

Indian Cuisine and its Diversity

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The variance in terrain and the tropical climate explains the array of spices and raw food material available in India. At various times in history, local kings, Mughal emperors, French, Portuguese and British, had ruled parts of India. This has influenced the cuisines to give it its unique characteristics. With the vast variety in cuisine, it is hard not to find a dish that suits one's palate.

India is broadly divided into four regions: North, South, East and West. Each region has a wide variety of cuisine. Below is the description of a few region-specific dishes available at IndiaFest 2017: India has an astounding diversity of religions, languages and cultures. Food preparations are dependent on the locally available produce and influenced by cultural, traditional and religious factors. The common thread that runs through these various cuisines is the creative use of spices for flavor and aroma.

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Northern India

Punjab Cuisine

Food from the state of Punjab is strongly influenced by Mughal (Persian) cuisine. Tandoor (grilling over hot charcoal in a clay oven) is a unique cooking method which is characteristic of North Indian Cuisine.

Items on Menu:

Chicken Kebab: Minced chicken marinated with yogurt, lemon-juice, and mild spices and grilled.

Tandoori Chicken: Chicken on bone marinated with tandoori masala (spice mix containing cayenne pepper and turmeric) and roasted.

Gulab Jamun: Dessert made of deep fried flour dough balls soaked in flavored sugar syrup.

Mango Lassi: Yogurt drink flavored with mango pulp.

Delhi Cuisine

Delhi is India's national capital and has strong Mughal influence as Delhi has served as the Mughal capital for centuries. Due to its rich cultural diversity, Delhi has multiple international cuisines that are transformed to cater its residents.

Items on Menu:

Chana Puri: Chickpeas cooked in a spicy gravy with onions and tomatoes (chana) served with Puri (fried bread made with refined wheat flour).

Gobi Manchurian: Lightly battered Cauliflower coated with Indian version of Manchurian sauce.

Chai: Spiced Indian Tea with milk.

Western India

Gujarat Cuisine

Traditionally, Gujarati food is entirely vegetarian due to the major influence of Hinduism. The food is known for its subtle spices and mild flavor.

Items on Menu:

Sev Khaman: A famous Gujarati dish which is made from khaman or dhokla (fermented gram flour and yogurt batter steam cooked) and Sev (small pieces of crunchy noodles made from Chickpea flour paste).

Dabeli: A tasty potato mixture which is filled into small burger bun and then topped with onion, garlic chutney and Sev.

Jalebi: It is a popular Indian sweet dish which is made from fried fermented refined flour batter dunked in saffron flavored sugar syrup.

Chaos: Cold yogurt drink lightly flavored with spices.

Maharashtra Cuisine

Maharashtra is the second most populous state and historically one of the major trade centers in India. Hence, the food here is predominantly influenced by intermingled cultures.

Mumbai (Bombay), the capital of Maharashtra is known as the financial capital of India. Mumbai, "a city that never sleeps" is famous for Bollywood and its 24-hour availability of street food. Street food is a very important part of Mumbai's culture and is a reflection of the fast paced and vibrant life in this city.

Items on Menu:

Pav Bhaji: Thick mix of vegetables; potato, peas, carrot, cabbage, cauliflower, cooked in tomato gravy and a blend of aromatic spices (Bhaji) served with bread toasted with butter (Pav). The bhaji is garnished with chopped onions, cilantro and lime.

Pani Puri also known as Gol-gappa: Small hollow puffed balls stuffed with mashed potato and sprouted beans and then filled with flavored mint water.

Kalakand: Dessert made of ricotta cheese, dry milk and sweet condensed milk flavored with cardamom and garnished with almonds and pistachio.

Konkan/ coastal Maharashtra is known for its scenic shoreline and slow paced relaxed life. The food is known for its unique bold blend of spices (Malvani Masala) and its generous use of coconut.

Items on Menu:

Malvani Chicken with Jeera Rice: Chicken curry made with fresh ground coconut and Malvani masala (local mix of spices). It is served with basmati rice cooked with Cumin seeds (Jeera) and mild spices.

Onion Bhaji: Spicy crispy fritters made with onion slices dipped in chickpea batter flavored with red chili powder.

Vada Pav : Spiced mashed potato balls rolled in gram flour batter and deep-fried

Eastern India

West Bengal

West Bengal, Odisha and Assam are three of many states comprising eastern part of India. The geographical characteristics of this region make fresh ingredients come by easily and take center stage in this cuisine. This cuisine has a distinct character due to the use of ingredients such as mustard oil, paanch phoran (mix of five spices) to name a few.

Items on Menu:

Chicken Tikka Masala with Naan: Pre- marinated pieces of chicken, grilled and then added to a tomato based creamy gravy and served with naan.

Samosa Chaat: It is a fast food made of pre-cooked samosa, chick peas, yogurt and tamarind chutney, garnished with onions, coriander and lemon juice.

Rasmalai: it is a Bengali dessert consisting of patties of curdled milk, sugar syrup soaked in sweetened, thickened milk.

Southern India

Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Kerala are the 5 states forming most of Southern India. Rice and lentils form the major base of South Indian Cuisine. Certain flavorful spices like curry leaves, peppercorns and mustard seeds are primarily used in these dishes.

Andhra Pradesh/Telangana Cuisine

This cuisine is known for its hot and spicy taste. This part of India was ruled by the Nizams (Muslim Emperors) for more than a century thus influencing this cuisine. It is a perfect blend of Hindu and Muslim styles of cooking.

Andhra Chicken Curry and Coconut Rice: Chicken marinated with almonds and cashew paste and cooked with onions, tomato and masala. Basmati rice cooked in coconut milk along with mild spices and served with chicken curry

Plain Dosa: Thin Crispy rice and lentil crepes, Served with chutney and sambar

Masala Dosa: Thin Crispy rice and lentil crepes filled with mildly spiced cooked mashed potatoes. Served with chutney and sambar.

Chutney (dip): Fresh grated coconut blended with spices and tempered with curry leaves and mustard seed.

Sambar (Lentil soup): Vegetable stew flavored with tamarind water and a blend of aromatic spices.

Falooda: Cold dessert made of milk, rose syrup, chia seeds, nuts (cashew, almonds, pistachio), gelatin and served with a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

Tamil Nadu Cuisine

Tamil Nadu being the southernmost state of India has tropical climate that is suitable for cultivation of numerous spices.

Items on Menu:

Chicken 65: Deep fried crispy chicken coated with egg and marinated with ginger, garlic, pepper, cashews and spices.

Chicken Biryani: Biryani is a dish representing the blending of cultures in India. Basmati rice is cooked with marinated meat (Mughal influence) and flavored with local bold spices. It is served with Raita.

Raita: Yogurt mixed with cucumber, tomatoes, onions, cilantro and salt.

Vegetable Biryani: Basmati rice cooked with selected marinated vegetables and flavored with local bold spices. Served with Raita.

Mysore Pak: A south Indian dessert made of ram flour, ghee and sugar.

Juice/ Drink Bar

A few popular juices made from local ingredients are available.

Items on Menu:

Mango Mastani: Mango drink made from the pulp of Alphonso mango which is the most popular variety of mango in India.

Chocolate Mastani: Chocolate drink garnished with nuts.

Kokum Sharbat: Juice made from a local tropical fruit called Kokum.

Lemon Sharbat: Indian Lemonade.

Food will be cooked by local Indian families who are really enthusiastic about presenting selected unique flavors of different regions of India to the people of Arkansas. You certainly do not want to miss this opportunity to experience the tastes of India! So come on down to the River Market with friends and family to enjoy a display of Indian

Indian Cuisine