promises to be an eclectic and exciting event that includes approximately 40 features, shorts and documentaries, Bollywood By Night screenings, and a Tribute to India's acclaimed actress Madhuri Dixit. Between the screenings, enjoy IFFLA Rhythm Village presented by Rukus Avenue, an eclectic selection of free public outdoor entertainment at the ArcLight Hollywood Cinemas courtyard April 23-26.

www.indianfilmfestival.org

Tickets go on sale on APRIL 3 AT ArcLight Hollywood box office or online at www.arclightcinemas.com

We’re Just a Click Away

By Linda Blakeley, Ph.D.

I remember when it took days or weeks to send a letter internationally to someone who lived on another continent. I had to stand in line at the post office and after the postal worker weighed the letter or package, I paid them. They whisked the correspondence away. I remember, I walked out of the post office knowing sooner or later, my friend or relative would receive it but I never felt any sense of closeness.

We all know how things have changed. With a click of the mouse I can communicate with someone thousands of miles away in an instant or send a gift without leaving my house. By now, most of us may take it for granted, but I would like to thank all of those techies who figured it all out because believe me, it is not something I could have even imagined without their help.

The world is definitely one global community now. What happens in one part of the world reverberates in another within minutes if not seconds with the internet. I couldn’t imagine inventing the computer or our internet capabilities but as a psychologist helping people communicate and resolve differences, I hope each of us takes a few minutes everyday to imagine all people, no matter our race or religion, treating each other with respect and dignity, to value our common humanity, learn from our differences and communicate in constructive ways that can benefit us all.

Linda Blakeley, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Beverly Hills
Directed by
Liz Mermin

UK/2007/99min/ Digibeta/ LA Premiere

A behind the scenes look at the making of a Bollywood action/thriller based on actual events, all of which take a back seat to the real life drama unfolding in the courtroom and in the media for the film's leading man.

SATURDAY, APRIL 26 - 9:00 pm
ArcLight Hollywood
6360 W. Sunset Blvd.
Hollywood, CA 90028

Q&A with director Liz Mermin to follow the screening

Tickets go on sale April 3 at the ArcLight Hollywood box office and online at www.arclightcinemas.com
General admission: $11; Discounted admission: $9 (students, seniors, children, AFI & ArcLight members)
Opening and Closing Night Galas: $60 each (includes screening and reception)
Tribute: $25 (Friday, April 25, 2008)
Fest Pass: $95 (access to regular screenings)
All-Access Pass: $220 (access to regular screenings, galas and tribute)
For more information on the festival program please visit www.indianfilmfestival.org
Memories of DIWALI

By Smita Salgaonkar

Diwali or Deepavali is a major Indian holiday. Many legends are associated with Diwali; one reason for celebration is that this is the last harvest of the year before winter. Business people close their accounts during this season and begin the next business year. The deity of wealth in Hinduism, goddess Lakshmi is also thanked during this festival and everyone prays for a good year ahead. This is the common factor in Diwali celebrations all over the Indian subcontinent. Northern Indians celebrate the return of Lord Ram from 14 years of exile, after he killed Ravana. Whatever the reason for the celebration, Diwali is truly the ‘Festival of Lights’. The lighting of lamps, signify victory of good over evil.

Having lived in the US since 1984, I’ve been back many times, however, never during the Diwali celebrations. With school age kids, that time just never was convenient. However, now that the kids are older, Diwali seemed to be the perfect time for a visit, so in November 2007, I decided to travel to Mumbai to experience Diwali once again.

All through childhood, Diwali was undoubtedly, the most exciting time of the year! Diwali meant school holidays, new clothes, firecrackers, special foods that are made only at that time of the year and also getting together with friends and family. Drawing Rangoli used to be one of my favorite things to do during Diwali. Rangoli is a form of floor art, done outside the front door, to welcome guests, which uses finely ground white powder and colors to draw a design.

Diwali celebrations were just as exciting after a gap of so many years. I met up with friends and family, exchanged sweets and gifts. I also made some attempts to draw Rangoli, but did not dare to light up firecrackers and left that to the neighborhood kids.

After a gap of 23 years, I celebrated ‘Bhaubij’ with my brother. This day celebrates the sacred relationship between brother and sister. Bhaubij falls on the last day of Diwali celebrations. On this day sisters pray for the health and long life of their brother. The sister invites the brother over for a meal. The brother presents his sister with gifts to honor the day and promises to protect her at all times.

Since Diwali is based on the lunar calendar, the exact month and day varies every year. In 2008, Diwali will be celebrated from October 26th to October 30th.

Smita Salgaonkar is owner of Saffron Spot in Artesia and in 2006 was Mrs. Asia.
Mehndi from start to finish

Here are some of the smiling faces who shared in last year’s celebration.

Diwali 2007

Photos - David Salazar
**Upcoming events**

April 22 - 27 - **Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles** (IFFLA). Arclight Hollywood

Saturday April 26 - “**Shot in Bombay**” presented at IFFLA by L.A./Mumbai Sister City Affiliation. 8pm Arclight

Sunday, June 1 - **The Los Angeles Sister Cities** Cultural Day. A fun-filled, cross-cultural, free public event featuring entertainment from Los Angeles’ Sister Cities. At The Grove. 2pm-6pm

Sunday, June 8 - **Street Foods of Mumbai** LAMSCA’s spring event at **Flavor of India**, West Hollywood.

Saturday June 28 - Little India Tour - Explore the culture & foods of India in a guided tour of our local India community.

Tour begins in Artesia at 11a.m. Reservations: dcsalazar@ca.rr.com

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**The best gifts are unanticipated.**

Last year’s newly named Hollywood Santa Parade was one for me. As a representative of LAMSCA, I experienced the Parade while wearing a sari and leaning from the side of the trolley car that was one of the floats for L.A. Sister Cities. I was assembled with Sister City representatives from other affiliations wearing the traditional costumes of their countries.

It was my first in-person parade, having only ever seen them on TV - that one way box of communication. Instead of hearing the confident narration of the commentators informing me of what was next, I heard laughter and shouts of the excited crowd, smelled the cool night air and had no idea what would happen next.

What did happen next was marvelous. As I leaned out of the trolley, smiling and waving to the crowds lining the route, they reciprocated my gesture en masse. Their grins were irrepressible. In return to hollers of “Merry Christmas,” “Feliz Navidad,” “Joyeux Noel” and “Namaste” from us on the trolley, they would echo it back magnified and gleeful. As we rolled slowly along the parade route, hand after hand raised itself in friendly gesture accompanied by grins and smiles.

We are used to waving to those we know but waving to strangers is considered well…strange. This acceptable venue for it revealed a simple yet profound discovery and one befitting a Sister Cities experience: When you wave and smile at the world, the world waves and smiles in return.

- Lane Maser

*Photos - Erik Friedl*