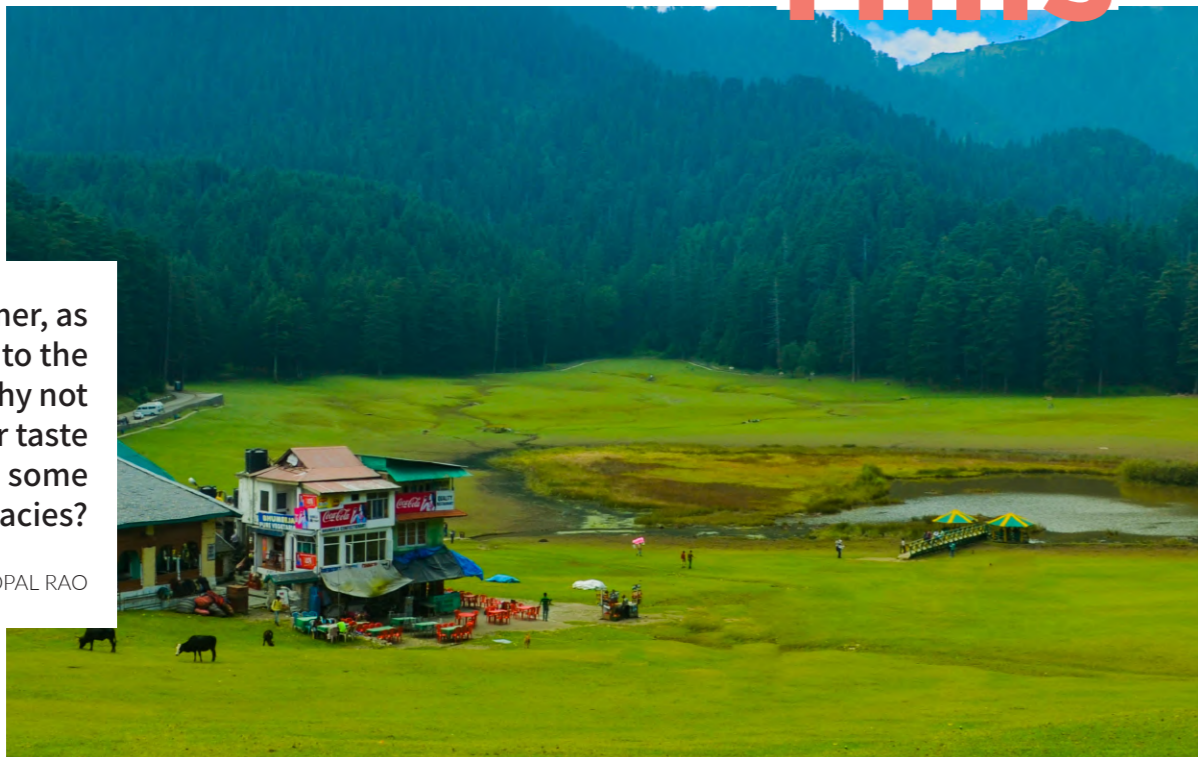




Flavours from the Hills



This summer, as you head to the mountains, why not satiate your taste buds with some local delicacies?

TEXT: BINDU GOPAL RAO



MUSOORIE | ALMORA

The naturally stunning state of Uttarakhand has a diverse culinary palate that is finely nuanced and segregated by traditions from Garhwal and Kumaon regions. The *phaanu*, for instance, is a popular dish from the Garhwal region that is a wholesome mix of different kinds of lentils and horse gram soaked overnight and cooked with simple spices and served with rice. The *kandalee ka saag*, quite well known in the Kumaon region is made using a leafy green called the *bicchu ghas* (nettle green). The lentil-based curries, *garhwal ka fannah*, popular in Mussoorie, and *chainsoo*, another lentil dish, are specialities of the region. These of course work best with the local bread *lesu*,

made with a combination of wheat and *ragi* flour with carom seeds. As an accompaniment try the *bhang ki* chutney made using *bhang* (hemp) seeds. Likewise, the Kumaoni *raita* is another standard accompaniment that is made with curd, turmeric and cucumber and is a relish in the local meal. A meal from the hills of Uttarakhand must include the *singori*, a dessert from Almora, made with *khoya* (milk solids) and wrapped in *maalu* leaf, that lends a unique flavour to the dish. Another popular *khoya* dessert from Almora is the *bal mithai*. While in Almora, do taste *dubuk*, a blend of slow-cooked lentils served with rice and *jhangore ki kheer* (barnyard millet dessert).



In queen of hills Mussoorie, enjoy views of the Doon Valley and the distant white-capped Himalayan peaks, walk around the Mall Road and explore colonial landmarks. The quaint hill-station of Almora sits amidst lush forests. Nearby, explore Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary, Kasardevi and the Baijnath temple. Also close-by is Kausani.

The beautiful Valley of Flowers starts blooming from July-August



Guide

Dehradun, Uttarakhand's capital, is a cafe paradise, with cosy and quaint outlets spread across the city that sits in the lush Doon Valley. Do feast on traditional biscuits, cakes and cookies and bring back the healthy red rice!



The well-connected airport is Dharamshala. SpiceJet connects direct and one-stop flights to Dharamshala from Delhi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and many more destinations in India. Book now at www.spicejet.com



SRINAGAR | GULMARG

The paradise called Kashmir woos you with its sights and its flavours. From the aromatic cup of *kehwa* to the unique *seer* or salted pink tea, and from the elaborate *wazwan* to various types of breads, the Valley is a heaven for foodies. While in Srinagar, try the *wazwan* banquet, an almost 36-course meal. It traces its history to traditional chefs known as *wazas*, believed to have migrated from Central Asia. The meal is served in a particular order and includes rice, *meethi-maaz* (lamb intestine with fenugreek leaves), kebabs, *waza kokur* (chicken dish), *tabakh maaz*

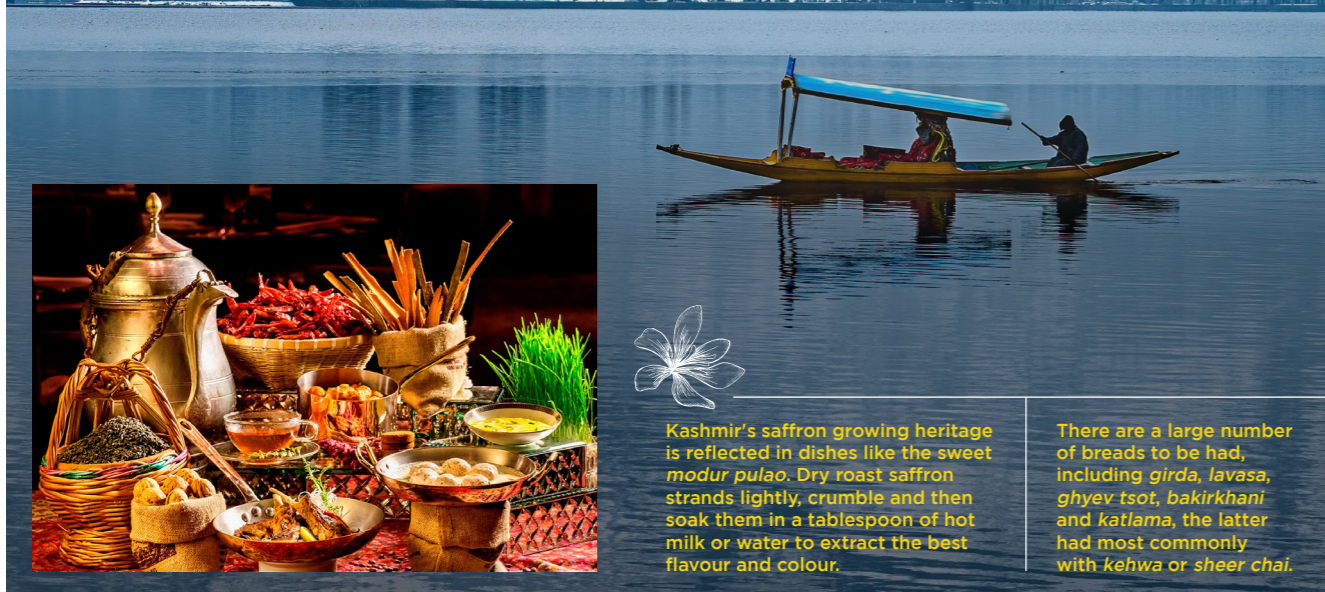
(sheep ribs), *rista* (saffron flavoured mutton), *rogan josh* (lamb gravy) and *gushtaba* (meat ball curry). Another must-have is the Kashmiri Pandit *saal*, a feast of dishes cooked without onion and garlic and with a heavy influence of asafoetida, ginger and fennel. Taste the mutton and whole green lentil dish *naine monge khescher*, the *nadroo yakhni* made with fresh lotus stems, the *gogji razmah* (kidney beans) and *choonth pakori* (green apple slices dipped in gram flour batter and fried). While most of the dishes can be tried in Srinagar, in Gulmarg don't miss the fresh trout!



Guide

While travelling, try the traditional *seer* or *noon chai*, which is relished as a morning drink with traditional bread. It's made with green tea leaves rolled into small balls, milk, sea salt and baking soda!

In the heart of Srinagar is the mesmerisingly serene Dal Lake, guarded by the high Himalayas and with vibrant *shikaras* and houseboats cruising along. Around it are charming Mughal-era gardens. Also visit the Shankaracharya temple and holy Hazratbal. Around 50 km away is Gulmarg, a skiing hub in winter and a lush carpet of green in summer.



Kashmir's saffron growing heritage is reflected in dishes like the sweet *modur pulao*. Dry roast saffron strands lightly, crumble and then soak them in a tablespoon of hot milk or water to extract the best flavour and colour.

There are a large number of breads to be had, including *girda*, *lavasa*, *ghyev tsot*, *bakirkhani* and *katlama*, the latter had most commonly with *kehwa* or *sheer chai*.



LEH



Ladakh is a wondrous land of dramatic terrain, high-altitude roads, peaceful monasteries and happy people. Add to it lip-smacking traditional cuisine, that has remained unaltered through centuries.

The Ladakhi meal is a mix of grains like barley and wheat, and meat with green vegetables making an appearance mostly in summer. The vegetables are often mixed with *zho* (curd) or *tara* (buttermilk) to make *tangthur*, or added to the ubiquitous *thukpa*. *Tangthur* is served at lunch with another staple, *paba*. The latter, a unique boiled bread, is

made from *tsampa* (roasted barley flour), pea and other lentil flours. A nutritional powerhouse, enjoy it the traditional way at lunch! Breads are common in Ladakhi cuisine and you can start your day with freshly-baked *tagi khambir* layered with local apricot jam! This thick wheat flour bread is baked on an iron or stone griddle over *thup* (traditional oven). In Leh, you will make locals very happy if you ask for *khambir* with a cup of salty butter tea (*gurgur cha*) right in the morning! Also try *tingmo*, a soft bread roll typically had with meat.



Don't Miss

Chutagi is another famous Ladakhi dish, in which a pasta dough is shaped like bow-ties and cooked with vegetables or meat. Also try *skyu*, a wholesome soup made with wheat-flour dough pasta and vegetables.



In and around Leh, explore the Leh Palace, Shanti Stupa, Thiksey and Hemis monasteries and experience the Magnetic Hill.

Outside Leh, plan trips to the stunning Pangong Tso Lake, Nubra Valley and Lamayuru monastery.

Sea buckthorn grows in large quantities in Ladakh and the Ladakhis turn it into preserves and squashes.



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CHAMBA | KULLU MANALI | SHIMLA

High up in Himachal Pradesh, in the land of rolling Himalayan meadows bounded by snow-covered peaks and abundant orchards, food is a fragrant mix of herbs, fruits, nuts and milk. And meals are a community celebration, a time for feasting! A reason why a must-try experience is a *dham*, a traditional sit-down celebratory meal, with regional variations and flavours. In Chamba, a *dham* starts with rice and green lentil curry, followed by *madrah* (kidney beans or white grams cooked in yoghurt), and other lentil dishes. Towards the end is served *khutta* made of jaggery and tamarind and for dessert there is *mittha* (sweetened rice garnished

with dry fruits). In the highlands of Lahaul, Spiti and Kinnaur, try the Tibetan-influenced *thukpa*, a popular dish made with meat, vegetables and noodles in a fiery curry. And don't forget to sip *thang* (salty butter tea). Try *siddu* (steamed stuffed wheat flour burger) anywhere in the state. A walnut paste stuffing turns this ordinary looking bun into a tasty treat! It can be relished with any curry. For non-vegetarians, a must-try is *khamod* meat, a Chamba speciality of mutton cooked with curd, spices and garnished with dry fruits. A fresh catch of trout, roasted, steamed or in a curry is a delicacy in Barot, Sangla, Pabbar and Kullu-Manali!



Don't Miss

In Shimla, Himachal Pradesh's stunning capital, try freshly baked goodies at innumerable cafes. Also taste traditional dishes like *chana madra*, (yogurt-based chickpea gravy), *chha gosht* (mutton cooked with gram flour) and the fried snack *babru*!

Go offbeat in the Himalayas with places like Triund, Barot, Shoja and Churah. Or explore the Great Himalayan National Park. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, this forested area is known for its rich biodiversity.

From Shimla's colonial charm to Manali's adventures and from serene Dharamshala and McLeod Ganj in the Kangra Valley to the high-altitude cold desert of Spiti, travel to any destination in Himachal Pradesh to enjoy the natural beauty of the Himalayas. Then there is quaint Dalhousie, popular Kasauli and offbeat Tirthan Valley!

Himachal Pradesh is an adventure paradise with options for trekking, hiking, paragliding, rafting and skiing.