

NORTH INDIA CUISINE

This Flavor Focus has been a long time coming. And now at last, we're taking on a global cuisine and flavor-filled world that fully satiates our true obsession and nerdism around spices - we're headed to India.

But India is freaking enormous.

The country has a wonderful and expansive diversity of region, climate and culture; Indian cuisine is beloved for its bold flavors, aromatic spices, and almost endless array of dishes - but the regional variances, customs and traditions deserve focus and their time at the table.

That's why we're honing in on a specific region so we can attempt to make a proper deep dive: join us as we explore North India: Mumbai, Delhi and beyond.

Known for more rich and decadent dishes, indulgent ghee-dripping breads and tandoor-smoked meats - sit back while we let the flavors and spices of this region bloom, while we also play with ways to experiment with these traditional flavors.



CUISINE CRED CHECK

MEET CHEF AKSHAY BHARDWAJ

Chef Akshay has skyrocketed into the culinary stratosphere in a relatively short amount of time - and there's no stopping the bold new flavor and dish innovations on his horizon. And while his family hails from New Delhi, Akshay has been making his mark and bringing the large world of Indian fare to the small island of Manhattan.

So while we dive deep into the flavors and food of North India - we're tapping a bone-fide, Michelin Star-winning expert chef to keep us honest.

NAME: Chef Akshay Bhardwaj

THAT HANDLE: @akshaycooks

IN THE INDUSTRY: 10+ years

KNOWN FOR: Executive Chef at Junoon in NYC that received a total of three Michelin Stars under his leadership, plus named on the Forbes Under 30 List



AKSHAY HOT TAKE:

Growing up within an Indian family, food is such an important part of the day, the community and the culture. I first found a love of eating, before I had a love of cooking.



INDIA: A COUNTRY FULL OF FLAVOR

There's one thing all regions of India share: their cuisines are heavily influenced by the local landscape and climate. Just like any other global region - the agriculture, livestock, and local ingredients available both dictate and inspire the cooks in the kitchen.

WE TAKE A *VERY* HIGH-LEVEL LOOK AT THE MAJOR REGIONS WITHIN INDIA AND COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF THEIR CUISINES:



WEST INDIA
A true melting pot, to this day there's a scarcity of fresh fruits and veggies across the region, but despite the lack of fresh produce, the majority of locals follow a plant-based diet. That means dried lentils and legumes can be found in most dishes. And Mumbai, one of the largest cities in India, is world-famous for its rich seafood, meat dishes and street food.

SOUTH INDIA
This tropical and coastal climate is catalyst to a lighter, rice-based diet rich in coconut, tamarind, plantains, lemongrass, native fruits, and dried chiles. Lighter oils and generous use of spices are used with seafood dishes. The cuisine also reflects Ayurvedic traditions of medicine that seeks to restore the mind and body's health and vitality through natural means and foods.

CENTRAL INDIA
Here hot peppers on even hotter days means sweat will keep you cooler. The hot and arid climate leads to this preference toward chili peppers, plus a heavy Mughal influence means plenty of meaty dishes like kebabs alongside traditional vegetarian dishes.

EAST INDIA
With a humid climate and extensive river and lake systems, fresh produce and rice are plentiful here. From creamy tomato fish curries to lentil stews, much of this region's cuisine revolves around providing some cooling from the heat, like cold yogurt dishes, in addition to Bengali fried snacks and sweets.

...and without further ado...

NORTH INDIA

With the Himalayas to the north and home to "the food bowl", the rolling landscape of North India creates a food scene somewhat mirroring European and American agriculture with fields of wheat, rice, corn, and dairy alongside Indian aromatic spices.

Pair the geography with the region's history of immigration, trade, and conquest (mainly Persian, Turkish and African influence), and you can start to recognize dishes that remain popular to this day.

The Mughals brought dairy to the forefront with paneer, ghee and yogurt, and this dairy tradition is the signature of the richer dishes North India is known for like melt-in-your-mouth Tandoori Chicken, creamy curries and Chicken Tikka Masala. Tibetan traditions also shows up in more hearty, comfort dishes like dumplings and stews.

AKSHAY HOT TAKE:

North Indian cuisine basics include whole wheat roti and flour-based breads versus rice. Lentils and vegetables, meats from chicken to mutton, and the spice blends are more cumin and coriander based with green chiles, ginger, garlic, and using ghee and heavy cream and butter.



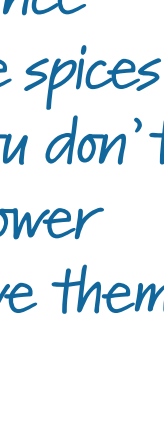
TRADITIONAL COOKING TECHNIQUES TO TRY

The evocative and downright delicious-smelling aromas of onions and garlic sauteeing slowly until they become a jammy caramelized consistency is some magical stuff.

But that's just the beginning of where technique, tradition and creativity merge in the kitchen while making North Indian-inspired dishes. Let's dive into the various cooking techniques often used to make this regional fare:

AKSHAY HOT TAKE:

I love a good goat curry - I do a golden korma, which is more of a nutty-based gravy. The gravy starts with onions that are really deeply cooked in butter so they caramelize and almost add a sweetness using the bhuno technique. I'll typically add cashews, poppy seeds, almonds, and maybe walnuts, then spices and a yogurt to smooth out the sauce.



<p>BALCHAO aka fermentation.</p> <p>Seafood or vegetables are pickled with vinegar and spices and then reduced to a drier consistency and consumed with rice or bread.</p>	<p>BHAPA aka steaming.</p> <p>This pot-in-pot steaming technique uses a perforated utensil with the food placed in a container, and water is used to steam the food.</p>	<p>BHUNAO aka sauteeing.</p> <p>Sauteeing and constantly stir-frying ingredients like onions, garlic, tomatoes, etc. at low heat until the food loses its moisture and caramelizes.</p>
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<p>DHUNGAR aka coal smoking.</p> <p>Live coal is added to a container and that container is kept in the food while cooking. Hot oil or ghee is poured over the coal, which creates smoke to infuse the flavor.</p>	<p>DUM aka slow cooking.</p> <p>An ancient and time-consuming process, this low and slow technique produces amazing flavor. Cook food on low heat using the steam that is trapped inside the pot or pan, and the food is cooked in its own juices to become tender.</p>	<p>TADKA aka tempering.</p> <p>Heat ghee or oil and bloom spices to infuse the fat and bring out the bold flavors of the spices.</p>
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<p>TALNA aka deep-frying.</p> <p>This ancient process was created to increase the shelf life of food while traveling long distances - also because deep fried food is decadently delicious (samosas, anyone?).</p>	<p>TANDOORI aka clay oven cooking.</p> <p>Marinated meats are placed on skewers and into a wood-fired clay oven. Flatbread dough is slapped to the side of the oven to bake, infusing a smoky flavor.</p>
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We're biased that spices are at the heart of these cooking techniques - question is: which one will you try first?

NORTH INDIAN FLATBREAD BREAKDOWN

WE'RE TALKIN' NAAN, ROTI AND PARATHA

India and North India is home to dozens of delicious carb-y breads for all those countless dishes. But we're breaking down the differences between the big three in the northern region: naan, roti and paratha.

NAAN:
HISTORY: Aiding 1300 A.D., the Mughals made it a staple in the royal court in the 1500s and the bread eventually made its way into every day life as Curry's counterpart
TEXTURE: Because naan is leavened and rises with yeast and made with all-purpose flour, it has a rich, soft, chewy, and puffy texture
FLAVOR: Slightly charred and smoky then brushed with ghee or butter and topped with garlic and chopped coriander leaves
METHOD: Cooked in a tandoor (clay oven)
CHEF TIP: Don't have a tandoor? Use a pizza stone or a cast-iron skillet in the oven at the highest temperature; place the rolled naan directly on the hot surface to achieve that signature charred effect.

ROTI:
HISTORY: The origin of roti has been attributed to East African merchants, the Persians and the Mughals, but - whoever gets the credit - it's been around for centuries.
TEXTURE: Because there's no yeast used and made with whole wheat flour, roti is thin and dense, but pliable
FLAVOR: Slightly earthy with a slight char
METHOD: Cooked in a tawa (flat griddle), the bread will puff up and then finish flat
CHEF TIP: Use a gentle touch - apply light pressure with a spatula or a clean kitchen towel - this will help the roti puff up evenly and result in a light and airy texture.

PARATHA:
HISTORY: First mentioned in a 12th-century Sanskrit encyclopedia.
TEXTURE: Flaky layers with a creamy filling
FLAVOR: Rich with a buttery crisp and indulgent savory filling
METHOD: The dough is rolled out, folded, and rolled again to create multiple layers and then often stuffed with a filling like potato, paneer or spinach. It's then baked in a tawa skillet with oil or ghee until crispy. This can be an meal or side and served with condiments like yogurt, pickles and chutney
CHEF TIP: Use plenty of ghee to get that crispy texture and make sure the dough is rolled out evenly (not too thick or thin) this will help seal the filling and prevent it from oozing out during cooking.

Flavor Up that Flatbread
Like everything that has to do with dough - you can - and should - **EXPERIMENT WITH FLAVOR.** You can mix in ingredients like **CUMIN, CARDAMOM, AND FENNEL SEED,** or amp up the flavor with blends like Garam Masala, Curry Madras, Tandoori Glory - or fusion flavors with Tomatodro, Jamaican Jerk, Nashville Hot, Purple Haze, Pumpkin Spice, and more.

EXPERIMENT WITH FLAVOR

OUR SPICEOLOGISTS SERVE UP THEIR TAKES ON NORTH INDIA-INSPIRED DISHES.

- Breakfast: **Tandoori Glory Sticky Buns** MIN 10268
- Lunch: **Curry Madras Butter Chicken** MIN 10143
- Appetizer: **Cumin, Coriander and Turmeric Aloo Bonda Masala** MIN 10141, 10138, 10275
- Dinner: **Garam Masala Curried Beef Tagine Oso Bucco** MIN 11582
- Sides: **Tandoori Glory Roasted Carrots with Maple Yogurt** MIN 10268
- Dessert: **Mango Tango Carrot Pudding** MIN 10602
- Drink: **Curry Madras White Cocoa with Tandoori Glory Marshmallows** MIN 10143, 10268

THE GREAT GARAM MASALA MULTIVERSE

Garam Masala is one of the OG all-purpose blends in the spice world. And even though it's one of the most well-known spice blends in the world and a staple in global kitchens - it's close to impossible to define what Garam Masala actually is because there is no single recipe for it.

That's because the blend's ingredients vary by region, family traditions and preference. Also, climate. Cuisine. Local ingredients. The Garam Masala multiverse variations are endless. The blend can consist of as few as five ingredients and up to 30+, including cardamom, nutmeg, cinnamon, fennel seeds, ginger, garlic, mustard seeds, mace, star anise, tamarind, fenugreek, bay leaves, dried red chiles, and more.

Garam Masala is thought to have originated in Northern Indian cuisine with the first use during the Mongol Empire in the 13th century. In Ayurvedic medicine, the ancient Indian medical system, the spices in the blend are warming, which increases the metabolism (rather than being hot in flavor). Northern India has more areas that have cold seasons, so warming spices are more prevalent. Garam Masala spread throughout the subcontinent and never really stopped.

Garam Masala from Northern India often only black pepper to bring heat to aromatic and sweet spices, creating a milder blend. But the farther south you go in India, the hotter the Garam Masala thanks to more chiles.

So what about Spiceology's Garam Masala? Our fresh-ground warming spices is a bold blend of big cardamom, cinnamon, clove, cumin, and nutmeg flavors. But feel free to experiment and add other ingredients to make your mark in the Garam Masala multiverse.



AKSHAY HOT TAKE:

Green Cardamom is one of the most under-valued spices. It's also one of the few spices you can add into every type of dish - it literally can go in everything and all courses of your menu.

NORTH INDIA-INSPIRED INGREDIENTS & BLENDS

Bring North India-inspired flavors into your kitchen with these spices and blends:

SHOP NORTH INDIA-INSPIRED BLENDS & INGREDIENTS

REACH OUT TO YOUR DISTRO REP OR SALES@SPICEOLOGY.COM WITH QUESTIONS.