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## KURT TO THE CHASE

HOW KURT STRAUB, VP, INDIA OPERATIONS, HYATT HOTELS AND RESORTS, IS RE-USHERING IN THE HUMAN TOUCH IN HOSPITALITY

# RICE IS NICE

The amazing rice variants available in India ensure that there is never a dull moment in a chef's life and kitchen

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO



**D**id you know that rice has been cultivated in India since 5000 BC? A staple diet for more than half of the world's population, it is a crop that is not just cultivated but also revered. There is plenty of folklore associated with rice,



➔ Anshuman Bali, executive chef, JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar.

and in many countries it is actually considered to be a gift from the gods. Well, chefs are certainly thanking their stars for this offering since it one versatile produce that they can use in myriad forms to whip up delectable dishes.

## MYRIAD CHOICES

Rice, a seed of grass species like *Oryza sativa* (Asian) or *Oryza Glaberrima* (African), is a widely-consumed staple meal in India. It has innumerable variants that differ on the basis of type, colour and taste. Within the country itself a variety of rice is found — basmati is preferred in central and northern India aromatic; Kashmiris use a lot of red and pink rice, whereas the southerners have an inclination towards short grain for dosa batters, etc., due to its high starch content.

Similarly, in Thailand, Jasmine rice is widely used, while glutinous or sticky rice is popular in Chinese cuisines. Caribbean cuisine uses Japonica rice, while Mediter-

ranean and Italian cuisines use medium grain varieties.

“Long grain rice is usually slim and dry once cooked and is used at premium occasions. It would be well suited to a Biryani, whereas Jasmine rice (or Thai fragrant rice) is sticky and more starchy, which makes it ideal for Asian cuisine. The Chinese black rice is used to make dessert with coconut milk and palm sugar in Asia, whereas short-grained rice is used for the idli/dosa batter in Southern India. Paella rice comes from the Spanish region of Valencia and is used to make the authentic Paella dish. We use a lot of risotto rice for our dishes at Silver Beach Cafe and Estella,” explained Chef Vincy Rebello, head chef, Silver Beach Café.

## MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

Chefs specialising in Indian cuisine prefer Basmati that is aged, long grain, aromatic and has uniformly heavy grains. Tanuj Nayyar, executive chef, Jaypee Residency



→ Chef Prateek Sandhu prepares an ice cream made of black rice, and palm jaggery at Masque.

**LARGEST RICE PRODUCING STATES OF INDIA**

- WEST BENGAL
- UTTAR PRADESH
- ANDHRA PRADESH
- PUNJAB
- TAMIL NADU
- ODISHA
- BIHAR

Manor, Mussoorie explained, "I prefer this variant as it is full of flavour and compliments Indian food very well. Its texture makes it appealing to the eye. Another variety of rice that we prefer is the purple one from Meghalaya, which is rich in vitamins and has a good taste."

Brown and red rice are considered to be one of the healthiest options as compared to white rice. They can be used



→ Chef Chakradhar, Hotel Howard Johnson, Bengaluru Hebbal.



→ Chef Vincy Rebello, head chef, Silver Beach Café.



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IMAGE COURTESY: THE CHOCOLATE SPOON COMPANY

➔ Acquerello rice is amongst the most sought-after rice for preparing risotto because of its texture and consistency.



➔ Chef Prateek Sadhu, head chef and co-owner, Masque, Mumbai

in any type of cuisine. Both have similar nutritional values. Japanese rice, typically Koshihikari, is the highest quality sushi rice. Its firmness, consistency, aroma and natural sweetness make it a perfect choice for making sushi.

Neeraj Tyagi, executive chef, Shangri-La's, Eros Hotel, New Delhi, averred, "For risottos, Acquerello rice is one of the most sought-after rice. The rice is premium quality rice and is produced

and packed by The Rondolino family, based in Northern Italy. The rice is famous for its texture and consistency. The unhulled grains are aged in steel temperature controlled silos. This aging makes the proteins, starch and vitamins in the grains less water-soluble, which allows the grains to absorb more liquid and flavours when cooked simultaneously improving the grain's consistency. The grains then become less sticky and consequently less likely to bind together when cooked."

#### COST FACTOR

Risotto rice is usually very expensive as is well-aged long grain basmati. Brown, red and black are equally steep due to their rare availability and because they are the latest 'health' fads and preferred to white rice when it comes to losing weight. Different varieties of rice have different price. Some are costlier than the others. "The price variation depends on the country of origin, shippers and the like. Usually, there is a price comparison that happens between the different options of rice available and then on the

basis of quality of a particular vendor is selected with renegotiated prices," said Anshuman Bali, executive chef, JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar.

Being premium, Acquerello rice is expensive and costs around INR 2000 per kg. Only the Rondolino family is the main producer of Acquerello rice and their grains are known for its polish, nutrients and flavour.

#### SUPPLIER CONSIDERATIONS

Considering the fact that this is an item that is required in large quantities, suppliers are selected on the basis of their ability to deliver a standard quality product in a timely manner. Given that over 40,000 cultivated rice options are currently available, the choice is based on ease of availability on a regular basis, standard, quality and the cuisine.

Rajeev Janveja, corporate chef, Lemon Tree Hotels explained, "At Lemon Tree Hotels, rice is determined by its physical and chemical characteristics. When we look at the grain, it has to be whole, the kernel should not be discoloured or have any foreign particles. When we talk

about chemical characteristics, it should be aged, have aroma and should give us the best texture when cooked. We select vendors that provide good quality rice at the most optimum price with the ability to supply throughout the year with pan-India presence.”

The pricing is worked out with vendors in bulk quantity; yearly tenders are prepared and accordingly, the pricing of the dish is finalised so that the overall costing is balanced. Bali added, “A database is available with the purchase committee of all credible vendors of a particular product. An annual tender submission exercise is held in which they quote the prices. This is further negotiated and eventually gets finalised for the best product at the best price.” The vendor’s reputation in the market, product delivery, effective pricing, delivery stability whole year around and quality and consistency of the product are key elements of choosing the right suppliers.

Increasingly, hoteliers do not appear to be very brand conscious for this particular ingredient. Chef Chakradhar, Hotel



➔ Paella at The Chocolate Spoon Company is given a healthier twist with the use of brown rice.

Howard Johnson, Bengaluru Hebbal said, “We generally don’t go by brand value as such. We like to analyse the product on offer and see how our guest recognize and relish the food as well at the same time. So quality will only be the inclina-

tion for us to go for any brand and also the value it holds for guests today in the market. It is based on the idea of relationship building and extracting better quality products at a short period of time and in an cost effective manner.”

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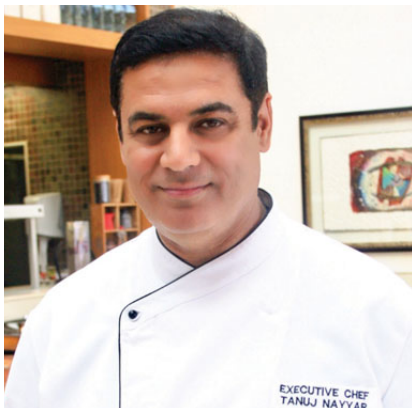
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➔ Rajeev Janveja, corporate chef, Lemon Tree Hotels.



➔ Tanuj Nayyar, executive chef, Jaypee Residency Manor, Mussoorie.



➔ Amit Bhatia, executive chef, The Chocolate Spoon Company.

### PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

Hoteliers call for an annual tender that is then filled by the suppliers. After that shortlisted suppliers are called for negotiations and specifications. On the basis of factors like best rate for the year, quality and consistency a supplier is selected. "We select a particular variant on basis of the quality and the dish. For example,



## Did You Know?

- India is the second leading producer of rice in the entire world, preceded only by China.
- Rice is the staple diet of nearly half the world's population.
- More than 90% of the world's rice is grown and consumed in Asia.
- It takes 5,000 litres of water to produce 1 kg of irrigated rice.
- 65 kilos of rice are milled annually for every person on earth.
- Rice is a symbol of life and fertility, which is why rice is traditionally thrown at weddings.
- In India, rice is associated with prosperity and with the Hindu goddess of wealth, Lakshmi.
- There are more than 40,000 varieties of rice that grow across every continent, except on Antarctica.

Bomba rice is the supreme strain of rice used in Spanish cuisine. It is grown in fresh mountain water and it known for its firm and delicious. It is ideal for making Paella and there is no substitute for it," explained Tyagi.

Chef Prateek Sadhu, head chef and co-owner, Masque, Mumbai said, "At Masque, we are partial to small grain pink rice from the Gurez valley in the Himalayas. It has a very unique flavour profile; it is very aromatic and starchy, and pairs

exceptionally well with fish. Selection depends on the flavour and textural profile we are looking for in a particular dish. We also make it a point to work with small-scale farmers specifically, so that narrows the field down a bit. Rather than brands, we source out local suppliers and then sample the produce for quality to work out what pairs best with our food. Where the rice is grown and in what condition is very important to us. We travelled India extensively before opening the restaurant in order to meet these suppliers and find a product that we love; we have maintained those relationships and as the restaurant grows, so do our networks."

Amit Bhatia, executive chef, The Chocolate Spoon Company, added, "As procurement manager, the person in concern will ask for the different samples of required varieties of rice which would be tested by our highly qualified chefs. On the basis of guest necessities and tastes also according to our standards, we select the best quality and the orders are being placed to the specific vendor."

In the meanwhile, chefs are busy experimenting with the many variants of rice available to them, mixing it up with various other produce. After all, with an crop this versatile, and their imagination at hand, they know that the sky is the limit when it comes to unlocking culinary delicacies. ■