

NORTH INDIAN CUISINE

The ultimate destination of foodies is the North Zone of India. There is absolutely no dearth of variety for a creative gourmet in this part of the country. The zone is fortunate to be the hub of some of the most exotic styles of cooking. Many of which are renowned all over the world and regarded as the most developed and refined of all culinary arts.

Most famous of all is the Mughal Cuisine. National, capital, Delhi is the place to enjoy this style in its best form. Known for their love for life and lavish styles, Mughals treated their gastronomic requirement with a lot of seriousness. They added a touch of royalty to the food and produced mouth watering taste with the generous use of spices, sausages, dry-fruits and butter. Roasted in tandoors, the meat dishes taste out of this world.

A typical North Indian meal would consist of chappatis, parantha or pooris (unleavened flat breads), pilafs, dals, curries that are mild and made in ghee, thick, creamy dals, vegetables seasoned with yogurt or pomegranate powder, lots of greens like spinach and mustard greens cooked with paneer, north Indian pickles, fresh tomato, mint, cilantro chutneys and yogurt raitas. Hot, sweet cardamom milk is very common before going to bed. North Indian desserts and sweets are made of milk, paneer, lentil flour and wheat flour combined with dried nuts and garnished with a thin sheet of pure silver. Nimbu Pani (lemon drink), Lassi (iced buttermilk) are popular drinks of the North.

Tandoori cooking is a north Indian specialty and famous the world over. Tandoori chicken, naan, tandoori roti, tandoori kebabs are a hit in most Indian restaurants.

States included:

Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh.

Geographical and cultural influence on the region's cuisine: North India has extreme climates – summers are hot and winters are cold. There is an abundance of fresh seasonal fruit and vegetable to be had. Its geographical position with relation to the rest of the Sub-continent means that this region of the country has had strong Central Asian influences both in its culture and its food. Mughlai and Kashmiri styles of cooking are not just prevalent, they are also popular.

Style of food:

North Indian curries usually have thick, moderately spicy and creamy gravies. The use of dried fruits and nuts is fairly common even in everyday foods. Dairy products like milk, cream, cottage cheese, ghee (clarified butter) and yoghurt play an important role in the cooking of both savory and sweet dishes. Thanks to the fact that such a rich variety of fruit and vegetable is available at all times of the year, the region produces a dazzling array of vegetarian dishes.

Staple foods:

North Indians seem to prefer Indian breads over rice, if the rich variety is anything to go by. This region is home to the tandoori roti and naans (bread made in a clay tandoor oven), stuffed parathas (flaky Indian bread with different kinds of vegetarian and non-vegetarian fillings) and kulchas (bread made from fermented dough). Rice is also popular and made into elaborate biryanis and pulaos (pilafs).

Cooking oils commonly used:

Vegetable oils like sunflower and canola. Mustard oil is rarely used and only in some states of the region. Ghee is normally reserved for special occasion cooking.

Important spices and ingredients:

Coriander, Cumin, Dry red chillies, turmeric, Chilli powder, Cardamom, Cinnamon, Cloves, Garam Masala, Aniseed/Fennel, etc.

Popular dishes:

Mutter Paneer (a curry made with cottage cheese and peas), Biryani, Pulaos, Daal Makhani, Dahi Gosht, Butter Chicken, Chicken Tikka, Fish Amritsari, Samosas (snack with a pastry case with different kinds of fillings), Chaat (hot-sweet-sour snack made with potato, chick peas and tangy chutneys), Motichoor laddoo

Northern Indian cuisine has the following main schools of cooking :

Kashmiri, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Marwari, Gharwal and Pahari, UP, Awadh or Luchnawi.

Kashmiri - The piece de resistance in the wazwan, the traditional 24-course banquet with many cooking ways and varieties of meat - some in curry, some dry, some pounded in various sizes. These are carefully cooked by cooked overnight by the master chef, Vasta Waza, and his retinue of wazas. When I traveled to Kashmir with my family we were invited to a Wazwan given for a wedding. We were made to sit on the floor in fours and share the meal out of a large metal plate called the trami. The rice was in a mound in the center which was quartered for the four who sat around the trami. There was also an earthen pot of freshly made yogurt and chutney for us to share. The meal began with a ritual washing of hands at a basin called the tash-t-nari, which is taken around by attendants. We were served seekh kababs of 4 varieties - methi korma, tabak maaz, safed murg and zafrani murg, and the first few courses. Seven dishes are a must for these occasions-- Rista, Rogan Josh, Tabak Maaz, Daniwal Korma, Aab Gosht, Marchwangan Korma and Gushtaba.

Punjabi - Sarson ka saag, originating from Punjab. This dish of mustard greens simmered and slow cooked over coals along with rajma, kali ma or lentils and served in dhabas or roadside stalls which many say has the best food in Northern India. The dishes are served with unleavened bread of cornmeal or wheat and a dollop of butter or with steamed basmati rice.

Rajasthan - Gram flour or Besan is a major ingredient here and is used to make some of the delicacies like Khata, Gatte Ki Sabzi and Pakodi. Powdered lentils are used for Mangodi and Papad. Bajra and corn are used all over the state for preparations of Rabdi, Khichdi and Rotis. Sweets include Laddoos, Malpuas, Jalebies, Rasogullas, Mishri Mawa, Mawa Katchori, Sohan Halwa, Mawa and many more.

Uttar Pradesh - Most families in Uttar Pradesh eat vegetarian food. Banaras, India's holiest city is in UP, is famous for its bazaars full of 'jalebis', sweetmeats and a myriad variety of 'kachoris'. The 'pethas'.

Awadh style of cooking are world famous for its tender meat dishes and excellent sweets.

Lucknow is known world wide for its biryanis and different meat preparations. Nihari and naan, a mutton dish served for breakfast is one of the dishes that should be tasted to be believed.