

Cooking classes are becoming a fun way of exploring a new city through the culinary route



A typical vacation would include scurrying for local ingredients and cooking with them

A cooking vacation

BINDU GOPAL RAO

HOLIDAYS today are all about immersive experiences where you see a city in offbeat ways. And one of the best ways to understand the ethos of a city is through its cuisine. This is a key reason why cooking classes are now being offered to tourists and guests as part of understanding a city's culinary roots.

Local lore

Cooking classes are offered in a variety of combinations. A class can last an hour and a culinary tour could run into days. It is really about how much you want to know and appreciate food.

Neha Gupta, founder, Saffron Palate, teaches cooking lessons from her kitchen studio at home. "I mostly take classes in North Indian food as I am based in Delhi. Sometimes, based on requests, I also

teach South Indian. We want to provide the global traveller an authentic experience of Indian food and culture." They also organise market walks to orient the guest with the local vegetables, spices and the like.

Rita Shinde, proprietor, Rita's Gourmet Goa, runs cooking classes curated to impart culinary experiences in Goan cuisine to domestic and international tourists. Her day-long cooking class includes a five-hour tour to the local farmers' market. Besides, she also conducts two five-day cookery workshops and culinary tours. "I always had a passion for Goan and Portuguese cuisines. In the last eight years, this passion has turned into a full-time profession," she says.

Conversations & more

Activities like cooking lessons also help build an interesting conversation as well as the relationship between guests and

chefs. Chef David Ansted, Executive Chef at Grand Hyatt Goa, says, "Our chefs put in a lot of effort in bringing out the best recipes to the table. The food is crafted with great passion and attention to detail. However, the biggest compliment for us is when a guest requests for the recipe." Fleur Soumer, head of Sita Cultural Centre, Pondicherry, feels food is the best way to discover any culture. "Pondicherry is a multi-cultural city and people coming here love to explore it through its many cuisines."

A dash of ayurveda

An important aspect of many of these cooking classes is that they advocate Ayurveda as a way of life, which believes that prevention is better than cure and what you eat decides the quality of your life.

Ayurveda never prescribes refrigerated food as nature wants us to consume fresh food. Taking this idea to the guests is

Kairali—The Ayurvedic Healing Village. "We explain the ingredients and their benefits to our guests. They are free to just take notes or join us and cook using those ingredients. Our daily cooking regimes also help people understand that simple food is not just tasty but also nutritious," says Gita Ramesh, joint managing director, Kairali Ayurvedic Group. Similarly, Naturoville organises weekly classes where enthusiasts are taught the basic principles of Ayurvedic cuisine. "We want our guests to understand that Ayurveda does not exclude any major food groups but teaches you how to prepare all types of food for optimal digestion and absorption. It is a food therapy that can be customised for the individual to optimise healing and boost energy rapidly," explains De Thomas Varghese, VP & chief consultant at Naturoville.

The next time you holiday, take the culinary route and discover the many joys of ingredients and cuisines.

Trends we'd like to see

MOVE on, we must, but there are some major trends from the last decade that we'd love to transpose into the New Year.

Farm-to-table dining

Organic, fresh and healthy "farm-to-table" dining is a welcome change from the toxic, pesticide-ridden, genetically modified food that's usually sold in the markets. The concept includes an aesthetic (exposed brick walls, plain tables, Edison bulbs) along with a mission to serve local, sustainably produced food sourced from farmers markets. Menus change with the seasons. Now, if only they would make the food tasty...



Girls@gupshup
ARADHIKA SHARMA

Sessionable craft beer

The later years of the decade saw an explosion of lighter, locally produced sessionable craft beer. For the uninitiated, sessionable beer denotes a drink that contains low amounts of alcohol, so that several can be consumed in one drinking "session". The said beer is easily drinkable, light, refreshing. Now if only they can make it low-cal too.

Informality

Millionaires wear jeans and keds, eschewing the traditional suits, ties and highly polished leather shoes. Traditional marriages are becoming archaic, making way for a more informal live in culture. Politicians (not Indian) employ fewer security men. Job opportunities are increasing in informal economies; Written and interpersonal communication is becoming increasingly informal. (Vaise, I still prefer being addressed as 'ma'am' by people two decades younger than I am!)

Inclusivity and diversity in fashion

Designers got committed to making the fashion labels more inclusive in terms of models, designs and ramps. To promote diversity, they used models who were pregnant, plus size, transgender, breast cancer survivors, wearing hijab and amputees. They threw sizing restrictions out of their dressing rooms. They cast aside ageism and put models in their 80s on the covers of fashion magazines.

(Looks like I still may have a chance to make it to the ramp!)

Average Joe heroes

Move over, Alpha male heroes! 'Everyman heroes' like Ayushman Khurrana, Rajkumar Rao and, recently, Vikrant Massey are trying out new personas that challenge toxic maleness. Such characters are usually working or middle class and deal with everyday problems which make them much more relatable. What a pleasant relief that heroes can talk about having erectile dysfunction or being bald or being afraid of being ordinary. Ordinary rocks, dude!

Yoga and spirituality

The practices are old wines in new, designer bottles marketed by the likes of Bikram Chaudhary while the old traditional park-style yoga has been appropriated by domestic gurus like Swami Ramdev. Whether it is people doing 'hot yoga' in their Lululemon gear or aunties stretching into a *tadasana* in their loose *salwar-kameez*, the world is busy doing *pranayams* and twisting their bodies into various impossible postures.

Reduced emissions and electric cars

Auto giants strode towards meeting regulatory requirements for reduced emissions and improved fuel economy, controlling production and development costs and achieving engine durability while increasing output.

All the major global car companies have announced their versions of the EVs with faster charging, reduced costs and better energy density of batteries. How environmental friendly! If only they'd make these vehicles more affordable...

Binging, guilt free



FOOD
TALK

PUSHPESH PANT

AFTER the uninhibited eating binges during X-mas and New Year celebrations — roasts, cakes, and other rich repast — it is time for course correction. Sanity demands that stomach be given the much-needed rest, but, the titillated senses resist. We always find this time of the year particularly difficult to endure. The question that haunts constantly is what would be pleasing to the eyes and tempting for the palate but not a burden on the stomach?

Fortunately, this is when the markets are flooded with seasonal vegetables, colourful and crunchy, and full of goodness. These lend themselves to a variety of cooking techniques — steaming, boiling, grilling, stir frying, baking etc. They complement each other in taste and texture and can co-exist harmoniously with many a fruit.

It's a joy to make a 'one-pot meal' from mixed vegetables. The best thing is it doesn't require the 'crutches' of rice and *roti*. If you can't live without grains, you may serve the veggies on a bed of steamed rice or have a *roti* or a slice of bread on the side. But for us the carbs contributed by potatoes, sweet potatoes and sweet corn are enough. We suggest that you play around with the sauce-like gravy/dressing and keep tinkering with the seasoning. We love this melange laced with a spoonful of *aachar masala* stirred in as the vegetables are simmering. Yet another way to make the meal more 'substantial' is to boil a cupful of pasta — whole wheat penne or macaroni — and toss it in with the vegetables.

And, as you may have noticed, this hundred percent *shakahari* recipe eschews the *tamasik* and prohibitively expensive onions totally! The tear-jerker isn't indispensable after all. Garlic has suffered exclusion not due to the company it usually keeps but because it interferes with the distinct flavour of different vegetables. If you like that extra crunch, do not hesitate to add a generous fistful of roasted peanuts, parched gram or puffed rice!



VEGGIE POT

INGREDIENTS:

Carrots (scraped, cut in discs or batons)	100g
Cauliflower florets	100g
Green peas (net shelled)	100g
Sweet corn kernels	200g
Potatoes	100g
Sweet potatoes (roasted, peeled, cut)	100g
Tomatoes	200g
Button mushrooms	100g
Butter	100g
Chilli flakes	1 tsp
Cumin powder	1 tsp
Homemade garam masala/chaat masala	
Sambar masala	1 tsp
Black peppercorn powder	1/2 tsp
Salt to taste	
Sugar (optional)	1 tsp
Lemon juice	1 tsp

METHOD:

Parboil and peel the potatoes. Cut lengthwise in wedges. Pan grill in a little butter on a non-stick pan. Boil lightly (or steam) cauliflower, carrots, sweet corn and peas. Wipe clean mushrooms and slice. Blanch the tomatoes, remove the skin and chop finely.

Heat butter in a pan and when it melts, add the potatoes. Pan grill for a couple of minutes until light brown, then add the mushrooms, stir fry for a minute more and add the other vegetables, except the sweet potatoes, along with chopped tomatoes and salt. Sprinkle chilli flakes, black peppercorn powder and masala mix of your choice. Cook on low medium heat till the sauce drapes the vegetables evenly. Adjust seasoning, sprinkle lemon juice and enjoy hot.

That missing sense of parking



GOOD
MOTORING

H. KISHIE SINGH

Indian drivers are considered about the worst in the world. Their parking habits are just as notorious. They stop, abandon their cars and walk away, without caring for who they are inconveniencing. This is what happened at the Tees Hazari Courts some time ago.

A lawyer drove into the court complex and parked next to a jail van! That's right, a jail van. A jail van is used to transport criminals/undertrials to and from the jail to the courts. To park right next to it is an extremely serious offence. In this day of lawlessness and terrorism, such an action would ring alarm bells. Policemen trained for such actions would suspect a 'snatch' of a prison-



FILE PHOTO

Mindful parking of the car is a rare quality among Indians. We are mostly okay about parking at our whim, oblivious to whoever we are inconveniencing

er. A policeman demanded the car be moved. The lawyer declined. We know what happened next.

A very unique situation has developed which puts Delhi in the position where the police are asking for protection and the lawyers are asking for justice! And yes, the citizens are demanding oxygen.

Let's discuss some common sense parking rules.

The police, the ambulance and the fire-tender have absolute right of way on the road. With sirens blazing, they will be rushing to help a person, attend to an emergency and maybe save a life. You may not obstruct their movement. Parking lots in Chandigarh used to have a fire lane. During shopping hours, a fire breaking out could have disastrous consequences. However, with our habit of haphazard parking, the fire lane has ceased to exist. If a fire broke out, a fire tender would not be able to reach the accident site.

Another common sight: an ambulance is zooming down the road, siren blazing. Half a dozen cars follow the ambulance at the same speed, hoping to save time. This is a very dangerous move. Should the ambulance have to suddenly slow down, there could be multiple rear-end crashes, possibly disabling the ambulance and harming the patient. Abroad this is considered a very serious offence.

In the developed countries you are warned not to follow an ambulance. On the highway you should, considering the speed on the highway, maintain a safe distance of 80-100 meters. That would be the stopping distance on highways. In cities, where the speeds are slower, 20-30 meters will be considered a safe distance. You, as the driver, have to be smart and keep a safe distance. Of course, traffic and weather conditions will play an important role in maintaining a safe distance and speed.

The point being made here is that you have to behave like a responsible citizen. It is not possible for a policeman to be in every nook and corner of the city. The city belongs to you. It is your duty to make it more livable, safer and cleaner.

In Chandigarh, there are wide open spaces that hold *apni mandis*. They are right next to residential areas; again, it is a common sight to see a long line of cars parked in front of the entrance gates of the residents. This is really being cussed. There could be an emergency when the resident is unable to drive out of his house. A man comes back from office and cannot drive into his driveway. That is being really nasty!

Happy Motoring!
PS: Since writing this column, the illegal squatters have been removed from the market places in Chandigarh. The fire lanes are functional.



ILLUSTRATION: SANDEEP JOSHI