

# PUNJABI CUISINE

## INTRODUCTION

Punjabi cuisine (from the Punjab region of Northern India and Eastern Pakistan). Punjabi cuisine can be non-vegetarian or completely vegetarian. One of the main features of Punjabi cuisine is its diverse range of dishes. Home cooked and restaurant Punjabi cuisine can vary significantly, with restaurant style using large amounts of clarified butter, known locally as ghee, with liberal amounts of butter and cream with home cooked concentrating on mainly upon wheat masalas (spice) flavourings. Though wheat varieties form their staple food, Punjabis do cook rice on special occasions. During winter a delicacy, Roh Di Kheer, is cooked using rice. Rice is cooked for a long time in sugar cane juice.

Within the state itself, there are different preferences. People in the area of Amritsar prefer stuffed parathas and milk products. In fact, the area is well known for quality of its milk products. There are certain dishes which are exclusive to Punjab, such as Mah Di Dal and Sarson Da Saag (Sarson Ka Saag). The food is tailor-made for the Punjabi lifestyle in which most of the rural folk burn up a lot of calories while working in the fields. The main masala in a Punjabi dish consists of onion, garlic and ginger. Tandoori food is a Punjabi speciality especially for non-veg, dishes. Many of the most popular elements of Anglo-Indian cuisine - such as Tandoor. Naan, Pakoras and vegetable dishes with paneer - derive from the Punjab.

Punjabi people are robust people with robust appetites and their food is like the Punjabis themselves, simple, sizeable and hearty with no unnecessary frills or exotic accompaniments. The Punjabi tandoori cooking is celebrated as one of the most popular cuisines throughout the world. Huge earthen ovens are half buried in the ground and heated with a coal fire lit below it. Marinated meat, chicken, fish, paneer, rotis and naaris of many types are cooked in this novel oven and the results are absolutely scrumptious!

Punjab has imbibed some aspects of its cuisine from external influences. Connoisseurs of the cuisine say that the gravy component of Punjabi cuisine came from Mughals. The most popular example is the Murg Makhani. It served the state well to combine this influence in its cooking since it had a lot of pure ghee and butter. Murg makhani also provided a balance to tandoori chicken, which was dry because it was charcoal cooked. Nans and parathas, rotis made of maize flour are typical Punjabi breads. Of course, over the years the roti has been modified to add more variety, so there is the rumali roti, the naan and the lachha parathas, all cooked in the tandoor.

Winter, in Punjab, brings in the season of the famous makki ki roti (maize flour bread) and sarson ka saag (mustard leaf gravy). No meal is complete without a serving of lassi (sweet or salted drink made with curd) or fresh curd and white butter which is consumed in large quantities. The other popular dishes, which belong exclusively to Punjab, are Ma Ki Dal, Rajma (kidney beans) and stuffed parathas.

In a vastly diverse country like India, every region has something typical to offer whether it is in clothes or in food or in its music, dance and art.

Punjab, the land of milk and honey, boasts of a robust climate where the agricultural revolution has reaped rich dividends. The land of plenty has a cuisine, which caters to the characteristic needs of the people.

Punjabi cuisine is not subtle in its flavor. There are no intricate marinades or exotic sauces but it has full-bodied masalas (spices) cooked with liberal amount of desi ghee (clarified butter) always served with a liberal helping of butter or cream. Milk and its products are an essential part of every day cookery, curd and buttermilk are also an essential concomitant with every Punjabi meal.

A predominantly wheat eating people, the Punjabis cook rice only on special occasions. It's never eaten plain or steamed, for steamed rice implies that somebody is sick. Rice is eaten always with a Bagar (flavoring) of cumin or fried onions with Rajma or Kadhi, Rajma with rice or rice with Kadhi is eaten on holidays or on festive days. In winter rice is cooked with Gur or with peas called matarwale chawal or as a delicacy called Rao Ki Kheer which is rice cooked on very slow fire for hours together with sugar cane juice.

In Punjab itself, there are differences in flavors and style. For example, people around Amritsar prefer well-fried stuffed parathas and milk sweets. The people of Doaba region eat more of them, in the Malwa region Bajra (ground maize) khitchadi (kedgerie) is a delicacy. There are a course certain dishes, which are part and parcel of Punjab, and their very mention conjures up the rich flavour of the state. Mah Ki Dal, Sarson Ki Saag and Makkee Ki Roti, meat curry like Roghan Josh and stuffed parathas can be found in no other state except Punjab. The food is suitable for these who burn up a lot of calories while working in the fields and tilling their small acres. For the urban folk, however, eating even one dish is enough because life in the cities is so sedentary. The main masala in a Punjabi dish consists of onion, garlic, ginger and a lot of tomatoes fried in pure ghee.

*An average days meal would generally comprise :*

#### **BREAKFAST**

Stuffed Aloo Mattar (potatoes and peas) Paranthas and a glass of butter milk.

#### **LUNCH**

Sarson Ka Saag and Makki Ki Roti with onion Chutney.

#### **DINNER**

Mah Ki Dal, Bhunna Gosht, Tandoori Roti and Dahi Raita.

### **WHY PUNJAB CUISINE IS SPECIAL?**

Many gourmets believe that the Punjab is India's land of mills and honey - and that it has the best cooks in the nation. The food is rich, creamy and robust. Subtlety is not a priority.

### **PUNJAB CUISINE INSIGHTS**

Cooks liberally use dairy products including curds, cream, ghee (clarified butter) and churned milk (buttermilk). Diners in the Punjab love stuffed foods. Stuffed paratha bread is particularly popular, especially when filled with Vegetables.

Wheat, not rice, is the leading starch staple in the Punjab diet.

The external roots of Punjab cooking lie in ancient Persia and the Mughal Dynasty.

### **HALLMARKS OF PUNJABI FOOD**

Pulse, bean and /or lentil preparations:

Dal makhani (Mah di dal)

Dal maharani

Dal arnritsari

Lobiya (Black eyed bean)

Raj ma (Red kidney bean)

Choley (eaten with bhatoora or naan).(Whole Bengal gram e.g Bengal chickpeas)

Punj ratani dal (mixtures of 5 lentils) etc...

Saron (sarson) da slag to makki di roti

These are generally soaked overnight or for at least 8 hours and gently simmered on the embers of a tandoor (A clay oven of the shape of a horizontally sl iced pot) along with ginger, garlic and a few other garam masala (whole spices like cardamom, cinnamon, mace, and bay leaf).

These are then combined with a tangy masala base which could include tomato or dried mango (aam choor powder) or even pomegranate seeds (anar dana). The character typical to the bean or whole lentil preparation is that the shape is retained intact, but the gentlest pressure would make it into a paste.

Dollops of cream and butter provide for the rich finishing touch. Garnishing is usually with shredded coriander leaves and julienne of ginger.

#### ***Other very popular Punjabi food include:***

Samosas

Shahi Paneer (Butter Chicken, but chicken replaced with Paneer (Indian Cheese))

Tandoori Chicken

Tandoori Fish

Paneer Pakora

Pakorras

Jalebi

Gulab Jamun

## **FAMOUS SPECIALITIES OF PUNJAB**

**Tandoori Murg** - One of India's finest dishes. A halved or quartered chicken (murg) is marinated in yogurt and spices, then broiled inside the tandoor, a five-foot-deep jar shaped clay oven, usually sunk vertically in the ground.

**Tikka Murg** - Marinated large boneless chicken cubes are skewered then quickly cooked inside a scorchingly hot tandoor oven.

**Biryani** - A fragrant Punjab adaptation of the Middle Eastern Pilaf. The main ingredient rice is cooked in a pan with meat and/or vegetables, fruit and nuts, and spices.

**Raj ma** - Red kidney beans are simmered for several hours in a seasoned broth.

**Sarson Ka Sag** - Mustard leaves are simmered, then sauteed. The leaves become enticingly coated with a thick curry sauce.

**Makki Di Roti** - Cornbread (a wintertime treat). A perfect companion for the Sarson Ka Sag vegetarian dish.

**Lassi** - A refreshing yogurt drink. Comes sweetened or salted.

## **BREAD PREPERATION**

The Punjabi breads are generally flat breads, only a few varieties are raised breads. The breads may be made of different types of flour and can be made in various ways:

1. Baked in the tandoor like naan, tandoori roti, kulcha, lachha paratha
2. Dry baked on the tava (Indian griddle) like phulka or chapati, jowar ki roti, baajre ki roll and the very famous makke ki roti (these are also smeared with ghee or white butter)
3. Shallow fried like paratha, aloo or mooli paratha
4. Deep fried like puri and bhatoora (a fermented dough)

The tandoor also allows for tasty chicken and meat preparations including seekh kebab, tandoori chicken, reshmi tikka and malai tikka.

These breads can be made by just about everyone, however it is often said that it is only made the best with Punjabi hands. Punjabi people are especially skilled in the making of these various breads.