

WOMEN'S DAY SPECIAL

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The Classic Dishes of Kutch

Food from the desert of Gujarat

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By Bindu Gopal Rao



The annual Rann Utsav is a celebration of all things Kutch and while art and culture is the focus, there is another aspect that is not much focused on which is its cuisine. The Tent City is the best place to stay when you are here as it showcases a selection of local Kutch fare as well. With an emphasis on taste and flavour, the food of Kutch is a melange of flavours. “The taste of the dishes is slightly skewed towards being a little spicier compared to regular Gujarati food that tends towards being sweet. Roasted chana dal or besan is also used quite extensively which you will see in the farsans we make - ghatiya, methi gota and fafda,” says Suraj Mandal, who oversees the food at Tent City.

We list five must try dishes that are quintessentially Kutch.

Bajra Khichdi

Bajra is a millet that is extensively grown in the region and finds its way into staples - the bajra khichdi and bajra roti. This humble meal is a staple in this region and is eaten by all. Said to keep the stomach full, it is also preferred by farmers as a lunch option. Usually eaten with pickle, garlic chutney or yoghurt this is a healthy and wholesome dish that is a must try when in Kutch. The raw and rustic freshness of the Bajra and the combination of the spicy accompaniments make this a must try here. Bajra Roti is also eaten by most people in the region and is usually teamed with chole or tindly subzi.

Kutchi Dabeli

Believed to have originated in Mandvi, a town in the Kutch region of Gujarat in the 1960s, the Kutchi Dabeli is said to have been made by street vendor Keshavji Malam. Incidentally, his family still runs the store there. What makes this dabeli different from its Maharashtrian counterpart is that it is stuffed with curry. In fact, the word dabeli means ‘pressed down’ in Gujarati. This potato curry is made with





a special Kutch dabeli masala (that is available in stores and online) and stuffed into a pav bun. The dish is then topped with tamarind chutney, green coriander chutney, red chilli, sev, pomegranate pearls, roasted peanuts, and other spices and served. This is a dish that is bound to take your taste buds on a culinary journey with its sweet-sour texture.

Thepla

A staple at breakfast, lunch and dinner, the Kutch thepla is slightly thicker and flakier making it a wholesome dish. It is also light on the stomach, and you can be forgiven for eating many of them. The small sized theplas are best enjoyed hot and team well with pickled whole green chillies and sweet mango pickle. The thepla is usually made of whole wheat, fresh fenugreek leaves, Indian spices, and sesame seeds. Usually, the shelf life of a thepla is long and hence it is a great option to be packed on travels. The ones that can travel are relatively thinner and flatter which is easy to carry and eat.

Mawa

One of the most loved desserts of the Kutch region is Mawa, something that all locals swear by. The Kutch region is known for a specific kind of buffalo called Banni and this dessert is made using the milk of the same. Colloquially referred to as 'Banni no mavo', it is available both as a sweet and plain variant and is a must have at the sweet shops that dot Khavda, Bhuj, and Bhirandiar. The sweet version is labelled as 'gift of white Rann', has a gooey brown texture and is made by mixing milk and sugar. The best part is that it lasts over a week and is easily one of the best food souvenirs to carry back home. So do not miss this when in Kutch.



Gulab Paak

With a fudge-like texture, the Gulab Paak must be the region's best kept dessert secret. This is a not too sweet dessert that is made with a variety of nuts including pistachios, almonds and cashews and is covered in traditional pink rose petals. To this cow ghee, cardamom and sugar are added to create a sweet that is a perfect bite sized treat. A must try in the region, you will see other variants as well which include a variant with flour. However, it is pertinent to note that the original Gulab Paak has no flour and is called as Shahi Gulab Paak and is a must taste and buy dessert in Kutch.

