

SOUTH INDIAN CUISINE

South Indian Cuisine is a term used to refer to the cuisines found in the four southern states of India, namely Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. As opposed to North Indian cuisine, there is limited use of garam masala and other dried spices except cardamom, black pepper and turmeric.

South Indian cuisine is rice based. Rice is combined with lentils to make wonderful dosas, idlis, vadas and uttapams. These items are glorious and delicious besides being nourishing and digestible (due to the fermenting process). They are combined with sambhar (dal), rasam (tamarind dal), dry and curried vegetable and pachadi (yogurt). Their rice preparations are also masterpieces like biryani from Hyderabad, lemon rice and rice seasoned with coconut peanuts, tamarind, chillies, curry leaves, urad dal and fenugreek seeds.

South Indian chutneys are made of tamarind, coconut, peanuts, dal, fenugreek seeds, and cilantro. Meals are followed by coffee. South Indian dals and curries are more soupy than North Indian dals and curries. South Indian cuisine is also hotter.

Coconut milk straight from the nut is a common beverage and sight in South India. Coffee is very popular in South India and Madras coffee is popular in South Indian restaurants throughout the world.

The South Indian food is a brilliant blend of flavors, colors, seasoning, nutritional balance, fragrance, taste, and visual appeal.

PARIMARAL - THE SOUTH INDIAN TRADITION OF SERVING A TRADITIONAL MEAL

A typical traditional meal in South India is served on a "Vazhailai", a freshly cut plantain leaf. The Sappad or food that is served on a banana leaf (even the size of the leaf varies from one community to another) is displayed like an identity card. One look and a guest will know the community, the status, the exact wealth of the family, and from where they originate.



The top half of the leaf is reserved for accessories, the lower half for the rice, and in some communities, the rice will be served only after the guest has been seated. The lower right portion of the leaf may have a scoop of warm sweet, milky rice Payasam, which should be lapped up quickly. While the top left includes a pinch of salt, a dash of pickle and a thimbleful of salad, or a smidgen of chutney. In the middle of the leaf there may be an odd number of fried items like small circles of chips, either banana, yam or potato, hard round discs of spiced, ground dal known as VADA, thin Papads, or frilly wafers, or Vada.

The top right hand corner is reserved for the heavy artillery, the curries, hot, sweet, or sour, and the dry items. If it is a vegetarian meal, the vegetables are carefully chosen, between the country ones—gourds, drumsticks, brinjals/eggplants—and the 'English' ones, which could be carrot, cabbage, and cauliflower. If it is a non-vegetarian meal, in some cases, a separate leaf is provided for the fried meats, chicken, fish, crab, and so on. But again, the variations are presented carefully, one dry one next to a gravies one.

There may be a side attraction such as a Puran Poli, or sweetened dal stuffed into a pancake, Puris, sweet rice or any one of the famed rice preparations such as Pulisadam, or Bisibela bath.

After having worked through the preliminaries, the long haul starts with the rice, which is generously doused with ghee. Sambhar, the highly spiced dal-based dish containing whatever appropriate vegetable there is in season, follows and this is succeeded by Rasam.

After a final round of rice and curds, or buttermilk or both, a traditional meal concludes with a small banana, a few betel leaves and nuts.

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN "FOUR STATES' CUISINES"

The similarities in the four states' cuisines are the presence of rice as a staple food, the use of lentils and mild spices (as opposed to the strong, pungent spices used by North Indian cuisine), use of dried red chillies and fresh green chillies, coconut and native fruits and vegetables like tamarind, plantain, snake gourd, garlic, ginger, etc.

The differences can be found below, but overall all the four cuisines have much in common and differ mostly in the spiciness or hotness of the food.

ANDHRA FOOD

Described as the spiciest of these four states' cuisines, there is a generous use of chilli powder (Guntur), oil and tamarind. The most famous food items are:

Vegetarian: Pesarattu, Pulihora (or Pulihaara), Gongura, Avakkai (cut raw mango) pickle.

Non-vegetarian: Kodi Iguru (fry), Kodi Pulusu (gravy), Chepa Pulusu etc., Hyderabadi Biryani

Andhra cuisine is largely vegetarian but the coastal areas have a large repertoire of seafood. The cuisine has many variety of dishes made from meat. Another factor to remember is that Hyderabad, being the capital of Andhra Pradesh, has its own characteristic cuisine considerably different from other Andhra cuisine. The Nawabs patronised the Hyderabadi cuisine which is very much like the Lucknowi cuisine of the Avadh. The only difference is that the Nawabs of Hyderabad liked their food to be spicier, so was born the

Hyderabadi cuisine which included the Kacche Gosht ki Biryani and the Dum ka Murgh, Baghara Baingan and Achaari Subzi during the reign of the Nawabs in Hyderabad. Fish and prawns are curried in sesame and coconut oils, and flavored with freshly ground pepper. Andhra food is served with rice. Rice, sambar and other lentil preparations, and steamed vegetables delicately flavored with coconut, spices and fresh herbs. Snack or tiffin time is made of many preparations like onion pakodas; vadas or savory lentil doughnuts dunked in steaming hot sambar; and steamed rice muffin like dumplings called idlis. Savories are murku, roundels of rice flour paste deep fried; and appadams. Desserts include payasam, a pudding made with rice and milk and the popular Sheer Khurma - a Hyderabadi delicacy with dry fruits and dates.

KARNATAKA FOOD

Described as the mildest (in terms of spice content) of these four states' cuisines, there is a generous use of palm sugar or brown sugar and sparingly used chili powder. Since the percentage of vegetarians in Karnataka is very high compared to the other states, vegetarian food is enjoyed by almost everyone for all meals of the day. Udupi cuisine forms an integral part of Karnataka cuisine. Some typical dishes include Bisibele bath, Ragi Rotti, Akki Rotti, Saaru, Vangi Bath, Khara Bath, Kesari Bath, Davanagere Benne Dosa, Ragi Mudde, and Uppittu. The famous Masala Dosa traces its origin to Udupi cuisine. Plain and Rave Idli, Mysore Masala Dosa and Maddur Vade are popular in South Karnataka. Coorg district is famous for spicy varieties of pork curries while coastal Karnataka boasts of many tasty sea food specialities. Among sweets, Mysore Pak, Dharwad Pedha, Pheni, Chiroti are well known.

A typical Kannad meal includes the following dishes in the order specified and is served on a banana leaf: Kosambari, Pickle, Palya, Gojju, Raita Dessert (Yes, it is a tradition to start your meal with a dessert (Paaysa!) Thovve Chitranna Rice Ghee. What follows next is a series of soup like dishes such as Saaru, Majjige Huli or Kootu which is eaten with hot rice. Gojju or Raita is served next; two or three desserts are served; fried dish such as Aambode or Bonda is served next. The meal ends with a serving of curd rice.

KERALA FOOD

Kerala cuisine is not so diverse when compared to the other South Indian states. Since Kerala's main export is coconuts, almost all of the foods have coconuts associated with them, either in the form of shavings or oil extracted from the nut. Also there are a lot of seafood based specialities, which can be sometimes be customized for vegetarians.

Kerala is noted for its variety of pancakes and steamed rice cakes made from pounded rice. For the Muslims, the lightly flavored Biryani-made of mutton, chicken, egg or fish-takes pride of place. In seafood, mussels are a favorite. For the Christians, who can be seen in large concentration in areas like Kottayam and Pala, Ishtew (a derivation of the European stew), with Appam is a must for every marriage reception. Kerala also has it's own fermented beverages -the famous Kallu (Toddy) and Patta Charayam (Arrack). Arrack is extremely intoxicating and is usually consumed with spicy pickles and boiled eggs (Patta and Mutta).

Vegetarian: Olan, Paalpradaman, Nendarangai Chips, Aviyal.

Non-vegetarian: Shrimp Coconut Curry, Fish Poriyal.

Typical Indian Masala Dosa (Kerala style): It is a combination of shredded cooked and fried vegetables with Indian sauce and a lot of spices as the basic stuffing, enveloped by a thick brown Dosa made out of a dal and rice batter. To add to this unique preparation it is served with hot Sambhar and coconut chutney.

TAMIL FOOD

Some vegetarian and non-vegetarian specialties of Tamil cuisine are shown below.

Vegetarian: Idli, Sambar, Vadai, Rasam, Dosa, Thayir Sadam (yogurt rice), Thayir Vadai (yogurt-soaked fritters), Kootu (made with any vegetable with lots of liquid), Poriyal (made with any vegetable in dry style), Murukku, Uthappam, Idiappam, Appalam and Papadam (fried chips), freshly made Thayir Pachidi (yogurt mixed with uncooked vegetables).

Non-vegetarian: Karuvadu Kozhumu (dried preserved fish flavored curry), Chettinad Pepper Chicken, Fish Fry

Food is generally classified into six tastes - sweet, sour, salt, bitter, pungent & astringent and traditional Tamil cuisine recommends that you include all of these six tastes in each main meal you eat. Each taste has a balancing ability and including some of each provides complete nutrition, minimizes cravings and balances the appetite and digestion.

Sweet (Milk, butter, sweet cream, wheat, ghee (clarified butter), rice, honey) Sour (Limes and lemons, citrus fruits, yogurt, mango, tamarind) Salty (Salt or pickles) Bitter (Bitter gourd, greens of many kinds, turmeric, fenugreek) Pungent (Chili peppers, ginger, black pepper, clove, mustard) Astringent (Beans, lentils, turmeric, vegetables like cauliflower and cabbage, cilantro)

A typical meal (Lunch or Dinner) will be served on a banana leaf. As the staple diet is rice, steamed rice will be served along with a variety of vegetable dishes like sambar, dry curry, rasam and kootu. Meals are often accompanied by crisp appalams. After a final round of rice and curds or buttermilk or both, a meal is concluded with a small banana and a few betel leaves and nuts.

Chettinad cuisine is famous for its use of a variety of spices used in preparing mainly non-vegetarian food. The dishes are hot and pungent with fresh ground masalas, and topped with a boiled egg that is usually considered essential part of a meal. They also use a variety of sun dried meats and salted vegetables, reflecting the dry environment of the region. The meat is restricted to fish, prawn, lobster, crab, chicken and mutton. Chettiars do not eat beef and pork.

Most of the dishes are eaten with rice and rice based accompaniments such as Dosais, Appams, Idiyappams, Adais and Idlis. The Chettinad people through their mercantile contacts with Burma, learnt to prepare a type of rice pudding made with sticky red rice. Chettinad cuisine offers a variety of vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. Some of the popular vegetarian dishes include Idiyappam, Paniyaram, Vellai Paniyaram, Karuppatti Paniyaram, Paal Paniyaram, Kuzhi Paniyaram, Kozhakattai, Masala Paniyaram, Adikoozh, Kandharappam, Seeyam, Masala Seeyam, Kavuni Arisi & Athirasam.