

Indian food



The Distinctive Northern Indian Cuisine After discovering that I must write a research paper on a topic of choice from India, I immediately decided that the cuisine of India was of most interest. I am one that loves food, and I enjoy foods of other cultures. I am Greek, so I love European foods, and India is a bit of a change from what I am used to, therefore I was interested in the food of India. My task is to research the cuisine of Northern India. Features of the Northern Indian cuisine that interest me are the history and the current style of the Northern Indian cuisine.

I am always interested in seeing how a culture progresses over time. India has rich and varied cooking traditions, many deeply trapped with spiritual traditions that are thousands of years old. Other cooking styles arrived throughout India's long history with those who wandered into the land from afar and settled here and there. Still others have been shaped by the natural forces of climate and geography. These many cooking styles can be generally divided into four regional cuisines, with north Indian flavors and style standing out distinctly from the rest.

The northern part of India is said to be part of the India in which the influence of the early light-skinned Aryan invaders can still be seen, in the cuisine, culture, and language. This is the part of the world in which Sanskrit is believed to have evolved. Due to climate and growing conditions, wheat plays a stronger role in northern Indian cuisine than in other areas of the country. There are many states that make up the Northern Indian cuisine. Kashmiri cuisine is a unique blend of Indian, Iranian, and Afghani cuisines.

It is essentially meat-based and centered on a main course of rice. Unlike the Brahmins in other parts of the country, the Kashmiri Brahmins are nonvegetarian. Punjabi cuisine is simple, substantial, and robust, reflecting the extremes in climate and the industrious nature of its people. It forms a distinctive part of the culture. Everyday meals are centered on bread.

Parathas (breads that are plain or stuffed with shredded, seasonal vegetables, seasoned with herbs and spices, and baked on a hot griddle) are favored for breakfast, served with a dollop of homemade butter.

Uttar Pradesh is best categorized by the cities of Benaras, which is traditionally Hindu in character, and Lucknow, which is traditionally Muslim in character. Rajasthan's cuisine has been influenced by the availability of food resources in the desert state and by the warlike lifestyle of the Maharajas. The food had to be cooked in such a way that it would last for several days when the men went off to war. The scarcity of water gave rise to a cuisine that is cooked with very little or no water. This is especially true of the desert belt, where milk, buttermilk, or ghee is often substituted for water.

Spices are an essential element to Indian cuisine, and they employ some of the most aromatic and beautiful spices on earth. Historically, however, in addition to adding delectable flavors and attractive aromas, the spices were chosen for their food preservation and medicinal properties. While many spices are common throughout most Indian cuisines, the methods and ratios of usage differ in each region, with some spices being much more common in some areas and other flavors being more specific. North Indian cooks tend to use their spices in freshly ground powder form.

Chili peppers are common to Indian cuisine, and in the north, Mirch, or Kashmiri chili pepper are especially popular. Ground red chili powder is important northern Indian flavor, as is turmeric, sweet bay or laurel leaves, cumin, black and green cardamom, coriander, and cassia tree bark. Garam masala is a spice mixture used extensively in northern Indian cuisine. This is a blend of spices, which is loosely built upon a set of common spices, but varies widely from region to region, even from family to family. In the north, a basic garam masala would consist of raw cardamom seeds, cinnamon, cloves, and black pepper.

Ghee, or clarified butter, is particularly important to the flavor of northern cuisine. Flat breads of various types, including chapattis, roti, puri, different types of parantha, and tandoori baked breads like nan are a part of most north Indian meals. Showing the religious influence of the Vaishnava Hindus, the northern states (Uttar Pradesh in particular) have created some of the finest vegetarian cuisine in the world, built upon a wide variety of pulses, or legumes and fragrant Basmati rice. The well-defined seasons of India bring with them a series of particular fruits and vegetables.

Thus, menus and diets vary considerably year round from lush berries in the early days of summer to ripe watermelons available during the later hot weeks of the same season. Certain seasons are associated with specific foods, according to the "Sushruta Samhita", an ancient medical text, written around 600 B. C. E. It recommends pungent foods in spring, sweet and cold in summer, salty and sour during the rains, sweet in autumn, and greasy and hot in winter. Traditionally, Indian food is served as a complete meal in one course.

It is composed of several vegetables, a dal (a purée of lentils), and a central starch, which is the main source of calories. Yogurt, relishes, and chutneys are served on the side. In the North, the starch is unleavened bread, such as chapati (a flat griddle bread). People in the North tend to eat more wheat and maize, which are easily available and made into bread. Pulses high in protein, carbohydrates, and fiber have always played an important part in the diet of Indians. For vegetarians, pulses provide essential proteins. The most commonly eaten meats are chicken, mutton, and fish. A rice-based sweet usually signifies the end of a meal.

Savory and sweet snacks are very popular, but do not correspond to specific meals or dishes. Northern India has a great tradition of "snacking." Alcohol is not consumed along with food, but iced water or lassi (a yogurt-based drink) usually accompanies the meal. North Indians place great emphasis on the use of milk and milk products in their cuisine. This is particularly true of the Punjabis, who use a great deal of ghee (clarified butter), white butter, paneer (homemade cottage cheese), and cream in their cooking. For those who cannot afford or tolerate ghee, the preferred oils are mustard and peanut.

There is a religious significance to many foods in Northern India. Rice has an important place in Hindu religious ceremonies. During weddings, it is thrown into the fire because it is the symbol of fertility. When the Hindu bride leaves her maternal home for the last time, she throws fistfuls of rice over her head, signifying the riches of her childhood home. Similarly, when she enters the home of her husband for the first time, she knocks over pots of rice that line

the entrance to the house. The extent to which the grains spill across the floor denotes the prosperity the bride will bring to her new family.

Rice is also a traditional dish in the daily menu offerings at the temple.

Legend has it that an ancient king dreamed Lord Jagannath had asked him to introduce boiled rice in the menu at the temple. The monks, unwilling to partake of the plain , even when the king told them of his dream, decided to feed it to a dumb monk first to see if he regained his powers of speech before accepting the rice as temple food. According to legend, not only did the monk retrieve his powers of speech, he also recited all the verses from the Vedas. Mango leaves and fruit also have religious connotations.

It is said that mango is the favored fruit of Ganesha, the deity who can remove any obstacles. All those who wish to have their desires fulfilled string a garland of mango leaves on their front doors. Ghee has great religious significance as it is considered pure. It is used in all Hindu ceremonies, burned in every temple lamp, and used during cremation. Associated with the Sikh community of Punjab, an offering of wheat flour, clarified butter, and sugar in equal amounts is made to the gods symbolizing universal brotherhood. During its preparation, hymns are sung in the food's praise.

North Indian flavors have become an important part of international cuisine, spreading through the world's metropolitan centers and into the food cultures of many countries. Beloved especially for its specialized tandoori dishes and vegetarian creations, North Indian cuisine continues to expand and flourish globally. References: <http://www.indianfoodsco.com/Classes/NorthIndian.htm> <http://www.indianmirror.com/cuisine/cus5>.

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