

What's on Your Plate in 2026?

Food in 2026 is all about making choices that are guided by intent, information, curation, and more...

By Bindu Gopal Rao

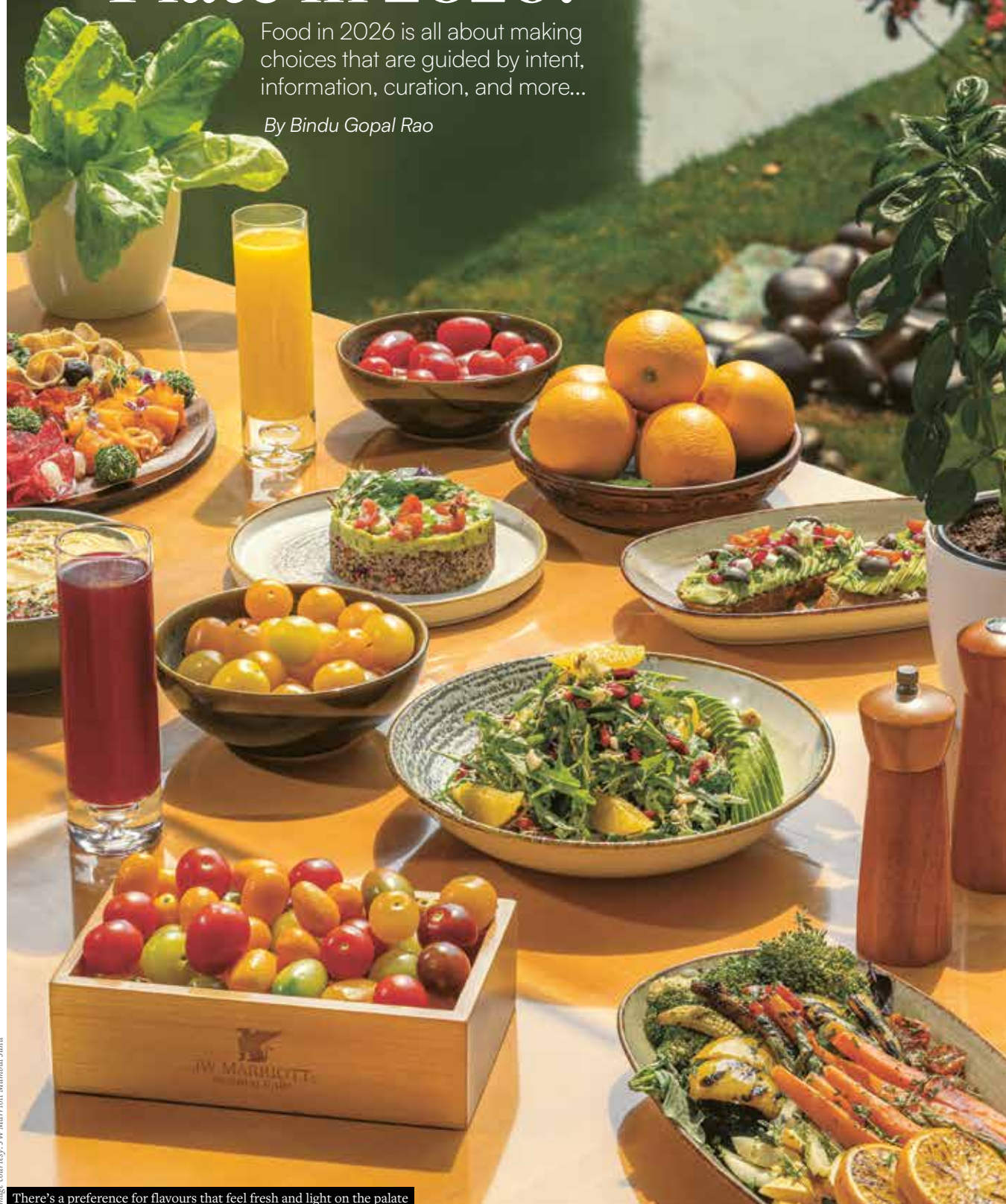


Image courtesy: JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu

There's a preference for flavours that feel fresh and light on the palate

Wondering what food trends will be in vogue in 2026? Well, read on as industry experts tell us all about what to look out for...

Wellness, Reloaded

In 2026, diners are no longer guided by generic notions of ‘healthy eating’. They are informed, intentional and increasingly aware of how specific nutrients support energy, longevity and overall well-being.

“Guests are now actively seeking ingredients with functional value like leafy greens rich in micronutrients, nuts and seeds for healthy fats, fruits known for antioxidants, and vegetables that deliver vitamins and minerals in meaningful amounts,” says Saurabh Taneja, Executive Chef, Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity. Guests today are increasingly aware of what goes into their meals, focusing on ingredient quality, functional benefits, and overall nourishment rather than labels alone. This includes higher interest in protein-rich dishes, fibre-forward ingredients, natural sugars, fermented foods, and cleaner cooking methods.

“There is also a visible shift towards balanced plates where fibre and protein are carefully considered rather than treated as opposing choices. For chefs, this means designing menus that deliver nutrition without compromising on flavour, technique, or satisfaction,” adds Taneja.

Personalised Health & Wellness with Smaller Plates

In 2026, wellness dining is defined less by uniform trends and more by individual intent. The focus has shifted from simply offering healthy dishes to truly understanding the guest behind each choice.

Umesh Singh, Executive Chef, Novotel New Delhi City Centre, says, “From a culinary standpoint, this evolution is strongly supported by the growing availability of fresh, seasonal



Image courtesy: Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity

Farmer's Market Super Grain Salad

GI tagging plays a significant role in preserving heritage in food; Image courtesy: ITC Hotels



Saurabh Taneja, Executive Chef, Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity



Umesh Singh, Executive Chef, Novotel New Delhi City Centre



Rajesh Wadhwa, Executive Chef, LOYA, Taj Westend Bengaluru



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



Luxury dining in 2026 reflects a growing convergence of indulgence and wellbeing

Image courtesy: The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts

“Luxury dining is evolving from performance to purpose, where chefs become custodians of knowledge and the plate becomes a quiet record of place.”

- Rajesh Wadhwa

produce in local markets. Ingredients such as millets, whole grains, seasonal vegetables, and plant-forward proteins are now central to menu design, allowing chefs to create dishes that are both satisfying and mindful. Serving these preparations in smaller, thoughtfully curated portions enables guests to enjoy flavour and variety without feeling overindulgent.”

Personalisation remains at the heart of this trend. Guests value the freedom to choose meals aligned with their dietary preferences, whether low oil, low sugar, vegetarian, vegan, or gluten-free. “Smaller plates naturally encourage mindful eating and better digestion, reinforcing a holistic approach to wellness. This shift also brings operational advantages. Controlled portions help reduce food wastage while ensuring consistency and quality,” adds Singh.

Culinary Anthropology

The most important shift shaping dining today and defining where culinary focus is headed in 2026 is the return to ‘meaning’. Diners are increasingly interested in knowing which community a dish comes from and why it is eaten the way it is.

“At LOYA, Taj West End Bengaluru, we approach food as cultural memory. Ingredients like tudki rice, wild jhakiya, Himalayan cucumbers, Timur pepper, and walnut ink exist because of land, climate, and community knowledge passed down over generations. Our techniques such as dhungar, dum, and sigdi are responses to geography and lived experience. When diners engage with this kind of food, they are not consuming novelty but continuity. Luxury dining is evolving from performance to purpose, where chefs become custodians of knowledge and the plate becomes a quiet record of place,” says Rajesh Wadhwa, Executive Chef, LOYA, Taj Westend Bengaluru.

Pop-ups Focusing on the Chef’s Specialities

The growing interest in chef-led pop-ups that highlight lesser-known regional cuisines reflects a wider shift in how guests engage with dining today.

Ho Chi Ming, Executive Chef, Renaissance Bengaluru Race Course Hotel, says, “At Renaissance Bengaluru Race Course Hotel, we have been consciously shaping our culinary

programming around this approach by giving our in-house chefs greater creative ownership. In 2025, I led a series of food festivals, including an Uttarakhand pop-up, a Himalayan Fusion feast, and a Pan-Asian Fair. Each of these was designed to highlight regional influence, ingredient integrity and thoughtful curation, while allowing our chefs to bring their own perspectives to the table.”

These menus are developed through research and personal connection, often with key ingredients sourced directly from their regions of origin, and then adapted carefully to suit a luxury hotel environment.

Functional food: Cooking with Intention, Not Instruction
Food today has become deeply personal. Guests aren’t just looking for what tastes good, but they are asking, ‘How will this food make me feel?’

Chef Saurabh Tyagi, Director of Culinary, The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore, says, “We are living in an age of information overload, where nutritionists are on speed dial, AI generates diet plans, and wellness podcasts are consumed for breakfast. Amidst all this, guests are looking to us not for rules, but reassurance; food that feels intuitive, grounding and nourishing without being fussy. Functional food allows us to do exactly that. Prebiotics appear naturally through our in-house ferments, cultured dairy, and slow-fermented multi-grain breads – foods that have existed for centuries, now understood anew. Low-glycemic ingredients like lentils, millets, amaranth, and buckwheat offer steady energy, especially for guests moving between meetings, flights, and long days. Neurotropic foods like mushrooms, nuts, berries, cacao, turmeric, and cold-pressed oils are some foods that support focus and balance.”

Immersive Culinary Storytelling

Today’s discerning traveller seeks more than indulgence. They look for meaning, connection, and authenticity at the table. Dining can no longer be just about presentation or scale; it needs to tell a story.

“At Saraca Hotel Lucknow, we place cuisine at the heart of experience-led hospitality, bringing together authentic recipes, heirloom techniques, and truthful cooking to create experiences rooted in place and memory. Mehmaan-Nawaazi is integral to Awadhi traditions, and we ensure that our guests feel its warmth through curated set menu dinners, chef’s table



Chef Saurabh Tyagi, Director of Culinary, The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore



Mohsin Qureshi, Cluster Executive Chef, Saraca Hotels & Resorts

experiences and more, offering a glimpse into the glorious days of the Nawabs. From the spices to cooking methods and the way food is presented and served, it allows guests to not just taste a meal but experience its soul,” says Mohsin Qureshi, Cluster Executive Chef, Saraca Hotels & Resorts.

Floral & Botanical Infusions

These infusions have quietly been part of the F&B space for some time, like using rose and kewra in Indian cuisine or cham-omile and lavender in teas.

“There’s a preference for flavours that feel fresh and light on the palate. Botanical infusions deliver exactly that because they are visually beautiful and edible, and they elevate a dish without overdoing it. There is also a growing appreciation for ingredients that feel intentional, rather than indulgent.



Salt Baked Scottish Salmon

Image courtesy: Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity.

“There is a visible shift towards balanced plates where fibre and protein are carefully considered rather than treated as opposing choices.”

- Saurabh Taneja



Gaurav Malhotra, Director of Culinary, JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu



Pradip Pani, Executive Chef, Grand Mercure Mysore



Manisha Bhasin, Corporate Executive Chef, ITC Hotels



Anupam Dasgupta, Senior Vice President – Operations, North India and Head of Wellness, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts

“With technology managing numbers and forecasts, we as chefs can give more attention to flavour, balance, and care on the plate.”

- Pradip Pani

Flowers and herbs tap into wellness, sustainability, and aesthetics all at once. We grow a variety of herbs and botanicals that are used across our kitchens and bars. For instance, at Mezzo Mezzo, our modern European restaurant showcases a basil-infused butter candle alongside fermentation-led herb-infused oils,” says Gaurav Malhotra, Director of Culinary, JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu.



Sesame and pickled vegetable salad at The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore

Technology in the Kitchen

Technology has become a quiet but essential part of how we cook today.

“We use artificial intelligence as a smart assistant to our chefs by working behind the scenes. AI helps us do the math that kitchens have always struggled with, allowing us to plan better and cook more responsibly. By analysing patterns and demand, the AI helps us understand exactly how much food to order. This reduces waste and ensures that fresh ingredients are used thoughtfully rather than thrown away. It also supports consistency in the kitchen, helping the favourite dishes of our guests taste the same every time they visit, no matter the day. With technology managing numbers and forecasts, we as chefs are free to focus on what truly matters. We can give more attention to flavour, balance, and care on the plate,” says Pradip Pani, Executive Chef, Grand Mercure Mysore.

Micro-regional Cuisines Using Indigenous GI-tagged Ingredients

GI tagging plays a significant role in preserving heritage when it comes to food. India has close to 635 GI-tagged products. One of the biggest threats to food heritage today is counterfeit or unauthorised imitation.

“GI tagging helps prevent this by providing legal protection against the use of regional names and qualities by producers outside the protected area. This also ensures that the authenticity of the product is preserved, and it continues to reflect the true heritage of the region. GI not only protects the produce but also helps by safeguarding traditional practices, promoting cultural identity, and maintaining regional food diversity, thus helping chefs ensure our culinary heritage is not lost. Unusual ingredients open vistas for innovation and being the trendsetters and bring ancient culinary wisdom on the world map,” says Manisha Bhasin, Corporate Executive Chef, ITC Hotels.

Mindful Indulgence

Luxury dining in 2026 reflects a growing convergence of indulgence and wellbeing. Guests increasingly seek cuisine that is flavour-forward yet lighter, ingredient-conscious and aligned with holistic living.

“Aujasya by The Leela brings this philosophy to life through thoughtfully designed menus inspired by ancient wisdom and modern nutritional science. Each offering is crafted to nourish the body while delivering exceptional taste, seamlessly integrating balance, vitality, and contemporary luxury. Mindful indulgence, as expressed through Aujasya by The Leela, represents a shift towards conscious dining without compromise, setting a new benchmark for wellness-led luxury hospitality,” says Anupam Dasgupta, Senior Vice President – Operations, North India and Head of Wellness, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts.

From personalised wellness and mindful portions to cultural continuity and conscious indulgence, dining in 2026 has become a deeply personal experience—one that nourishes both body and mind. ■