

EAT & DRINK

India's ice cream industry gets a taste of reinvention

Driven by curiosity and nostalgia, artisanal brands mix homegrown flavors with global inspiration



This ice cream offering from Tresind Mumbai pays homage to "khandvi," a popular savory snack from the western Indian state of Gujarat made with gram flour, yogurt and spices. (Courtesy of Tresind Mumbai)

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HYDERABAD, India -- "You must try the Chakkarakeli banana soft serve," says a staff member at Manam Chocolate Karkhana, an upscale Indian craft chocolate shop in Banjara Hills, Hyderabad. And from one lick of this ice cream, it is safe to say it tastes even better than the original fruit -- a native south Indian fragrant banana that has been churned into this creamy dessert.

This is one example of a shift in how people in India are experiencing ice cream. It's no longer just about indulgence. Clean-label and plant-based options are now at the forefront, with people seeking transparency over the

ingredients, resulting in ice creams that feel fresher and guilt-free. There is also a growing appetite for regional and seasonal flavors.

Diners are curious about ingredients that celebrate local produce, and ice cream chefs are completely clued in to the shift. Globally inspired and even savory pairings are having a moment, too, with new trends in flavors that challenge the traditional sweet perception of ice cream.

Ankit Gupta, co-founder of Burma Burma, India's only specialty Burmese restaurant and tearoom, with locations in several cities, agrees. "What excites us most is that Indian consumers are increasingly open to exploration. They want their ice creams to tell a story, whether that's nostalgia, travel or a bold new flavor they've never encountered before."

And it is this spirit of curiosity that is driving the artisanal ice cream movement forward in the country. According to Vantage Market Research, the global ice cream market is estimated to grow to \$154.5 billion by 2035 at a compound annual growth rate of 6.40%. Meanwhile, India's ice cream market was valued at approximately 268 billion rupees (\$3.46 billion) in 2024 and is expected to reach 1,078 billion rupees by 2033.



Ice creams from Burma Burma, India's only specialty Burmese restaurant and tearoom, include Avocado Honey, left, and Pineapple Energie. (Courtesy of Burma Burma)

Lupa, a fine dining restaurant on MG Road in Bengaluru, is another example of how this trend is taking shape in India. Led by award-winning chef Manu Chandra and restaurant veteran Chetan Rampal, it has a mini "gelato lab" nestled in the private indoor dining area. With choices such as the popcorn-scented Night at the Movies and Dark Chocolate Gelato, Lupa's gelateria strives to have an option for every palate. Using fresh, carefully sourced ingredients, the gelato reflects the broader push toward quality and creativity in India's dessert scene.

"Our menu only features gelato made with A2 cow's milk and, in fact, without any eggs. So, if you think a single scoop is not enough to satisfy your sweet tooth, ask for a double and make your culinary journey to the streets of Florence last a little longer," says Chandra. He is referring to milk from cows bred to produce only the A2 protein, which is believed to be easier to digest.

The process of creating new and unusual flavors, however, is "a constant work in progress," says Ruby Islam, head chef at Manam Chocolate. Islam adds that she is focused on "pushing boundaries on a product line that is

nostalgic but has the potential to be paired with many other ingredients, such as craft chocolate, and be consumed in a format that's novel and exciting."



Lupa, a fine dining restaurant in Bengaluru, features a mini "gelato lab" in its private indoor dining area. It uses only A2 cow's milk -- which contains protein that is believed to be easier to digest -- and offers flavors such as Mango and the popcorn-scented Night at the Movies. (Courtesy of Lupa)

With increasingly sensitized palates and a greater exposure to new ideas, dessert lovers are more willing to experiment than ever, Islam says. "Until a few years ago, matcha wasn't even a thing, and now guests are excited by the integration of such new and international flavors," says the chef, referring to the green tea powder that has become popular in drinks and other products. "Savory ice creams were never on the radar, but now salted caramel is all the rage."

Nostalgia is a clear driver in the artisanal ice cream space. At Bombay Sweet Shop in Mumbai, the soft serves are inspired by *mithai* (Indian sweets and desserts) and the everyday sweetness that many Indians have grown up with.

"One of our earliest and most unique innovations was the Malai Toast, inspired by the simple comfort of bread, milk and sugar," says Girish Nayak, chief *mithaiwala* at Bombay Sweet Shop. The shop recreated it as an ice cream using bread-flavored ice cream, creamy *malai* (a type of clotted cream), and sugar, just like someone's mother might have made. "It was our way of celebrating something deeply nostalgic but rarely seen in an ice cream format," he adds.

There is a strong trend toward the fusion of Indian flavors in ice cream, a shift from just using chocolate or berries, to creations inspired by ingredients such as *gulkand* (rose petal preserve), jaggery (a type of cane sugar), *thandai* (a milk-based drink with nuts, seeds, saffron and sugar), or *kulfi* (a dense dairy dessert).



Bombay Sweet Shop in Mumbai sells soft serves inspired by "mithai" (Indian sweets and desserts), including Malai Toast, left, and Thandai, right, a milk-based drink with nuts, seeds, saffron and sugar. (Courtesy of Bombay Sweet Shop)

But going even further with savory ingredients is another part of this movement. This is particularly evident at Bengaluru's Lavonne Ice Cream Kitchen (LICK), where customers form long lines throughout the day. Some

of LICK's most popular ice creams have been about taking something familiar and giving it a clever twist.

Prathana Narang, LICK's lead chef, says: "Watermelon Feta is one of those. It started as a simple idea inspired by a classic summer salad, but in ice cream form it became something new: sweet, refreshing, with that savory, salty edge that made people curious and excited to try it."

Smoked Chocolate is another favorite at LICK, where they added smoky tannins to chocolate ice cream, giving the resulting product depth, richness and a complexity that lingers. Melon Ginger balances delicate sweetness with a subtle spice, while Pecan Pie brings together nostalgia and indulgence with mascarpone gelato layered with pecan fudge, pecan crunch and pecan crumble.



Bengaluru's Lavonne Ice Cream Kitchen (LICK) draws crowds with such flavors as Watermelon Feta, Pecan Pie, left, and Smoked Dark Chocolate, right, which contains smoky tannins. (Courtesy of Lavonne Ice Cream Kitchen)

At Tresind Mumbai, the team created the crowd favorite *khandvi* ice cream. Khandvi is a popular savory snack from the western state of Gujarat made with gram flour, yogurt and spices including turmeric, ginger and salt.

Other ice cream innovations include Yakult (the Japanese fermented milk probiotic drink), roasted barley, and fermented black apple.

"When we were creating the khandvi ice cream, we created a Gujarati *farsan* (snack) platter by incorporating other elements. While creating a dessert with different textures of milk, we needed little acidity, so the easiest way was to create a yogurt ice cream. But we came up with an idea. Rather than using yogurt, we can use fermented milk -- Yakult -- and it came out well," explains Sarfaraz Ahmed, corporate chef at Passion F&B India (Tresind Mumbai).

As customers increasingly seek storytelling, novelty and authenticity in what they eat, ice cream in India is catching up to those expectations. Ankit Chona, CEO of Hocco Ice Cream, which has a growing presence in key northern and western Indian markets, understands this well.

"When we started Hocco, I wanted to build ice creams that had a spark of surprise," Chona says. "*Aamchi*, a mango-shaped dessert, celebrates India's love for mangoes; the Modak ice cream is created especially for Ganesh Chaturthi (the festival celebrating the birth of Hindu deity Ganesha) in Maharashtra, where *modak* (a sweet flavored with coconut and cardamom) is culturally revered; and Bijlee, India's first caffeinated ice candy, is designed with Gen Z in mind."



Left: Hocco sells ice cream shaped like "modak," a traditional sweet flavored with coconut and cardamom. Right: Sarfaraz Ahmed, corporate chef at Passion F&B India, the company behind Tresind Mumbai. (Source photos courtesy of Hocco Ice Cream, Tresind Mumbai)

The common thread, says Chona, is simple: Take something people already love, whether it's a traditional sweet or a global trend, and reimagine it in a way that feels fun but is also gourmet.

Vinesh Johnny, chef and founder of LICK, stresses the power of synergy when exploring new ideas. "We also push boundaries through collaborations," he says. "Working with international chefs like Andres Lara and Matteo Casone brings new perspectives that influence how we approach flavor, texture and presentation. Gelato at LICK is treated as a living, evolving craft, always open to innovation and reinterpretation."

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