

India on a Plate

Food festivals in hotels are shining the spotlight on lesser-known and hyper-local cuisines that are giving them a fillip.

By Bindu Gopal Rao





Anish Shrivastava, GM – Operations,
Sayaji Resorts & Spa, Udaipur



Vaibhav Gupta, General Manager, The
Astor Goa



Ajit Singh Garcha, Area General
Manager, The Park Hyderabad



Abhishek Bhattacharya, Head of Sales,
WelcomHeritage Hotels

Food festivals at hotels are being promoted not just as events but as cultural experiences. The idea was always to create a sense of discovery, and hotels are making sure that unusual cuisines are being presented on a pedestal.

Cuisine Cues

Several conscientious hotels consistently curate food festivals that spotlight hyper-local and unusual cuisines. Anish Shrivastava, GM – Operations, Sayaji Resorts & Spa, Udaipur, says, “Most recently, we introduced Daastan-E-GT Road: The Highway Tales, featuring regional favourites such as Amritsari Fish, Kabuli Pulao, and Murthal ke Paranthe—dishes rarely found in mainstream restaurants. Our thought process was to move beyond the expected and revive dishes of cultural and historical significance that are gradually fading from everyday dining. We believe food is one of the most powerful storytellers of a region, and by showcasing these unique cuisines, we offer our guests a deeper connection with the destination. It is as much a celebration as it is a preservation of our culinary heritage.”

Being Prepared

Preparation for these food festivals typically begins with research, where chefs travel, document local techniques, and work with local farmers, spice growers, and small producers

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Ho Chi Ming, Executive Chef,
Renaissance Bengaluru Race Course
Hotel



Vimal Verma, GM, Anantara Jaipur
Jewel Bagh

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- Vaibhav Gupta

to understand ingredients at their origin. “Each festival is preceded by tastings, trials, and training sessions where our team experiments with textures, cooking methods, and pairings until the final menu resonates both with authenticity and refinement. For example, with The Chilli Trails, our latest pop-up series, we deep-dived into Konkan coastal cuisine, tracing how local chillies shape the region’s culinary identity,” says Vaibhav Gupta, General Manager, The Astor Goa. Their research process is rooted in both tradition and innovation. “We begin by tracing the cultural and historical context of the cuisine, understanding how trade routes, migration, and local microclimates have shaped its evolution. From there, we experiment in the kitchen, testing ingredients, cooking techniques, and pairings to balance authenticity with modern dining sensibilities,” adds Gupta.

Revival Matters

When focusing on unusual cuisines, hotels are also making the case for reviving lost recipes. This is also a way to have new generation audiences appreciate traditional food. Ajit Singh Garcha, Area General Manager, The Park Hyderabad, says, “Over the past year, we have celebrated the coastal flavours of Konaseema, revived forgotten recipes from Telangana during Bathukamma week, and brought the hearty food of Nagaland, Assam, and Kashmir to our tables. We also collaborate with chefs from regions like Konganadu who specialise in Ooty and Kodaikanal cuisine, allowing us to showcase truly native dishes that are rarely found outside their communities. By choosing cuisines that are overshadowed or slowly disappearing from home kitchens, we create experiences that feel fresh yet rooted in tradition.”





Sagar Kulkarni, Director of Food & Beverage, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel

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Immersive Experiences

As guests and travellers evolve, the focus is slowly but surely changing to ensure that they have an authentic and immersive experience that connects them to the region's culture in a deeply personal way. Abhishek Bhattacharya, Head of Sales, WelcomHeritage Hotels, says, “Our core motivation for showcasing these cuisines is to provide guests with an authentic and immersive experience that connects them to the region's culture in a deeply personal way. The ingredients for a large part of the dishes are sourced from farms and markets nearby, with fresh and wholesome ingredients. It's about preserving traditions and offering a genuine taste of Himachal Pradesh to



our guests, curated after extensive research on the culture and heritage of the region. Alongside the culinary preparation, we promote these offerings through card stands in the restaurants, standees placed in the lobby and other key visibility areas, and active posting on social media platforms. This helps us create awareness and excitement around the regional specialities we proudly serve.”

Sourcing Right

To give guests an authentic experience, preparation begins with sourcing. The process of identifying cuisines begins with open discussions where each chef brings forward ideas inspired by their expertise and experiences. “It is essential that the ingredients come directly from the regions being represented, ensuring authenticity in every dish. We also invite chefs who hail from these regions, allowing them to share not just their culinary expertise but also their memories tied to the food. Beyond highlighting only the well-known dishes, we focus on creating menus that feature homely, comforting recipes that carry a sense of nostalgia,” says Ho Chi Ming, Executive Chef, Renaissance Bengaluru Race Course Hotel.

Marketing Push

To ensure that these food festivals reach the right audience, hotels use marketing strategies that blend storytelling-led digital campaigns, collaborations with food bloggers, and engaging teaser videos across social media to build anticipation. “We highlight these festivals as cultural journeys rather than dining promotions. Storytelling forms the core of our marketing—whether through engaging visuals on social media, collaborations with culinary voices, or personal narratives that explain the origins of each dish. Guests are drawn not just by the food but by the stories it carries,” says Vimal Verma, GM, Anantara Jaipur Jewel Bagh.

At Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur, the team sees food as heritage. “By reviving lost recipes and unusual culinary traditions, we are

not only enriching our guests’ experiences but also safeguarding Rajasthan’s cultural memory. Our goal is to ensure these stories of resilience, adaptation, and artistry continue to live on the table for generations to come,” adds Verma.

Overcoming Challenges

Sourcing remains one of the biggest challenges, particularly for hyper-local ingredients and regional specialities that fall outside regular supply chains. To maintain authenticity, most hotels work closely with local vendors and small suppliers. Equally critical is training the teams, as these cuisines often demand distinct cooking techniques and presentation styles.

“Challenges mainly include sourcing speciality ingredients and ensuring our staff can reproduce the cuisine authentically. To address this, we work closely with carefully selected suppliers and conduct dedicated training sessions with the guest chef before the pop-up begins. This hands-on guidance ensures our team fully understands the techniques, flavours, and presentation, maintaining consistency and authenticity throughout the festival,” says Sagar Kulkarni, Director of Food & Beverage, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel.

Guest Satisfaction

At the end of the day, the aim of these food festivals is to delight guests. After all, they are looking for distinctive experiences, and unique food festivals tick all the right boxes. Most hotels say that the response to these food festivals is almost always overwhelmingly positive. Guests enjoy discovering something new—be it a forgotten grain or an unusual spice combination. Many are delighted to rediscover flavours reminiscent of their grandmother’s kitchens or from cities they have previously visited, while others take joy in exploring dishes completely unfamiliar yet deeply rooted in the region’s traditions and culinary heritage. So the next time you are at a hotel, do not forget to check out their food festivals – chances are you will be surprised in more ways than one. 