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KITCHENS OF THE GODS

Temple Kitchens: Where faith meets food with the sacred bond of spirituality, community, and nourishment

TT BUREAU



Image Courtesy: Jagannath Temple, Puri

Food in India has never been only about filling the stomach. It flows into prayers, festivals, and our sense of belonging. Meals, over time, became sacred moments where nourishment transformed into energy of a higher kind. Step into a temple kitchen, and the clang of pots and the aroma of ghee feel as reverent as chants in the sanctum.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL ROOTS OF TEMPLE KITCHENS

The origins of temple kitchens go back to antiquity, where food was tied to devotion. Ancient texts such as the Vedas and Puranas describe food as sacred, to be offered before being eaten. It was gratitude, not indulgence.

The Rig Veda speaks of yajnas where ghee, grains, and fragrant offerings were poured into fire rituals for the gods. Later, the Mahabharata narrated scenes of grand feasts, such as Yudhishtira's Rajasuya Yagna, where feeding thousands was seen as both a royal duty and an act of faith.

SACRED GIVING THROUGH THE GIFT OF FOOD

Among all forms of charity, none shines brighter than Annadaan – the giving of food. In Hindu thought, food is life itself, and feeding another is offering to the divine. Manusmriti and the Bhagavad Gita praise this act as the highest of deeds.

The spirit crosses faiths. Jain philosophy, rooted in non-violence, urges householders to share food selflessly. Sikhism institutionalised it through langar, the community kitchen, where everyone eats together as equals. Buddhism honours food offerings to monks as a source of merit, binding giver and receiver in a cycle of care.

ICONIC TEMPLE KITCHENS OF INDIA

Jagannath Temple, Puri, Odisha

One of Hinduism's holiest shrines, the Jagannath Temple, houses an extraordinary kitchen. Each day, food is prepared for 25,000 to 50,000 devotees, with numbers multiplying during Rath Yatra.

At the heart of the offering is the famed Chappan Bhog, fifty-six different dishes prepared as offerings to Lord Jagannath. These dishes reflect the culinary diversity of Odisha and combine grains, lentils, vegetables, sweets, and savoury items, cooked entirely without onion or garlic to maintain ritual purity. The food, once consecrated, is distributed as Mahaprasad, believed to carry the blessings of the deity. For devotees, consuming it is not only an act of nourishment but a sacred ritual linking them with divine grace.

Golden Temple, Amritsar, Punjab

The Golden Temple's langar, founded by Guru Nanak, is one of the world's largest community kitchens. Between 50,000 and 100,000 meals are served daily, with numbers soaring during festivals.

The Golden Temple kitchen functions entirely through the efforts of volunteers known as sevadars. Thousands come each day to roll rotis, wash utensils, cut vegetables, and serve food. Donations from devotees fund the ingredients, and the sheer scale of daily preparation is astonishing. Giant cauldrons, industrial-sized pans, and chapati-making machines work side by side with human hands, creating a rhythm of devotion that powers the entire operation.

Tirupati Balaji, Andhra Pradesh

The kitchen at Tirumala Venkateswara Temple is as iconic as its deity. Central is the world-famous Tirupati Laddu, granted GI status and produced in hundreds of thousands daily.

Made of flour, ghee, sugar, and cashews, the laddus have remained unchanged in recipe for more than a century. They are carried home by pilgrims not merely as sweets, but as tokens of divine blessing.



The distribution system is equally remarkable. The temple has developed efficient ways to ensure every devotee, regardless of crowd size, receives prasad. Special counters, tokens, and volunteer assistance keep the flow steady, reflecting the temple's dedication to serving pilgrims with dignity.

Annapoorneshwari Temple, Horanadu, Karnataka

Dedicated to Goddess Annapoorna, the embodiment of nourishment, the temple feeds all visitors. Meals – rice, sambar, rasam, curries, and buttermilk – are served thrice daily on banana leaves.

Prepared without onion or garlic, the food becomes prasadam, symbolising the goddess's eternal promise that no devotee leaves hungry.

The meal service at Horanadu is offered three times daily and consists of traditional South Indian food. Typically, it includes rice, sambar, rasam, vegetable curries, and buttermilk, all served on banana leaves. The food is satvik, prepared without onion or garlic, and cooked with devotion to maintain its sanctity. Once consecrated, it becomes prasadam and is distributed to devotees seated together in large dining halls.



Image Courtesy: Isckon Temple, Juhu

Guruvayur Temple, Kerala

The Guruvayur Temple in Kerala, dedicated to Lord Krishna, is among the most important pilgrimage centres in South India. Known as the “Dwarka of the South,” it attracts thousands of devotees every day. Alongside its spiritual prominence, the temple is deeply respected for its Annadanam scheme, through which free meals are provided to all devotees as part of the temple’s service to society.

The practice of Annadanam here is rooted in the belief that feeding others is one of the highest offerings to Lord Krishna, who is worshipped at Guruvayur as the divine child. Every day, simple yet wholesome meals are served consisting of rice, sambar, vegetable curries, and payasam, a sweet dish prepared with jaggery, milk, and rice. These meals follow traditional Kerala vegetarian cuisine, prepared without onion or garlic to ensure purity.

Udupi Krishna Temple, Karnataka

Founded in the 13th century by Madhvacharya, Udupi is both a Vaishnavite centre and the birthplace of Udupi cuisine. The temple kitchen follows strict satvik principles, avoiding onion and garlic.

Meals feature vegetables, lentils, rice, coconut, and spices like pepper and curry leaves, reflecting purity and devotion. Over centuries, this cooking style spread globally, making “Udupi cuisine” synonymous with wholesome vegetarian food.

Sabarmati Ashram and Akshardham, Gujarat

Though not traditional temples, both embody sacred community dining. At Sabarmati Ashram, Gandhi introduced simple shared meals of coarse grains, vegetables, and milk, reinforcing equality.

At Akshardham temples, mass dining continues the tradition of

offering food as service, echoing India’s age-old temple kitchens in modern settings.

THE CULINARY PRACTICES OF TEMPLE KITCHENS

Temple kitchens are rooted in satvik cooking. Meals avoid onion, garlic, and pungent foods, believed to disturb spiritual balance. Instead, they rely on rice, lentils, vegetables, dairy, and spices like turmeric, cumin, and cardamom. The simplicity preserves purity, while feeding thousands.

TEMPLE KITCHENS IN FESTIVALS AND RITUALS

Festivals transform temple kitchens into feats of scale. During the Rath Yatra at Jagannath Temple, demand for Mahaprasad multiplies. During Navaratri, temples across India prepare unique offerings – sundal in Tamil Nadu, kuttu ka atta dishes in North India, and festive thalis in Gujarat.

Each festival links food directly to its deity. Krishna Janmashtami is incomplete without panjiri, while sweet modaks mark Ganesh Chaturthi. These foods are both offerings and mythic symbols, binding ritual with memory.

GLOBAL INFLUENCE OF TEMPLE KITCHENS

Temple kitchen traditions extend worldwide. Sikh gurdwaras across the globe serve langar, carrying India’s ethos of equality and community to international audiences. Hindu temples abroad also replicate practices of prasadam distribution, keeping alive the spiritual link between food and faith for diaspora communities.

WHERE FAITH CONTINUES TO FEED

Temple kitchens are more than mass kitchens – they are living testaments to India’s spiritual and cultural ethos. Food begins as an offering to the deity, is consecrated, and then sustains millions.







Image Courtesy: Oyekake



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MICHELIN-STAR DINING: WHEN CULINARY ART BREAKS FREE



Image Courtesy: Sorella

Culinary wizards are redefining Michelin dining with bold flavours and sustainability.

TT BUREAU

Welcome to the wild side of fine dining. Michelin-starred restaurants have ditched stiff formality and embraced full-throttle creativity. This isn't your classic white-tablecloth experience anymore. This is culinary theatre with a flair for the dramatic, eccentric, and delightfully unconventional.

Today's Michelin chefs are boundary-pushers and visionaries. They're food philosophers, storytellers, artists, and eco-warriors wrapped into one, staging flavour-packed performances where every dish has a plot twist. Menus unfold as immersive narratives, each course a crafted revelation—merging avant-garde techniques with emotional resonance. Edible illusions challenge perception, redefined classics blur memory and innovation, and certain flavours evoke sensory nostalgia, distilled through elements as refined as caviar and as volatile as vaporised citrus.

Restaurants have become dynamic stages for culinary expression. Appetisers arrive with engineered spectacle, mains showcase cross-cultural precision, and desserts double as commentaries—merging flavour, design, and purpose into seamless, thought-provoking experiences.

Sustainability is no longer a footnote, it's a headliner. Farm-to-table now plays like a saga, every ingredient with a backstory

worthy of a documentary. Upcycled elements are presented with the swagger of luxury caviar.

In today's Michelin landscape, rules are mere suggestions. Expectations? Best left at the door. These restaurants revel in the unexpected, serving bold compositions and cheeky presentations while delivering on every flavour front.

Strap in because gastronomy's gone rogue, and it's never tasted better.

RIISING CULINARY ICONS: FRESH STARS ILLUMINATE THE SCENE

There's nothing quite as thrilling as catching a star chef on the rise, especially when they're busy rewriting culinary rulebooks with daring flavours and cheeky imagination.

Leading the wave, London's buzzworthy Ikoyi has been turning heads since earning two Michelin stars in 2022. At the helm is Jeremy Chan, a chef who doesn't just play by his own rules, he tears them up, sprinkles them on a plate, and serves them with flair. Chan draws inspiration from West Africa, concocting dishes that sound mad but taste marvellous. Picture smoked jollof rice alongside aged sheep kebab, or plantain caramel pairing with smoked eel. Bold? Absolutely. Brilliant? Undeniably. Ikoyi's irreverent creativity even earned them

the prestigious “One to Watch” nod from the World’s 50 Best Restaurants in 2021.

In Seoul, another star rises at Gucci Osteria da Massimo Bottura, a stylish fusion of haute couture and haute cuisine. Earning a Michelin star within a year of opening in 2022, Bottura blends refined Italian classics with fabulous Korean twists. Expect black garlic risotto or silky tortellini with Hanwoo beef—each bite like Bottura whispering mischievously, “You didn’t see that coming, did you?”

Ikoyi and Gucci Osteria embody Michelin’s new spirit: bold, imaginative, and delightfully cheeky.

CULINARY MAVERICKS: WHERE TRADITION MEETS AVANT-GARDE

If dining was theatre, these restaurants would be swinging from the rafters. Welcome to the world of culinary mavericks, where



Image Courtesy: SSAL

tradition is dazzled and deliciously disoriented.

Leading the pack is Copenhagen’s two-star Alchemist, a restaurant so audacious it practically requires a seatbelt. Chef Rasmus Munk takes diners on a five-hour gastronomic odyssey. With a jaw-dropping 50-course tasting menu served across surreal spaces, guests are less diners than participants in a culinary circus. Think edible clouds, dishes inspired by social commentary, and interactive art. Within just seven months of opening in 2019, Alchemist earned two Michelin stars, proving a little madness goes a long way.

Across the pond in Chicago, chef Curtis Duffy stuns at Ever, a two-star gem where precision meets playful whimsy. Since its 2020 debut, Ever has wowed with masterful performances: Maine lobster with curry essence, coconut mousse with caviar—refined flavours with a twist. Every dish feels like Duffy sharing a culinary secret wrapped in artistry.

GLOBAL FUSION: WHERE CULINARY BORDERS DISSOLVE INTO DELICIOUS MAGIC

Fusion cuisine has evolved from culinary rebel to sophisticated global passport. Still mischievous, but now with poetic purpose.

At the forefront stands Atelier Crenn in San Francisco,



Image Courtesy: Garydankosf

helmed by Dominique Crenn—the first woman in America to claim three Michelin stars. Crenn is more culinary poet than chef, composing breathtaking flavour combinations on her edible canvas. Her menu reads like an intimate travel journal—Californian ingredients paired with Japanese yuzu or Middle Eastern spices. Each dish tells a deeply nuanced story that words can’t fully capture. Her cuisine becomes a sensory recital, transporting diners across continents in a single bite.

In Singapore, Burnt Ends reimagines barbecue as culinary rock concert. Chef Dave Pynt uses custom ovens that roar to volcanic temperatures. Smoked quail eggs shimmer with whispers of ancient fire, and king crab legs pulse with bold Southeast Asian energy. Pynt’s flavour revolution is cheeky, confident, and irresistibly chaotic.



Image Courtesy: PRIK HOM

MICHELIN GREEN STAR: WHEN SUSTAINABILITY BECOMES THE CULINARY ROCKSTAR

Sustainability used to be the culinary equivalent of that hemp-wearing cousin lecturing about compost. Today, thanks to the Michelin Green Star, it’s gone glam—saving the planet has

never looked (or tasted) this good.

Enter SingleThread, the Californian oasis rewriting the sustainability playbook. Chef Kyle Connaughton conducts an environmental symphony where 70% of ingredients come from their own farm. Diners are pampered and eco-conscious, feasting on dishes like farm-fresh greens accessorised with sustainable caviar. It's high-fashion farm-to-table.

Across the globe in Bangkok, Haoma cranks sustainability up to eleven. Chef Deepanker Khosla has transformed his restaurant into an eco-superhero lab. With a 90% waste recycling rate, vertical gardens, aquaponics, and zero waste ambitions, Haoma makes traditional farms look outdated. Seafood tartares and garden-fresh salads become edible works of environmental art.

DESTINATION DINING: WHEN FOOD BECOMES THE ULTIMATE TRAVEL PASSPORT

Forget postcards, today's travellers chase restaurants so extraordinary they're worth crossing continents for.

Madrid's DiverXO is a culinary carnival by chef Dabiz Muñoz. With three stars since 2013, Muñoz crafts performance art on a plate: Iberico pork dim sum, surreal desserts, and wild flavour plot twists. Every dish is a sensory revolution. No wonder he snagged the top spot at The Best Chef Awards in 2021.

In Tokyo, Narisawa offers a serene counterpoint. Chef Yoshihiro Narisawa, with two stars and a permanent place on the World's 50 Best list, serves dishes that embody Japanese landscapes. His "Satoyama Scenery" is a poetic love letter to nature—wild herbs, pristine seafood, and forest aromas whispering of misty mornings.



Image Courtesy: Aphotic

A CULINARY JOURNEY WORTH EMBARKING UPON

These extraordinary Michelin-starred venues transcend indulgence. Each delivers not just gastronomy, but powerful stories, cultural discovery, and environmental purpose. When you travel next, think of these as experiences, places where brilliance, sustainability, and flavour unite into memories you'll savour forever.



Image Courtesy: 7 Adams Restaurant

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CULINARY COMPASS: INDIA'S FLAVOUR SYMPHONY

Exploring India's iconic regions through bold spices, soulful stories, and timeless tastes

TT BUREAU



Gujarati Thali. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia

India's culinary identity is deeper than spices. It is a reflection of land, climate, society, and tradition. Each region brings its own rhythm to the plate, shaped by geography, faith, and seasonal produce. These time-honoured customs turn daily meals into moments of remembrance and celebration.

GUJARAT: GENTLE SPICE

Gujarati cuisine is a lesson in balance and inventiveness. Deeply influenced by Jain and Vaishnav traditions, it remains largely vegetarian. It reflects a philosophy rooted in non-violence, minimalism, and seasonal eating.

One of the key traits of Gujarati cuisine is its use of jaggery and sugar. These sweet elements balance sour and spicy flavours. Tamarind, mustard seeds, and green chillies often appear, but the gentle sweetness gives Gujarati dishes their unique identity.

Snacks like dhokla and khandvi are well-known beyond Gujarat. Dhokla is a steamed, spongy cake made with gram

flour and fermented batter, garnished with mustard seeds and coriander. Khandvi, made using spiced besan rolled into thin layers, is topped with coconut and carries a silky texture.

Seasonal dishes reflect the deep bond between soil and the kitchen. Aamras with steaming puris in summer is refreshing. Winter invites undhiyu, a medley of root vegetables, beans, brinjals, and fenugreek dumplings, slow-cooked in earthen pots buried underground. Rich and rustic, it speaks the language of Gujarat's heartland.

BENGAL: CULINARY POETRY

Bengali food is a celebration of rivers, rituals, and refined taste. It carries the rustic charm of village kitchens while reflecting the elegance of royal feasts. Every meal flows like poetry, simple yet expressive, delicate yet bold.

Fish is the heart of the cuisine, with hilsa ilish reigning supreme. Steamed in mustard, paired with pulao, or cooked

with eggplant, it is more than food, it is emotion. Everyday meals feature humble staples like macher jhol, a light fish curry, and moong dal with fish head, while vegetarian classics such as cholar dal with luchis, aloo posto, and shukto add depth and grace.

Kolkata's streets bring colonial-inspired flavours in rolls, fritters, and the kabiraji cutlet, still beloved in cafés like the Indian Coffee House. Sweets crown Bengali food, with sandesh, rasgulla, mishti doi, and payesh embodying edible artistry. Even panta bhat, fermented rice with mustard oil and chillies, reflects Bengal's soul.

KERALA: LEAF & SPICE

Kerala food is a fragrant journey through history. Known as the Spice Garden of India, the state's cuisine has absorbed influences of Arab, Portuguese, Dutch and British traders while remaining rooted in local traditions. Coconut in all forms, paired with rice, defines its base, with tamarind, curry leaves, and green chillies adding balance and zest.

Breakfast is a highlight with puttu and kadala curry, delicate appam with stew, and idiyappam soaking up curries. Along the Malabar coast, seafood reigns with prawn curries flavoured by kokum and fish molee in coconut milk. Thalassery biryani, with jeerakasala rice, shows the festive Moplah touch.

Vegetarian fare peaks with the Onam sadhya, a banana-leaf feast of avial, olan, erissery, pachadi and payasam. Snacks like pazham pori and toddy shop specials add everyday charm. Each dish reflects Kerala's communities and history, making the cuisine humble yet timeless, a true gem of the Flavours of India.



Pitha Platter. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia

SEVEN SISTERS

North East Indian cuisine is among the most earthy and unexplored parts of the Flavours of India. Here, food is less about indulgence and more about instinct, survival, and the changing of the seasons. Bamboo, wood fire, wild greens, smoked meats, and fermentation shape meals. Each of the Seven Sisters: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura, contributes its own distinct rhythm to the region's table.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH: BAMBOO PLATES

High altitudes and Tibetan influence shape Arunachali food. Rice, millet, and barley form the foundation, enriched with herbs, smoked meats, and fermented vegetables. Pickled bamboo shoots and chilli pastes accompany daily meals, while river fish



Image Courtesy: StayVista



A Local Cuisine of Nagaland. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia

smoked over firewood provide sustenance. Winters bring hearty porridges and soups, while festivals like Losar feature sticky rice, pork, and fermented sides. Food here is simple yet soulful, eaten from bamboo plates, whispering of home and harmony.

ASSAM: BRAHMAPUTRA BITES

Assamese cuisine mirrors the gentle flow of the Brahmaputra. Rice is constant, with dishes highlighting freshness rather than heavy spice. Khar, an alkaline broth from banana peel ash, cleanses the palate, followed by masor tenga, a light, tangy fish curry.

Festivals bring specialties: pithas and coconut-stuffed rice cakes at Rongali Bihu, and roasted pork and fish during Bhogali Bihu. Tribal communities add smoked pork, fermented fish, rice beer, and chilli chutneys, weaving diversity into Assam's calm cooking.

MANIPUR: FORAGED AND FERMENTED

In Manipur, meals are anchored by rice, fermented fish, and boiled vegetables, eaten slowly and reverently. Eromba, a spicy mash with fermented fish, is a staple, while soibum, fermented bamboo shoot, flavours stews. Herbs such as perilla and wild coriander give fragrance. Ooti, a rice and lentil porridge, and chamthong, a vegetable soup, balance intensity. Festivals feature black rice pudding and dumplings, reflecting Manipuri cuisine's herbal, ancestral depth.

MEGHALAYA: HILLSIDE FEASTS

Rice and pork dominate Meghalaya's food culture. Jadoh, rice with pork fat and blood, and dohneiiong, pork in black sesame paste, are staples. Each tribe adds its touch: Khasi kitchens favour turmeric and ginger, Jaintia meals love dry fish, and Garos use soda from wood ash. Foraged ferns, mushrooms, and roots add layers, while rice beer flows at weddings and harvests. Meghalaya's food is smoky, uncommercialised, and tied to community life.

MIZORAM: MILD AND MINIMAL

Mizo cuisine is modest and seasonal. Rice pairs with boiled vegetables, smoked pork, and mild stews. Vawksa rep, pork with chillies and onion, and bai, a vegetable and herb stew, are daily

favourites. Sanpiau, rice porridge sold at roadside stalls, brings comfort, while seasonal herbs and forest produce expand the palate. Festivals like Chapchar Kut unite communities over food and dance, proving Mizoram's cuisine is healing and restorative.

NAGALAND: FIRE AND FERMENT

Naga food is fiery and fearless. Smoked pork with bamboo shoots is the signature, while akhuni, fermented soybean paste, adds pungent intensity. Galho, rice porridge with smoked meat, is common, and chillies, especially Bhut Jolokia, give ferocity to chutneys. At the Hornbill Festival, tribes unite over feasts of buffalo, millet pancakes, and wild greens, reflecting food as identity and strength.

TRIPURA: FOREST WISDOM

Tripuri cuisine, centred on Mui Borok, values freshness and balance. Rice with vegetables, pork, or fish forms the base. Berma, fermented fish, defines flavour, while wahan mosdeng, a pork salad with bamboo shoots, and green chutneys with fermented shrimp are staples. Foraged mushrooms, snails, and edible flowers bring forest wisdom. Festivals like Garia Puja highlight rice beer and shared feasts, each tribe adding its own variation.

Together, all these states embody food that is wild, fearless, and rooted in tradition. They offer India flavours that are unpolished yet profound, carrying the memories of different cultures forests, rivers, and fire.



Sadya on Banana Leaf. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia



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DECADENCE ON THE MENU

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At the upper tier of global cuisine exists a category reserved for those who treat indulgence as an art form. Ultra-luxury food and drink isn't about satisfying hunger; it's about precision, rarity, and spectacle. Ingredients are difficult to source, methods take years to perfect, and presentation often rivals fine jewellery.

These experiences are curated for individuals who value distinction over convenience. In this world, a scoop of ice cream can rival a sports car, and a cocktail can come with its own security detail.

BYAKUYA ICE CREAM

Developed by Cellato in collaboration with chef Tadayoshi Yamada, Byakuya holds the title of the world's most expensive ice cream at over ₹5.23 lakh per scoop. Created over 18 meticulous months, it blends white truffle from Alba—known to fetch up to ₹14 lakh per kilo—with aged Parmigiano Reggiano and sake lees, a traditional Japanese fermentation byproduct.

Its flavour walks a line between earthy intensity and subtle sweetness. Served in a glass jar with a gold-plated spoon, this dessert is less about cooling down and more about slowing down—with purpose.



Byakuya Ice Cream, Image Courtesy: Cellato



Almas Caviar

ALMAS CAVIAR

Sourced from albino beluga sturgeon often older than the people eating them, Almas caviar is among the rarest on Earth. It sells for up to ₹28 lakh per kilo. The light golden roe is hand-harvested and prepared using the malossol method to preserve its delicate, nutty flavour.

Presented in 24-karat gold tins and consumed with mother-of-pearl spoons (to avoid tainting the taste), it sets the standard for edible elegance—if one can call it that with a straight face.

FRRROZEN HAUTE CHOCOLATE

At Serendipity 3 in New York, Frrozen Haute Chocolate is priced at ₹21 lakh. Yes, for a single dessert. It's built from 28 rare cocoas and five grams of edible gold, paired with an artisanal truffle and served in a goblet lined with more gold than most people's jewellery boxes.



Frrozen Haute Chocolate, Image Courtesy: Moskevyyu

The diamond-encrusted spoon, naturally, is yours to take home—ideal for stirring future cups of instant coffee with a touch of irony.

LOUIS XIII PIZZA

Crafted by chef Renato Viola and priced at ₹10 lakh, Louis XIII is far from your average pizza night. The dough rests for 72 hours before being crowned with caviar, lobster, and mozzarella di bufala, all sourced with a level of scrutiny most countries reserve for diplomats.

Prepared and served in your home, it's a dining experience that arrives with its own entourage—and a healthy respect for crust geometry.

STRAWBERRIES ARNAUD

At Arnaud's in New Orleans, Strawberries Arnaud comes with a 7-carat pink diamond ring and a bottle of vintage champagne. At ₹12 crore, it's either the most expensive dessert in the world, or the most extravagant way to pop a question.

The strawberries are soaked in port, wine, and citrus, topped with house-made ice cream, and served alongside live jazz. The pressure to say yes is implied.

THE MACALLAN 1926

Distilled in 1926 and aged for 60 years, The Macallan 1926 Fine & Rare has reached valuations of up to ₹16 crore per bottle. Fewer than 50 exist. Tasting notes include dried fruits, leather, and understated spice. A purchase signals refined taste—or exceptional auction instincts.



Image Courtesy: The Macallan

D'AMALFI LIMONCELLO SUPREME

At ₹370 crore, this liqueur is as much a statement piece as it is a drink. Produced by Antica Distilleria Russo using Amalfi lemons, the liquid is traditional; the bottle is not. Three white diamonds and an 18.5-carat gem adorn it. Only two were made—because apparently, that's all the market can handle.

HENRI IV DUDOGNON HERITAGE COGNAC

Aged for a century and packaged in a platinum and gold decanter with over 6,500 diamonds, this ₹17 crore cognac brings together distilling, gem-setting, and serious patience. It's best enjoyed in quiet contemplation, or secured in a vault with motion sensors.

MORE THAN A MEAL

The world's most expensive foods and drinks stand apart for a reason. They combine hard-to-find ingredients, expert production, and carefully choreographed presentation.

Designed for those who seek accuracy, heritage, and exclusivity, they represent the very edge of culinary craftsmanship, where even the spoon deserves its own insurance policy.



Henri IV Dudoignon Heritage Cognac



Strawberries Arnaud, Image Courtesy: Arnaud's Restaurant

PLATES IN THE CLOUDS

Inside the sky-high kitchen revolution where fine dining meets flight.

TT BUREAU

It is two in the morning at a major airport flight kitchen. The air is filled with the scent of freshly baked bread, caramelised sugar from a crème brûlée being torched, and crisp micro-greens arriving in chilled crates. Chefs in white jackets move with precision, garnishing dishes, sealing trays, and scanning QR codes before they head to the tarmac.

For decades, “airline food” carried a reputation for blandness. Tight budgets, mass production, and the challenges of cooking for thousands made it functional but forgettable. That image is changing fast. Airlines, especially in premium cabins, now see food as a brand-defining feature, and even economy meals are improving.

THE TASTE CHALLENGE AT ALTITUDE

Eating at 35,000 feet is not the same as dining in a restaurant on the ground. The aircraft cabin is a unique environment that alters how we perceive flavours, aromas, and even textures. Studies conducted by the Fraunhofer Institute for Building Physics in Germany and commissioned by Lufthansa have shown that at typical cruising altitudes, the reduced air pressure and humidity inside the cabin can dull our sense of taste and smell by

as much as 30 percent.

Cabin air humidity is usually below 12 percent, drier than most deserts on Earth. This dryness affects our nasal passages and taste receptors, making it harder to detect subtle flavours, particularly sweetness and saltiness. At the same time, cabin noise from engines and airflow, averaging around 85 decibels, has been found in research to further influence flavour perception, reducing our ability to detect sweetness while enhancing umami-rich tastes. This is why tomato juice, rich in umami compounds, is surprisingly popular on flights, even among passengers who rarely drink it on the ground.

OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

The Indian players, especially TajSATS, highlight a domestic catering ecosystem geared towards scale, reliability, and security. TajSATS’s daily output of 50,000 meals and its investments in safety and technology position it as a powerhouse in Indian aviation catering. Meanwhile, companies like Sky Gourmet, Ambassador Sky Chef, ChefAir, and TFS add depth through regional agility, niche offerings, and integration with airport food and beverage environments.



Image Courtesy: Qatar Airways



Emirates Flight Catering. Image Courtesy: Airline Reporter, Flickr

On the global front, LSG Sky Chefs, gategroup, and DO & CO represent three tiers of service. LSG Sky Chefs delivers volume and comprehensive services across geographies. Gategroup offers breadth and strategic integration after the LSG European acquisition. DO&CO operates at the other end of the spectrum, offering premium and bespoke culinary service tailored to luxury expectations.

PASSENGER EXPERIENCE & MENU STORYTELLING

Airline catering today is not only about providing sustenance during a journey. It has evolved into a curated experience designed to reflect an airline's brand identity, regional heritage, and service philosophy. The food tray is now a storytelling platform, and every element from the appetiser to the beverage list plays a role in shaping a passenger's perception of the airline.

Premium airlines often weave menu design into their broader brand narrative. Menus are not simply lists of dishes but carry the stories of the ingredients, the regions they come from, and the chefs who create them. Passengers on long-haul flights with airlines such as Singapore Airlines, Emirates, and Qatar Airways frequently encounter menu descriptions that highlight the provenance of produce, artisanal preparation methods, or a chef's personal inspiration for a dish.

In India, carriers like Vistara and Air India are using this approach to distinguish themselves. Festival-themed menus during occasions such as Diwali or Onam, or seasonal specials that highlight regional Indian cuisines, give passengers a taste of home or introduce them to lesser-known delicacies. Such initiatives also serve as soft marketing, generating social media buzz and reinforcing the airline's cultural connection to its audience.

INDIA'S UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

India's airline catering sector is at a turning point, with growing recognition that the country's culinary heritage is not just a

point of pride but also a powerful differentiator in the global aviation market. As Indian carriers expand their domestic and international networks, there is a unique opportunity to present the nation's food traditions to a worldwide audience.

This is not limited to standard curries or rice dishes. The focus is shifting towards thoughtfully curated regional thalis, millet-led menus, and seasonal festival specials that reflect both authenticity and modern nutrition trends.

Regional thalis offer an ideal solution for in-flight service. They provide variety in a compact format, allowing passengers to sample multiple dishes that together tell a story about a region. A South Indian thali might include sambar, rasam, avial, curd rice, and appalam, each portioned in small bowls for easy service.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR SKY KITCHENS

Airline catering is evolving rapidly, and the next phase will focus on personalisation, sustainability, and innovation in menu design. Passengers are no longer satisfied with one-size-fits-all dining.



Image Courtesy: British Airways

Airlines are moving towards allowing greater personalisation, where travellers can pre-select their meals, choose portion sizes, or customise certain elements before the flight. This not only improves satisfaction but also helps caterers plan more accurately and reduce waste.

Plant-forward menus are expected to play a central role. Global demand for plant-based eating is rising, driven by both health and environmental awareness.

Airlines are experimenting with menus that highlight vegetables, grains, legumes, and plant proteins as the star of the dish rather than a side. These menus appeal to vegetarians, flexitarians, and even meat-eaters looking for lighter options that work well at altitude.

TOP PLAYERS IN AIRLINE CATERING

Indian Champions in Airline Catering

TajSATS Air Catering

- TajSATS Air Catering is India's largest airline caterer with 45+ years of expertise, operating 9 kitchens in major cities.
- Mumbai facility alone makes ~50,000 meals daily with AI-enabled food safety systems.
- FY24 revenue: ₹900 crore; target: ₹1,040 crore.

Sky Gourmet

- Strong presence in Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, serving domestic & international carriers.
- Specialises in regional, European, and pan-Asian menus with customisation flexibility.
- Focus on hygiene protocols and cold chain management.
- Known for bespoke VIP, charter, and premium carrier menus.
- Expertise in last-minute changes, fine plating, and exclusive diets.
- Works closely with airlines on business & first-class menu design.

ChefAir

- Serves both budget and full-service airlines with versatile offerings.
- Compact, ready-to-eat packs for LCCs; broader menus for premium carriers.
- Strengths in batch production, rapid turnaround, and cost-efficient catering.

Travel Food Services (TFS)

- Combines in-flight catering with airport lounges, cafes, and outlets.
- Offers multi-cuisine, seasonal, and festival-based menus.
- Integrated sourcing and logistics improve efficiency and quality.

LEADING INTERNATIONAL CATERERS

LSG Sky Chefs

- Operates in 50+ countries, serving 300+ airlines with millions of meals yearly.
- Offers catering, lounges, logistics, and retail food solutions.
- Adapts menus to local tastes with advanced safety systems.

Gategroup

- Global leader in 60+ countries, serving 700M+ passengers annually.
- Flagship: Gate Gourmet, plus retail & branding services.
- Expanded via LSG's European operations, strengthening premium hubs.

DO & CO

- Boutique luxury caterer for Emirates, Turkish Airlines, and Austrian Airlines.
- Focus on restaurant-level meals, seasonal menus, and fine patisserie.
- Cross-pollinates expertise via restaurants, hotels, and global event catering.



Image Courtesy: Emirates



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Image Courtesy: Wikimedia

UNESCO HERITAGE SERVED HOT

UNESCO-listed food cultures preserve heritage, nurture identity, and strengthen communal harmony

M GOUTHAM

Food is more than sustenance. It is memory, ritual, and identity; a shared act that is the very heartbeat of culture. UNESCO's recognition of traditional food cultures highlights the profound role of cuisine in shaping communities and creating an intangible heritage. Here are thirteen culinary traditions officially recognised for embodying cultural identity, communal values, and enduring flavour.

WASHOKU: SEASONS ON A PLATE

Washoku, literally "Japanese food," is not merely a collection of dishes but a philosophy rooted in balance and reverence for nature. At its heart lies Ichiju Sansai – "one soup, three sides" – a nutritionally balanced meal of rice, miso soup, protein, and two vegetable dishes. This structure, low in fat yet rich in variety, is credited with supporting Japan's reputation for longevity.

Washoku celebrates the seasons with ingredients and plating that mirror nature's rhythms, while festivals such as New Year's osechi ryori showcase elaborate symbolic foods. Before every meal, the phrase itadakimasu expresses gratitude to farmers, nature, and the cook. UNESCO recognised washoku in 2013 as

a living cultural heritage binding together aesthetics, nutrition, and respect for the environment.

BORSCHT: BOWLS OF RESISTANCE

In 2022, UNESCO added the traditional cooking of Ukrainian borscht to its list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. Beyond its vivid ruby colour and beetrooty richness, borscht is a symbol of resilience, unity, and cultural identity.

Every family and region has its own recipe, with additions of cabbage, potatoes, carrots, or meat. The preparation is deeply communal, where generations gather to chop, stir, and share, especially during holidays, weddings, and commemorations. In recent years, amidst conflict, cooking borscht has become a quiet act of defiance and hope, reaffirming national pride. UNESCO's recognition honours borscht as an "element of social integration and cohesion."

HAWKER CULTURE: FROM STREET TO CENTRE

Singapore's hawker culture is a vibrant culinary mosaic shaped by migrants from China, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The

culture traces its roots to itinerant food vendors of the 1800s and their portable kitchens that sold modified versions of their own ethnic cuisine. Soon, the hawkers became central to the city's street food culture. By the late 20th century, they were moved into organised hawker centres over rising public and urban planning concerns, now numbering over 110, which serve as community dining halls.

These bustling hubs are the nation's "culinary soul," where laksa, biryani, Hainanese chicken rice, and satay coexist in affordable, everyday meals. Apprenticeship schemes and annual events like HawkerFest aim to safeguard this unique heritage. Needless to say, with its centuries of heritage, the hawker culture has evolved to represent the multicultural society of Singapore.

CEEBU JËN: FISH, RICE AND IDENTITY

Known as the national dish of Senegal, ceebu jën is a communal platter of fish, broken rice, and seasonal vegetables, flavoured with tomatoes and spices. Its roots trace back to Saint-Louis in the 19th century, where a cook named Penda Mbaye is credited with its invention. This richly flavoured food reflects a blend of indigenous culinary techniques and colonial influences, evolving over time into a complex composition celebrated across Senegal.

Typically served in a shared bowl, ceebu jën symbolises hospitality and unity, with etiquette dictating that each diner eats respectfully from their portion. Through oral tradition and family kitchens, ceebu jën continues to embody Senegal's culinary pride and cultural identity.



Jollof Rice With Fish. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia

JOUMOU SOUP: FREEDOM IN A BOWL

Declared by UNESCO in 2021 as an intangible heritage, Haiti's soup joumou is a dish of resilience. This humble food item was once a delicacy reserved exclusively for French colonial slave owners, forbidden to the enslaved African Haitians who cultivated the main ingredient—giraumon, a native Caribbean pumpkin variant. Following Haiti's victorious revolution and declaration of independence on January 1, 1804, Haitians transformed soup joumou into a celebratory dish that expressed their newfound freedom and dignity.

Prepared with giraumon pumpkin, meat, vegetables, pasta,



Image Courtesy: Wikimedia



Image Courtesy: Oruçoğlu Termal Otel

and spices, jourmou is eaten every New Year's Day as part of Independence Day celebrations. Families and communities collaborate in its preparation – farmers grow the pumpkins, women and children help in kitchens, and artisans craft cooking utensils. Beyond nourishment, jourmou is a “bowl of freedom” connecting generations through memory and pride.

KEŞKEK: RITUAL, WHEAT AND COMMUNITY

Inscribed by UNESCO in 2011, Turkey's keşkek is a slow-cooked wheat and meat stew that anchors communal life in rural Turkey. Prepared for weddings, circumcisions, and festivals, its preparation is a spectacle: wheat is pounded rhythmically in stone mortars, often accompanied by music, before being simmered overnight in large cauldrons.

Cooking usually takes place outdoors in large cauldrons, with wheat, meat, onions, spices, water, and oil simmering overnight. On serving day, villagers beat the thickening stew with mallets to drumbeats and cheering, turning cooking into a festivity, which includes entertainment such as music, plays, and performances, transforming the cooking process into a festive communal occasion.

OSHI PALAV: THE KING OF MEALS

Known as the “king of meals,” oshi palav – or pilaf – is a Central Asian emblem of hospitality. This millennia-old dish was recognised by UNESCO in 2016.

Oshi palav's origins are ancient, potentially dating back to the Sogdian and Bactrian civilisations around the 2nd century BCE.

It is traditionally cooked outdoors in large pots, the dish brings together communities in rituals of sharing. With origins dating back to ancient Sogdian and Bactrian civilisations, oshi palav remains central to weddings, festivals, and social gatherings. Local sayings attest to its power: “No osh, no acquaintance,” meaning a shared plate can forge bonds lasting decades.

There are reportedly up to 200 varieties of oshi palav, each showcasing unique local twists in ingredients and preparation styles, underscoring the dish's versatility and deep cultural embedding across Central Asia.

LAVASH BREAD: A LOAF FOR RITUAL

Lavash, a thin flatbread baked in underground clay ovens called tonirs, is both a staple and a cultural anchor in Armenia. Recognised by UNESCO, it embodies communal life, as women gather to knead, bake, and sing, passing traditions across generations.

Lavash has been a staple in Armenian households for generations, its origins tracing back thousands of years as a fundamental bread of the region. Traditionally, lavash is baked in a tonir—a cylindrical clay oven buried in the earth—where the dough is skillfully slapped onto the hot walls to bake quickly, creating a distinct texture that is soft yet sturdy.

Lavash is also used for various rituals; swaddling newborns for protection, or being draped on brides' shoulders at weddings for prosperity. Its versatility, used fresh, dried, or as a wrap, makes lavash a daily essential that also anchors Armenia's symbolic and sacred ceremonies.

TOM YUM: HOT, SOUR AND TIMELESS

In 2024, Tom Yum Soup was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, recognising it as an iconic symbol of Thai culinary tradition and cultural identity.

Tom Yum is a classic hot and sour soup that epitomises the vibrant flavour profile central to Thai cuisine. Traditionally made with fresh ingredients like lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves, galangal, fresh chillies, lime juice, and proteins such as shrimp (Tom Yum Goong), the soup offers a harmonious balance of spicy, sour, salty, and sweet tastes. Originating from central Thailand, Tom Yum has long been a staple in Thai households and street food culture, served both as an everyday comfort food and a dish for special occasions.

Traditionally served communally, it reflects Thai values of hospitality and togetherness, and epitomises the vibrant flavour profile central to Thai cuisine. Beyond its culinary popularity, tom yum is a cultural expression of health, freshness, and local agriculture, with recipes passed down in households and preserved in street food culture.

CEVICHE: MARINATED BY THE SEA

Peruvian Ceviche, officially recognised in 2023, traces its lineage to ancient coastal civilisations and reflects both Indigenous knowledge and Spanish colonial influences.

Ceviche is a dish of raw fish marinated in fresh citrus juice, typically lime or lemon, and seasoned with local ingredients such as onions, chilli peppers, and salt. This "cooking" by acid is a hallmark of the dish, which originated in Peru's coastal fishing communities, embodying traditions dating back to ancient civilizations like the Caral, Moche, and Chimú, who consumed fish, salt, and hot peppers, and the influences introduced during the Spanish colonial period.



Image Courtesy: Wikimedia

Ceviche represents a system of artisanal fishing, farming, and culinary transmission. National Ceviche Day, celebrated every June 28, cements the dish as an emblem of Peruvian pride and its global culinary revolution.

NSIMA: MALAWI'S DAILY BOND

Recognised by UNESCO in 2017, nsima is Malawi's culinary cornerstone and a powerful emblem of identity and community. This thick maize porridge, shaped by hand and shared from common plates, is a ritual of respect and unity.

The preparation of Nsima remains a communal act: maize is often ground by hand, with elders passing cooking skills and mealtime etiquette to younger generations. Served with seasonal relishes of vegetables, legumes, or meat, nsima reflects both diversity and tradition. Its role extends into schools and households alike, embedding cultural values of hospitality, cohesion, and belonging.

Through UNESCO's recognition, nsima is safeguarded as a living heritage, ensuring that its techniques, customs, and meaning endure in Malawi's modern life.



Image Courtesy: Wikimedia

TIFFIN TALES: INDIA'S MIDDAY MAGIC

Beyond steel or leaf, the Indian tiffin remains an everyday love letter wrapped in tradition.

TT BUREAU

Few objects in India inspire as much affection as the tiffin box. Cylindrical, stainless steel, and stacked with compartments clasped together, the tiffin is far more than a container. It begins in a kitchen, travels through bustling streets, and opens with a metallic click that signals care and nourishment. For generations, the tiffin has bridged the gap between domestic intimacy and professional routine, carrying comfort into offices, schools, and railway compartments.

The word itself carries a colonial echo. In the early nineteenth century, British officers in India found heavy luncheons

impossible in the heat. They adopted lighter bites, borrowing the slang "tiff" for a small repast and reshaping it into "tiffin." At first it meant a snack, but as the term moved into Indian kitchens, it acquired a new character. It came to denote both the vessel and the practice of carrying food. A borrowed word was transformed and given an Indian soul.

As cities expanded and railways spread, the tiffin became indispensable. Eating outside food was often mistrusted, for food in India is linked with ritual and memory. The tiffin safeguarded sanctity, allowing families to send meals into factories, schools, offices, and trains.



Image Courtesy: Magnolia.p, Pinterest



Image Courtesy: Wikimedia

MUMBAI'S DABBAWALAS: THE MIDDAY MIRACLE

If the tiffin is India's most loyal companion, Mumbai's dabbawalas are its legendary custodians. In a city where millions live far from workplaces and endure crowded train journeys, the arrival of a fresh meal on time feels miraculous. Yet, six days a week, an army of white-clad men delivers nearly two hundred thousand tiffins across Mumbai with error rates so low that Harvard and global leaders have studied them.

The system is a ballet of efficiency. Dabbawalas collect tiffins, mark them with coded symbols, and funnel them through trains, bicycles, and handcarts. Boxes are sorted and re-sorted before reaching banks, offices, and technology hubs. Their accuracy achieves Six Sigma standards, with fewer than one error in several million deliveries.

Each tiffin is also emotional. A sweet dish sent after a quarrel, a note slipped under rotis, or a snack for a nervous child makes the box a messenger as much as a meal. For workers living far from families, its arrival is reassurance, a reminder of home.

Even disaster has not stopped them. During the floods of 2005, dabbawalas waded through water to deliver meals. The lockdown of 2020, which halted their work, revealed how vital they had been for over a century. Today, they remain cultural icons of resilience and pride, their bicycles as much a symbol of Mumbai as its skyline.



Image Courtesy: Wikimedia

KERALA'S BANANA LEAF MAGIC

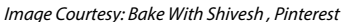
In Kerala, the tiffin takes a greener form: pothichoru, a parcelled meal wrapped in banana leaves. Preparation is ritual. Rice is placed at the centre, accompaniments such as coconut thoran, rasam, or fried fish are layered, and the leaf is folded and tied with string.

For Keralites, pothichoru evokes nostalgia. The fragrance of rice steaming inside a leaf recalls mornings when families rose early to prepare meals for children or workers. On long train journeys, its unwrapping filled compartments with aroma, sparking instant camaraderie as passengers exchanged pickles or papads.

It is also a model of sustainability. Long before eco-consciousness became fashionable, banana leaves provided renewable, biodegradable packaging that infused food with subtle fragrance. Even in modern offices of Kochi or Thiruvananthapuram, pothichoru remains a tether to heritage.



Image Courtesy: Familia Kitchen, Pinterest



In southern India, the word “tiffin” often refers not to a box but to light meals served in eateries. The “tiffin room” is an institution in cities such as Bengaluru or Chennai.

Here, food is democratic. Rich and poor converge at the same tables, dissolving social lines. Tiffin rooms embody community, tradition, and egalitarianism served on steel plates.

Across India, the tiffin mirrors geography and culture. In Gujarat, thepla with pickle is famed for endurance, carried on long journeys. Punjab brims with butter-soaked parathas, generous and hearty. Bengal's tiffin rests on rice and fish curry, often with mishti doi.

Each meal is more than sustenance. It is narrative, carrying stories of land and adaptation in every bite.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Indian tiffin is the way it is shared. In schools, the opening of tiffins is ritual. Children crowd around, exchanging parathas for pulao or sweets for curry, their first taste of regional cuisines often occurring in this way.

Gujarati kadhi. In factories, lunch breaks resemble community picnics. Across India, eating together is as integral as the food itself.

Like the sari or the sitar, the tiffin is an artifact of Indian culture. Its compartments reflect food philosophy — balance between cereals, proteins, vegetables, and sweets. Its durability mirrors the resilience of Indian households.

Yet it continues to adapt. Subscription-based tiffin services thrive in cities. Social media showcases curated lunchboxes of millet dosas, avocado parathas, or quinoa pulao. Sustainability movements revive banana leaves and cloth carriers. Among the diaspora, the tiffin carries even greater meaning, becoming an edible anchor in distant offices.

The tiffin endures because it fuses practicality with emotion. It is economical, healthy, and sustainable. More profoundly, it collapses distance, keeping loved ones present through taste. Each box is a love letter: thought, effort, and care carried across miles.

To understand India, one must look beyond street food or fine dining and witness the quiet miracle of the tiffin. Watch dabbawalas cycling through rains, a schoolchild bartering chocolate for chutney, or the fragrance of a banana-leaf parcel filling a Kerala train.

In these small rituals lies the essence of India's culinary identity: food that nourishes bonds as much as bodies. The tiffin is not simply a box but a story of affection, resilience, and continuity.

With every click of its lid, India reveals itself — inventive, diverse, and enduring. It is daily luxury in its truest form: an ordinary act that becomes extraordinary through memory, care, and connection. For travellers seeking to understand India's soul, no banquet or gourmet spread conveys it better than a humble tiffin shared at noon.





वन की बात

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HOT BITES, STREET LIGHTS



An exploration of Indian street food of four cities: Banaras, Kochi, Gangtok and Jaipur

TT BUREAU

India's street food is more than a quick bite—it is culture served on a plate. In Banaras, the ghats awaken with carts of chaat, vibrant with chutneys and spices. Jaipur's old city fills with the aroma of kachoris crisped golden in hot oil, while Gangtok's hills release steam from baskets of momos paired with fiery chilli sauce.

Far south in Kochi, the harbour air carries the fragrance of fish curries simmered with coconut and tamarind, echoing spice trade legacies. Each city tells its own tale through flavours shaped by geography, history, and generations of shared tradition.

Street corners become kitchens, recipes become heirlooms, and every bite becomes a passport into the heart of its people. To taste India's street food is to taste its living history—spices traded, cultures blended, and communities bound together through food that is humble yet timeless.

BANARAS ON A KHULAD

Banaras, one of the world's oldest living cities, offers a feast for the senses at every corner. At sunrise, its narrow lanes fill with the clang of ladles on iron tawas, the aroma of fried potato, hing, and ghee wrapping around the ghats. Street food here is more than sustenance; it is a ritual, a culture, and a memory etched in taste.

Chaat is the city's pride. At Deena Chaat Bhandar, the famous tamatar chaat shines. Tomatoes are simmered with spices, mashed, and topped with sev, coriander, and lemon, creating a flavour that is fiery yet refreshing.

Kashi Chaat Bhandar serves golgappas with spiced water, chickpeas, and potatoes that explode with crunch and tang. Aloo tikki, papdi chaat, and dahi puri are equally cherished, blending crisp textures with tangy chutneys and creamy curd.

Vendors, many carrying forward generations of recipes, add warmth to every plate. Their stalls may be small, yet their legacy is vast. Amid temple bells, monkeys on rooftops, and the river's calm, the food takes on a deeper meaning.

Though modern twists like cheese golgappa appear, Banaras thrives on tradition. Each bite is not only a taste but also an experience of the city's living spirit.

GOLDEN CRUNCH OF RAJASTHAN

Jaipur, the regal heart of Rajasthan, greets you with colours, culture, and the irresistible aroma of fresh kachoris frying in ghee. As the city stirs to life each morning, kachori stalls draw queues even before the shutters of bazaars rise. These flaky, golden snacks are more than breakfast. They are a

celebration. In Jaipur, street food carries the richness of royal kitchens and the warmth of home-style spice.

Step into the bustling old city and head toward Rawat Mishthan Bhandar. Here, pyaaz ki kachori reigns supreme. Stuffed with a fiery mix of spiced onions, the crust is crisp, almost biscuit-like, and shatters into delicate flakes with every bite. The stuffing is soft, hot, and hits with a punch that leaves no room for subtlety. Paired with tamarind chutney or a bowl of aloo ki sabzi, it becomes both a snack and a satisfying meal.

Walk further, and you'll find Kanji Sweets serving raj kachori that looks like an edible sculpture. This oversized kachori shell is hollowed and filled with curd, potatoes, chickpeas, boondi, and layers of chutneys. It is crunchy, tangy, spicy, and sweet, all in one. The dish mirrors Jaipur's personality: grand, layered, and impossible to ignore.

Each shop has its own secret mix of masalas. Gopi Kachori Wala offers aloo kachori with mint chutney that delivers a refreshing zing. Meanwhile, Sampat Kachori's spicy version has minimal garnish but leaves a lingering warmth. Every corner offers something new. Yet, each keeps the foundation of the kachori intact: bold flavours wrapped in golden crispness.

Mawa kachori is another gem. Unlike the spicy versions, this sweet treat is filled with khoya and nuts, deep-fried and dunked in saffron syrup. It appears during festivals and weddings, offering richness and indulgence in equal measure.



Image Courtesy: Uma Shah, Pinterest



Image Courtesy: Pinterest

BITE-SIZED BLISS IN GANGTOK

Nestled in the Eastern Himalayas, Gangtok welcomes visitors with cool breezes, mountain views, and the comforting aroma of steaming momos. These dumplings are the soul of the city's street food, found everywhere from family-run stalls to busy cafes.

At dawn, MG Marg comes alive with bamboo baskets stacked high and steam rising into the morning air. Vendors serve hot momos filled with pork, chicken, or vegetables, always paired with the fiery red chilli chutney that has become their signature companion. Some stalls offer deep-fried momos with crisp edges, kothey momos pan-fried until golden, or jhol momos served in a spiced broth. Cheese and seasonal fillings such as spinach or mushrooms add variety while respecting tradition.

The chutney deserves equal attention. Bold and addictive, it may be smooth and smoky at one stall and sharp and chunky at another. Every bite becomes a burst of flavour, simple yet unforgettable.

For locals, momos are everyday comfort, eaten during breaks or while catching up with friends. For visitors, they are a discovery worth returning for. Whether traditional or with a modern twist, momos in Gangtok are more than food. They are heritage, warmth, and joy served against the backdrop of misty hills.

TIDES & TASTES: KOCHI CURRIES

Kochi, with its sea breeze and unhurried charm, is defined by the aroma of fish curries simmering in coconut oil and earthen pots. Here, food is culture, and fish curry is its heart.

At breakfast stalls and lunch houses, the red Kerala fish curry stands out. Made with kodampuli for its smoky, sour depth and spiced with red chillies, it often features sardines or mackerel, tender in tangy gravy. Paired with kappa, or boiled tapioca, it becomes a staple of everyday life.

Along the waterfront, seafood markets bustle as the day's catch moves quickly to family-run eateries. Generations have perfected recipes using pearl onions, fresh coconut, curry leaves, and hand-ground spices, ensuring flavour is always authentic. Meals are often served on banana leaves, where rice, papadam, and seasonal sides frame the curry beautifully.

Modern cafés in Fort Kochi add their touch with fish moilee served with bread or grilled catch alongside yams, blending tradition with innovation. Yet the essence remains.

To taste fish curry in Kochi is to savour the sea, the soil, and the stories carried through kitchens. It is food that nourishes and connects, both simple and profound.

A TASTE OF INDIA, ONE STREET AT A TIME

Across the vast stretches of India, flavours shift like landscapes. In Banaras, chaat offers more than spice. It captures the ancient rhythm of a city that never sleeps. In Jaipur, flaky kachoris remind us of royal kitchens and bustling morning traditions passed through time. Gangtok's steaming momos deliver the quiet comfort of mountain life. Kochi's fish curries serve the depth and generosity of the sea.



Image Courtesy: Momo King, Pexels

WHY? TO GET A STEP AHEAD OF DISEASE.

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HAPPY GUTS AND STRESS-FREE JOURNEYS

Simple steps to prevent stomach upset and maintain your gut health while travelling

TT BUREAU

Travel is an exciting way to discover new places and flavours, but it can challenge your gut health and its delicate balance. As you encounter unfamiliar foods, water, and routines, your gut microbiome may struggle to adapt, leading to bloating, cramps, or irregular digestion, not always from infection, but from rapid change. The good news? With a few smart habits before, during, and after your trip, you can keep your gut resilient and focus on the adventure ahead.

WHY YOUR GUT HATES VACATIONS

Travel is exhilarating: new foods, vibrant cultures, and exciting

landscapes. But it can also stir up something less glamorous: gut trouble. While most people worry about food poisoning or traveller's diarrhoea, the real culprit is often more subtle. Non-infectious gut issues are incredibly common and usually stem from a sudden shift in your microbiome, the trillions of bacteria, fungi, and viruses that live in your digestive system.

Spicy street food, unfamiliar ingredients, changes in water, altered meal times, and even jet lag can throw your gut into a spin. This imbalance might be caused by a bug or infection, it could be just your gut flora struggling to adapt. The result? Bloating, mild cramps, diarrhoea, constipation, or nausea, often without fever or severe symptoms.



Image Courtesy: Propicks

Understanding the science behind your belly blues helps you take back control. Travel should expand your horizons, not your toilet trips. With a little gut-friendly prep, you can enjoy your journey without any digestive detours.

THE REAL CULPRIT: YOUR GUT MICROBIOME IN CHAOS

Eating Unfamiliar Foods: Sampling spicy street food or exotic fruits is one of the greatest joys of travel, but it can also be a shock to your gut. These new foods often introduce unfamiliar microbes, spices, and preparation methods that your digestive system isn't used to.

Even healthy or hygienically prepared meals, as per a recent interview posted by University of Utah, can temporarily upset your gut flora, which may result in bloating, discomfort, or altered bowel habits. If you're used to a certain style of cuisine at home, rich gravies, fermented foods, or even tropical fruits might push your microbiome out of balance. To ease the transition, try local dishes in moderation, eat slowly, and allow your body time to adjust.

Drinking Different Water: Even water that is safe by local standards can contain different bacterial strains or mineral compositions that your gut isn't accustomed to. In regions where tap water isn't treated the same way as it is in your home country, this can be a fast track to mild digestive issues like gas, stomach cramps, or loose motions. This isn't necessarily due to contamination. It could be your microbiome reacting to the unfamiliar contents. Regardless, be safe and stick to bottled water or filtered, boiled water. Be mindful of ice cubes and juices made with local water, too.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE TRAVELLING

Eat a diet rich in fibre (fruits, vegetables, whole grains) and fermented foods (yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut) in the weeks leading up to your trip, to help in improving gut health. This helps cultivate a more diverse and resilient microbiome that's better equipped to handle change. Fermented foods feed beneficial gut bacteria and can help build a buffer against digestive disruptions.

Consider taking probiotic supplements with strains like *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium* before and during your trip. These supplements can help reinforce your gut barrier and improve microbial diversity. However, their effectiveness can vary from person to person, so it's best to start a couple of weeks early to gauge your body's response.

Good hand hygiene is critical: wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before meals and after restroom use. Carry alcohol-based hand sanitiser for situations where soap isn't available. This small habit can significantly reduce your exposure to unfamiliar microbes.

HOW TO TRAVEL SAFELY

Keep hand hygiene a priority. Washing with soap and clean



Image Courtesy: Stockking

water is best, but hand sanitiser can help in a pinch, especially before eating or handling snacks on the go.

Manage stress actively. Travel delays, sleep disruptions, and tight schedules can add up. Get sufficient rest, hydrate often, and take quiet breaks to keep your body calm.

Only use antibiotics or over-the-counter medications if prescribed by a healthcare professional. Self-medicating can cause more harm than good and worsen gut imbalance.

If you do experience stomach upset, focus on hydration. Oral rehydration salts can help replenish lost electrolytes. Stick to bland, easy-to-digest foods like rice, bananas, and toast until your symptoms improve. Listen to your body, rest, eat light, and give your gut time to recover.

If symptoms like severe pain, high fever, or persistent vomiting/diarrhoea occur, seek medical attention promptly. It's better to be cautious than let a minor issue escalate.



Image Courtesy: Timolina

THE STYLE EDIT: FALL 2025 TRAVEL WARDROBE

Fall 2025 style champions luxe layers, travel-ready essentials, and bold details for every destination

TT BUREAU



Image Courtesy: Kate Hewko

As autumn 2025 unfurls its golden palette, travel becomes as much about style as it is about discovery. This season sets a new benchmark for fashionable wanderers, blending practicality with personal flair.

Designers and travellers alike are championing playful layering, bold accessories, and smart packing strategies—ensuring every look is both runway-ready and road-tested.

TRENDS TO KNOW

From New York's sleek shows to Milan's flamboyant runways, fashion houses have reimagined fall attire with travellers in mind. Faux fur dominates in multiple forms, from sweeping coats to cropped jackets, while leopard print resurfaces as a statement of power dressing. Leather is draped and sculpted in modern cuts, and accessories—oversized and dramatic—complete the look.

Prep-inspired varsity jackets and crisp button-ups sit alongside boho silhouettes, with maximalist fringes and textured layers giving ensembles a playful edge. Pattern-mixing is now an art form—plaid paired with florals signals bold confidence.

Shoes, too, command attention. Autumn hues set the tone: oxblood Mary Janes for vintage elegance, forest-green loafers for polish, and racing sneakers for energy on the move. Each balances comfort with flair, perfect for days that flow from sightseeing to late-night dinners.

THE CAPSULE WARDROBE

Effortless travel style begins with a capsule collection. Versatile basics—neutral long-sleeve tops, fitted sweaters, and weather-proof outerwear—anchor the look. Trench coats and puffers lead the way, while camel, chocolate brown, russet red, and olive green set a timeless seasonal palette.

Relaxed trousers and midi skirts pair well with multiple tops, while track pants, beloved by celebrities and seasoned travellers, bring ease and runway edge. Add a standout piece for personality, a cropped faux fur jacket, a leopard-print blouse, or a fringed midi.

Accessories add the polish. Scarves provide warmth and artistry, oversized bags stow essentials, and sleek sunglasses elevate any look. Footwear should balance elegance with practicality, think cushioned oxfords or sneakers that carry you from cobbled lanes to chic bistros.

LAYERING MADE EASY

Layering is both functional and expressive. Textures like cashmere, corduroy, and merino wool add depth while trapping warmth without bulk. Lightweight base layers topped with vests or cardigans, finished with trench coats or faux fur, ensure flexibility for shifting temperatures.

Reversible, wrinkle-resistant pieces extend options for longer trips. Organza or sheer blouses layered over slips nod to daring runway trends while remaining wearable. Knit dresses with tights and boots make an easy transition from day tours to evening soirées.

PACKING SMARTER

Seasoned travellers swear by the 5-4-3-2-1 rule: five tops, four bottoms, three pairs of shoes, two bags, and one dress. Packing cubes streamline the process, keeping outfits crease-free and organised. Jewellery should be light yet distinctive, layered pendants or slim bangles that add flair without weighing down luggage.

Autumn calls for clever extras. A compact umbrella and tights guard against sudden showers, while a travel-sized style kit, lint roller, stain stick, fabric spray, keeps every look impeccable on the go.

DESTINATION DRESSING

Wardrobes should reflect not only the season but also the destination. For city breaks, blazers, bold prints, and sharp tailoring stand out against urban backdrops. Countryside escapes call for knits, puffers, and sturdy boots.

Retailers are meeting the demand with accessible pieces. Platforms such as Amazon and global stores are offering fall-ready staples—plaid shirts, suede bomber jackets, and versatile track pants, bringing high style within easy reach of every traveller.

THE TAKEAWAY

Autumn 2025 is about comfort, confidence, and creativity in equal measure. With a capsule wardrobe, clever layering, and smart packing, every trip becomes a showcase of personal style. This is the season to experiment boldly, travel light, and let your look reflect both the richness of fall and the spirit of adventure.



FAMOUS INDIAN BOOK MARKETS

Historic Indian book markets brim with rare finds, academic gems, and cultural treasures

TT BUREAU



Image Courtesy: Betsy Daniel, Flickr

Indian book markets are historical and cultural landmarks that embody the literary pulse of their cities. Here's an expanded look at the leading book markets, the kinds of books they offer, their histories, and practical tips on how to reach them.

DARYAGANJ BOOK MARKET & NAI SARAK, DELHI

In the heart of Old Delhi, where the air hums with the scent of spice shops and the clang of cycle rickshaws, lies one of the capital's greatest weekend rituals: the Daryaganj Sunday Book Market. Stretching for nearly a kilometre, it transforms a slice of the city into a literary carnival each week, a tradition that has endured since the 1960s. Here, pavements and makeshift stalls groan under the weight of printed words; everything from fresh paperbacks to hardbound relics with histories of their own.

The selection is dizzying. Academic essentials line

the path, catering to every stream from engineering and medicine to arts and law. For students, it is a goldmine of competitive exam guides sold at a fraction of their original cost. Side by side, there are stacks of Hindi and English classics, dusty, rare editions long out of print, and children's comics and magazines that spark nostalgia. Amid the piles, you might even spot international bestsellers or unexpected gems; half the joy here lies in the serendipity of discovery.

AVENUE ROAD, BENGALURU

Avenue Road in central Bengaluru is an academic lifeline, where bookshops have been nurturing students, job seekers, and passionate readers for over a century. The scent of ink and the warm glow of shopfronts spill onto the busy pavement, drawing in everyone from hurried undergraduates to leisurely browsers in search of their next read.

The range of books here reflects Bengaluru's role as one of India's great educational hubs. Engineering and science textbooks sit alongside school and college guides, offering affordable lifelines to those preparing for exams. Tucked into shelves are well-worn volumes of literary fiction and timeless Kannada literature, celebrating the state's rich linguistic heritage. At street-side stalls, thin exam pamphlets promise quick preparation for competitive tests, while newer shops are carving a space for poetry collections and self-help titles that speak to the city's young, ambitious crowd.

MOORE MARKET, CHENNAI

Tucked beside the grand façade of Chennai Central Railway Station, Moore Market is a place where time seems to slow down. For generations, it has been a sanctuary for those who find joy in the scent of yellowing pages and the thrill of unearthing rare treasures. Whether you are a lifelong bibliophile or a casual wanderer, stepping into its narrow lanes feels like entering a living archive of Chennai's literary and cultural past.

The selection here is deliciously eclectic. You'll find stacks of second-hand English and Tamil books, ranging from contemporary fiction to beloved classics. Comics and vintage magazines spill out of wooden racks, their faded covers holding decades-old stories. Students trawl through piles of academic texts and imported technical manuals, while collectors hunt for old detective novels that might be long forgotten elsewhere. Some stalls even have books stamped with the marks of libraries halfway across the world, lending them a history as intriguing as their contents.

COLLEGE STREET, KOLKATA

If there is a beating heart to India's literary culture, it pulses along the bustling stretch of College Street in Kolkata, fondly known as Boi Para, or "Book Town." Here, the air is thick with the scent of old paper, the murmur of bargaining voices, and the occasional rustle of pages as hands search for a long-sought title. It is the largest book market in India and proudly claims the title of Asia's biggest second-hand book hub.

The sheer variety here is staggering. You might find academic lifelines, engineering manuals, medical textbooks, tomes on political science or Sanskrit stacked in neat towers by vendors who know the syllabi of the city's universities almost by heart. On the other hand, you'll encounter Bengali literary treasures: works of Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, and contemporary voices, often printed in vibrant paperbacks. Between them lie rare first editions, foreign language imports, avant-garde magazines, collectable coffee-table books, and rows of illustrated children's stories. Prices are often negotiable, making it a sanctuary for both penniless students and passionate collectors.



Image Courtesy: BillJones94, Wikimedia Commons

The origins of College Street are deeply entwined with Kolkata's academic heritage. In the 19th century, the area blossomed around a cluster of prestigious educational institutions: Presidency College, the University of Calcutta, and the Hindu School, among others. As scholars, professors, and students mingled in this intellectual hotbed, bookshops naturally sprouted to meet their needs, eventually transforming the street into an enduring cultural landmark.

ABIDS & KOTI, HYDERABAD

When the weekend sun rises over Hyderabad, the neighbourhoods of Abids and Koti awaken into open-air libraries. By mid-morning, pavements are transformed into winding aisles lined with books, and the hum of bargaining mixes with the clinking of chai glasses at roadside stalls. Together, these parallel markets offer a distinctly Hyderabad experience, part hunt, part heritage, and entirely devoted to the written word.

The offerings are as varied as the city's own cultural tapestry. Students come searching for competitive exam guides, while others browse stacks of fiction that range from popular thrillers to hardbound classics. Poetry in Telugu, Urdu, and English sits beside stacks of yellowed encyclopedias, their pages crinkled with age.

FLORA FOUNTAIN, MUMBAI

In the heart of Mumbai's historic Fort district, the elegant Flora Fountain stands as a Victorian sentinel, surrounded by



Image Courtesy: Pritam, Pixahive

the daily hum of office-goers, tourists, and, most delightfully, booksellers. Here, the city's colonial architecture frames a street-side market where literature flows as freely as the lunchtime crowd. Footpath stalls sprawl along the pavements, their canvas awnings sheltering towers of books that seem to grow taller with each passing hour.

The variety is as cosmopolitan as Mumbai itself. Rare classics sit side-by-side with imported bestsellers, tempting both casual readers and collectors. Parents guide children toward colourful shelves of children's literature, while young

professionals hunt for law textbooks or business guides in the midst of their workday errands.

Flora Fountain's book market emerged in the post-independence years, when street vendors began catering to the city's growing class of office workers, lawyers, and students. Over the decades, it has weathered shifting literary tastes and Mumbai's ever-changing skyline, adapting to new reading trends while retaining its old-school street-market charm. The sight of a vendor deftly recommending a book based on a two-minute conversation is as much a part of the experience as the books themselves.

APPA BALWANT CHOWK (ABC), PUNE

In Pune, a city often called the Oxford of the East, Appa Balwant Chowk, or simply ABC, has long been the place where academic ambition meets the easy camaraderie of a chai break. This bustling book hub forms an unbroken link between the city's numerous colleges and the eager minds they nurture. Here, the hum of traffic is matched by the murmur of customers flipping through books, negotiating prices, or simply lingering over a conversation about their favourite authors.

ABC's bookstalls and shops cater to an impressively wide audience. Textbooks for every discipline, from engineering to literature, share shelf space with competitive exam guides for UPSC, banking, and state-level tests. Readers can browse



Image Courtesy: Sumita Roy Dutta, Wikimedia Commons



Image Courtesy: Pinakpani, Wikimedia Commons

current fiction fresh from the presses, religious scriptures in Sanskrit, Hindi, and Marathi, and children's comics that evoke the nostalgia of summer holidays. Indian language titles thrive here, reflecting Pune's literary traditions and the city's deep appreciation for Marathi literature in particular.

The story of ABC is entwined with Pune's transformation into a student capital in the decades after independence. Since the 1950s, its pavements have been stacked with books, sometimes in neat rows, sometimes in haphazard piles that invite curious rummaging. Generations of students have bought their first-year syllabi here, returned for reference books, and eventually come back for novels to read in the quieter moments of campus life.

AMINABAD, LUCKNOW

In Aminabad, the literary and culinary worlds live side by side. This old quarter of Lucknow hums with an unmistakable blend of the spice-laden air of kebab stalls, the earthy scent of old paper, and the faint perfume of attar drifting from nearby shops. Between textile merchants and food vendors, bookstalls stand like quiet pockets of reflection amid the market's bustle, offering a slower rhythm in a city famous for its leisurely grace.

The selection is a tribute to Lucknow's cultural depth, with volumes by Mirza Ghalib, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, and contemporary poets displayed alongside Hindi literature and rare biographies. Shelves also hold local history books that capture the spirit of the Nawabi era and the city's enduring syncretic heritage. The occasional illustrated children's book or slim novel in English adds to the variety, but the soul of Aminabad's book trade is firmly rooted in its

regional and historical identity.

Aminabad's creative pulse stretches back to the Nawabi era, when it was a gathering place for poets, writers, and thinkers. In the evenings, mushairas (poetry recitals) would echo through its courtyards, and the area's refined conversational culture shaped the literary tastes of generations. Today, the book vendors keep that legacy alive, even as the market embraces the energy of modern commerce.

The Aminabad Metro station drops visitors right into the heart of the market, and buses and cabs ply the area throughout the day. Many choose to combine a book hunt with a food trail, starting with a search for a rare poetry collection and ending with a plate of Galouti kebabs or Lucknawi biryani.



Image Courtesy: Gangulybiswarup, Wikimedia Commons

INDIA'S SACRED RIVERS REIMAGINED

River cruises in India promise intimate vessels, curated excursions, and landscapes steeped in myth.

TT BUREAU

India's rivers have shaped cultures for millennia. Today, they are being rediscovered as corridors of luxury experiential travel. With more than 5,000 kilometres of operational waterways, India is positioning itself as a river-cruise destination that blends indulgence, cultural immersion, and reflection.

At the centre of this growth is the Government of India's Cruise Bharat Mission, set to develop 51 river cruise circuits across 14 states and three union territories by 2027. Passenger volumes have risen from under 100,000 in 2014 to nearly half a million in 2025, with revenues projected to exceed USD 230 million.

River terminals in Varanasi, Patna, Kolkata, and Guwahati are being built to international standards with lounges, immigration counters, and modern docking facilities to ensure that these waterways are now true luxury destinations.

Luxury river cruising is more than transport. It is an invitation into the country's living culture, experienced at an unhurried pace from the comfort of floating boutique hotels. The appeal lies in contrast: stillness on deck as dawn breaks over temple spires, followed by curated excursions where small groups engage with artisans, historians, and naturalists. Each moment is carefully staged to balance exploration with serenity, creating journeys that feel deeply personal rather than hurried.

FLOATING LUXURY

Luxury river cruise vessels typically carry 20 to 50 guests, ensuring privacy and personalised service. Suites of 25–40 square metres feature floor-to-ceiling windows or balconies and contemporary comforts such as Wi-Fi, climate control, and spa-standard bathrooms, expressed through handwoven textiles and carved wood.

Onboard, Ayurvedic therapies, yoga, and meditation accompany menus that source produce locally: Bengal's Hilsa fish, Assam's bamboo-shoot dishes, and Kerala's coconut-based recipes paired with fine wines, Indian single malts, and botanical cocktails. Butler service remains discreet yet intuitive, while lounges, libraries, and shaded decks invite travellers to slow down, reflect, and connect with the passing landscapes.

THE GANGA

Stretching 2,525 kilometres, the Ganga is India's most revered river. Cruises glide past sacred ghats and artisan villages, with the luminous Ganga Aarti in Varanasi—priests lifting flaming lamps to chants and bells—unforgettable from a private deck.

Shore days bring Kalna's terracotta temples, Murshidabad's nawabi mansions, and Kolkata's colonial avenues; evenings on board pair regional cuisine, music, and storytelling with the legend of a goddess whose torrents were calmed by Shiva's locks.





Image Courtesy: Pritha Ganguly, Pexels

THE BRAHMAPUTRA

The Brahmaputra in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh offers a wilder canvas. Revered as the Son of Brahma, it symbolises power and renewal in local lore. Itineraries combine luxury with adventure: safaris in Kaziranga National Park, visits to Majuli Island's Vaishnavite monasteries and mask-making traditions, tea-estate excursions, and interactions in tribal villages.

On board, Assamese textiles and woodcarvings frame Bihu dance performances and dinners of fish curries, bamboo-shoot recipes, and fragrant teas. New terminals planned at Guwahati will soon enhance access.

KERALA BACKWATERS

Kerala's labyrinth of canals and lagoons provides a serene counterpoint. Myth credits its creation to Lord Parasurama, who reclaimed the land from the sea. Traditional kettuvallam hulls are reimagined as houseboats with Jacuzzi suites, private dining decks, and personalised wellness.

Guests drift past coir-weaving villages, spice plantations, and bird-rich wetlands; during Onam, snake boat races animate the waterways in a spectacle best enjoyed from a sun deck.

SLOW TRAVEL AND SUSTAINABILITY

These journeys embrace slow travel: mist on the Ganga, elephants bathing on the Brahmaputra, lantern-lit canals in Kerala. Sustainability underpins growth, with operators using solar power, bio-digesters, and robust waste management while partnering with artisans, farmers, and guides.

The Inland Waterways Authority of India is building eco-friendly cruise terminals to align luxury with responsibility.

Increasingly, guests are invited to learn how their presence supports local economies through the sourcing of food, the commissioning of crafts, or the employment of guides. This integration ensures the journeys are not only indulgent but also purposeful, contributing meaningfully to riverine communities.

THE FUTURE OF RIVER LUXURY

India's river-cruise market is expanding fast. Operational waterways have grown from three in 2014 to twenty-four in 2024, with twenty-nine targeted by 2025. Passenger volumes have increased five-fold, with revenues projected to exceed USD 230 million.

Eco-conscious vessels with hybrid propulsion and immersive cultural programming are already in design, promising more choice, refinement, and opportunities to experience India's rivers as both timeless storytellers and contemporary luxury destinations.

Luxury river cruising in India offers the opportunity to dialogue with one of the world's oldest civilisations, carried on waterways that invite discovery, contemplation, and reconnection, all in the embrace of opulence.



Image Courtesy: Kashi Government

EPIC TREKS IN THE HEART OF THE HIMALAYAS

For seasoned trekkers and first-timers alike, each Himalaya trek offers its own unique set of challenges and rewards.

TT BUREAU

It's not just the altitude that takes your breath away—it's the sense of awe that makes you feel deeply alive as you take a transformative trek across Uttarakhand or Himachal Pradesh.

Himalayan treks offer a breathtaking fusion of adventure and spirituality, and some of their most iconic trails are a passage through ancient cultures, serene glacial lakes, and majestic alpine meadows.

The snow-draped silence of Kedarkantha, the windswept expanse of Dayara Bugyal, the sacred stillness of Dodital, and the rugged drama of Buran Pass—each landscape leaves an imprint. Trekkers often return changed, with stories etched in their hearts and a yearning for the next ascent.

DAYARA BUGYAL TREK – UTTARAKHAND

Starting from the picturesque villages of Raithal or Barsu, this trek takes you through a fairytale landscape of maple and oak forests before opening out into Dayara Bugyal—one of the country's most stunning high-altitude meadows. Located at 3,606 metres, the Bugyal is perfect from May to October for its rolling green pastures and from December to March for snow-laden trails. Barnala Tal, a quiet lake, and the Someshwar Mahadev temple in Barsu are serene stops. From the top, the snowy peaks of Bandarpoonch, Kala Nag, and Srikanth create an awe-inspiring horizon. The route is well-marked, with quaint dhabas serving rajma-chawal and hot tea near Barsu and



Ruinsara Lake Trek, Image Courtesy: Discovery Hike

Raithal. Local legends speak of spirits guarding the meadows, believed to protect the region's shepherds and wildlife.

How many Days Trek: 6 days

Base Camp: Raithal

Seasons: Summer, Post-monsoon, Winter

Months: May to October, December to March

Altitude: 3,606 m

Grade: Easy to Moderate

BALI PASS TREK – UTTARAKHAND

A challenging yet soul-stirring expedition, the Bali Pass trek connects Yamunotri to the famed Har Ki Dun Valley. Starting at Sankri, it cuts through the remote villages of Osla and Taluka, where wooden homes cling to steep slopes. The 66-kilometre





Bali Pass Trek

trail traverses the lush Ruinsara and Har Ki Dun valleys, with alpine flowers and birch forests leading to Ruinsara Lake. The Bali Pass summit at 4,950 metres rewards trekkers with commanding views of Swargarohini, Bandarpoonch, and Black Peak. Best visited in June or September, the trail includes campsites near the lake and rustic meals at local dhabas. Osla village is home to a Someshwar temple, and folk songs of Swargarohini's mythical stairway to heaven still echo in the evening air.

How many Days Trek: 8-9 days

Base Camp: Sankri

Seasons: Summer and Autumn

Months: May, June and September

Altitude: 4,950 m

Grade: Difficult

RUINSARA LAKE TREK – UTTARAKHAND

A standalone trail to Ruinsara Lake is ideal for moderate trekkers. Beginning at Taluka, the trail passes Seema village and enters the glacially-carved Supin Valley. The lake, nestled at 3,600 metres, reflects Black Peak and Swargarohini in its still waters. Dotted with dwarf rhododendrons and ringed by alpine grasslands, this trek is a floral wonderland in May and September. The route is also used by shepherds migrating with their flocks and shares overlaps with ancient Indo-Tibetan trade routes.

How many Days Trek: 7-8 days

Base Camp: Taluka

Seasons: Summer and Autumn

Months: May to June, September to October

Altitude: 3,600 m

Grade: Moderate

DODITAL-HANUMANCHATTI TREK – UTTARAKHAND

A scenic crossover trek from Sangam Chatti to Hanumanchatti, this trail leads you to Dodital Lake, believed to be the birthplace of Lord Ganesha. At 3,310 metres, the lake is framed by oak and pine forests, and a small Ganesh temple rests on its banks. After crossing Darwa Pass, trekkers descend through sweeping views of Bandarpoonch and Kala Nag peaks. Spring and post-monsoon are the best seasons for this 40-kilometre journey, often punctuated by sightings of monals and musk deer. At Agoda village en route, locals narrate the tale of Ganesh's birth and offer home-cooked meals of mandua roti and bhangjeera chutney.

How many Days Trek: 6 days

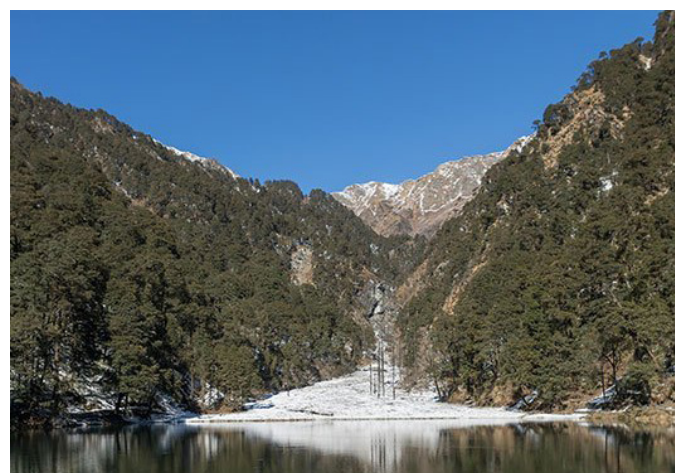
Base Camp: Sangam Chatti

Seasons: Spring and Autumn

Months: March to June, October to December

Altitude: 3,310 m

Grade: Moderate



Dodital-Hanumanchatti Trek, Image Courtesy: Rakesh Tiwari

BURAN PASS TREK – HIMACHAL PRADESH

The 40-kilometre Buran Pass trek is a crossover between Janglik and Barua in Himachal's Pabbar Valley. Starting from the charming village of Janglik, known for its wooden homes and warm hospitality, the trail ascends past thick forests and the glacial Chandranahan Lake. At 4,572 metres, the pass presents a panoramic view of the Kinnaur range. A highlight is the exhilarating descent over a near-vertical snow wall, requiring careful navigation. Villages like Diude and Barua on either end give trekkers a glimpse into the culture of the region, while pine and deodar forests accompany much of the route. Campsites along the way, especially near Litham, are spectacular under the starry night sky.

How many Days Trek: 7 days

Base Camp: Janglik

Seasons: Pre-monsoon, Autumn

Months: May to June, September to October

Altitude: 4,572 m

Grade: Moderate to Difficult

KUARI PASS TREK – UTTARAKHAND

Also known as the Curzon Trail, the Kuari Pass trek offers a unique window into the inner Garhwal Himalayas. Beginning from Karchi and passing through remote hamlets and oak-filled forests, the trail climbs to 3,815 metres. Here, one can gaze at a majestic amphitheatre of peaks—Nanda Devi, Kamet, Chaukhamba, Dronagiri, and Hathi Ghoda Parvat. The Gorson Bugyal section, a high-altitude meadow, is a trekker's delight, especially between March and November. Along the route, simple mountain huts offer piping hot thukpa and tea, while old folk in Tapovan village speak of Lord Curzon's passage through these hills.

How many Days Trek: 6 days

Base Camp: Karchi (via Joshimath)

Seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn

Months: March to June, September to November

Altitude: 3,815 m

Grade: Moderate



Kedarnath Trek, Image Courtesy: Himalaya Hikers

HAR KI DUN TREK – UTTARAKHAND

A 500-year-old culture trek—Har Ki Dun is a trail that needs no introduction. Trekkers have always trodden these paths to witness the magnificent Swargarohini massif from the sacred valley. Starting at Sankri and following the Supin River, the trail winds through ancient villages like Osla and Seema. Their carved wooden homes and the Someshwar temple in Osla echo with songs passed through generations. The cradle-shaped Har Ki Dun valley at 3,566 metres offers ethereal views of Swargarohini and Bandarpooch peaks. Trekkers traverse pine-scented trails, blooming meadows, and glacial streams. Local families often welcome trekkers with bowls of siddu, a steamed delicacy, and stories of the Pandavas' journey to heaven.

How many Days Trek: 7 days

Base Camp: Sankri

Seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn, Early Winter

Months: April to June, September to December

Altitude: 3,566 m

Grade: Easy to Moderate

KEDARKANTHA TREK – UTTARAKHAND

Kedarkantha is filled with clearings that make for perfect rest spots and campsites. Each clearing offers stunning views and has its own unique charm. The sunsets from these clearings, especially at Bhoja Dhadi, are some of the most dramatic you will ever see. With clearings spaced at just the right intervals, the trek feels well-balanced and complete.

As a standalone mountain, Kedarkantha offers multiple





Hampta Pass Trek, Image Courtesy: Indiahikes

routes to the summit, each with its own beauty. This gives trekkers the flexibility to choose quieter trails or adapt their plans based on weather conditions. These multiple options add to the allure of the trek. From Sankri, the path passes through Juda Ka Talab—a frozen lake in winter—before climbing to 3,800 metres. The summit rewards with breathtaking 360-degree views of Gangotri, Yamunotri, Swargarohini, and Black Peak. Trekkers often enjoy homely meals at Sankri's guesthouses and listen to tales of a local guardian deity believed to reside on the peak.

How many Days Trek: 6 days

Base Camp: Sankri

Seasons: Winter

Months: December to April

Altitude: 3,800 m

Grade: Easy to Moderate

HAMPTA PASS TREK – HIMACHAL PRADESH

Linking the verdant Kullu Valley to the stark desert of Lahaul, the Hampta Pass trek is a dramatic cross-section of landscapes. Beginning from Jobra and climbing up to 4,300 metres, the trail winds through pine forests, wildflower meadows, and finally across Hampta Pass. Along the way, one camps near Chika, Balu ka Ghera, and the ethereal Chandratil Lake—a moon-shaped glacial lake that stuns with its turquoise sheen. Best done between June and October, the trek offers rare biodiversity and stark contrasts in terrain. Shepherds use this pass seasonally and often regale trekkers with mountain lore by the fire.

How many Days Trek: 6 days

Base Camp: Jobra (via Manali)

Seasons: Summer and Autumn

Months: June to October

Altitude: 4,300 m

Grade: Moderate

PANGARCHULLA PEAK TREK – UTTARAKHAND

An offbeat summit climb, the Pangarchulla trek starts from Joshimath and follows part of the Kuari Pass trail. It culminates at a rocky summit at 4,700 metres, demanding stamina but rewarding trekkers with sweeping views of Nanda Devi, Hathi Ghoda, and Trishul peaks.

The trail is peppered with wildflowers in spring and snowfields in late autumn. Trekkers camp at Khulara and Gulling and pass oak, maple, and rhododendron forests teeming with birdlife. Locals from Tugasi village offer organic meals and speak of a snow spirit that protects the peak.

How many Days Trek: 6-7 days

Base Camp: Joshimath

Seasons: Spring and Autumn

Months: April to May, October

Altitude: 4,700 m

Grade: Moderate to Difficult

These trekking trails are not just routes across mountain passes—they are journeys through time, culture, and self-discovery. No two treks are the same. Each path carves its own story on your soul.

From the silence of snow in Kedarkantha to the wind-sung meadows of Dayara Bugyal, every step teaches you something. It humbles you, grounds you, and fills you with a sense of wonder that no photograph can fully capture.

What begins as a physical journey always ends as something more—an internal expedition to a deeper, quieter part of yourself. And when you finally descend back into the valleys, your heart remains somewhere high among the clouds, calling you back for just one more trek, one more trail.

GOA'S HIDDEN GEMS: SCENIC TREKS AND TRAILS

Goa has a secret. Tucked behind the postcard-perfect beaches and shacks strung with fairy lights, a quieter, wilder Goa waits to be discovered.

TT BUREAU

This is Goa, where the Mandovi gleams below moss-covered fort ramparts, where sea caves echo with the sound of waves and wingbeats, and where waterfalls tumble through emerald forests. If you thought Goa was all about lazy hammocks and sunset cocktails, prepare to meet its adventurous, soul-stirring side.

REIS MAGOS TRAIL

On the northern bank of the Mandovi, the Reis Magos Fort stands like a patient storyteller, ready to reveal centuries of drama. Built in 1551 by the Portuguese, this fortress has played many roles: military outpost, royal residence, prison, and even a hospital. Today, it is both a monument and a time capsule, its laterite walls glowing a deep rusty red under the tropical sun. The walk up to the fort is a gentle one, winding through shaded lanes where old Portuguese houses lean over the road with wooden balconies and sloping tiled roofs. Each turn of the path feels like stepping further into Goa's colonial past until the fort's imposing gateway rises before you, an invitation to pause and take in the weight of history.

Inside, the fort is remarkably well-preserved. Its courtyards whisper of parades and prisoners, while its holding cells remind visitors of the turbulent times Goa once endured. Climb up to the ramparts, and the reward is a view worth every step: the Mandovi River shimmering below, Panjim's whitewashed churches dotting the horizon, and the faint outline of ships at the harbour. It is a serene spot, far less crowded than Goa's more famous forts, making it perfect for slow exploration. Occasionally, cultural events and guided tours breathe new life into the old walls, turning the fort into a stage where art and history meet. The Reis Magos trail is less about covering distance and more about lingering, listening, and letting the fort tell you its stories.

TOLIVIA BEACH CAVES

Far in South Goa lies one of the state's best-kept secrets: the sea caves near Loliem, better known as the Tolivia or Cupa Caves. To get there, you must first earn the view. The trail stretches

four to five kilometres through rugged plateaus and patches of thick greenery, a moderate hike that asks for sturdy shoes and a willingness to scramble over boulders. As the sound of the sea grows louder, the cliffs come into view and the path drops towards a rocky beach. Time your trek with the low tide, because only then do the caves open their mouths to welcome visitors.

Step inside and the air cools instantly. The cave stretches almost ninety metres into the rock—the longest on India's west coast—and every step is accompanied by the soft rumble of the ocean outside. Bats hang like dark ornaments overhead, colourful pebbles glint underfoot, and natural rock formations twist into strange and beautiful shapes. The entrance frames a view of the Arabian Sea so perfect it feels like a painting. This is a trek that strips away the Goa of beach parties and neon signs and replaces it with something raw, elemental, and thrilling. It is not uncommon to finish the hike covered in sea spray and red dust, with a grin that says you have discovered a Goa very few will ever see.

CHORLA GHAT

For those who crave elevation and sweeping views, Chorla Ghat offers a mountain escape at the tri-junction of Goa, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. The most popular route here is the Vagheri Peaks Trek, a seven-kilometre round trip that climbs steadily through lush forests, eventually leading you to one of Goa's highest points. At over 3,500 feet, the panorama is staggering: valleys roll away into misty distance, the forest canopy ripples like a green ocean, and during the monsoon, waterfalls slice silver ribbons down the slopes.

Chorla Ghat has a rhythm all its own. Early mornings here are often wrapped in mist, with bird calls punctuating the quiet, and every now and then, a Malabar giant squirrel darts across a branch. The trek is moderately challenging, with some steep sections that will make you earn the view at the top, but it is worth the effort. If waterfalls are your weakness, there are side trails that lead to the Twin Vajra Waterfalls and other hidden cascades like Mangeli and Karavati, best seen when the monsoon is in full song. In winter, the air is crisp and clear, and the valleys open up under golden light—perfect for those who want their hikes served with drama.



Treks & Trails: Rejuvenating Monsoon Escape

TREKKING THE ROOF OF INDIA

Where Every Trail is a Story and Every Step a Revelation

TT BUREAU

Curating the best trekking trails of Ladakh is no easy task, because Ladakh is not a place you merely visit, it is a place that transforms you. If there is one corner of the planet where wind, stone, sky and soul come together to create a living canvas, it is here. The light changes by the hour, turning the mountains into a palette of gold, rust and violet, while rivers carve silver lines across the barren earth.

Every path in Ladakh is more than a route; it is a story waiting to be lived. The wind seems to carry the chants of monks from distant monasteries, prayer flags ripple with secrets, and ancient trails still remember the footfalls of traders who once crossed these passes with salt, wool and silk. Peaks rise like sentinels, some inviting, some

forbidding, each one daring you to test yourself against its heights.

Whether you are tying your boots for the first time and dreaming of your first high-altitude adventure, or chasing the thrill of summiting above 6,000 metres, Ladakh finds a way to reach into your spirit. Here, the journey is never only about the destination, it is about finding pieces of yourself along the way.

SHAM VALLEY: THE GENTLE SOUL

Sham Valley, fondly known as the Baby Trek, is the perfect introduction to Ladakh's rugged beauty. This trek is as much about slowing down as it is about walking. The path winds through Hemis Shukpachan and Tingmosgang, villages that seem suspended in time.



Image Courtesy: r/SoloTravel_India, Reddit

Apricot trees bloom along the trails, barley fields shimmer in the wind, and prayer flags flutter softly above whitewashed gompas. The homestays here are charming, offering hot thukpa, freshly baked barley roti and the kind of mountain hospitality that warms you as much as the sun. Sham Valley is ideal between June and September, when streams run full and long days allow time to sit by glacial waters and absorb the serenity that defines this part of Ladakh.

MARKHA VALLEY: THE HIMALAYAN CLASSIC

Markha Valley is the trek that turns casual walkers into lifelong mountain lovers. It is Ladakh's most iconic trail, a route that strings together remote villages, fluttering chortens and sky-high passes into one breathtaking journey.

You'll cross rickety bridges lined with prayer flags, stop at crumbling forts that speak of forgotten kingdoms, and climb towards the high Gongmaru La at 5,260 metres for views that seem to go on forever. The landscape shifts dramatically: narrow canyons give way to broad plains, and golden poplar groves lead to meadows where Stok Kangri glows on the horizon. Homestays in Skiu, Markha and Hankar offer simple but delicious meals, steaming bowls of thukpa, tsampa porridge and apricot jam with roti — turning every halt into an experience. The best season is late May to mid-September, when rivers are manageable, trails are alive with colour, and cobalt skies make every photograph look unreal.

MATHO PHU: THE QUIET SECRET

For those who seek stillness, Matho Phu is the trek that whispers rather than shouts. The trail climbs past 4,100 metres into wide meadows where wildflowers bloom in summer, and the air feels charged with silence. Herds of yaks graze lazily as you walk, their bells echoing faintly across the ridges.

Here, the intimacy of the landscape becomes the reward, evenings spent with Changpa nomads under yak-hair tents, sipping salty butter tea and watching the sun disappear behind jagged peaks. This trek is less about distance and more about being present, about letting the rhythm of the mountains reset your own. June through September is the ideal season, when snow has melted, passes are open, and the meadows turn into a painter's palette.

KANG YATSE II: THE DREAM SUMMIT

When you are ready for a challenge, Kang Yatse II offers the perfect test. Towering above 6,200 metres, this semi-technical peak is a rite of passage for trekkers stepping into the world of mountaineering. The route begins in Markha Valley before peeling away into the wilder terrain



of scree slopes and snowfields. Summit day usually starts before dawn, under a sky blazing with stars, with a slow, steady climb that tests body and mind.

The reward is one of the most spectacular panoramas in the Himalayas, K2, the Gasherbrum massif and the Zaskar range all visible in the distance. Camps at Nimaling provide hearty, energy-rich meals of momos and barley soup, a welcome comfort before the final push. July to September is the most reliable window, when weather conditions are more forgiving and crevasses are clearly visible.

RUMTSE TO TSO MORIRI: THE WILD NOMAD TRAIL

For trekkers seeking a long, meditative journey, the route from Rumtse to Tso Moriri is a masterpiece. It crosses a string of passes above 5,000 metres, each one opening into a new valley painted in shades of ochre, rust and gold. Wild kiangs race across the plains, dust rising like a mirage, and the night sky here is so clear you feel as though you can fall into it.



Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons

The Changpa nomads, with their black yak-hair tents, offer a rare glimpse into a way of life that has remained unchanged for centuries. Sitting cross-legged on their rugs, sipping butter tea and sharing simple barley porridge, you realise this trek is as much about human connection as it is about the landscape. The final reward is the turquoise sweep of Tso Moriri, a lake so still it reflects the sky like a mirror. The best months are July through September, when the passes are snow-free and the high desert is at its most accessible.

THE FINAL STEP

Trekking in Ladakh serves more than views. The cultural immersion—sharing a floor mat in a 300-year-old monastery, chatting with wrinkled grandmothers spinning wool, or joining monks during evening chants—enriches

the trek beyond its physical journey. And then there's the food. Whether it's thukpa in a smoky kitchen, a hot bowl of skyu cooked with mountain veggies, or butter tea that tastes oddly comforting in thin air, Ladakhi cuisine is the quiet hero of your journey.

Every journey has a moment when the trail fades, the dust settles, and you realise the real transformation happened within you. The mountains do not demand anything grand, only that you show up, take one step after another, and let them strip away the noise you carried with you. At the end, it is not the altitude or the distance that stays with you, but the quiet courage you found along the way. And as you stand there, looking back at the path you walked, you know this is not the end at all, it is the beginning of every journey still waiting for you.





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FLAVOURS OF THE HILLS

A Culinary Sojourn through Uttarakhand, where every bite is a whisper from the mountains, and every dish carries the wisdom of the ages

TT BUREAU

A Culinary Sojourn through Uttarakhand, where every bite is a whisper from the mountains, and every dish carries the wisdom of the ages.

Nestled amid snow-capped peaks and temple-studded valleys, Uttarakhand exudes a quiet mystique. Known for its sacred rivers and spiritual sanctuaries, the state also guards a lesser-sung treasure—its cuisine. Simple yet soulful, earthy yet elegant, the food of Uttarakhand is not a loud declaration but a gentle invitation.

This is not a cuisine of flamboyance. It's a cuisine of nourishment. Rooted in altitude and ancestry, it offers a sensory map of life in the hills—resilient, rhythmic, and deeply mindful of nature.

TWO REGIONS, ONE SOUL: GARHWAL & KUMAON

Uttarakhand's culinary identity is shaped by two distinct cultural belts: Garhwal in the west and Kumaon in the east. Each has its own repertoire, subtly distinct in technique and taste, yet bound by a shared philosophy—use what the land gives, waste nothing, and cook with heart.



Where Garhwal leans on slow-cooked stews and hearty dals, Kumaoni cuisine delights in spice-laced vegetables and wild herbs. Grains like madua (finger millet) and jhangora (barnyard millet) stand in place of refined flour. Seasonal vegetables, lentils, and foraged greens bring the landscape to the plate.

The resulting meals are humble and deeply satisfying, much like the people who prepare them.

THE ROOTS RUN DEEP

Centuries of isolation due to mountainous terrain meant that locals had to cultivate a diet that was sustainable, nutritious, and adaptable to long winters. What emerged was a farm-to-fork philosophy, long before it became a trend.

Millet, including madua, jhangora, and cholai (amaranth), are prized for their high nutrition and adaptability to rocky soil. Pulses like gahat (horse gram), bhatt (black soybean), and urad (black lentil) dominate. Foraged greens—kandali (nettles), linguda (fiddle-head ferns), and bichhu ghas—are cooked into nutrient-rich saags.

Mustard oil lends depth. Spices are minimal—often restricted to turmeric, cumin, asafoetida, and the elusive jakhya seed, a wild herb that crackles in hot oil, imparting its signature nuttiness.

This is mountain food in its purest form—earthy, balanced, and beautifully aware of its terrain.

SIGNATURE DISHES: CRAFTED BY NATURE, COOKED WITH INTUITION

Gahat ki Dal: A defining staple, this is a slow-cooked horse gram curry, often paired with rice. It's high in protein and perfect for the cold climate. The dal is tempered with jakhya and garlic, giving it a warm, aromatic finish.

Kafuli: Uttarakhand's beloved green curry, made from spin-



Image Courtesy: *Maihupahadi*

ach and fenugreek leaves. Thickened with rice flour and flavoured with ginger and chillies, it's a comforting winter delicacy served with steamed rice or roti.

Phaanu: This Garhwali speciality is a thick lentil curry made with a mix of soaked dals. Hearty and nutritious, it's a slow affair that rewards patience with depth of flavour.

Chainsoo: An intense black gram preparation with a smoky note, thanks to the dry roasting of lentils before grinding. It's a robust dish often eaten with steamed rice and ghee.

Aloo ke Gutke: Simple yet bold, these spiced potato chunks are tossed in turmeric, jakhya, and chilli powder. Often served during festivals and village feasts, it pairs well with bhangjeera chutney or curd.

Dubuk: Ground soaked pulses like gahat or bhatt cooked into a thick curry. Comforting and warming, it is especially popular in Kumaon during winters.

Thechwani: Radish or potatoes are crushed and slow-cooked in mustard oil with minimal spices. Its texture is as memorable as its tangy, sharp flavour.

Bhangjeera Raita: A creamy accompaniment made with curd and the unique bhangjeera (Perilla seeds), this raita offers a burst of nuttiness and pairs beautifully with rice-based dishes.



Image Courtesy: *Cookilicious, Pinterest*



Image Courtesy: Dinesh Chandila, Pinterest

Bhatt ki Churkani: A Kumaoni favourite made from black soybeans, this curry is both rustic and nutritious, often cooked in iron pans to enhance iron content.

Baadi: Made using buckwheat flour and served with ghee or local curries, Baadi is one of the most wholesome traditional meals of the region.

WILD NOTES: A REIMAGINED JUNGLE SHIKAR

Historically, the hills echoed with the traditions of wild game hunting, especially during festivals. Dishes like Jungli Shikar, made with boar or goat meat, were once reserved for special occasions. Today, the same preparation is reimagined using free-range mutton or chicken, marinated with curd and mustard oil, and slow-cooked in iron pots with minimal spices, letting the meat speak for itself.

It's the kind of dish that turns a kitchen into a storybook.

SWEET NOSTALGIA

Baal Mithai: A culinary emblem of Almora, Baal Mithai is made from roasted khoya coated in tiny white sugar balls. It's chewy, rich, and carries the taste of festivals past.

Singhal: Made with semolina, banana, curd, and cardamom, this flower-shaped fritter is deep-fried to golden perfection. Traditionally served during weddings, its design is as charming as its taste.

Pua Lapsi: A celebratory duo of sweet wheat pudding and fritters, this dessert is a winter staple and often part of harvest festivities.

Arsa: Soft yet crunchy, these rice-jaggery sweets are a Kumaoni winter delight, enjoyed during weddings and family gatherings.

Singori: Khoya-based sweet wrapped in Maalu leaves. The leaf imparts a distinctive aroma, making each bite a celebration.

Jhangora ki Kheer: A delicately flavoured kheer made using barnyard millet, milk, and cardamom, garnished with dry fruits.

THE ELIXIRS OF THE HILLS: SIPS WITH A STORY

Buransh Juice: Made from the blood-red blossoms of the rhododendron, this vibrant drink is tart, refreshing, and loaded with antioxidants. It's a seasonal affair—served chilled in summer and slightly warm in winter.

Herbal Pahadi Chai: Infused with tulsi, nettles, lemongrass, and wild flowers, this tea is brewed in copper kettles and believed to boost immunity. Sipped slowly, it offers a bouquet of the Himalayas in every cup.

MORE THAN FOOD: A LIVING TRADITION

Food in Uttarakhand is closely intertwined with festivals, climate, and community. During Harela, the harvest festival, locals make dishes with fresh grains and greens. During Nanda Devi Raj Jat, a once-in-12-years pilgrimage, communities prepare dry snacks, sun-dried lentil cakes (badis), and pickled roots to sustain long journeys.

Copper vessels, stone grinders (sil batta), and iron kadhai are still commonly used, retaining both nutrition and nostalgia. In the hills, cooking is a ritual. It's the art of listening to the season, to the soil, and to the stories passed down by grandmothers around smoky chulhas.

THE REVIVAL: FROM VILLAGE KITCHENS TO BOUTIQUE MENUS

Once overlooked, Uttarakhand's cuisine is now finding the spotlight it deserves. Sustainable resorts and wellness retreats across the state have begun celebrating local ingredients and recipes. Curated experiences like Taste of Uttarakhand menus in select urban restaurants offer a modern tribute—featuring millet khichdis, rhododendron sorbets, and gahat galouti kebabs.

Even in Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, mountain pop-ups are gaining traction, helping diners reconnect with a cuisine that is soulful, sustainable, and distinctly Indian.

Modern chefs are now taking these rustic dishes and giving them a gourmet twist—kafuli espuma with truffle oil, bhangeera raita foam, and Baadi gnocchi with burnt garlic butter are showing up in luxury dining spaces. Drinks too, are seeing reinvention: Buransh mimosas, rhododendron negronis, and jhangora-millet smoothies are delighting urban palates. This new wave not only preserves heritage but also makes it relevant to contemporary tastes and wellness-conscious lifestyles.

THE LAST BITE: WHY HILL FLAVOURS TASTE BETTER

Uttarakhand's cuisine is a masterclass in restraint. It reminds us that richness is not always in excess. It can lie in the humble lentil, the foraged fern, the nutty seed that grows wild on slopes. To eat in Uttarakhand is to embrace a slower pace.



Image Courtesy: Gastronomic Bong, Pinterest

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