

MADHYA PRADESH CUISINE

There's an old Indian adage, *atithi devo bhava* a guest is as God. Over the centuries this has been drilled so deep into succeeding generations of Indians that hospitality is almost next to godliness here.

Madhya Pradesh dishes out some of the most delectable platters in India. The state domiciles people from all corners of the country. Thus, recipes of various states influence its salver. Madhya Pradesh has skillfully amalgamated the recipes of the various erstwhile states and given them its own distinctive flavor. As far as daily meals are concerned, wheat, jowar and maize are the core grains and are mostly included in every meal. The meals also incorporate protein rich lentils, especially Arhar Dal. An important traditional food of Madhya Pradesh is 'bafla' (wheat cakes), dipped in ghee and eaten with strong peppery lentil broth.

The recipes of the state are a heady combo of both sweet and salty flavors. People have a strong penchant for sweets and desserts, which reflects in their food habits. Popular sweet delicacies are Jalebi, Kusli and Cashew Burfi. As cities like Gwalior and Indore abound in milk and dairy products, dairy-based platters are more common in these regions. However, desserts and traditional mithais are common in every household. During summers, sweet flavors follow each meal. Juicy mangoes, watermelons, custard apples, bananas, papayas and guavas are preferred after heavy meals.

Food habits in Madhya Pradesh vary from region to region. Wheat and meat dominate the northern and western regions, while the people of wetter south and east prefer rice and fish. In certain regions of Madhya Pradesh, people consume rice and fish in a daily manner. Bhopal is famous for its rich variety of meat and fish dishes. Piquant delicacies like rogan josh, korma, keema, biryani pilaf and kababs (shami and seekh) are very popular. Among drinks and beverages, lassi (buttermilk), sugarcane juice, sulfi (liquor distilled from the flowers of mahua tree) and date palm toddy are very famous.

Apart from the huge range of culinary delights, even the hospitability and generosity of the people of Madhya Pradesh is legendary and forms an important part of their food culture. They equate guests with God and are avid followers of the adage '*Atithi Devo Bhava*' (Guest is akin to God). Invitations for lunch and dinner are not uncommon. Especially in the villages of the state, the hospitality and warmth can be quite overpowering. Tables are laden with an array of dishes and people serve with a fervent pleasure. Moreover, generous second helpings are always welcome and considered as gestures of compliments to the host.

CENTRAL INDIA CUISINE

Cuisine of Central Zone of India consists of both sweet and salty dishes. People of this part of the country do not have a distinct cuisine of their own, but they have beautifully imbibed the best of the food cultures from the neighbouring states. This amalgamation of popular food cultures has resulted in the cuisine which is quite popular in its own right.

Chhatisgarh, which is an independent state today was till very recently a part of the larger state Madhya Pradesh. Popular choice of food in Chhatisgarh is hence very similar to that of Madhya Pradesh.

Food pattern in this zone differ from region to region. In some regions people take wheat and meat as their staple diet, but in other regions rice and fish is more common. Indore, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, offers the best of the food of this zone and is quite popular amongst foodies.

Most appreciable part of the states in this zone is that people are simple at heart and treat guests with the greatest respect. They have truly imbibed the tradition Indian saying, '*Atithi Devo Bhava*' and thus see God in any guest that visits them. Thus we have the best of Indian food served in the most hospitable manner in this zone. What else does a food tourist want??

THE HOSPITALITY OF PEOPLE

The people of Madhya Pradesh are a very warm and hospitable lot. People invite you for lunch and dinner at the drop of a hat. In the villages, especially, the hospitality can be quite overwhelming. Appetizers, piping hot food, second helpings and desserts are offered to the visitor as if there's no tomorrow. Refusing any course or helping is out of the question as it is taken as an insult to the host and his kitchen.

DELICACIES OF CUISINE

Indian meals are large, leisurely affairs with tables groaning under food and lots of heady (and heated!) conversation. Nobody believes in eating less of more here. If you like a dish you are expected to eat more of it; more often than not the hostess will serve you a generous second helping herself.

It is good manners to praise a dish; if you churlishly refuse to, your considerate host will take offence. Refusal to eat even a single course can lead to a crowd of people fussing all over you, pressing alternative dishes. At the end of a heavy meal if you burp dont be surprised to see an approving, indulgent smile playing on the hosts face. Burping is a sort of Indian equivalent of my compliments to the chef; I liked the food so much Ive stuffed myself silly.

DIVERSITY OF CUISINE

The cuisine in Madhya Pradesh varies from region to region. The north and west are mainly wheat-and-meat based, while the wetter south and east are rice and fish dominated.

Gwalior and Indore abound in milk and milk-based preparations. Bhopal produces exquisite meat and fish dishes, of which the spicy rogan josh, delicious korma, luscious keema, all-season favourite biryani pilaf and succulent kababs such as shami and seekh are almost legendary. But heavens dont even think of trying all of these together unless you want to get the stomach upset of the century. They are extremely rich, spicy and creamy dishes.

An interesting dish is the bafla (wheat cakes) dunked in rich ghee which are eaten with daal (a pungent lentil broth). The tongue-tingling sharpness of this combo is moderated by the sweet ladoos that follow it.

In summers the meals tend to end with fruit luscious mangoes (dusseharis) which you must try and take home), juicy melons and watermelons, custard apples, bananas, papayas, guavas. To drink, there is lassi (buttermilk), sugarcane juice, an excellent beer and a fine rum which is produced from the cane. For stronger (and more adventurous) heads there is the local liquor which is distilled from the flowers of the mahua tree called sulfi and date palm toddy.

RECIPES IN MADHYA PRADESH & CHATTISGARH

People of Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh are fond of sweets and namkeens. Though they do not have a distinct food style of their own they have imbibed the best of the recipes of other states of India and given them a distinct flavour of Madhya Pradesh. Influence of recipes of other states is stronger in Madhya Pradesh as a large number of people from different corners of the country came and settled in this erstwhile largest state of the country.

Staple food of the people in these states is wheat, jowar and maize. The meals are also inclusive of protein rich lentils. Most commonly consumed of all is the Arhar dal. People cook vegetables in variety of styles as these are must part of the daily food habit of the people. People of Madhya Pradesh are very much fond of sweets and this is duly reflected in the cuisine of this state. Food pattern in these states varies from region to region. In some regions people consume rice and fish in their daily routine. Dairy based dishes are more commonly used in Gwalior and Indore districts.

The best part of these states is that people here are extremely hospitable and treat guests with utmost respect and generosity. The old Indian saying of 'Atithi Devo Bhava', meaning guests is as God comes true to this state.

Some famous dishes are:

1. **Kusli**
2. **Lavang Lata**
3. **Cashew Barfi**
4. **Jalebi**
5. **Khurma**
6. **Sabudana Ki Khichadi**
7. **Moong Dal Ka Halwa (Lentil Pudding)**
8. **Shikanji**