



*Godrej*  
**Food  
Trends**  
Report 2026

*Stories*



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An illustration of a stack of books with a pen resting on top.

# About the Annual Godrej Food Trends Report

Since its inception in 2018, the Godrej Food Trends Report has emerged as one of the most credible platforms on themes that significantly impact the food industry each year. Over the years, the report has continuously evolved to include a wider group of industry experts who are encouraged to reflect on the year gone by and share their projections on key themes that will influence the industry in the coming year.

The Godrej Food Trends Report has been facilitating deep conversations in the food space each year. To date, the report has drawn on insights from **over 2000 experts and thought leaders** from **food, beverage and allied industries** spanning **across industry verticals and geographies**.

## Media Coverage

Over the last 7 years, the report has driven over 2000 media conversations and has been read by people across the globe. The 2024 edition of the Godrej Food Trends Report alone drove 400 news features since its launch, reaching regional and global audiences. This edition garnered 2.5lac report downloads, reaching 11M readers!

## Awards and Accolades

So far, Godrej Food Trends Report has won **over 10 prestigious industry awards and accolades** for concept, content and design.



# Global recognition for Godrej Food Trends Report over the years



2018 (2 wins)



2023



2018, 2019 (2 wins), 2020, 2021, 2022 (2 wins), 2023 (2 wins), 2024



2023



2022 (2 wins), 2023 (4 wins)



2022



2024



## A note from Tanya Dubash

Welcome to the ninth edition of The Godrej Food Trends Report (GFTR).

It is with immense pride that I watch this report solidify its position as the definitive authority on India's culinary trajectory each year. Over time, we have transitioned from merely observing the industry to actively shaping the dialogue between data, tradition, and the future of food. This year, we explore Stories, the powerful narratives of provenance and connection that now dictate value in our food system.

A defining story of 2026 is the rise of the Female Farmer. We see the 'invisible backbone' of agriculture finally stepping into the light. Aligning with the UN International Year of the Woman Farmer, we are witnessing a surge in demand for transparency that celebrates produce from women-led agri-businesses. Their traditional ecological wisdom and earth-stewardship will become premium value propositions, transforming the culinary narrative from simple sourcing to profound empowerment.

One of the trends that resonates with me is about Protein going *Namkeen*. The fatigue of sweet-centric protein bars and chalky shakes is leading to a savoury-first protein revolution, stimulating a category of functional snacking that caters to the salt-forward Indian palate. With industry leaders already successfully launching street-food-inspired collections like *bhel* bars, and manufacturing tech-solving the shelf-stability of spice-based fats, the savoury protein bar is poised to become a staple of the functional, mindful-eating movement in India in 2026, and beyond.

The explosion of Quick-Commerce will redefine domesticity through 'assisted cooking', weaving together high-quality, pre-prepared simmer sauces and marinades with the tactile joy of the home kitchen. By outsourcing the labour-intensive 'prep' while retaining the final 'sear', this trend will stimulate a new culinary middle ground that allows urban dwellers to reclaim the kitchen without the burden of time-poverty.

One trend that is personally heartening to me is about Pet Nutrition coming into focus. For those of us who are pet parents, our furry friends are integral family members, and I am happy that their longevity and well-being are being nurtured.

As with every edition, this 2026 report serves as a strategic compass for those navigating this narrative-driven landscape. I hope these insights inspire you to embrace the stories shaping the future of the Indian food ecosystem.

Happy Reading!  
Best,



**Tanya Dubash**  
Executive Director & Chief Brand Officer  
Godrej Industries Group



## A note from Sujit Patil

As we unveil the 9th edition of the Godrej Food Trends Report (GFTR), I am reflecting on this remarkable journey that began in 2018 under the banner of Vikhroli Cucina. Over nearly a decade, we have systematically explored the 'what', 'where' and 'when' of India's culinary identity. Moving from the Atlas of our diversity to the Provenance of our land and the Seasonality of our harvests, each edition has served as a cornerstone for collaboration and innovation.

But as any great cook knows, a recipe is just ink on paper until you add the human element. This year, we explore the heartbeat of our culture through the theme of Stories. In an era of rapid-fire innovation and digital overstimulation, storytelling is the force that cuts through the noise to provide the 'who' and the 'why' behind every bite.

This shift toward depth is also redefining how we view the land. We have reached a point where provenance is being 'pincoded'. Consumers are moving beyond broad-stroke labels, seeking ingredient-forward experiences that zoom in from regional cuisines to hyper-local micro-regions. Driven by a surge in GI tagging and intentional culinary travel, the industry is weaving the narratives of specific communities into unique 'foodprints' that offer diners deep cultural immersion. Whether it is the story of a GI-tagged grain or the evolution of the Indian kitchen from the communal *chulha* to the smart oven, the focus has shifted to the specific hands and histories that shape our meals.

Ultimately, we are entering an era where intention overrides opulence. Driven by a global movement toward conscious living, the era of grandiose, 'all-you-can-eat' excess is waning. 2026 is defined by unforgettable experiences crafted with intent behind every aspect, from the 'Menu as Memoir' in chef-led establishments to the 'Protein Paradox' in our nutritional habits. This meaningful simplicity shifts the narrative from extravagance to purposeful consumption that elevates simple ingredients, the people who grow them, and the story behind the food.

As we approach our tenth-anniversary milestone in 2027, this ninth edition serves as a vital bridge, harmonising nearly a decade of insights into a synergistic narrative. We have moved from mapping the land to understanding the heart, proving that the future of Indian food is written by the people who grow, cook, and share it.

I invite you to leverage these stories to inspire your own creative and strategic horizons, as we prepare to bring this journey full circle.

Sincerely,



**Sujit Patil (@sujitpatil)**  
Chief Communications Officer  
Godrej Industries Group





## A message from Rushina Munshaw-Ghildiyal

Welcome to the 9th edition of the Godrej Food Trends Report.

Looking back, 2025 was a year that came full circle for me. It began with ticking off a long awaited bucket list desire to study the plant to plate journey of spices in Idukki, Kerala. This was followed by a deeply personal honour witnessing the 2024 edition of this report recognised as the Best of the Best on a global stage at the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards in Lisbon. Mid-year brought the release of my book MUMBAI, which also won a Gourmand Award, and my year culminated with the launch of CHUTNEY, a two-year labour of love celebrating this essential condiment. It is heartening that these personal achievements resonated so perfectly with the larger narrative of the Godrej Food Trends Report.

Our 2025 edition lived up to its reputation as the food equivalent of a fashion forecast, as almost all of its forecasts proved remarkably accurate across the board. Led by our theme of Seasons, which proved truly portentous, we saw the industry align with the natural calendar to strengthen the bond between the diner, the farmer, and the environment. A distinct manifestation of this was the rise of Himalayan Cuisine. This cultural ascent reached its pinnacle in January 2026 when Chef Prateek Sadhu of NAAR served Himalayan flavours at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, a landmark moment for simple ingredients like *jakhiya*, *gucchi*, and *mandua*. Our Regional Perspectives section this year celebrates the specificity and hyper-local authenticity that GI-tagging is bringing to India's culinary conversations. Parallely, heritage alcohols broke free from stereotypes to win awards on the global platform. This year, our Global Perspectives section showcases just how much of a mark India is making in this niche.

This edition adds the next chapter in the journey of tracing our culinary ethos. We began by celebrating diversity with the Atlas of Food in 2023, explored Provenance in 2024, and studied Seasons in 2025. The global validation and local transformations I have witnessed this past year reaffirmed a belief that our culinary culture has never been just about the food on the plate, but about the stories we tell. With that, I welcome you to 2026, the year of Stories.

As with every edition, this one is organised into sections containing essays that serve as a living anthology of trends. Dining In traces how technology reshapes the Indian kitchen, and Dining Out examines the restaurant experience through the lens of the menu. In Health, Hygiene, and Lifestyle, we chronicle wellness coming full circle as traditional practices see a resurgence. The beverage section examines *chai-nashta* as a driving force for commerce,



while our dessert section explores our relationship with sugar. Food Media explores the evolution of digital storytelling, and Food Travel focuses on destinations as narrative forces. We conclude with Emerging Conversations, tackling the protein paradox and its impact on our nutritional evolution. These essays illustrate how stories are the ultimate currency of value in the F&B industry.

As we synthesised this year's insights, three distinct conversations emerged. The first is a shift toward hyper-local authenticity and regional specificity, driven by GI-tagging and provenance. The second is a strengthening of intent, as we move from mindless consumption toward strategic mindfulness. Finally, there are stories. Every culinary experience will now come with a narrative that satisfies the soul as much as the palate. This is a vital anchor in an era of tension between the precision of AI and the imperfection of the analogue, where storytelling will be an essential bridge that humanises our innovation.

Stories create genuine, lasting connections and storytelling, humanity's original art form, is now the dominant force influencing modern media. It goes beyond simple facts to create empathy, trigger memory, and inspire action. Every aspect of this edition is driven by a narrative that influences both eating habits and perceptions.

I invite you to delve into these chronicles. Tap into the pulse of a nation that is finally, proudly, telling its story, one bite, and one memory at a time. In doing this, may this report also inspire you to find your story in every meal you savour in 2026.



### Rushina Munshaw-Ghildiyal

Curator and Editor-in-Chief, Godrej Food Trends Report  
Managing Director, A Perfect Bite Consulting





# Top Trend Predictions for 2026

In alphabetical order (A-Z)



## Chatpata piquant flavours will rule palates

While global flavour trends enter an era of maximalist flavours—where every note is amplified to the extreme—and experimenting with 'Swicy' (sweet-spicy) and 'Fricy' (fruity-spicy) profiles, India will double down on its *teekha-chatpata* roots. The food industry will embrace maximalism by turning the volume on bold, piquant flavours and taste up to the absolute limit. Expect 'flavour-collision' dishes and mashups that break rules to create unapologetic, layered profiles and multi-sensory experiences for a generation that will seek adventure in every bite.



## Female farmers will take center stage

Aligning with the UN International Year of the Woman Farmer, and bolstered by the Indian government's strategic push toward gender-inclusive agriculture, the Indian female farmer, the invisible backbone of agriculture, will finally step into the light in 2026. Industry demand for transparency, provenance combined with growing attention to empowerment of local producers will celebrate produce from women-led agri businesses and direct-to-consumer platforms. Traditional ecological wisdom and earth-stewardship will become premium value propositions and storytelling assets in culinary narratives.



## Dietary fibre will become mainstream

Driven by a growing pursuit of holistic metabolic health, 2026 will see 'fibremaxxing' move from a social media niche to a mainstream wellness pillar. Fueled by a collective desire to reduce ultra-processed food consumption and achieve natural satiety (partly inspired by GLP-1 diets) dietary fibre will gain prominence as a premium functional ingredient. This resurgence will manifest in fibre-forward menus and fibre-fortified snacks and RTE products that prioritise gut-brain wellness and balanced metabolic health for the modern Indian palate.



## Home cooking will evolve intelligently

The explosion of Quick-Commerce is redefining domesticity through 'assisted cooking', bridging the gap between convenience and craft. In 2026, home cooking will evolve into a hybrid experience, weaving together high-quality, pre-prepared base preparations with the tactile joy of the final finish. This shift will stimulate product innovation that offers a new culinary middle ground, allowing time-poor consumers to reclaim the emotional satisfaction of home cooking without the labour-intensive prep.



## Intention will override opulence

Driven by a global movement toward quiet luxury and conscious living, the era of grandiose, all-you-can-eat excess is waning. 2026 will be all about unforgettable experiences crafted with intent behind every aspect. Meaningful simplicity will shift the narrative around consumption from extravagance to purposeful consumption, that elevates simple ingredients, people and the story behind food.



## Mindful escapism will define snacking

The 2026 consumers will increasingly view indulgence as a strategic tool for emotional support rather than mindless consumption. They will circumvent mindless eating in the pursuit of strategic consumption. Products leveraging playfulness, nostalgic flavours and mood-enhancing ingredients will become edible anchors designed to provide 'bite-sized joy,' or micro-doses of happiness and comfort to uplift and dispel uncertainty.



## Mithai will go Indo-modern

The era of simple sugary treats is ending. Iconic concepts like *Gulab Jamun* Cheesecake and *Rasmalai* Tiramisu were just sweet flirtations. The next chapter of *mithai* is headed toward a passionate entanglement with Western influences. Desserts will be multi-sensory experiences of exciting texture mashups (creamy-crunchy combinations) and adventurous flavour juxtapositions, transforming traditional sweets into complex, contemporary indulgences to stimulate the globalised Indian palate.



## Multi-Regional restaurants will rise

A new generation of dining hubs is set to spark an era of culinary cross-pollination. In 2026, multi-regional restaurants will move beyond singular traditions, weaving diverse Indian flavours into a cohesive, immersive celebration of the country's gastronomic identity. This pan-Indian narrative will allow the adventurous Indian diner to explore the breadth of the nation's palate under a single roof.



## Pet nutrition will come into focus

2026 will mark a turning point for pet food. With pets increasingly being embraced as integral family members, household nutrition plans will evolve to place their dietary needs on par with the rest of the family. This shift will drive a rise in scientifically formulated food tailored for longevity and well-being. By blending high-quality ingredients with specialised veterinary science, these options will optimise palatability and digestibility, establishing a lifestyle-driven approach to the family pet's long-term health.



## Protein will go namkeen

Fatigue with sweet-centric protein products is sparking a 'savory-first' revolution in functional snacking. In the coming year, protein-rich snacks will pivot toward namkeen profiles to better cater to the salt-forward Indian palate. Driven by the success of *bhel* bars and high-protein frozen snacks like *kebabs*, and supported by new manufacturing tech that stabilises spice-based fats, savoury protein is poised to become a staple of mindful eating. Expect a surge in savoury protein bars featuring the bold, addictive flavours of traditional Indian street food.



## Provenance will be pinned

Consumers will move beyond broad-stroke labels, and seek out ingredient-forward, high-value storytelling driven culinary experiences. Driven by the rise of GI tagging and a surge in culinary travel, the lens that has been on regional cuisines since 2017 will zoom in to focus on hyper-local destination-driven concepts that weave together the narratives of micro-cuisines of specific communities and microregions into unique 'food-prints' that offer diners deep cultural immersion.



## Savoury-forward cocktails will make a big splash

India's naturally savoury-inclined palate, driven by the recalibration of the sugar quotient in mixology, will see savoury cocktails captivate drinkers, in the ever-evolving 'Liquid Gastronomy' movement. In 2026, the line between bar and kitchen will blur as mixologists employ techniques like fat-washing and fermentation to infuse drinks with hyper-local umami-rich, spicy, and pickled notes, transforming the glass into a culinary canvas to cater to a growing Gen Z demographic that values complexity and cultural storytelling over high-sugar, high-alcohol offerings.

# Regional Perspectives

By the year 2030, the Indian government aims to register 10,000 Geographical Indication (GI) tags to traditional Indian products and crafts, in an effort to improve the country's intellectual property system, and to give unique local products a better standing in global markets. This year, the Regional Perspectives section celebrates this, by showcasing Indian GI tagged culinary products, alongside exemplary individuals and institutions passionately engaged in keeping them alive.

**Saffron [Kashmir (N)]**  
Pampore-based Noush by Basu Kesar highlights the 6-step Mongra hand-processing of Kashmiri saffron, honouring farmers, tradition, and legacy while embracing modern standards and community empowerment.

**Bikaneri Bhujia [Rajasthan (W)]**  
Haldiram's traces its roots to Bikaner, where a thin, crisp version of bhujia—made with local moth-beans and deep-fry tradition—became a sensation.

**Gir Kesar mango [Gujarat (W)]**  
Wild Jai Farm highlights GI-tagged Gir Kesar mangoes through storytelling, emphasising traditional farming, natural ripening, and sustainable practices to preserve the fruit's unique flavor and cultural heritage.

**Sangli raisins [Maharashtra (W)]**  
Umrani Farms showcases Sangli raisins from indigenous Sharad and Sonaka grapes, promoting traditional, chemical-free farming while empowering women farmers and supporting social and environmental sustainability.

**Kasti coriander [Maharashtra (W)]**  
Kasti Kotimbir Shetkari Utpadak Sangh produces GI-tagged coriander from Ashvi village, Maharashtra, preserving local farming while highlighting distinct aroma and regional identity.

**Dharwad peda [Karnataka (S)]**  
Big Mishra Pedha uses Dharwad peda's GI tag to showcase regional tradition, exclusivity, and heritage, creating consumer trust and premium positioning.

**Alleppey Green Cardamom and Malabar Black Pepper [Kerala (S)]**  
Idukki-based Graamy uses geographic tagging to preserve spice heritage, challenging trade-route names, offering indigenous peppers and cardamom varieties with unique flavours and culinary uses.

**Nendran banana [Kerala (S)]**  
Malabar Se incorporates locally sourced bananas into traditional Kerala snacks and desserts, using design and flavours that reflect regional culture and connect consumers to Kerala's culinary heritage.

**Jammu - Kashmir**

**Himachal Pradesh**

**Punjab**

**Chandigarh**

**Haryana**

**Delhi**

**Uttarakhand**

**Uttar Pradesh**

**Rajasthan**

**Gujarat**

**Maharashtra**

**Goa**

**Karnataka**

**Kerala**

**Madhya Pradesh**

**Chhattisgarh**

**Telangana**

**Andhra Pradesh**

**Tamil Nadu**

**Bihar**

**Jharkhand**

**West Bengal**

**Orissa**

**Odisha**

**Sikkim**

**Arunachal Pradesh**

**Assam**

**Meghalaya**

**Nagaland**

**Manipur**

**Tripura**

**Mizoram**

**Malta [Uttarakhand (N)]**  
Himalayan Haat in Pauri Garhwal shares grounded storytelling, highlighting women prepping GI-tagged Malta and Burnash for coolers, jams, and preserves.

**Munsiyari Rajma [Uttarakhand (N)]**  
The Pahari Life is a Uttarakhand-based brand promoting authentic Himalayan produce. Their GI-tagged Munsiyari Rajma is organically grown, nutrient-rich, and known for its creamy texture and unique mountain flavours.

**Kala Bhat [Uttarakhand (N)]**  
Trishulii is a sustainable brand from Uttarakhand that empowers local farmers, preserves Himalayan heritage, and promotes eco-friendly, authentic mountain products crafted with care to bring the true taste of the hills.

**Banarasi Paan [Uttarakhand (N)]**  
From the heart of Varanasi, brands like Netaji Paan Bhandar (est. 1890) serve betel leaves layered with gulikand, dry fruits and aromatic spices—every bite a tribute to street-culture heritage and timeless hospitality.

**Dalle Khursani [Sikkim (NE)]**  
NE Origins uses Sikkim's GI-tagged Dalle Khursani to connect consumers with its cultural roots, sourcing directly from local farmers and women-led groups to ensure authenticity and community support.

**Karbi Anglong Ginger [Assam (NE)]**  
Pirbi Ethnic Haat near Kaziranga promotes Karbi Anglong Ginger, high in gingerol, supporting local farmers and conscious consumption through dry, powdered, and value-added products.

**Bhoot Jolokia [Nagaland (NE)]**  
Naagin Sauce highlights India's regional chilli heritage—Sankeshwari, Bhut Jolokia, Kanthari—offering sauces with real ingredients, ethical sourcing, and flavours crafted for the Indian palate, beyond just heat.

**Sirakhong chilli [Manipur (NE)]**  
Hill Wild was founded by Zeinorin Angkang, inspired by the distinct flavours of her homeland, bringing them globally while supporting local farmers and preserving traditional culinary knowledge.

**Lakadong Turmeric [Meghalaya]**  
Two Brothers, Pahari Roots, and Amyra Farms source turmeric directly from farmers in Meghalaya's East and West Jaintia Hills, naturally containing 8-13% curcumin—six times more than other varieties.

**Joynagar er Moa [West Bengal (E)]**  
Earth Story Farm showcases artisanal Nolen Gur, seasonal sourcing, and Bengal's culinary heritage, collaborating with local cooperatives to ensure authenticity while supporting traditional livelihoods.

**Rasgulla [Odisha and West Bengal (E)]**  
K.C. Das leverages Bengal's GI-tagged Rasgulla to assert legacy, heritage, and regional pride, amidst historical West Bengal-Odisha GI disputes.

**Guntur Sannam chilli [Andhra Pradesh (S)]**  
US-based spice brand Diaspora Co. spotlights farm partners cultivating heritage spices through storytelling, highlighting GI-tagged Sannam chilli from Guntur, celebrated for its vibrant color, fiery kick, and distinctive flavours.

**Ooty Varkey [Tamil Nadu (S)]**  
The Varkey from Donnington Bakehouse is made in small scale batches in the Nilgiri hills, using mountain water and wood-fired ovens; each batch carries the brand's artisanal legacy.

### GI Tagging in India

- Chillies
- Fruits, Dry Fruits and Nuts
- Legumes and Dals
- Savouries & Snacks
- Spices
- Sweets



# GI Tagging: Documenting India's Food Diversity

Region-specific branding, visual storytelling, and conscious distribution, are coming together in a living archive of place, people, and practice and elevating indigenous and local ingredients and foods.

## GI Tagging: Documenting India's Food Diversity

India's food landscape is a testament to its rich diversity—from Kashmir's saffron, to Kerala's peppercorn, Odisha's *Rasagolla* to Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi Macaroon. Its culinary legacy is as ancient as it is diverse.

Every product—as it travels from the soil to the plate—carries with it layers of history, culture, and community that deserve to be acknowledged and preserved. As conversations around food, identity, and origins deepen, GI tags are growing beyond their roles of legal markers, into symbols of heritage. They are transforming into powerful storytelling tools, connecting producers and consumers.

Producer communities, custodians, brands big and small, chefs, food media, and content creators, are able to leverage GI tags to highlight and strengthen connections across the food system, making these tags accessible and meaningful.

This year, the Regional Perspectives section celebrates this, by showcasing Indian GI tagged culinary products, alongside exemplary individuals and institutions passionately engaged in keeping them alive. Through region-specific branding, visual storytelling, and conscious distribution, they are both elevating indigenous and local produce, and reshaping how

consumers engage with food: as a living archive of place, people, and practice.

That said, the work is just beginning, as there are a million stories still waiting to be explored and learned from across India, both at the hyper local as well as pan-India level.



## What Is GI tagging?

Geographical Indication (GI) tagging offers a form of intellectual property protection to products and foodstuffs that originate from a specific geographical region. It validates the role of terroir, provenance and production methods

that shape a product's qualities and reputation.

Globally governed under the World Trade Organization (through the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights or TRIPS

Agreement), in India, GI tagging is administered by the Geographical Indications Registry (under the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trade Marks, Ministry of Commerce and Industry). Its core objective is to create opportunities

for enhanced market value and export potential for regional producers.

GI tags in the food space encompass a broad range of products, bifurcated into agricultural goods and prepared foodstuffs. The former can include spices (Kashmiri Saffron, Malabar Pepper), specific varieties

of rice, legumes or other grains (*Basmati Rice*, *Munsiyari Rajma*), fruits (Nagpur Orange, *Shahi Litchi*), vegetables and more.

The latter can include sweets or confectionaries (*Tirupati Laddu*, Joynagar *Moa*, Silao *Khaja*), savoury snacks (Ratlami *Sev*, Bikaneri *Bhujia*), condiments (Similipal *Kai* Chutney,

*Appemidi* Mango Pickle), and beverages (Goan *Feni*, Uttarakhandi *Buransh Sharbat*).

As legal markers, GI tags prevent unauthorised use of a specific product name, protecting traditional production methods, and promoting the economic interests of the registered producers.

## GI tagging: Safeguarding Indigenous Peoples & Their Wisdom

For generations, many communities have served as custodians of ingredients and products, often working outside formal structures to safeguard traditional techniques while adapting them to changing climates, resources, and social dynamics. Their oral histories, rituals, and everyday practices are deeply embedded in the making of these products.

The right to preserve, propagate and narrate a product's history—and pass down its knowledge—rests with local communities, its true custodians and storytellers. As processes like biodiversity documentation become more institutionalised, there is a pressing need to ensure that these

communities are recognised and included. Genuine recognition involves not only acknowledgment but also active participation, consent, and equitable benefit-sharing.

GI tags, granted collectively to a regional community or producer group—not to individuals—ensure that only registered producers within the defined geographical region can use the GI name (Darjeeling Tea or Kashmiri Mongra Saffron), preventing unauthorised use or misrepresentation of origin.

Furthermore, in recognising these custodians of traditional knowledge, GI tagging facilitates systems that support and protect their rights in a rapidly formalising landscape—where

legal frameworks, market forces, and intellectual property regimes are increasingly shaping how knowledge is valued, shared, and owned. This is especially urgent as regional borders blur and products gain market value, making the assignment of authenticity a complex and contested process.



## Leveraging Storytelling Through GI Tagging

GI Tags offer a powerful tool to craft and communicate compelling stories around regional ingredients and foodstuffs. Brands that have emerged from these regions and producer groups are able to leverage GI tags to offer grounded, place-based narratives that reflect these ecosystems and value chains, deeply embedded in landscape, knowledge and skill.

Several brands championing GI tagged products today are also placing their producer communities at the forefront, and empowering with documentation tools. Whether sharing glimpses into farming practices, post-harvest processing, or skill-based value addition, these narratives allow brands and communities to cut through the noise and build lasting connections

with consumers. Thereby strengthening market linkages and transforming novelty into long-term viability.

Beyond storytelling, the geographical connection also opens up possibilities for culinary tourism, allowing travellers to visit these regions and observe or participate in the production cycle or farm-to-plate experiences of GI tagged products.



## Creating Education Content With GI Tagged Storytelling

Disseminating product knowledge and demonstrating usage directly influence the consumption patterns of ingredients and products, ultimately impacting sales. Storytelling has become a key component in creating content that shares product characteristics, usage, recipes and more—particularly for agricultural

products with specific culinary applications—within brand strategies. One effective approach brands are using, is collaborating with food influencers, and content creators who bring credibility, relatability, fresh storytelling methods, and connections to new audiences.



## The Way Forward

As discussions around authenticity and regional identity deepen, the documentation and potential commercialisation of traditional knowledge must be approached with care. Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) frameworks are essential to ensure that communities retain

control over how their knowledge is used while respecting their choices, including the decision to not commoditise valued products. Institutions like local Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) play a crucial role as intermediaries, bridging the gap between local

custodians of wisdom from tribal and indigenous communities, modern research and technological advances. They work closely with diverse stakeholders to document traditional practices, identify products that hold cultural, ecological, and economic value and facilitate their path to market.



Godrej  
**Jersey**™

# The Thick Curd



Refer actual pack for more details  
Creative Visualization. The actual product may differ due to the nature of the product  
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# Global Perspectives

Over the last decade, India's culinary heritage has seen tremendous celebration across the world, with ingredients, restaurants and chefs all making their mark on global palates. Now, this interest in Indian flavour and craft is expanding into the international alcoholic beverage scene. This year's Global Perspectives section celebrates the impact.



# The Global Impact of Indian AlcoBev

## Himachal Pradesh:

**Single Malt Whisky:** Distilled in the Himalayas, this small-batch single malt offers mountain purity and gentle complexity in every sip.

## Haryana

**Single Malt Whisky:** Indri, a triple cask whisky produced in Haryana, has impressed global judges with its balanced flavor and bold innovation.

## Rajasthan:

**Single Malt Whisky:** Rajasthan's desert-aged whisky, marrying sustainability and innovation with rich flavour and Diageo's global finesse.

## Maharashtra/Delhi:

**Whisky:** A heritage whisky brand revived for the modern palate, with smooth textures and nostalgic Indian character.

**Vodka:** An edgy vodka brand redefining Indian spirits with exotic flavours like chilli, mango, and saffron, made for adventurous palates.

## Goa:

**Rum:** A contemporary Goan rum crafted from jaggery and molasses, designed to bring artisanal flair to Indian sugarcane spirits.

**Gin:** A wild Himalayan gin that uses local juniper, turmeric, and raw mango to craft a bold and earthy flavour profile.

**Gin:** A uniquely Indian gin with vibrant citrus and spice notes, capturing the sensory magic of Indian kitchens.

**Gin:** Forest-inspired gin using rare Indian botanicals like pine tips and Palash flowers to evoke the scent of wilderness.

**Single Malt Whisky:** Goa's finest single malt, combining coastal aging and Indian craftsmanship to produce smooth, tropical expressions adored worldwide.

**Vermouth:** India's first vermouth, handcrafted in Goa using Indian herbs and spices for an aromatic, bitter-sweet twist.

**Aperitivo-style Liqueur:** A bright, herbaceous aperitivo that celebrates Indian botanicals in a refreshing and stylish new format.

**Strawberry Liqueur:** A playful strawberry liqueur from Goa, full of ripe berry sweetness and tropical charm.

**Liqueur:** Made with Gondhoraj lemons, this Indian take on Limoncello offers zingy citrus with local flair.

**Coffee Absinthe:** A bold coffee absinthe combining India's finest beans with European tradition for a spicy, aromatic kick.

## Various (India):

**BandarPul**

**QUAFFINE**

**Coffee Liqueur:** Indian coffee liqueurs using locally sourced beans to create deep, rich, and robust spirits with café soul.

## Uttarakhand:

**Gin:** From the Himalayan foothills, this gin features native timur pepper and citrus, delivering crisp, tingling flavors.

## Meghalaya:

**Gin:** Infused with Khasi Mandarin and Meghalaya rainwater, it's as refreshing & pure as its Northeast origin.

## Uttar Pradesh:

**Single Malt Whisky:** A luxurious whisky from the Himalayan plains, offering smooth, elegant flavour with a distinctly Indian finish.

## Madhya Pradesh / Odisha / Chhattisgarh:

**Tribal Spirit (Mahua):** A traditional flower-based tribal spirit reimagined for global palates with smooth, earthy sweetness.

## Karnataka:

**Single Malt Whisky:** A uniquely Indian gin with vibrant citrus and spice notes, capturing the sensory magic of Indian kitchens.

**Rum:** A seamless blend of Caribbean and Indian cane spirits, offering a sweet, smooth, and spicy rum experience.





# Distilling Excellence: Indian Spirit Rising

A new vanguard of entrepreneurs and mixologists has propelled India's alco-bev industry onto the global stage, confidently matching world-class standards and signaling a new era of global competitiveness.

In September 2025, the 27th edition of Spirits Selection by Concours Mondial de Bruxelles (CMB) took place in the town of Tequila in Jalisco, Mexico. Often referred to as the United Nations of Spirits, it featured 2598 spirit samples from 70 countries, blind tasted by 140 international experts. India, which participated in the categories of whisky (premium and single malt), rum, gin, brandy, liqueurs, and ready-to-drink cocktails, showcased a record medal performance, bringing home 14 silver and 6 gold medals, even winning a Grand Gold Medal or 'Revelation' for the very first time. The winning brands, from start-ups, to mid-sized and large legacy companies, represented a true cross-section of India's current alco-bev landscape. Most exciting were the silver medals awarded to *mahura* and cashew *feni* brands, bringing recognition to India's indigenous spirits on a global level.

This is a reflection of the confidence with which the Indian alco-bev industry has been benchmarking itself against global standards in recent years. India's performance at Spirits Selection is by no

means isolated. Indian brands have also been winning in other prestigious competitions such as the International Spirits Challenge (ISC), the International Wine and Spirits Competition (IWSC), and the San Francisco World Spirits Competition (SFWSC).

Such global recognition has also successfully parlayed into an increase in spirits exports. Recent figures released by Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC), place exports in FY24 at USD 400 million—a 30% jump over pre-pandemic numbers. Volumes surged by 52% to 8 million cases, of which Indian single malts accounted for an impressive 150,000.

**"Some of India's super-premium single malts are giving well-known global labels stiff competition even in traditional markets like Europe, the US, and the Gulf nations,"** observes **Anant Iyer**, CIABC's Director General. Adding that regions like Australasia, and the Americas which have a strong concentration of the Indian diaspora and large disposable incomes, are key export markets.

Apart from an increased international presence, the ready availability of Indian spirit brands on domestic retail and airport duty free shelves has also translated into an uptick in sales, as additions to the home bar as well as excellent gifts and souvenirs. **"We have always been selective with our offerings at Bangalore Duty Free. But several Indian brands, across whisky, agave spirits, liqueurs, vodka, gin, and wine have entered the market over the last 3-4 years, and to keep up, we've had to increase our selection to 2.5 times what it used to be,"** says **Dilpreet Singh Mehta**, Country Commercial Director, Dufry Retail India Pvt Ltd. **"Over the last 3 years, the volume of sales on our Indian range has increased threefold."**



## Whisky: Igniting A Spark For Craft Spirits

However, this has not always been the case. The rise of Indian craft spirits can be traced back 15 years, to when N.R. Jagdale, the then-managing director of Amrut Distilleries, made the bold decision to sell Indian single malt to the Scotch market. Rather than selling to the

Indian diaspora, Amrut's success was in its strategy to compete alongside global greats in blind tasting after blind tasting. Not only did Amrut hold its own against established Scottish counterparts, in many instances it even came out on top. The anointment of Amrut Fusion as the third best

whisky in the world in Jim Murray's Whisky Bible in 2010 catalysed the Indian single malt fever.

What distinguishes Indian single malts are their unique flavour characteristics, brought about by two key factors: ingredients and

climate. As opposed to Scottish two-row barley, Indian six-row barley lends more husk and protein, and is lower in carbohydrates, making for a richer, more complex flavour. Further, India's warmer temperatures intensify interactions between the spirit and the barrel, accelerating the extraction of flavour compounds and overall maturation process. While this does mean Indian distillers need to be watchful to avoid over-aging and excessive evaporation, it also

offers opportunities for innovation in techniques that give Indian whiskies the bold expressions that set them apart.

In the wake of Amrut's success, a wave of brands have emerged from the country, including Paul John, Rampur from Radico, Indri from Piccadilly, and more recently GianChand from DeVANS and Crazy Cock from South Seas Distilleries. Data from the International Wine and Spirits Record (IWSR) indicates

that Indian single malts have now surpassed their Scottish brethren by volumes in the domestic market. In response, multinational companies are also entering the segment, through brands like Godawan by Diageo, and L77 by Pernod Ricard. This rapid growth is driving expansion across production and maturation facilities, brand portfolios and marketing efforts, signalling a continued growth for the Indian single malt category.

## Innovation In Premium IMFLs

The global (and domestic) success of Indian single malts has inspired similar large-scale production and innovation in a range of other Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) categories. A legacy of the British, the term IMFL was coined to indicate foreign-origin spirits made in India. They were often considered inferior, and were exported primarily for the Indian diaspora. But today, IMFL brands are leveraging the Indian identity—its ingredients, craftsmanship, provenance stories and more—as a unique and powerful selling proposition that not only distinguishes them from foreign competitors domestically, but also appeals to a wide and discerning international audience.

Examples are countless across categories, from gin, made in the classic London dry style, to rum, vodka, agave spirits, brandy, and most recently homegrown coffee liqueur, vermouth, absinthe, and aperitivo brands.

Given India's wealth of botanicals, it is no surprise that gin was the next category to attract homegrown innovation. Infused with Himalayan juniper berries, Hapusa (named after the Sanskrit word for juniper) was one of the first brands to enter the game, followed by Stranger and Sons, with its use of the aromatic Gondhoraj lime. This was followed

by a spate of regional offerings, each infused with locally sourced botanicals and signature hyper local characteristics. From Uttarakhand emerged Kumaon, a gin, infused with palate-tingling *timur* pepper (closely related to sichuan peppercorns). Meanwhile, Meghalaya gave forth Cherrapunji, infused with flavours of the Northeast like Kasi Mandarin, and beautifully packaged in a reusable stainless-steel bottle embellished with folk art. A more recent entrant distilled in Goa, Vanaha Gin—its very name meaning 'from the forest'—captures unique botanicals like *maulsari*, *palash* blooms, deodar and pine tips from across India's forests.

In addition to exports, global interest has also taken the shape of cross-continental collaborations. Australian distillery Four Pillars partnered with Stanger and Sons to create Spice Trade, a warm aromatic gin for the Australian market. Inspired by the ancient spice routes of India, it featured botanicals like turmeric, long pepper, red chilli, and black cardamom, balanced by a strong juniper base.

Hapusa is now in 24 international markets, from the UK and Italy to Singapore and Taiwan, with exports accounting for roughly 10% of their total volumes. **"We build Hapusa on wild Himalayan juniper—not the cultivated European kind—and layer**

**it with ingredients like turmeric, raw mango, and gondhoraj lime. These ingredients don't just symbolise Indian identity; they give Hapusa a bold, earthy character unlike anything else on the global backbar,"** says **Anand Virmani**, Co-Founder & Master Distiller, Nao Spirits & Beverages.

Rum is now burgeoning in the craft-distilled IMFL segment; unsurprising for a category so close to Indian hearts, and fitting, given a long history of sugarcane cultivation. Brands like Maka Zai, Huli, Idaaya, and Amrut's Two Indies are crafting exciting blends of cane, molasses, and in some cases even jaggery spirits, yielding rich, complex and nuanced rums. Meanwhile, vodka, another spirit that lends itself to endless innovation in flavour, has emerged with fascinating infusions, including anise, saffron, green chilli, and mango from brands like Smoke Lab.

Beyond these more prolific categories, local ingredients are finding their way into exciting developments among more niche segments, including liqueurs and vermouths. Indian coffee is being used to delightful effect in coffee liqueurs like Quaffeine and Bandaarful, as well as in a coffee absinthe called Paapi. Unusual Spirits' Limoncello 24 highlights *Gondhoraj* lime and 412 Strawberry Liqueur uses Mahabaleshwar strawberries. India's first homegrown craft vermouth,



Davana by Naveen Distillery, uses Nashik wine fortified with Indian botanicals, including wormwood, a key ingredient after which it is named, and Quro by Inspired Spirits, India's first aperitivo-style liqueur, is crafted with 36 local botanicals, including fruits like orange, grapefruit, *amla*, flowers like hibiscus

and moringa, and spices and herbs including cinnamon, *ashwagandha*, and *talispatra*.

This awakening of entrepreneurship could not have come at a better time. For instance, a French distillery has begun importing dried *mahua* flowers to create Mah, a label of India's heritage *mahua* spirit for the

European market. They are not alone, leading international alco-bev brands have been looking to India to source a range of ingredients and botanicals in significant quantities. While this is promising for the ingredient producers, it could leave India at risk of appropriation of its rich legacy by foreign players.

## Taking Native Spirits Beyond Borders

A category that is changing this narrative, however, is India's heritage spirits and liqueurs. The last two years have seen Goa's cashew and coconut *feni*, Central India's *mahua* or *mahura*, and the heritage liqueurs of Rajasthan enrapture global audiences with their flavours and provenance stories.

Until recently, India had done little to champion them beyond national borders. But just as Mexico made a success of mezcal and tequila, Peru of Pisco, and Brazil of Cachaça, a rising wave of Indian alco-bev players are doing sterling work to put these truly native Indian spirits on the global stage. On the policy front, there has been significant advocacy in favour of wider production and distribution. Distilleries are working to refine the profiles of these drinks and create unique brand identities rooted in terroir, while mixologists are developing an array of creative cocktails to showcase them in all their versatility.

While this movement is only just emerging, these heritage spirits and liqueurs are already garnering global attention, winning medals at the Spirits Selection awards, and finding their place across bar shows like the Athens Bar Show, Berlin Bar Convent, and Tales of the Cocktail in New Orleans.

As the face of the alco-bev industry, Indian bars are creating quite a stir on the global scene. The 2025 edition of Asia's Top 50 Bars, announced at a ceremony in Macau, ranked 9 Indian bars in the top 100, 5 of which were in the top 50.

New Delhi's Lair stood at No. 8, Bengaluru's Soka at No. 28, Goa's Boilermaker at No. 30, Bengaluru's ZLB23 at No. 31 and Bar Spirit Forward at No. 37.

Earlier in 2025, multiple bars from India also collaborated with the Roma Bar Show to run bar takeovers across Italy. In November 2025, the Athens Bar Week (which preceded the Athens Bar Show) tied up with 30BestBars India, to host shifts by Lair, New Delhi, and Soka, Bangalore, at top bars in Athens.



## Mixologists: Ambassadors Of Indian Cocktail Culture

The force behind this rising success of the Indian alco-bev industry is its talent: mixologists that are helming bar concepts across the world. As ambassadors of the country's beverage culture, they are masterfully championing a rich inheritance of flavour from the subcontinent, wherever they go.

After making a global mark as the beverage manager of the Mandarin Oriental and the Michelin-starred 8

½ Otto e Mezzo Bombana in Hong Kong, Devender Sehgal, now works as an independent bar consultant across the USA and Asia, creating contemporary cocktails that highlight the depth and complexity of Indian flavours. He incorporates ingredients like cardamom, black pepper, turmeric, *kokum*, fenugreek, and tamarind, in thoughtful ways that complement—rather than overpower—the base spirits, keeping the experience refined and accessible

A distinguishing factor that is increasingly giving these bars an edge, is their agility with ingredients and flavour combinations that are uniquely Indian. In Kolkata, Nutcase reimagines the classic whisky cocktail Penicillin by using *kalajire* (cumin) honey. At Sarava in Goa, a drink called Chronicles of Coriander blends Blanco tequila with roasted cumin, tamarind shrub, and smoked jaggery syrup to create a striking effect. At Raffles Udaipur, the Udaipur Sling—Rajasthan's take on the iconic Singapore Sling—combines gin, with homemade rose liqueur, guava, coriander, lime, and *lal maas* bitters, topped off with homemade *frangipani* soda.

Through their unique concepts and masterful mixology, such world-class bars are elevating India's status in the global beverage landscape.

to a global palette.

Hemant Pathak, General Manager at Junoon and Jazba in New York City, has built a cocktail programme that puts a twist on global classics with regional ingredients and Indian craft spirits. At Junoon, his Stinging Vesper is a bold and balanced variation on a Martini, splicing the piney juniper notes of Jaisalmer gin with citrus and spice. And at Jazba, Mr. Brown, his variation on a

Manhattan, blends the fruity, spicy notes of Godawan No 2 with the floral, citrusy and slightly numbing flavour of *timur*, a Himalayan cousin of the Sichuan peppercorn.

Having built a successful career in India, Rohan Matmary is now shaking things up in Kuala Lumpur. As the Beverage Manager at the Four Seasons and Head Bartender at Bar Trigona, he takes every opportunity to infuse cocktails with Indian inspiration. His reinterpretation of the Pornstar Martini, called Lumos, blends Kashmiri saffron, passionfruit nectar, and Trigona's signature honey, topped with sour mead, for a drink that is familiar yet distinct. Matmary also turns to Indian gins for bold and expressive cocktails that appeal to the Malaysian palette. One of his signature Gin & Tonics, made with an intensely fragrant, carbonated tisane of native pomelo, is perfectly enhanced by the tropical botanicals of Hapusa gin, like turmeric and *gondhoraj* lime.

Previously at PCO Mumbai, Roger Gomes, now helms Chef Sujan and Pujan Sarkar's Tiya Social in San Francisco, which aims to reshape the perception of an Indian cocktail bar. Their menu of signature drinks is rooted in heritage and designed for global appeal through contemporary American mixology. For instance, The Marina brings together two beloved drinks: the mango *lassi* and the piña colada. Crafted with pistachio orgeat, pineapple, Coco Lopez, and a custom rum blend, it is clarified and then crowned with the fluffiest mango *lassi* foam.

Beyond their own bar counters, Indian beverage professionals are also demonstrating authority at the most prestigious awards and championships across the world.

Yangdup Lama, co-founder of Sidecar, New Delhi and three other cocktail bars, received the Roku Industry Icon Award at the 2024 ceremony of Asia's 50 Best Bars.

His co-founder Minakshi Singh, is not only part of the education committee at Tales of the Cocktail, but is also the only Indian juror at the global finals of Diageo's World Class Bartender of the Year competition. Sehgal and Pathak have been winners at past editions of World Class. More recently, at its 2023 global finals in São Paulo, Aashi Bhatnagar of Pune's Cobbler and Crew, made waves as the first Indian, and only woman to reach the Top 10 (ultimately finishing 6th).

These recognitions are an apt reflection of the strides being made by Indian bar personalities in recent years.



## The Future: Global Drinking With Indian Flair

Today, India is undoubtedly shaping drinking culture on a global level. A growing portfolio of Indian-made craft spirits are winning international awards and finding rising success in export markets. Meanwhile, Indian

bar concepts rooted in flavour, heritage and craft are rewriting cocktail culture through masterful mixology and strategic cross-border collaborations. This is only the start.

As every segment of the industry puts the full force of its innovation behind championing Indian alco-bev culture for all the world to see, the future of drinking promises to be in high spirits.



## Dining In

Over the last 8 years, the Dining In section has been a window to the dining habits of consumers at home. The goal has always been to glean insights on what inspires, motivates and drives consumers to make the best use of ingredients, products, tools, facilities and resources available to them while planning their everyday meals. This year, the trends section continues to explore how rising awareness, evolving priorities, and improved economic conditions are driving demand for better quality of products and experiences from the food industry.

This year's essay explores the changing story of India's kitchens and how key phases in kitchen evolution influenced food habits and transformed how India ate at various points in history.

# The Indian Kitchen: A Journey Through Time

The Indian kitchen has been a space that has completely transformed with each generation of technological innovation. From the primal flicker of the chulha to the sleek surfaces of the modern airfryer, appliances that didn't just automate tasks—they fundamentally reshaped domestic life, generation after generation. This visual journey captures the dramatic transformation of the Indian kitchen through the ages, driven by game-changing appliances—and the stories they told, of every generation of Indian gastronomy.

## 1940's-1960's



### Early Years

- Chulha (BC to 1940s)
- Kerosene Stove aka Wick Stove (1940s)  
"Neeli jyoti wala" (Ashok) / "Har gruhini ka pasand" (Nutan)
- LPG Stovetop (1965 onwards) "Bhabhiji ko manana, toh LPG stove hi lana" (Khaitan)

## 1960's-1980's



### The First Wave of Appliances

- Refrigerator (1960s onwards)  
"A member of the family in a lakh and sixty thousand homes" (Allwyn)
- Mixer Grinder (1970s onwards)  
"Mujhe mixi la de re, o sajan rangeele"  
(Kanchan) / "We want revolution" (Jaipaan)

## 1980's - 1990's



### Expanding Aspirations of the Indian Kitchen

- OTG (1980s onwards) "Accha Khana" (Borosil)
- Pressure Cooker (1960s onwards) Mum deserves it - give her the best" (Prestige) / "Don't be chained to old style cooking.. Free yourself!" (Hawkins)
- Electric Rice Cookers & Pressure Cookers (1990s onwards) "The smart way to cook perfect rice" (Panasonic)

## 1990's - Today



### Beyond efficiency and convenience

- Induction Stoves (1990s onwards) "Elegance & Efficiency now Affordable" (Prestige)
- Dishwasher (1997) "Load it, close it, forget it" (IFB)
- Roti Maker (1990s onwards) "The kitchen MVP" (Bajaj)
- Microwave oven (1980s onwards) He said, "Why on earth do you need a microwave? .. So I said, "Why on earth do you need a credit card?" (Batliboi Eddy)
- OPOS (Electric Cooker/ Instant Pot) (2000s onwards) "Safe for your family" (V-Guard)
- Air Fryer (2010s onwards) "What's new on the menu?" (Philips)

# From The Chulha To The Instant Pot:

## The Changing Story of India's Kitchens

Technological evolution in the Indian kitchen may have been slow, but every advance has reshaped its existence and meaning.



### Focus Areas

Technological innovation paired with lifestyle changes brought the first wave of change in Indian kitchens, transforming them from functional spaces for preparing meals, to becoming a space for social interaction, fusing technology with efficiency and style. Today, growing disposable incomes and lifestyle aspirations are coupled with a pertinent desire for health and sustainability. Water and energy-saving fixtures and AI-enabled appliances sit alongside age-old cast-iron and stainless steel cookware, signalling to manufacturers that durability, versatility and efficiency are the key-factors in consumer decisions today.

In India, the kitchen has often lagged behind other sites of technological change. Yet when devices have arrived—from the pressure cooker to the refrigerator to the microwave and, more recently, the air fryer and Instant Pot—they have redefined everyday cooking and reshaped cultural expectations. Each appliance

has marked a milestone, not just in food preparation, but also its story, that reflected the changing rhythms of domestic life, the role of women in the household, and the aspirations of a growing middle class.

What we see in the kitchen is always tied to what happens outside it,

whether it's the economy, women's work, or even the food industry. Technology is contextualised by that wider frame. In India, that frame formed in the 1950s and 60s, when kitchens started moving away from coal and clay *chulhas* toward cleaner, faster, and more 'modern' modes of cooking.

### The Foundations Of Modern Cooking (1950s-60s)

The first major transformation of the Indian kitchen post-independence was in the kind of fuel used. For centuries, cooking had centered around the mud *chulha*, fired with coal, wood, or cow dung, leaving kitchens blackened with soot and women coughing from smoke. The kerosene stove brought only marginal improvement. The true shift came with the arrival of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders, into bigger cities from the 1950s onwards.

Cleaner and quicker, LPG set the stage for a new generation of

kitchenware. Most significant among these was the pressure cooker.



*"You needed the flat-surfaced burners of a kerosene or gas stove in order to be able to use a pressure cooker,"*

explains **Amita Baviskar**, professor of sociology and anthropology at Ashoka University. Though steam cookers of the ICMIC, Santosh and Rukmini variety had already been in use in Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai, the year 1959 was pivotal: TTK Prestige and Hawkins both launched their pressure cookers.

However, selling the idea of a sealed, hissing vessel was no easy task. Manufacturers invested in test kitchens that experimented with traditional recipes to adapt them for this new gadget. Free recipe booklets were bundled with every purchase, not unlike the 'starter packs' of recipes modern appliance companies offer today to encourage use. Demonstration vans travelled to towns and villages, projecting films to explain how dal or rice could be cooked in minutes.

The cooker quickly became a symbol of modernity. In 1969, it even featured in a family planning campaign: a 10-litre model was advertised as the 'ideal' size for the two-child household. The only glitch in this euphoric uptake was an undeniable safety issue: in kitchens across India during the 1960s and early 70s, accidents were common. Pressure cookers, poorly understood and sometimes poorly manufactured, would explode under steam pressure. The development of the gasket release system (GRS) in the

mid-1970s mitigated the issue, but gives context to Prestige's tagline of the time—'*Jo biwi se kare pyaar, woh Prestige se kaise kare inkaar*'. It may sound shockingly gendered today, but it conveyed safety and reassurance.

By the 1980s, the pressure cooker had not only become safe but indispensable, its sharp whistle—a sonic marker of middle-class kitchens across India—woven into the rhythm of daily life. It freed up women's time, enabled *dal*, meat curries, and tough

vegetables like carrots and potatoes to cook faster, and even inspired culinary creativity, with many homecooks using it to bake their first cakes.



### The First Wave Of Appliances

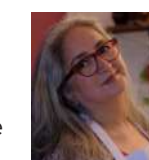
If the pressure cooker was about saving time, the mixer-grinder was about possibility. The Sumeet Mixie, India's first indigenous mixer-grinder was born from a domestic problem. When Madhuri Mathur's imported Braun blender failed to effectively grind dry spices and *dosa* batter, her husband Satya Prakash Mathur, a Siemens engineer, built a sturdier alternative with a single jar for both wet and dry grinding.

A similar innovation played out in South Indian kitchens with the wet grinder, invented by P. Sabapathy in Coimbatore in the 1950s. Intended to spare his wife the back-breaking daily task of grinding batter on a stone mortar, the electric wet grinder transformed the making of *idli* and *dosa*.

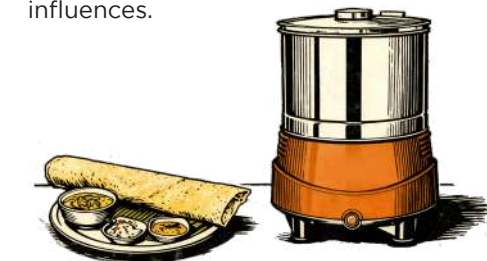
The 'mixie' emerged as an aspirational device in the 1960s and 70s. Early ads from Sumeet promoted it as 'the tough one', capable of handling all the rough and tumble tasks of the Indian kitchen. Its optional food processor attachment also promised housewives the ability to make french fries in a jiffy. Later campaigns positioned it as an 'electronic revolution' and a 'turning point in food preparation.'

By the 1980s, Sumeet was selling 50,000 units a month, becoming as ubiquitous as the pressure cooker. For many families, these devices didn't just reduce labour; they reshaped food routines, making certain dishes more frequent and accessible.

Bengaluru-based home chef **Deepa Chauhan**, swears by her two-decade



old mixer-grinder *"By now I've spent more on repairs than what I paid for it,"* she laughs. But she also keeps a wet grinder, which she uses for more than just fresh *idli* batter. *"I use it to grind homemade tahini and peanut butter. The stone doesn't heat up, so the texture stays silky."* The intrinsic role of these gadgets is reflected in their prevalence over decades and agility of adapting to modern culinary influences.



### Refrigeration & Electrification

Electrification brought another transformative device into the picture: the refrigerator. The fridge began entering Indian homes in the 1960s and 70s. Initially, more than storing leftovers, it was crucial for perishables like milk, butter, fruits, and vegetables, which could now be bought in larger batches and stored longer. In many parts, it also provided relief through hot summer months. Baviskar explains, *"When the refrigerator first came to India, what it represented for a lot of people was cold water. So the first thing that the fridge makes possible is cold water... not only for one's own consumption, but also for hospitality."*

Ads framed the refrigerator as a woman's ally in being both a good wife and an efficient mother. Kelvinator's 'Coolest One' series in the 1990s turned it into a status

symbol, while Whirlpool leaned on gendered tropes, with its 'Ice Ice Baby' jingle dramatising how the fridge could rescue a harried homemaker when ice ran out in the middle of a party.

In the post-liberalisation era, with more women from younger, nuclear households, entering the workforce, the fridge also freed up time they had to invest in frequent meal prep. Fruits and vegetables could be chopped and prepped in bulk, ready-to-use ingredients like chutneys and spreads could be stored to prep lunch boxes or augment meals. Surplus produce like peas and tomatoes, or batch-made snacks could also be frozen. Over time long-held beliefs that eating stored or reheated food was unhealthy also began to erode.

As aspirations grew, especially among the growing urban middle-class, the refrigerator both enabled and accommodated changing lifestyles. In every sense, *"the refrigerator was truly transformative. It revolutionised how we think and work with food,"* Baviskar concludes.



## Expanding Aspirations

By the 1990s, these new aspirations extended into cooking itself. The 'good cook' was no longer just one who excelled at traditional dishes, but one who experimented with recipes and techniques drawn from outside. These shifts drove the demand for new appliances.

Toasters, oven-toaster-grills (OTGs), and later microwaves allowed home cooks to experiment with baking and international cuisines. For those who had once baked cakes inside a pressure cooker, the OTG was an attractive upgrade that inadvertently spawned side industries for accessory gadgets like electric beaters, as well as bakeware like cake tins and pie molds. Cakes, pizzas, pastas and noodles became de rigueur alongside *dal-bhaat-roti-sabzi* in these new modular kitchens.

But not all gadgets saw such success. The microwave, despite

gaining a foothold in Indian kitchens in the 1990s, and more visibly in the 2000s and 2010s, never reshaped Indian cooking in quite the transformative way it did elsewhere. With cheap, fresh food, and the availability of domestic help, they were largely relegated to reheating and cooking rice in the absence of a rice cooker.

**Gitika Saikia**, Mumbai-based home chef and northeast food curator, recalls using the microwave to cook rice and dal before she got an LPG connection, but says it often got messy. **"The problem with cooking dal in a microwave is that you have to keep checking, otherwise water spills over while it is boiling."** She maintains that **"rice cooks best in a microwave, as the grains remain separated even without salt or oil."**



Still, once her gas connection came through, she promptly switched to a cooker.

The electric roti-maker, introduced in the 1990s, also saw mixed reception. It promised a different kind of convenience: it collapsed the labour-intensive task of rolling and cooking rotis into a single step. While some welcomed the efficiency, others found the taste and texture inferior. Some, like Chauhan, found creative alternate uses—such as dehydrating leftover *rotis* to make *khakras*.



## The 2010s & Beyond

The 2010s brought a new global entrant: the Instant Pot. Engineer and cookbook author **B. Ramakrishnan**—better known as Chef Ramki—believes its success amongst Indian cooks owes to the legacy of the pressure cooker: the Instant Pot retains its advantages while removing its drawbacks. **"You don't need to monitor whistles, it's not messy, it's not noisy,"** he explains. Its immediate success amongst the Indian diaspora, promoted Indian manufacturers to produce equivalents for the domestic market, although with a more gradual uptake.

Ramki himself sought to reinvent the pressure cooker through the One Pot One Shot (OPOS) method, developed with a modified pressure cooker and induction stove. By

cutting water out of cooking altogether and relying on 'pressure baking', OPOS retained texture, colour, and nutrients, and promised speed with consistency. Initial resistance to OPOS was real, he says. **"Any labour-saving device was always met with huge resistance in the Indian kitchen, mostly from patriarchal mindsets. Sweat and toil were always glorified, mostly by those who didn't sweat and toil."**

Over time, however, the promise of speed and consistency won over many home cooks, creating demand for a dedicated kit. To meet this, OPOS partnered with established appliance makers such as Butterfly Appliances and TTK Prestige,



adapting the standard pressure cooker design for waterless cooking.

By the late 2010s, Indian kitchens had already entered a phase of experimentation: Instant Pots, OPOS kits, and induction stoves were being tested by early adopters, while microwaves, OTGs, and *roti*-makers had settled into a niche but steady segment. Then came the next major jolt—this time driven by a global disruption: the Covid-19 pandemic.



## Covid-19 & The Appliance Renaissance

The pandemic created the most dramatic acceleration in home-appliance use in decades. With restaurants closed and everyone, including domestic workers being confined to their own homes, the urban middle-class turned to devices that could ease labour or diversify meals. Dishwashers, once considered a niche urban luxury, suddenly became a household necessity.

During this time, the dishwasher became a 'lifeline' in Saikia's Mumbai kitchen, even influencing other kitchen purchases. **"Anything that doesn't go into a dishwasher, I think twice about buying,"** she says. **"I even switched to steel utensils because the aluminium ones I used earlier had plastic handles, and I wasn't sure if they could handle that temperature."**

This period also saw a dramatic rise in the sales of OTGs, microwaves, and air fryers, showing how external shocks could suddenly popularise once-neglected appliances. Both the need to cook for oneself more frequently, and access to time for kitchen experiments, helped expand the notions of how they could be used. Instead of elaborate stovetop cooking, Saikia leaned on her OTG

to make one-pot meals. A focus on healthier eating resurfaced the value of air fryers to make oil-free comfort snacks. Meanwhile, Chauhan came to find her air fryer extremely convenient for smaller bakes, explaining, **"If I want to make a four-inch cake, or a single cookie from frozen dough balls, I didn't want to use my 20 litre OTG."** Others turned their microwaves into dehydrators, preserving herbs and vegetables from their pandemic kitchen gardens.

This pandemic appliance boom also extended to specialised devices such as electric pasta or bread makers, coffee machines, and soda-makers, as homebound families experimented with new food hobbies and routines.

Many Indians who once dismissed such appliances as Western lifestyle luxuries, came to adopt them and continue to depend on them even today. From the utilitarian dishwasher, to the health-driven air fryer, and even the niche espresso

machine—these appliances ushered in a new mindset around investing in convenience, comfort, and culinary creativity.



## The Future Of The Indian Kitchen

Even today, the evolution of the Indian kitchen continues to reflect broader shifts in how Indians live, work, and imagine ease. According to Baviskar, **"What happens in the kitchen is always shaped by what happens beyond it."** One of the most visible examples lies inside the refrigerator. **"You have a whole range of foods that were once made at home now available at low cost, from tiny cottage industries and big brands,"** she adds. As food delivery and quick-commerce platforms make it possible to buy produce on demand, long-term storage has become less essential. Yet, paradoxically, the freezer has grown in importance. With more ready-to-cook foods, bulk buying, and regional ingredients that travel across cities, the freezer is now the true heart of the modern fridge.

For Saikia, the choice of refrigerator is determined by the size of its freezer. Mumbai's humidity means even dry staples, like her pesticide-free rice and dal end up in the freezer to keep pests at bay. **"I've even got a 100-litre chiller just for my smoked meat and fish."** In Bengaluru, Chauhan echoes this. **"For the last ten years, I've had a dedicated deep freezer to stock up on seasonal ingredients like green garlic, moringa flowers, and raw jackfruit. I also make**

**saucers and condiments, bag and freeze them. If guests come, I can rustle up a meal in an hour."**

Today, more gadgets crowd the counter than ever before. As even more continue to enter the market each year, it is important to understand what determines success. Rather than making cooking reductive, it is the gadgets that make it easier to stay committed to fresh food, and lend themselves to creative utility, that create an enduring place for themselves. This captures an essential aspect of the Indian kitchen's evolution: the desire for modern convenience without losing the intelligence of older materials and methods.

Echoing this, Ramki believes a gadget's success will lie in being

rooted in the familiar. **"Devices like the Thermomix or robotic cooking machines won't work here. They're not designed for Indian food and demand too steep a learning curve,"** he explains. **"Any automated equipment that finds a lasting place in Indian kitchens will build on things like the pressure cooker or mixie, which are already a mainstay in our routines."** The real innovation, he sums up, lies in reimagining the known, not replacing it.

If the story of India's kitchens has taught us anything, it's that they never evolve in isolation. Through the decades of innovation, each new whistle, hum, and digital beep carries the echoes of social and cultural change, continually reinforcing the kitchen's role in our world.



## Action Points

The rising demand for smarter homes and efficient, modular kitchens brings many opportunities for the industry. The growing Indian manufacturing landscape should **prioritise India-first innovations**, creating solutions specifically engineered for Indian kitchens, rather than merely adapting global trends and products. Food media can create content to propagate and **popularise niche local and artisanal products** created to suit varied Indian kitchens and needs.



# Dining In Trends

Dining at home in India is far more than a routine necessity; it is a profound cultural ritual that blends ancient traditions with modern culinary evolution. With this in mind, each year the Dining In section, selects themes that examine consumer sentiments and behaviours that are most likely to influence and shape food habits at home in the coming year.

This year, we investigate emerging challenges to home-cooked meals, explore innovation in food categories across supermarket aisles, uncover exciting new product propositions that will entice consumers, unpack sentiments driving the packaged snacks industry, and revisit evolving perceptions around cooking mediums in home kitchens.

Read on for insights from our panel of industry observers and thought leaders about trends that will define the home dining landscape in 2026.

## Toolkit for 2026

Specialty food and beverage products—particularly those embodying the trifecta of transparency, convenience, and health benefits—are set to dominate markets in 2026.

The evolving consumer mindset, now seeking a balance between health and indulgence, presents significant opportunities for **F&B businesses**. With holistic wellness being a central priority, many consumers are gravitating toward sustainable, functional products that also deliver bold, global flavours. By pairing health consciousness with adventurous taste profiles, **specialty food producers** can cater simultaneously to nutritional goals and culinary curiosity.

At the same time, value-conscious buyers continue to assess quality alongside cost, underscoring the growing importance of authenticity. For **food brands**, articulating compelling narratives of premium value and cultural authenticity will be essential to building trust and capturing consumer attention in 2026.



# Alternatives To Home-cooked Meals

All through 2025, busy consumers continued to explore, experiment and adopt innovative ways to recalibrate everyday meals at home. This included embracing unconventional (to them) ingredients, products, tools, and techniques that promised a greater balance of health, taste and convenience, enabling them to augment, and sometimes even replace, traditional meals.

Our panel predicts that **Farm-fresh solutions (70%)** such as freshly cut fruits, salads and smoothies will be top shopping lists in 2026, reflecting a growing demand for perceived freshness and health. **Packaged snacks (63%)** such as chips and snack bars will continue to be a go-to option, as will **Fresh snack options (60%)** such as chaat, samosas, dosas etc, underscoring India's enduring love for familiar flavour-packed bites.



**Alka Jena**

In 2026, urban Indians will continue to seek balance between health, comfort, and convenience. Ready-to-cook kits, RTE packs, and farm-fresh solutions will see steady growth as they offer convenience with a sense of home-style comfort. Farm-fresh juices, salads, and deli-style snacks will appeal to those with growing wellness awareness while rising disposable incomes and smaller kitchens will see some consumers lean on these products to simplify daily cooking without losing the sense of freshness and familiarity that home meals bring.



**Archit Puri**

As more women enter the workforce, and the cost of hiring domestic helps rise, modern families with busy schedules will be more open to RTE, RTC and instant foods that have low prep times. Instant noodles are already a hit, though they're not healthy per se, but they tell us that Indians are open to instant foods. There's an opportunity for food manufactures to create hygienic and healthy dishes in this category with minimal to no preservatives.



**Amrita Raichand**

As a working mom, life is a constant juggle and that's exactly why smart, wholesome shortcuts matter. Today's consumers are choosing options that don't compromise on nutrition or taste. From fresh, farm-led solutions like salads, juices and smoothies to smart packaged snacks and ready-to-cook meals, convenience is getting a healthy upgrade. Whether it's a millet dosa mix, a nourishing trail mix or a quick wrap, the focus is on eating well without stress. For me, it's about keeping food simple, nourishing and joyful; because when we eat right, life just feels a little more magical.



**Bhavesh Sawariya**

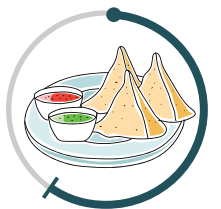
As consumers get busier while becoming more health- and calorie-conscious, they will increasingly move towards farm-fresh solutions to satisfy their between-meal cravings. At the same time, as more professionals migrate away from their homes, the desire for nostalgic, familiar food will drive demand for ready-to-cook regional dishes and spice blends—enabled by advancements in food processing technologies.



**70%**  
Farm-fresh solutions



**63%**  
Packaged snacks



**60%**  
Fresh snack options

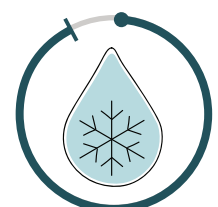




# Cooking Mediums

Dietary fats and cooking mediums are the cornerstones of cooking in any home, playing a crucial role in delivery of taste and health. With consumers becoming increasingly mindful of health, nutrition, immunity, and well being, the choice of cooking medium to support their dietary and lifestyle requirements stays in focus.

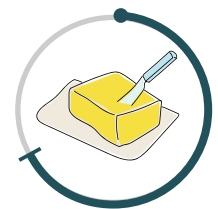
Our 2023 edition took a deep dive into dietary fats while our 2025 report carried a deep dive into palm oil. When asked to crystal gaze on cooking mediums in focus in 2026, almost the entire panel resonated that the appeal of **Ghee (91%)** as a healthy kitchen staple will endure into 2026. **Cold-pressed traditional oils (93%)** will continue to be in rotation while **Butter (79%)** has risen to become the third most favoured category.



**93%**  
Cold-pressed traditional oils



**91%**  
Ghee



**67%**  
Butter



**63%**  
Light oils



## Insia Lacewalla

In 2026, I see Indian kitchens embracing a richer 'oil wardrobe', we have come far from the 'one-bottle-fits-all' era. Health, tradition, and taste will drive choices. Cold-pressed regional oils like coconut, mustard, and groundnut for culinary diversity, and ghee for its cultural and nutritional comfort will hold space beside olive oil - as a thoughtful choice for salads and low-heat cooking. And avocado and rice bran oil will quietly gain ground among urban wellness-focused consumers.



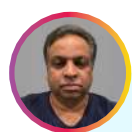
## Chef Harpal Sokhi

Indian kitchens will continue to combine traditional wisdom and modern science by rotating between ghee and aromatic cold-pressed oils, like *kacchi-ghani* mustard, peanut, and coconut, celebrating health, tradition, and flavour and keeping meals rich and nutrient diverse. This is something I have been advocating—using multiple oils in rotation prevents the body from getting accustomed to one kind of oil and causing plaque buildup over time. I'm also happy to see palm oil finally shedding its undeserved reputation and being recognised for its positives, such as stability in high-heat cooking. While it's not an everyday oil, it certainly has a place as a versatile companion in our diverse culinary map.



## Supriya Arun

The cooking medium debate has shifted from ghee vs oil to heritage vs hype. Smart families will rotate fats, respect culinary context, and practice portion control. They will resonate with brands that leverage cultural nostalgia; mustard oil from Bihar, sesame from Tamil Nadu, groundnut from Gujarat, over brands with opportunistic claims like 'heart-healthy', 'cold-pressed', or 'vitamin-fortified' (alluding to superior health, but hiding imbalances). In the end, the question is not if the fat was cold-pressed, cow-fed or regional, only how much and how often.



## Soumitra Velkar

Ghee has transcended the 'saturated fat' scare driven by Instagram nutritionists. Thanks to traditional (Ayurvedic) advocates for its benefits. It has come to embody the essence of 'culinary heritage'. Whether it's used for daily consumption on *rotis*, or festive *halwas* and *laddoos*, ghee is here to stay.



# Food Categories In Focus

The supermarket aisle is a surprisingly sensitive barometer of consumer sentiment and emerging behaviour. In the ritual of filling a cart, shoppers silently vote with their wallets. Our panel, who are also consumers themselves, weigh in on the categories of supermarket shelves that will see the most innovation in 2026.

Reflecting a desire for clean additive-free convenient options in home cooking, **Spice blends and pastes (94%)** will lead while **Snacks and munchies (81%)** follow, evolving rapidly, as brands continue responding to increasing demand for better-for-you foods and new flavours. Meanwhile, the **Breads (81%)** category will gain momentum with producers experimentation with local grains, millets and artisanal techniques such as sourdough fermentation.



## Farzana Contractor

In the world of Dogs & More, we always emphasise that while our pets are family, their nutritional needs are unique to their species. It is a common mistake to equate human food and treats with 'love.' The seasoned, oily, and salty meals we eat in India can actually be silent stressors on a pet's system. True wellness lies in species-specific nutrition. Dedicated pet food that is properly formulated to provide an optimal balance of proteins, minerals, and vitamins that human food simply cannot match. By prioritising high-quality, biologically appropriate diets over table scraps, our pets can enjoy the vitality, longevity, and health they truly deserve.



## Amitabh Bhatia

Consumers despite being busy prefer to buy fresh food without too many preservatives and chemicals. An Indian cultural context and traditions play into this behaviour. Therefore ready-made and ready-to-eat meals have somewhat limited appeal. Categories that combine convenience+quality options such as fresh-cut vegetables and juices will have much broader appeal.



## Zeba Kohli

Food in Indian households has mostly been created by local purchase and family recipes. With present health awareness increasing, purchasing local & fresh ingredients, using fresh oil/ghee and home *masalas* has increased, as has focus on using better utensils. Emphasis on tying-up with food charities & reducing food waste at banquets and large food producing units needs work, but will definitely be factored in the near future.

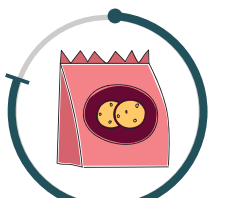


## Sadiq Gaziyani

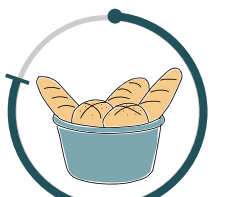
From what I see, beverages and breads will continue to see the most action because they're everyday staples and easy to experiment with. While categories like deli foods, sauces, and ready-to-eat items may see less traction in metro cities where food delivery platforms and cloud kitchens have reduced the need to cook. That said, frozen foods and snacks will grow steadily because they fit busy lifestyles. Overall, innovation feels strongest where convenience meets daily consumption. Pet food in particular is standing out of late, due to increasing awareness around pet care and diets.



**94%**  
Spice blends and pastes



**81%**  
Snacks and munchies



**81%**  
Breads



**75%**  
Dips, chutneys, and sauces



**75%**  
Pet foods



# Product Propositions

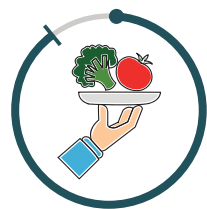
A continuous stream of warnings from medical fraternity, consumer forums, individual activists and even government agencies, in recent years, has triggered conversations and debates about the quality of our food products across forums. As a result, an increasing number of consumers are reviewing existing food choices in favour of cleaner, more transparent propositions.

Reflecting the shift, our experts identify **Clean label options (93%)**, featuring no preservatives or additives, as poised to dominate in 2026. **Freshly processed products (90%)**, like small batch ground flours and masalas, hail a resurgence of interest in traditional preparation methods. Meanwhile regional pride will drive consumer traction in **Artisanal and small-batch goods (83%)**, and **Made in India products (80%)**.



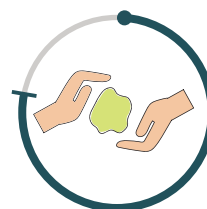
93%

Clean label



90%

Freshly-processed



83%

Artisanal and/or small batch



80%

Made in India



## Dr. Chef Avin Thaliath

This movement isn't just about better food — it's about rebuilding the relationship between people, producers, and the planet. Ultimately, it signals something profound: a reawakening of the consumer's right to know, and the producer's duty to be transparent. Food, after all, is not just nourishment; it is a relationship. And like any relationship, it must be built on trust.



## Dina Weber

Having a heightened sensitivity toward authenticity and meaning we will look at regional and traditional food with great stories to bring more colour and meaning into our day-to-day lives. That said, with health being important protein will continue its word of the year streak.



## Tanisha Laura Phanbuh

Consumers are definitely more careful while purchasing a product these days. Clean labels, low-calorie or protein fortification are amongst trending requirements. Smaller 'artisanal' brands are drawing attention, thanks to a good marketing strategy and luck with social virality. But all said and done, the market is still price-sensitive, and people are wary or reluctant to purchase from really small artisanal brands—partly because they are doubtful of the production systems, or because they don't believe in unbranded products.



## Chef Varun Inamdar

In 2026 and beyond, clean labels and freshly processed foods will no longer be trends; they will be expectations. Discerning consumers are reading ingredients like they read stories—questioning origin, intent, and honesty. Clean labels signal trust, transparency, and respect for the body, while freshly processed foods restore flavour, nutrition, and cultural integrity lost in industrial excess. I see this as a return to culinary intelligence where fewer ingredients mean deeper thought, and freshness is not convenience-led but conscience-led. The future of food belongs to products that are truthful, timely, and thoughtfully made.



# Snacks & Convenience Foods

Despite growing apprehensions around ultra-processed foods, snacks and convenience foods continue to dominate consumer mindspace and wallet share. This category has increasingly become the go to option for busy consumers looking for quick, effortless and flavourful alternatives to satiate urgent hunger pangs, emotional cravings and nutritional requirements.

In 2026, our panel foresees industry innovation focussing on health-driven and flavour-forward snacking propositions. There will be sustained momentum in the **Non-fried options (84%)** and **Special diet and lifestyle-support options (84%)**, better-for-you segments. Meanwhile brands will continue to bet on **New flavour options (81%)**, **International snack options (81%)** and **Regional speciality options (81%)**, reaffirming that when it comes to snacks, India's affections lie in many directions.



## Chef Rakhee Vaswani

The snacking landscape for 2026 is being rewritten by the 'conscious indulger.' While a significant majority of the industry will pivot toward non-fried and lifestyle-specific options, it is clear that health is no longer a niche but the new baseline. That said, we aren't willing to compromise on excitement. Global flavours like Kimchi and Sriracha will be as popular as our roots with regional Indian specialities. The future of snacking lies in the sweet spot: clean, preservative-free technology meeting bold, borderless flavours.



## Anand Bharadwaj

At Sweet Karam Coffee, savoury snacks lead over sweets in a 70:30 ratio, though seasons shift the balance. We see *chikki* sales soar in winter, chips peak during Onam, and sweets spike for Diwali and Janmashtami. Today's consumer seeks on-the-go, guilt-free indulgence—less sugar and less oil—without sacrificing traditional flavours. Moving forward, ingredient transparency will be paramount. We anticipate a shift where vital nutritional information moves from the back of the pack to the front, building trust through 'ingredient forwardness'. It's about honouring our heritage while meeting modern demands for cleaner, honest snacking.



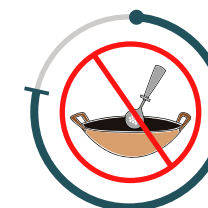
## Rukshana A Kapadia

These products have become indispensable thanks to their accessibility, affordability, taste, convenience and perceived gratification. Constant innovation in flavours, packaging, and marketing keeps this category fresh, exciting, and relevant, but comes with trade-offs. The emotional connection with these foods makes them difficult to replace entirely, but growing awareness of the detrimental effects of ultra-processed foods, presents an opportunity for innovation for snack manufacturers.



## Sharavana Raghavan

In my observation, consumer snack choices are influenced by priority, of taste, convenience, satiety, price, and lastly, health. Taste and satiety being primary drivers. Nostalgia plays a role in acceptance through familiarity, making certain snacks more permissible and sometimes overruling price or convenience. However, health is low on the priority scale. In my opinion, 'healthy snacking' is a phenomenon inspired by less balanced Western diets. In India, however, households have traditionally relied on home-cooked meals for their health quotient and viewed snacking as pure indulgence. While health may be a post-purchase justifier - after I've bought it, I can feel less guilty - it is not a purchase driver. Snack businesses that prioritise taste, texture and flavour in addition to health will continue to be the mainstay of the snacking category.



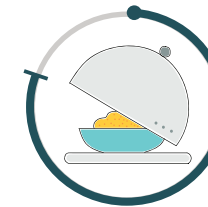
84%

Non-fried options



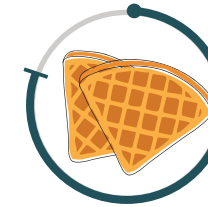
84%

Special diet/  
lifestyle options



81%

New flavour options



81%

International snack  
options



81%

Regional speciality  
options



Godrej

# WORLD'S YUMMIEZ PROTEIN



# Dining Out

The Indian dining out industry has evolved into a sophisticated, exciting mosaic characterised by a rapid fusion of tradition with global trends. The current landscape is a vibrant ecosystem, seamlessly blending the quintessential charm of street food with regional cuisines, a revival of forgotten flavours, hyper-local cuisines, and meticulously crafted chef-driven, globally-influenced fine dining. In this section last year, our experts discussed the growing trend of seasonal menus that is connecting future generations to our unique culinary heritage.

This year, our survey pages reflect the rapid evolution of the industry, driven by technology and consumer sophistication, and the Dining Out essay explores the fascinating journey of the restaurant menu—an intrinsic artefact that has borne silent witness to broader cultural shifts taking place in the Indian Dining Out industry down the ages.

# Menu as Memoir

India's Independence in 1947 catalysed a dramatic overhaul of the nation's dining industry. The country's bid for international standing included a program of planned development, industrialisation and urbanisation in which hospitality and fine dining played a critical role in its positioning on the global stage. Urbanisation gave impetus to the hospitality sector, and served to establish the foundations of a new urban eating culture. As early bastions of colonial establishment, Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, and Delhi emerged as the 'big four' at the forefront of culinary change in Independent India, contributing to the nation's burgeoning dining-out narrative. That gave rise to some of India's earliest premium dining establishments.

## Calcutta



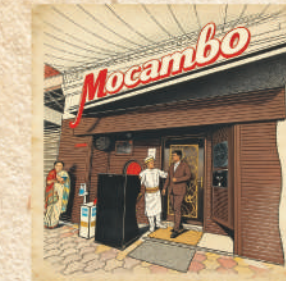
### Flurys

Flurys tearoom and pastry shop founded in 1927, embodied British-era elegance. It's continues to be a nostalgic hangout famed for its English breakfast, rum balls, and pastries.



### Trincas

Started by Swiss restaurateurs, Trincas grew from a tearoom into a European-style restaurant and live-music venue, preserving its heritage on Park Street.



### Mocambo

Established in 1956, Mocambo was among India's first nightspots, with live bands and a dance floor, later becoming a fine-dining Continental restaurant.

## Mumbai



### Leopold Café

Founded in 1871 by Irani immigrants, Leopold Café became a cosmopolitan hub for British officers, artists, and merchants, offering multi-cuisine fare in a colonial-vibe setting.

## Chennai



### Ratna Café

Since 1948, Ratna Café has served simple, hearty South Indian fare—dosas, idlis, sambars—while retaining the feel of a colonial café in Madras.

## Delhi



### United Coffee House

Opened in 1942, this elegant café with chandeliers and high ceilings was a go-to for intellectuals and colonial-era elites, offering both Indian and Continental menus.



### Karim's

Founded in 1913 near Jama Masjid, Karim's has been serving Mughlai classics from a coal-fired kitchen—a culinary legacy from royal and colonial times.

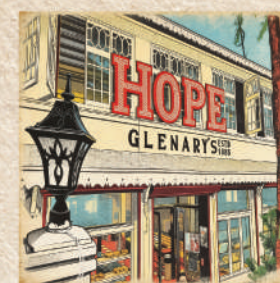
## Bangalore



### Koshy's

Since 1940, Koshy's has been a relaxed café-restaurant with wooden furniture and shuttered windows—a beloved haunt of writers, journalists, and thinkers.

## Darjeeling



### Glenary's

Over a century old, Glenary's combines a bakery on the ground floor with a café upstairs, offering baked goods, British-style breakfasts, and vintage hill-station charm.

## Pune



### Dorabji & Sons

Started as an Irani chai stall in 1878, it expanded into a restaurant offering Parsi specialties like dhansak and biryani, serving both British and Indian patrons.



### Puna Guest House

Founded in 1935, PGH was both a guest house and a restaurant for artists. Its menu has remained Maharashtrian, with thalis, poha, wadi, and other regional staples.



### Vaidya Upahar Gruha

Operating since around 1910, this place is famous for its misal-pav, poha, and traditional Maharashtrian breakfast, deeply rooted in Pune's heritage.



# The Menu as Memoir

## Tracing India's culinary identity through the bill of fare

A culinary timestamp and narrative artefact, the Indian menu has been a quiet and consistent chronicle of the evolution of Indian dining out.

### Focus Areas

In 2025, the Indian menu transitioned into a 'strategic asset', shifting the focus from mere variety to data-driven profitability. As we move through 2026, the narrative of menus will pivot to structural menu engineering. Extraordinary experiences will become the baseline expectation. For the industry at large, the priority is now radical transparency and narrative integrity, demanding a sharper focus on sourcing ethics and regional archives to satisfy a diner who values 'cultural investment' over sheer volume. Success will be defined by those who can master the 'invisible framework' of the menu—leveraging psychological anchoring and optimised contribution margins—to unlock long-term growth in an increasingly competitive global-luxury and heritage-driven landscape.

The radical metamorphosis of the Indian restaurant industry has been documented through a plethora of media: from newspapers to blogs and present day social media.

However, preceding them all has been an enduring cultural memoir, oft-overlooked as a mere utilitarian tool: the menu. While India emerged as a culinary global soft power,

the menu transformed from a rigid colonial directive into a vibrant, multi-page manifesto of the nation's changing tastes and aspirations.

### The Menu As A Living Archive

Historically, dining out in India was a functional necessity, for weary pilgrims and travellers. Its eating-out culture only took form during the colonial era. As dining evolved in the West, menus manifested from oral lists, dictated by the cook's whims or the day's market haul, into more formal bills of fare. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the French à la carte system had replaced the fixed-course table d'hôte.

These transformations travelled to India via colonial trade routes. The earliest incarnations were oral, found in early establishments—taverns, and lodging houses—that opened in cities like Calcutta and Bombay. As the Raj established itself, exclusive gymkhanas and gentlemen's clubs

mushroomed, featuring elaborate menus. With India's Independence in 1947, urbanisation and industrialisation triggered a dramatic overhaul of the dining landscape. The hospitality sector became central to the new nation's bid for international standing. Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Delhi, with their colonial foundations, emerged as the 'Big Four' leading this vanguard of change. Urban dining culture also evolved into two distinct infrastructures in this era.

On one end of the spectrum, a growing workforce looked to street food stalls and a host of small pre-independence eateries, such as the *khaanavals* of Mumbai, pice hotels of

Calcutta, or the *dhabas* of Delhi, with menus that remained functional and oral, prioritising sustenance over celebration.

The other end of the spectrum ushered in the rise of the restaurant industry, with foundational forerunners like Mumbai's Leopold and Madras Café, Kolkata's Nizam's and Flurys, and Delhi's United Coffee House and Karim's, introducing the 'standardised' menu. Typically



rendered in crowded, single-page formats, these menus were less about curation and more about a new, urban, democratic abundance. From the Mavalli Tiffin Room in Bengaluru, to Dorabjee & Sons in Pune, these documents became universal at the mid-range Indian eatery in the next half-century.

Highlighting the schism between

the functional and the aesthetic, were the menus of most upscale establishments, patronised by the affluent Indian upper class that occupied the niche left by the British elite. They ate out at colonial era hotels like the Great Eastern in Calcutta, the Imperial in New Delhi, as well as burgeoning chains like the Taj and Oberoi, for leisurely

indulgence. These places boasted elaborate menus that adhered to sophisticated European standards—featuring premium cardstock and ornate fonts that listed French and continental dishes—and became artefacts of aspiration. They codified fine dining for those times and defined the narrative of fine dining menus for decades to come.

### Evolution: The Menu Of Affordable Exotica

Economic liberalisation in the early 1990s ushered in a transformative period that fundamentally altered the Indian palate. Western influences and rising disposable incomes shifted dining out from a rare luxury to a social marker for the burgeoning middle class—comprising entrepreneurs, professionals, and government officials. This catalysed the emergence of two entirely new categories of affordable eateries with menus that successfully standardised and commercialised culinary diversity into affordable exotica.

The first was the Indo-Chinese eatery. Born from Chinese migrant communities in colonial-era Kolkata and Mumbai, Indo-Chinese cuisine hit cult status in the 1970s thanks to two parallel occurrences: the Taj Group's introduction of elevated Sichuan flavours at Golden Dragon, and Nelson Wang's creation of the Chicken Manchurian—a dish that fused the Indian *pakoda* with a soy-based gravy. Within two decades, this hybrid cuisine, through casual Indo-Chinese eateries, became the bastion of bold flavour and affordability. Their signature aesthetic—accordion-fold menus with clashing fonts in loud reds and charming typo-ridden descriptions—endure, having only expanded to include 'masala-fied' caricatures of broader Southeast Asian fare, like neon-green Thai curries and stock-powder renditions of ramen, to the original repertoire of manchurian, hakka noodles and sweet corn soup.

Contrasting the street style were upscale Pan-Asian restaurants that packaged Indo-Chinese cuisine into a luxury format. Their menus projected 'authentic' sophistication through heavy, multi-page bound volumes in rich shades of crimson, gold and black, with offerings curated by course and region, and spanning the spectrum from elevated 'Chindian'

classics to technique-driven dimsums and Peking Duck.

The defining characteristic of the era, however, was the emergence of the multi-cuisine restaurant—a uniquely Indian phenomenon that offered a 'one-stop shop' to satisfy diverse palates and multi-generational dietary demands of the middle class Indian family, serving up aspiration. In doing so, they also characterised a specific kind of globalisation, with 'masala-fication' of their offerings to suit the Indian palate.



"The pages of those thick, laminated, slightly frayed menus always felt so full of possibilities," reminisces **Rajan Sethi**,

MD of Bright Hospitality Pvt Ltd. "I remember pretending to read them with great care, even though my order was always fixed: Sweet Corn Chicken Soup, Chicken Lollipops, and finally the famous sizzling platter that arrived with a flourish of magical theatre." Highlighting that consistency was the charm of those menus that went beyond just food to embody comfort, abundance, and predictability, "They shaped my understanding of dining long before I ever considered the business behind it," concludes the visionary restaurateur behind award-winning brands like Ikk Panjab, The G.T. Road, OMO Soul Food, and AMPM Café & Bar.

Designed to mitigate risk, the encyclopaedic multi-cuisine restaurant menus were emblematic of cosmopolitanism in their offerings, but utilitarian. Crowded with content and minimal pictures, they prioritised variety over a focused culinary identity. They also conditioned the Indian consumer to accept, and eventually crave, the hybrid flavours they showcased.



"Growing up in Ajmer, dining out was a rare treat. Our parents typically took charge, which is why I still remember feeling suddenly

grown-up, the first time I held a menu and ordered *Shahi Paneer*," recalls **Chef Ashish Bhasin** wistfully. "That first experience was the beginning of my lifelong relationship with the stories restaurants tell." As founder & director of CB Hospitality, a consultancy, Bhasin works with a variety of restaurants.

The multi-cuisine menu established a 'fusion-first' mindset, leading to a culture where novelty—no matter how incongruous—became the primary metric. Generations of chefs found sanction to experiment without restraint, legitimising culinary anomalies like *Jalfrezi*, Baked Vegetables, and Mexican *Bhel*. While this genre of restaurants continues to thrive, the next few decades saw the Indian diner travel and grow more discerning, and chaotic multi-cuisine formats give way to more curated offerings.



## Specialisation: The Menu As The Ultimate Communicator

The 2010s and '20s ushered in a book for the restaurant industry. The fine dining sector saw the rise of the 'restopreneur' and 'standalone' restaurants, prioritising refined techniques, imported ingredients, bespoke experiences, and elevated menu aesthetics. Elevated Chinese continues to thrive, while Thai, Italian, Middle Eastern, and later Japanese cuisines established themselves.

The casual dining landscape was redrawn by a burgeoning café culture boasting branded coffee and specialty tea houses that offered casual meeting spaces and 'all-day dining' menus. Also adding to the offerings was the QSR (Quick Service Restaurant) sector which streamlined menus into efficient, visually driven documents, designed for high-efficiency performance.



**"Menus transformed from simple catalogues into narrative driven offerings—detailing ingredients, descriptions, theme and philosophy—and inviting diners to explore a restaurant's**

**culinary identity,"** notes Bengaluru based Food Writer, Hospitality Professional, and Media Personality, **Aslam Gafoor.**

The most definitive moment of that time was the emergence of the Modern Indian movement. The 'masala-fication' of the 90s was discarded in favour of intellectualising regional cuisines, flavours and ingredients. Pioneers like Indian Accent, and later The Bombay Canteen (2015), and Masque (2016), introduced provenance and regional diversity driven theatrical dining. Their menus became playful, finessed, driven explorations of reimagined flavours and nostalgia through a contemporary lens. *"The specialty standalone restaurant reflected a more mature market. Business fundamentals like P&L met high-concept storytelling. The menu was the ultimate communicator"*, concludes Gafoor, a keen industry watcher.

This unbridled fervour was brought to an abrupt halt by the pandemic. The 'new normal' forced a survivalist pivot, accelerating both streamlining

and digitalisation. Menus were rationalised and stripped of excess to navigate fractured supply chains. Post-pandemic, however, the pendulum swung back; consumers rebounded from the forced restraint, hungry for 'extraordinary' experiences. The years between 2022 and 2025 saw the industry undergo a gradual transformation from awakening to resurrection, and finally a new sophisticated maturity. This period saw a reimagining of the plate for a diner who now demanded global standards and a fiercely original local identity.



## Transformation: The Menu of Intent

In 2026, the industry is operating under a new paradigm with formats and menus evolving rapidly across verticals.

A sophisticated reinterpretation of the multi-cuisine format has emerged in tier 1 and 2 cities. Multi-regional cafés such as Folk (Mumbai) and Monsoon (Dehradun), and single cuisine concepts like Ikk Panjab (New Delhi) are becoming research-driven hubs that celebrate the 'untranslatable' hits of India's diverse hearths. By sourcing regional ingredients and heirloom grains, these concepts elevate hyper-local flavours into a refined setting.

Here, the menu becomes an educational travelogue, bridging disappearing traditions with a contemporary urban palate. Ikk Panjab, for example, serves a poignant archive of an undivided land, reviving 'lost' recipes from Sialkot to Lahore—like Kotkapura Atta Chicken—that transcend modern borders.

Owner Rajan Sethi, who views menus as living documents, shares

that they *"evolve faster than the interiors or even the brand identity of a restaurant"*, because they respond to how people eat and how dining culture shifts. He describes the concept of Ikk Punjab as history-led, and perceives its menu as a vessel for cultural preservation that has to carry the weight of heritage lightly. *"Every dish on the menu has a story, deep research that reflects the traditions of pre-partition Punjab"*, he explains, emphasising that it "needed to honour lineage and regional authenticity while protecting a culinary past and presenting it with respect."

According to journalist **Smitha Menon**, dining expectations now diverge by geography: **"Tier-2 cities still want a spread with status, reminiscent of an Indian shaadi where you look at the spread**



**and say, 'Oh they have this also, that also..' Conversely, in metros, 'decision fatigue' and 'shorter attention spans' have forced chefs to 'do the hard work of editing', shifting toward tighter, curated menus. However, minimalism can backfire when menus**

**offer only three words, leaving diners without a sense of expectation."**

In the high-velocity 'global-luxury' hubs of Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore, restaurants are transitioning into theatrical, high-concept experiential offerings. The industry has firmly entered The Era of the Culinary Auteur in which the chef considered as the 'North Star', transforms the menu into a 'philosophical manifesto' of radical transparency and choreographed storytelling.

Nisaba by Chef Manish Mehrotra adds a new layer to this evolution, while micro-restaurants like Prateek Sadhu's Naar, the Hussain Shahzad-led Papa's, and Rannaghar by Sienna in Calcutta, serve as the movement's primary



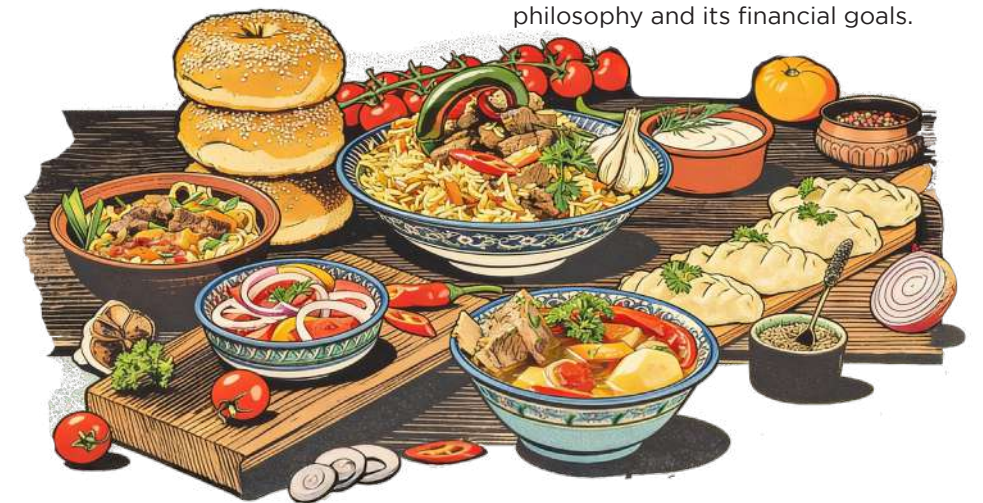
examples. Through precision over popularity, these micro-restaurants use nuanced menu engineering to balance uncompromising artistry with commercial viability.

In these intimate spaces, the menu is no longer a catalog of options; it is a philosophical roadmap. It represents a precise equilibrium of hyper-local ingredients and global techniques, underpinned by storytelling, sustainability, and a new standard of radical transparency. In this paradigm, the wall between the kitchen and the diner has collapsed, replaced by a direct, unmediated connection to the source of the craft.

The evolution of the menu has reached a tactile turning point, where the physical document is no longer just a list, but a primary 'touchpoint for play'. High-concept restaurants are reclaiming the menu as a piece

of 'new real estate' to engage diners beyond the plate.

As Menon notes, it is increasingly exciting to see menus that experiment with their physical form—transforming into *"colouring books that integrate elements like origami"* or utilising *"stories and trivia"* to create a multi-sensory experience. By reimagining the menu as an



## Engineering: The Architecture of Menu Consumption

The modern engineered menu is a strategic asset, generations removed from the functional, static lists of the past. No longer a mere inventory of food, it demands serious investment of intellectual capital and financial resources.

A well-engineered menu is built on a data-driven framework leveraging storytelling, and scripted performances. It is designed to influence psychological behaviour and maximise profitability. It has to justify the 'cultural investment' into the meal through precision and technological integration by utilising techniques like 'anchoring'—placing high-value, high-narrative signature dishes optimally to set premium expectations, while maximising profitability.

This high-performance modern menu must balance all that complex engineering with brand philosophy to, as Sethi articulates, *"disappear into the guest's experience"*. This process begins at the emotional core, where the 'familiar-to-novel ratio' and descriptive tone are tailored to the brand's specific identity. "At Ikk Panjab, this translates into a rooted, narrative-driven structure: appetisers are inspired by memories of tikkas and smoke on the streets, while mains honour the familiar sights and smells of the hearth our families left behind."

Conversely, for a brand like Espresso Anyday, the architecture shifts toward contemporary ease, fluidity, and a more youthful energy, requiring a menu that feels intuitive and expressive. Because no two brands speak the same language, the engineering process remains a bespoke endeavour—balancing data-driven profitability with a customised 'vessel' for storytelling.

Alongside brand identity, geographical context is equally intrinsic for successful execution. Chef Ashish Bhasin uses Indian cuisine to illustrate. *"I have designed Indian restaurant menus across the globe, but there is no template. Each menu must respect local psychology. In Chennai, this meant deep research and creating '2.0' versions of archival regional favorites, while in Ahmedabad, we engineered the menu around the local 'KMT' (Khatta, Meetha, Teekha) flavour DNA. On the global stage, we adapt differently to the audience: Dubai demanded soulful authenticity, while Texas required a 'multi-concept bridge' that balanced unapologetic heat for the diaspora with 'culinary theatre'—like a 14-course Omakase—for new palates."*

For **Chef Auroni Mookerjee**, everything serves a single master: taste. **"Menu creation is a delicate**

interactive object, chefs are moving beyond the static lists of the past to create a more meaningful, guided connection that begins the moment a guest sits down.

Whatever the format, in this paradigm, the menu is underpinned by cerebral menu engineering, a systematic approach to designing menus that bridges a restaurant's culinary philosophy and its financial goals.

**balance between the business and creative sides but a restaurant's vitality depends entirely on its overarching**

**theme. Without that North Pole, it's hard to give coherence to a menu,"** he explains. **"The specific guardrails of a brand need that fixed point on the horizon; otherwise, the menu loses its voice."** By maintaining these conceptual guardrails, Mookerjee injects a distinct personality into his work—whether through whimsical dish titles or a signature brand voice—ensuring the final document resonates deeply with the local culture.

This synergy of 'North Star' leadership, and 'disappearing' engineering defines the 2026 landscape. It is an era where the menu has transitioned from a static list into a living, breathing guide.



## Storied: The Menu Of The Future

As the definition of fine dining becomes more fluid—increasingly shifting towards intimate, experiential settings—the future belongs to clarity. The Indian menu's trajectory mirrors the nation's own maturation: it has transcended its functional origins to become a meticulously engineered blueprint

of brand philosophy and legacy. This potent, curated artefact reflects an industry that no longer just follows global standards but confidently sets them, ensuring even global trends resonate with regional DNA, marking a definitive coming-of-age for Indian dining on the world stage.



## Dining Out Trends

Indian diners today are driven by both curiosity and awareness, making quality, experience, and value the central forces behind their dining choices. While the thrill of tasting new flavours continues to draw footfalls in both established restaurants and emerging eateries, diner expectations are unmistakably shifting.

Diners across varied demographics are actively seeking out unique and immersive experiences, with a willingness to pay a premium. This has encouraged the industry to elevate their standards. Increasingly, diners are influenced by factors like provenance, nutritional value, stories behind their food, quality ingredients, as well as improved hygiene standards and efficient, friendly service. As India's diverse dining out scene continues to evolve, read on to find out which Dining Out trends our experts predict will shape the menu for 2026.

### Action Points

As the Indian dining landscape matures, the diner will seek experiences that offer storytelling. Menus will need to reflect this.

For restaurateurs, chefs and consultants, this offers an immense opportunity to experiment with local, seasonal, and regional themes that allow for deep immersion and cultural investment.

This will offer design and branding agencies a chance to take menus beyond static lists and convert them to turn into bespoke artefacts of interactive real estate that offer touchpoints of wonder and discovery.

Content creators can create meaningful content to translate experiences and touchpoints into resonant stories, engaging audiences seeking cultural immersion and curated storytelling.

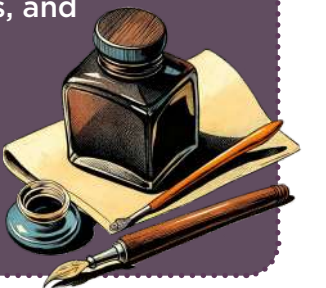
Food researchers will be invaluable to narrative development by providing historical inputs, and archiving culinary traditions and recipes that will enable the menu to function as a chronicle of cultural preservation and storification.

### Toolkit for 2026

In times to come the **hospitality industry** will be well served working towards building narratives around ingredient provenance, nutritional value, and story telling on their menu offerings. In an era when digital discoverability will be important and the quality of content a brand puts on their platforms is a defining factor, brands should look to invest beyond the idea of simply 'being online' and serving up AI slope.

The last applies to **content creators**, as well. The storytelling lens is shifting. Innovative menus, ingredient provenance, food producers, and off the 'eaten track' establishments will matter, but the human side of hospitality, real stories, and unique perspectives, will create emotional equity that no algorithm can duplicate.

In an environment, where the spoilt-for-choice diners seek novelty and memorability, **chefs** should gear up to be agile in adapting to trends, dietary shifts and personalisation requests to retain loyalty.

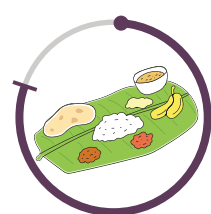




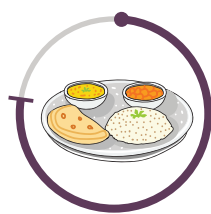
# Cuisines In Focus

The culinary proposition an establishment offers is its defining element. Dining experiences in India are increasingly being driven by consumer curiosity for new flavours and experiences. Regional and global cuisines typically offer a plethora of options to pick from, with restaurants constantly aspiring to serve up unusual and rare cuisines, rich with stories.

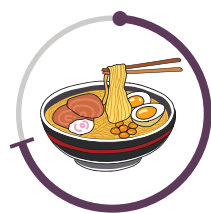
When asked about the cuisines most likely to capture attention in 2026, our experts pointed to **Festive/ celebratory cuisines (78%)** such as Himachali Dham, Onam Sadhya, Iftaar spreads. **Community cuisines (75%)** will draw out some lesser known cuisines like Dogri, Sindhi, and Kashmiri Pandit food. The consensus is clear, Indian cuisines that are seasonal and regionally rooted will drive the next wave of culinary curiosity. That said, **Exotic international cuisines (72%)** will continue to thrive, providing excitement to diners chasing adventure.



**78%**  
Festive/  
celebratory  
cuisines



**75%**  
Community  
cuisines



**72%**  
Exotic  
international  
cuisines



## Chef Ajay Chopra

Diners in 2026 will be most excited by festive and celebratory cuisines, as they tap into shared memories, rituals, and immersive, occasion-based dining that feels special. Community and regional Indian cuisines will follow closely, driven by a desire for authenticity, identity, and lesser-told food stories. Alongside this, exotic international cuisines will attract interest when they are niche, well-contextualised, and culturally rooted rather than generic. Cuisines like Malwa, Maratha, Rampur and Himachali may move towards center stage.



## Varun Bajaj

Festive pop-ups and celebratory meals have become a way for people to signal that they are part of a community (whether ethnically or socially). Also, social media has made it cool to attend Onam Sadyas and Iftaar Parties, whether you belong to the celebrating community or not, and this trend will only get more prevalent.



## Mrs. Sonal Naik Nimbalkar Mahurkar

2026 will be all about discovery through food. Diners are eager to explore community cuisines like Dogri, Sindhi, and Kashmiri Pandit. Hyperlocal and indigenous tribal cuisines are also gaining interest for their authenticity. As a proponent of royal Maratha cuisine, my experience is that even Gen Z is curious to try all of this. Younger diners are chasing novelty and will embrace heritage with a fresh lens. For them, it's about experiencing history in a modern, approachable way, which makes these once-niche cuisines suddenly feel exciting and relevant.



## Deepak Malloo

At Swiggy we are observing two complementary trends when it comes to cuisines in focus. The growth in travel is indirectly catalysing discovery - consumers try new cuisines and dishes when they travel and look for them at home. The global cuisine segment is evolving. Menus launched by the bigger chains are reflecting this. Japanese is huge, and Korean as well as Vietnamese are starting to show up. While affordability will continue to rule, premiumisation is becoming increasingly prominent in a few pockets, particularly among more mainstream cuisines with consumers showing a willingness to pay more for something different. Parallely, we are also observing a growing pride associated with specific regional Indian cuisines such as Pahari, Goan and Bihari.



# Menu Propositions

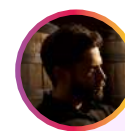
Over the past few years, there has been a visible shift in consumer preferences, towards more mindful and personalised dining experiences across all dining formats. Progressive food outlets are blending experimentation and innovation to help informed diners take greater control of what and how they eat. Chefs with distinct, well-researched menus that revive forgotten recipes and lost cuisines are commanding the most loyalty.

Within this burgeoning space, our experts identified the menu strategies most likely to entice diners to try new foods in 2026. **Pop-up menus (95%)**, featuring guest chefs and regionally inspired signature dishes, came up on top. **Traditional calendar inspired menus (81%)**, where festivals and seasons shape limited-time offerings, registered a distant second. Meanwhile, innovative restaurants will entice diners with special menus curated as **Chef recommendations (79%)** to showcase their dining propositions.



## Chef Shaun Kenworthy

India is changing at an unprecedented speed. Her food moment has arrived! You can feel it across big cities, small towns and in the most unexpected, remote corners of the country. Something I've been waving a flag for since the day I landed here! I am happy to see it's finally happened. That said, we've barely scratched the surface. The world needs to watch what's happening here. Indian consumers have evolved. The country's palate has opened up in every direction. The consumer of the future will go beyond 'global flavours' to explore hyper-local ingredients, forgotten techniques, and regional nostalgia with equal enthusiasm. They want the familiar, served fresh, modern renditions using local ingredients. They want India on the plate, but with today's language.



## Hamavand Chinoy

By 2026, diners will be drawn to menus that simplify choice while adding meaning. Chef-led recommendations and ingredient-forward storytelling will build trust and encourage experimentation, while single-category and tasting menus will offer clarity and confidence. Health and lifestyle cues will guide decisions without feeling restrictive, and calendar-led or pop-up menus will create urgency and relevance. The strongest propositions will balance personalisation with narrative, helping diners feel both informed and inspired.



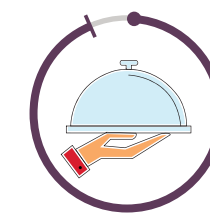
## Ahmedaki Laloo

Consumers will seek unique, Instagram-worthy experiences, health-conscious options, and authentic flavours. F&B outlets will respond by innovating with chef specials, multi-course, prix-fixe ingredient forward menus and curated culinary experiences.

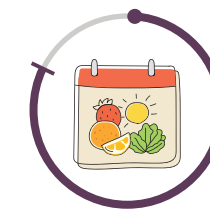


## Chef Vikas Seth

As diners continue to seek more mindful and personalised experiences, menu strategies in 2026 will balance innovation, cultural relevance, and diners' need for discovery. While health-aligned eating is growing, the Indian dining landscape still prioritises flavour, experience, and familiarity, with awareness building steadily. Collaborations, regional pop-ups, chef residencies, and thematic takeovers will be big in 2026—driven by curiosity, storytelling, and experiential dining culture. 2026 will see chef-led curation, regional pop-ups, ingredient-forward menus, and experiential formats take centre stage. Health-aligned and diet-specific menus will continue building presence, but taste, culture, and experience will remain the core of dining decisions.



**95%**  
Pop-up menus



**81%**  
Traditional calendar  
inspired menus



**79%**  
Chef  
recommendations



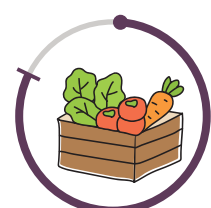
# Culinary Themes

Indian restaurants and bars constantly evolve by refreshing themes, formats, and menus to keep diners meaningfully engaged with their brand and stay on top of the game. Culinary themes are powerful in capturing ever-changing diner preferences. In 2026, restaurants will experiment not only with flavour, but with place, culture, and purpose.

Our panel predicted that restaurants with a strong **Regional identity (89%)** will lead in 2026, loosely followed by a rising interest in themes that celebrate **Provenance (81%)**, spotlighting ingredients and recipes with clear local stories and traceable sourcing. **Storytelling (79%)** narratives are natural extensions of these preferences that will both feed their brand presence and grow in popularity.



**89%**  
Regional  
identity



**81%**  
Provenance



**79%**  
Storytelling



## Poornima Somayaji

Diners will expect great flavour but also transparency, comfort, and care in every step: traceable ingredients, gentler cooking methods, calmer dining spaces, functional beverages, and personalisation with minimal fuss. Thoughtfully crafted ideas with a purpose and story will be in vogue. Diners will prefer restaurants that they can relate to, that offer stories, such as ingredient-forward menus, or multi-sensory experiences that are worth their time and money. While clean and diet-conscious food will be in focus, offbeat traditional Indian flavours will also find large acceptance.



## Chef Hussain Shahzad

The future of dining is less about opulence and more about attention! To time, to crafting, and to what truly belongs on the plate. Excess, whether in food or in experience, is losing relevance, while meals built with thought and care feel far more powerful. At Papa's, this comes through in how our menus are structured: fewer distractions, a sharper focus on context and craft, and a slower, more deliberate pacing as each course unfolds. When every decision is intentional, even simple ingredients feel elevated. That sense of purpose will define the most meaningful dining experiences going forward.



## Shruti Gupta

At Monsoon, our regional Indian restaurant, I've observed that diners today are looking for experiences that feel authentic, are rooted in culture, and rich in storytelling. Restaurants that experiment more with community traditions, regional identities, and foods linked to festivals and history will do well. Menus that highlight locally sourced ingredients and the craft behind dishes will be a significant part of dining because people want to understand the meaning behind what they're eating.



## Kunal Vijayakar

Experience-led dining will go mainstream. Dining out is evolving into an event, not just a meal. It is no longer just about food; restaurants are staging shows, with design-led spaces, open kitchens where the sizzle is part of the spectacle, chefs who double up as storytellers, and sensory lighting, live music, to enrich the experience. For the young and hungry, it's as much about the vibe, the playlist, and the perfect selfie spot as it is about the drinks and the food. Dining, today, is theatre, and every meal tells a story that comes with its own opening act.



# Dining Concepts

The Indian diner today is more willing to experiment than ever before! They are more than ready to venture beyond the known to try new flavours. The F&B industry is responding by offering innovative experiences across dining and bar formats, menus, themes and concepts.

Our panel predicts that **Hyper-local/Ingredient-forward concepts (88%)** will dominate when it comes to bar and restaurant concepts that appeal to adventurous diners in 2026. The new found sense of adventure extends to **Cocktail-forward concepts (84%)** that offer a combination of drinks, food and ambience driven by a theme. **Indian modern fine dining concepts (84%)** offering contemporary reinterpretations of traditional dishes will also be popular. Finally, diners should look forward to many more **Single-cuisine restaurant concepts showcasing a single region or community (82%)** this year.



## Isha Mayer

Indian diners are travelling more than ever, and with that has come a widening of palates and a growing openness to experimentation. Experience-driven, Instagram-friendly dine-outs now take precedence, fuelling the rise of chef-led concepts, theatrical dining formats and cocktail-forward menus designed as much for storytelling as for taste. At the same time, comfort remains king. Diners continue to gravitate towards the regional Indian flavours they grew up with, ensuring that homegrown cuisines—from humble staples to hyper-regional specialities—continue to reign supreme.



## Chef Manish Mehrotra

What I'm seeing more clearly now is that people are moving back towards authenticity. After years of chasing novelty, diners are looking for experiences that feel real, grounded, and emotionally familiar. In 2026, the concepts that will resonate most are those that are rooted in genuine flavours, honest ingredients, and a clear point of view, rather than trend-led theatrics. There is also a growing appreciation for focused, thoughtful concepts. Restaurants that explore a single cuisine, region, or idea allow for depth and storytelling, and that depth creates trust with the diner. Chef-driven spaces, too, will feel more personal, reflecting lived experiences, travels, and philosophies rather than a formulaic approach.



## Chef Vicky Ratnani

We're entering an era of 'less performance, more flavour.' In the kitchen, this means dialling down sugar to let bitter, sour, and salty notes lead—using tamarind, kokum, and fermented acids for depth. We are embracing comfort food without apology; ghee and butter are back, replaced by portion control rather than 'diet' restrictions. Ultimately, the shift is moving away from endless invention toward true mastery. It's about less menu and more soul—prioritising intentional flavour over culinary spectacle.

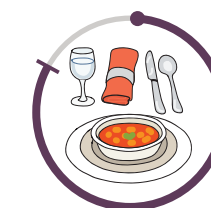


## Vaibhav Bahl - Co-Founder & Ceo, Conosh

People want the personification of cuisines from the custodians of these cuisines. Hence chef-based pop-ups that provide that relevance for consumers to experience not just flavours but validate their understanding of flavours, foods and travels by having conversation with these chefs while they are conducting the pop ups. It is engagement beyond the plate, which is what the customer is seeking.



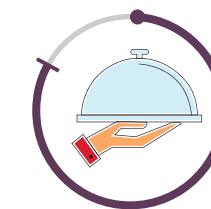
**88%**  
Hyper-local/  
Ingredient-forward  
concepts



**84%**  
Indian modern fine  
dining concepts



**84%**  
Cocktail-forward  
concepts



**82%**  
Single-cuisine  
restaurant concepts

# Beverages

India's beverage landscape is poised for a pivotal year, with tea and coffee holding their ground even as non-alcoholic and functional drinks surge ahead. For a growing slice of urban India, not drinking, or drinking less, is no longer unusual; it signals a lifestyle rooted in clarity, mental wellness and long-term health rather than just abstinence. As vegan beverage alternatives, functional drinks and mocktails occupy increasingly larger shelves in supermarkets, beverage makers are merging great taste and new flavours with wellness, promising mood, focus and energy benefits!

Meanwhile, in our essay this year, we deep dive into the phenomenon of *chai-nashta*! In just under a century tea has come to occupy an integral role in Indian culture, inspiring the cherished daily ritual of *chai-nashta*, a concept that has come to be a powerful symbol of hospitality, social connection, and tradition, that transcends regional and social boundaries as one travels the length and breadth of the country.



# Chronicles in a Cup



## Kashmir:

Noon Cha or Kahwa are paired with Kashmiri breads like Tshot, Baaqarkhani, and Sheermal.

## Ladakh:

*Gur Gur* or *Po Cha* (Butter Tea) made with yak milk, butter and salt is savored with Khambir, a local bread.

## North and Central India:

*Kadak Adrak Wali Cha* is accompanied by *samosas*, *mathris*, *pakodas* and sometimes even *chaats*.

## Rajasthan:

Ajwain-infused *chai* is paired with snacks like *papad churi*, or *kachoris*.

## Bihar:

Hot tea is accompanied by *Bhurja*, or roasted snacks like *channa*, *makhana*, or flattened rice.

## Assam:

Lal Chah or black tea, is accompanied by snacks like *Pirtha* (rice cakes) or *Muri* (puffed rice).

## Gujarat:

Gujarati *Masala Cha* is incomplete without dry *Nasto*, like *chevdo*, *sev*, *ganthiya*, *sev-mamra*, and fresh *Farsaan*, like *dhokla*, *patra*, *khandvi*.

## West Bengal:

Savoury fried snacks like *Chops*, *Shingara*, or *Telebhaja*, are paired with black Cha, or lemony *Lebu Cha*.

## Maharashtra:

Tea and snack pairings like *Chaha-Chapati* or *Chaha-Pohe*, are a daily staple.

## Mumbai:

*Mumbai chai* is iconic, be it the *chaiwalla* with his wire caddy of cutting-chai or cardamom-infused milky sweet Irani *chai*. *Khari Biscuits* or *bun-maska* are indispensable.

## Hyderabad:

Rich Irani Chai paired with salty-sweet *Osmania Biscuits*, or stuffed-fried pastries like *Lukhmi* or *Keema Samosas*.

## Karnataka and Tamil Nadu:

In place of tea, the milky, frothy *Filter Kaapi*, accompanies *Tiffin*, a light mid-day snack of *Vada*, *Bonda*, *Idli*, or *Dosa*.

## Andhra/Telangana:

*Chiruthindi*, or small snacks like *murukku*, *punugulu*, *mirchi bajji*, *vada* are served with evening tea or coffee.

## Bengaluru/Karnataka:

Breakfast or snacks like *Masala Dose*, or *Goli Bajje* are completed with *Filter Kaapi*.

## Kerala:

Sweet, milky *Chaaya* is paired with *Kadi* or fried snacks like *pazham pori*, *parippu vada*, and savoury puffs.



# Chronicles In A Cup:

## The transformative concept of *Chai-Nashta*

Tracing the evolution of *Chai-Nashta* from colonial import to cultural cornerstone and eventually entrepreneurial genius.

### Focus Areas

The *chai-nashta* narrative centers on three key transformational points: cultural adaptation, social equalisation, and commercial innovation. The egalitarian nature of this rich tradition is now a dynamic force driving entrepreneurial innovation—from the QSR sector and elevated tea lounges, a wave of ‘guilt-free’ product innovation and limitless new propositions—making it a perfect mirror of modern India’s ability to absorb foreign influence and recast it with an unmistakable local identity.

No culture is static, not in the least food culture. The story of *chai-nashta* is a testament to this: a colonial beverage meeting Indian social, economic, and culinary cultures, to forge a concept that deeply ingrained itself into Indian life. A beautiful, ever-evolving, example of creative storytelling and entrepreneurial innovation.

The foundations of *chai-nashta* lie in

British economic ambitions, which created the first narrative around tea in India. In less than a century, this foreign novelty evolved into a staple social ritual—that of pairing tea with light snacks—practiced across India, with local variations and stories shaping its journey.

*Chai-nashta* (or *chah-nasto*, *chaha-pohe*, *jol-khabar*, *jolpan*, depending on the region) not only influenced

India’s cultural fabric but, through evolving narratives and markets, became a highly profitable and enduring business model.



languages, and symbols to distance it from its colonial origins. As the trend caught on, English tea merged with the traditional spiced concoctions, incorporating milk, sugar, and local spices to mask the tannic flavours and taste more familiar, and thus becoming *chai*.

Eventually, this adapted to local tastes across the country: from Mumbai’s creamy *Irani* and black *Suleimani chai*, to North India’s *kadak adrak chai*, Gujarat’s complex *masala-infused chah*, and Kolkata’s light, tangy *lebu cha*.

launch an aggressive strategy to move massive tea deadstock from Assam and Darjeeling. The ITA targeted the general populace across all classes. They flooded high-footfall locations—railway stations, market squares, and industrial zones—with free sampling drives, public demonstrations, even vehicles shaped like tea kettles. When Gandhi and other nationalists criticised tea as both physically harmful (due to strong tannins) and symbolically imperialist, British and Indian marketers took to Swadeshi rebranding, using local imagery,

### The Cup That Bridged India

Considering how deeply ingrained *chai* is in India today, it’s hard to believe that just a century ago, it was an alien notion to most Indians. Apart from the elite few that adopted British social culture, in most homes, it was more traditional hot, therapeutic concoctions like *kadhas* and *kashayams* that offered daily refreshment. Tea only reached the Indian masses in the early 20th century due to a deliberate commercial move by the Raj. Following a global economic depression and the failure of their China market gamble, the British had the Indian Tea Association (ITA)

The ubiquitous popularity of *chai* catalysed its commercialisation. Pioneers like Tata, Brooke Bond and Lipton moved it from a mere commodity into packaged branded products by standardising blending

and packaging, bringing the promise of consistent taste. Constructing deeply resonant narratives of nationalism and familial trust, they positioned themselves as guardians of the home-brewed *chai* ritual.



### The Birth Of *Chai-Nashta*

Introduced by the British East India Company, the ritual of afternoon tea of High Tea, initially a symbol of colonial refinement, was quickly adopted by India’s aristocratic elite. It became a daily social practice bridging lunch and dinner, and by the early 20th century, found institutional expression in the offerings of colonial-era hotels such as the Taj Mahal Palace in Mumbai (1903) and the Imperial in New Delhi (1936).

As tea became more accessible, the exclusive High Tea ritual evolved into an everyday, egalitarian custom. Among working communities, its fixed timing gave way to a more flexible rhythm of small, sustaining

meals between work shifts. English teatime fare was replaced with affordable, energy-dense Indian *nashtas*, and the ritual itself acquired Swadeshi undertones during the Independence movement—transforming *Chai Nashta* into a social and cultural act of self-reliance and identity.

Its success lay in how it subverted India’s complex caste-based food hierarchies. Traditional Hindu food practices deemed foods cooked with water (*kachcha*) as vulnerable to ritual pollution, sharable only within one’s caste. By contrast, foods fried in oil or ghee (*pakka*) were ‘pure’, permissible across caste lines. *Chai*, a boiled and neutral beverage,

paired with universally acceptable *pakka* snacks like *samosas*, biscuits, and rusks, created a shared space to eat and converse across social groups. Tea stalls, where economic transactions replaced social hierarchy, emerged as egalitarian ‘third spaces’—sites for political discussion, intellectual exchange, and community gathering that quietly democratised public life.



### The Regionalisation Of *Chai-Nashta*

As *chai-nashta* spread, it absorbed local flavours and customs, giving rise to distinct regional interpretations.

In the east, Kolkata played a foundational role in shaping India’s tea culture. As the capital of British India and the nerve centre of the early tea industry, the city became both a trade hub and a cultural laboratory for new forms of social life around tea. By the 1920s and ‘30s, tea cabins dotted its streets—small, wood-panelled shops where writers, artists, and students gathered for *adda* (informal conversation). Here, the concept of *jol khabar*—tea with snacks—was born, establishing an enduring rhythm of communal tea-drinking and discussion.

Further east, in Assam, tea’s story ran even deeper. The Singpho people had long brewed wild tea from native bushes, a practice dating back centuries before British colonisation. Their indigenous use of *Camellia sinensis* var. *Assamica* directly inspired British planters to

commercialise tea cultivation in the region. Here, the culture of *jolpan*, or breakfast or tea-time, spread widely. Together, Bengal’s intellectual tea cabins and Assam’s indigenous heritage grounded India’s *chai* culture in both colonial modernity and ancestral continuity.

In Bombay, the city’s rapid industrialisation and cosmopolitan workforce gave rise to a different trajectory. “*Travelling salespeople promoted it at train stations, in the mill areas, factories, and office districts,*” notes food historian

**Dr. Mohsina Mukadam.** “Organisations were lobbied to offer tea breaks to their workers with the promise of increased productivity.” As tea became embedded in the rhythms of labour, entrepreneurial communities rapidly adapted. “*The Bhandari community, whose traditional trade in intoxicating beverages was monopolised by the British, turned to vending tea (also considered a stimulant or intoxicant at the time),*”



Dr. Mukadam explains. “*Similarly, the Nagori community of Rajasthan, known for selling milk, began selling chai as a natural extension.*”

Irani cafés, too, played a pivotal role in cementing *chai-nashta* culture. These establishments—simple yet hospitable—paired tea with baked snacks in spaces open to all, creating an atmosphere of conversation and camaraderie.

In the South, where coffee had long been dominant, tea carved out its own cultural niche. “*Though people*



*associate Kerala with coffee, tea is intrinsic to the region thanks to the spice trade,*” says **Marina Balakrishnan**, founder of Ootupura, a Mumbai-based home chef enterprise. who offers a signature *Chaya Kada* pop-up experience inspired by her childhood memories. The *chaya kada* (tea stall) evolved from the British notion of ‘tea and cakes’ into something distinctly local, featuring spicy, fried snacks and deeply personal rituals.

"In my grandmother's time, 11 AM or 4 PM meant tea-time," Balakrishnan recalls. "While we often had homemade palaharam (snacks), on days she couldn't cook, we'd visit the nearest chaya kada and bring home a hot parcel wrapped in banana leaf and an old Malayalam newspaper." Over time, the tea stall became as much a social anchor as a culinary one.

Balakrishnan goes on to observe that the tea shop culture remains central to Kerala's daily rhythm, answering the familiar question—*chaya-kku kadi*

undo? (what snacks accompany the tea today?)—with an ever-changing menu of fresh, perishable bites. "Hot, sweet, milky chaya pairs with pazham pori (banana fritters), parippu vada (lentil fritters), ulli vada (onion fritters), and seasonal specialties like arikadukka (stuffed fried mussels)." These rituals, deeply woven into regional life, exemplify how the British import of tea became, through *chai-nashta*, an emblem of Indian warmth, creativity, and community.



## The Commercialisation Of Comfort

The arrival of modern coffee chains like Barista and Café Coffee Day in the early 2000s offered perceivedly more sophisticated options for coffee drinking regions in the south, eventually spreading across the country. This spurred a counter-movement in the tea industry, pushing established brands and new entrepreneurs to reimagine *chai-nashta* within elevated, café-style settings. Wagh Bakri Tea launched tea lounges in the early 2000s, followed by Brooke Bond's Taj Mahal Tea House in Mumbai (2015), offering bespoke tea and snack menus.

Soon, high-end restaurants also leveraged the *chai-nashta* story, introducing special teatime menus to draw customers during off-peak hours. Their offerings expanded beyond basic tea to include fine teas from around the world, options of first and second flush teas, and floral tisanes, transforming the daily break into a special, monetisable occasion.

Seasonal menus during the rainy or colder months further deepened this connection. Soam Restaurant in Mumbai was an early example: a monsoon menu pairing hot ginger tea with bhajiyas and pakodas.



Founder **Pinky Chandan Dixit** explains, "*Chai and bhajiyas in the monsoons are an emotion.*" The initial success evolved into an engagement strategy: "*It's now not only an annual offering; we also have rotating seasonal menus that keep guests coming back for new tastes and flavours.*"



## The Second Wave: QSR Escalation

The 2010s ushered in yet another market vertical for *chai-nashta*: Quick Service Restaurants (QSRs). These businesses bridged the gap between the nostalgia of authentic but variable street experience and a modern, hygienic, and controlled product experience.

Each early player built a distinct narrative. Chaayos centered on personalisation, offering over 12,000 tea combinations. *Chai Point* revolutionised portability with vending machines and heat-retaining delivery for office-goers. Others like Chai Sutta Bar and MBA Chaiwala recreated the roadside 'tapri' vibe within café-style spaces. This QSR wave quickly established its place across corporate parks, malls, and airports—modernising the indispensable tea break.

According to Founder and CEO of Detales Brand Communications, **Tripti Bhatia Gandhi**, "*Restaurants need to constantly create propositions to gratify loyal customers and attract new ones.*"

**Chai-nashta as a concept is open to so many diverse applications that can provide both a unique culinary and educational experience of Indian and global cultures.**

This flexibility enables endless reinterpretations. For instance, Chai Jai in Srinagar pairs Kashmiri *kahwa* with *kandur-style* breads, demonstrating that there are as many successful, unique propositions as there are communities in India.

Further opportunities lie in globally parallel and resonant formats, like Yum Cha (tea and dumplings). Leveraging these in the Indian market, national restaurant chain Burma Burma's 2025 pop-up, From Burma, With Tea, spotlighted Burmese tea shop culture through a limited-edition menu. Conversely, the comfort of *chai-nashta* is also travelling outwards with the Indian diaspora, inspiring international restaurants like Dishoom in London, to reimagine the Parsi-Irani café tradition as a modern, scalable experience.



## Chai-Nashta At Home: Commensality & Comfort

Retail brands have long leveraged the social connection inherent in chai. Tata Tea's *Jaago Re* campaign linked waking up with a cup of tea to social consciousness, while Hindustan Unilever's Brooke Bond Red Label and Lipton campaigns emphasised the sharing of tea and snacks as family-time ritual.

Central to *chai-nashta* is 'dubao-ing'—dunking of crispy snacks in tea. Irani bakeries pioneered this with *khari* biscuits and *jeera* butter cookies, spurring entire supermarket aisles for biscuits, with household names like Britannia's Marie and GoodDay.

The national obsession with crispy, crunchy teatime offerings like *chevdo*, *chakli*, *kodbale* and *bhakarwadi*, has also bred a multitude of brands across the country, including giants like Hot Chips, Avarya, Trupti Snacks, Chheda, and Neelam Foodland. Complementing these are the traditional flavours offered by women-led cooperatives like Kutumb Sakhi and Lijjat.

In South India, filter coffee paired with local snacks maintains equal cultural importance. Brands like Sweet Karam Coffee, founded by **Nalini Parthiban** and **Anand Bharadwaj**, embody this ritual. Drawing on their grandmother's legacy, they provide authentic, health-conscious South Indian snacks, bridging the gap between authenticity, accessibility and tradition. Parthiban recalls, "*Authentic South Indian delicacies were available only in pockets. what was available was commercially produced, loaded with maida, palm oil, preservatives, and poorly packaged.*" Today, the brand has



scalded globally while preserving authenticity, clean labels, traditional flavours, and the 'grandmother connect' in its storytelling.

Consumers today, however, are not only seeking convenient, ready-to-consume options; they also want guilt-free variants, with clean labels, whole ingredients, and artisanal recipes. This shift is pushing both heritage and emerging brands to reformulate or innovate with their products, ingredient lists and packaging to emphasise on whole ingredients, reduced sugar content, transparent sourcing, artisanal and preservative-free recipes to capture a growing share of the evolving market.



## Evolving Consumer Expectations



"*Chai-nashta has always been an emotional and habitual moment in Indian homes, but what is clearly changing is the expectation from that moment. Today's consumer is navigating an 'effort-time-health' triangle. Convenience is no longer seen as a compromise; it is expected to coexist with quality and reassurance. Consumers want to know that what they are serving is not just quick but responsibly made,*" observes **Anushree Dewen**, Head of Marketing and Innovation, Godrej Foods Ltd.

She goes on to elaborate that the rise of air-fryers has fundamentally altered how consumers perceive frozen and ready-to-cook snacks. "*Air-fryers and frozen snacks have*

*naturally come together in real kitchens; not as occasional hacks, but as dependable solutions for lunchboxes, after-school snacks, late-night cravings and even small hosting moments.*" This is not just higher adoption of a new appliance, but a mindset shift, that is busting long-standing myths around frozen foods and appliance safety, and reinforcing that nutrition, reliability and convenience can coexist.

Dewen views this as an opportunity for brands to leverage in both product design and messaging. "*Over time, we expect more products to be developed keeping air-frying performance in mind, especially with traditional Indian and street-style snacks that consumers want to recreate at home without*

*the guilt or effort.*" This along with guiding consumers, through pack communication and usage cues, to optimise their experience will increasingly become part of how brands support modern cooking behaviour.

The brand also sees signals of more nuanced nutrition conversation emerging among urban and upper socio-economic consumer segments in times to come. Much like protein quietly moved into a mainstream cultural conversation, fibre is beginning to enter everyday consideration. While still nascent, this shift suggests that future snacking will evolve to balance, digestibility and long-term wellbeing alongside taste and convenience.

## Future prospects

As the *chai-nashta* landscape evolves, consumers will increasingly look for more excitement. One of the most visible shifts is the growing appetite for global flavours, often inspired by street food, quick-service restaurants and digital food culture,

but delivered through formats that remain familiar and comforting.

What is interesting about this, Dewen observes, is that "*this exploration rarely moves too far away from what people already*

*love. Instead, it shows up as familiar snacks with unexpected twists—bolder seasoning, layered heat, or international flavour cues that feel playful rather than alien. Product pairings like Yummiez Crispy Chicken Bites paired with Atomic Sauce are*

a good example of how flavour can be amplified while staying rooted in trusted formats.”

This flavour evolution is emerging in surprising formats. Beyond daily rituals, chai-nashta has found a niche in high-end gifting through curated hampers for tea lovers and food aficionados. These include selections ranging from masala chai premixes to gourmet tea blends, paired with traditional, and contemporary, snack offerings reimagined with twists in textures and flavours.

Uttarakhand-based e-commerce

brand Naashta celebrates regional culinary traditions with handmade snacks and condiments. Their *chai-nashta* series reimagines



local ingredients in contemporary ways. **“Whether it’s the end of a long day or the arrival of an unexpected guest, *chai-nashta* has always been about taking a pause, sharing a story, and feeling at home. Our Nostalgia Box is a tribute to that timeless Indian ritual of serving chai with crunchy, salty, and sweet accompaniments. It brings together a thoughtfully crafted**

selection of tea, snacks, and more that highlight lesser known indigenous ingredients like bhangjeera and jakhiya to stir up beautiful moments,” shares **Varun Bajaj**, Director, Ekat (of which Naashta is an entity).

*Chai-nashta* and *kaapi-tiffin* have also inspired a broad ecosystem of accessories and merchandise. Each tea-drinking region has developed distinct tools—from elaborate Kashmiri samovars and porcelain sets to utilitarian street items like cutting chai glasses and wire racks, terracotta kulhads, aluminum kettles—now widely available for home use and gifting.



## Enduring Relevance: A Symbol of Modern India

The journey of *chai-nashta* is a vivid cultural chronicle, demonstrating India’s ability to absorb foreign influence and recast it with an unmistakable local identity. From a British economic ambition to a

powerful social equaliser, and from a humble street stall to a global QSR concept, it is a continuously evolving, delicious mirror reflecting the diversity, and enduring spirit of modern India.

## Action Points

The enduring *chai-nashta* pairing is a powerful cultural concept that serves as a dynamic vehicle for both innovation and nostalgia within the food industry. Restaurants should strategically move beyond broad regional classifications to offer hyper-local propositions, developing immersive experiences through menu innovations like ‘Chai-Nashta Flights’ (regional snack and tea pairings) and functional beverages such as ‘Power Chai’. Simultaneously, brands must invest in product innovation to meet modern lifestyle demands by developing guilt-free, clean-label Indian snacks—low oil, high fiber/protein—that retain the emotional connection to flavour, extending to convenient ready-to-cook healthy options like millet tikkis. Ultimately, the simplicity and cultural relevance of *chai-nashta* also offer a rich and engaging narrative for content creators to explore through bespoke articles and recipes.



# Beverage Trends

India’s beverage space is at an exciting confluence of deep-rooted traditions and bold new global ideas. As the category expands in every direction, our beverage survey this year puts a spotlight on all the exciting developments in the non-alcoholic beverage and tea segments. Read on to find out what our experts predict will be the defining trends for these segments in 2026.

## Toolkit for 2026

The Indian beverage industry can take very specific cues from evolving trends. Thanks to the Gen Z demand for low and zero alcohol options, the non-alcoholic segment has transcended being a niche category, promising to shape the beverages landscape well beyond 2026. The demand for ‘better for you’ beverages that blend wellness, quality ingredients, and flavour, will only grow with growing audiences looking to drink better, not more!

With health becoming a priority for an increasing proportion of consumers, beverage brands will benefit from leaning further into gut-friendly offerings that use natural flavours and colours. Mixologists can take inspiration from the ‘savory forward’ cocktail trend and harness the diversity of salty, spicy, savoury, sour and fermented ingredients and flavours India offers to create propositions that offer tippers options that are high on flavour and wellness. It would be prudent to recognise that tea, beyond becoming aspirational, is also crossing over the bar to inspire non-alcoholic takes on sparkling wine, mocktails and more. Beverages have always offered beautiful inspiration, and the upcoming era of story-telling offers the opportunity for content creators to spin all sorts of tales in the glass, from stories of origins, and creation, to ingredients and more.





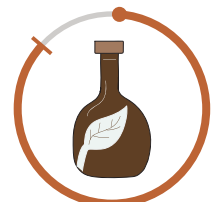
# Non-Alcoholic Beverages

The unprecedented growth in the non-alcoholic beverage segment has been palpable in recent years thanks to a shift from hedonistic to mindful consumption. Our panel predicts 2026 will see wellness and flavour experimentation doing the heavy lifting. Consumers will increasingly opt for 'benefit-first' beverage consumption.

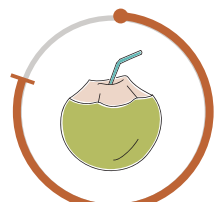
Traditional favourites like **Coffee-based drinks (88%)** and **Tea-based drinks (75%)** will continue to find favour amongst aficionados in both classical and newer forms with cults emerging around origin, craft and specialty coffees and teas. Meanwhile, health-conscious consumers will lean further towards **Fermented drinks (87%)** naturally bridge health with the 'cool' quotient. **Natural drinks (81%)** stay evergreen thanks to perceived comfort, purity, and health-benefits.



**88%**  
Coffee-based drinks



**87%**  
Fermented drinks



**81%**  
Natural drinks



**75%**  
Tea-based drinks



## Sargam Thakkar

While the fermented drink market saw a significant boom immediately post-COVID, demand has stabilised over the last two years. It has been my observation that consumers choosing sobriety frequently opt for fermented beverages over zero-proof alternatives. Furthermore, for those dedicated to fitness, whey-based beverages remain a near non-negotiable staple, and I definitely see continued growth in that category.



## Rajnush Agarwal

There's a quiet but deliberate shift underway. Today's discerning drinker isn't merely abstaining; they're choosing mindfulness over excess, clarity over indulgence offered by zero-proof drinks. At Mharo Khet, we've noticed guests gravitating towards herb-forward spritzes, citrus coolers, and botanical tonics — beverages that echo the land's rhythm without the haze of alcohol. It's less about saying no and more about saying yes — to flavour, to presence, to connection.



## Ryan Fernando

The market will reward brands that successfully balance health, heritage, flavour, and functionality in one compelling sip. Consumers will increasingly seek beverages offering both experience and function, gravitating toward drinks supporting energy, gut health, and mood through clean-label living. Fermented and functional drinks will surge as science-backed wellness goes mainstream, complementing trusted everyday choices like cold-pressed juices and coconut water. Finally, traditional Indian beverages—such as *jal jeera*, *sattu*, and *kala khatta*—will make a strong comeback driven by nostalgia, regionality, and hyperlocal authenticity.



## Sid Jalan

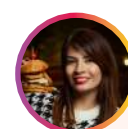
Healthy luxury is a permanent fixture in India's evolving landscape. We at Bebida Hospitality introduced Copenhagen Sparkling Tea to meet this demand. Crafted by an award-winning Michelin sommelier, it fuses Nordic innovation with Asian tea tradition. It is served in 200+ Michelin-starred restaurants globally. Designed to offer a sophisticated, non-alcoholic alternative to sparkling wines, it comes in three expressions, Blå, Lysegrøn, and Lyserød, all of which offer complexity without compromise for India's aspirational Gen Z and sophisticated tee-totalers seeking elegance in a glass.



# Tea Concepts

India's tea culture has evolved phenomenally from the simple, familiarity of traditional 'chai' into many sophisticated avatars that include exotic teas, ayurvedic herbal and flavoured propositions to leverage the medicinal and restorative benefits of this wonderful beverage to a larger audience.

Our panel's predictions for 2026 reflect a collective desire for wellness, comfort, and discovery. **Wellness teas (81%)**, that promise functional benefits by targeting sleep, stress, gut health and immunity, will be in demand. The universal appeal of **Masala chai (77%)** will prevail, while consumers will continue to experiment with **Herbal teas (74%)**. Younger, more adventurous consumers will also experiment with exotic offerings like **Tea-based fermented drinks (67%)** and **Tea-based cocktails and mocktails (50%)** as playful alternatives to the usual classics.



## Mudraa Keswani

India is a *chai*-first market. Milk tea is a daily habit, while herbal teas sit in the distinct, wellness-led lane. Growth in the segment will be in clear ladders: value-driven *chai* for comfort and functional wellness teas for specific occasions. The biggest drivers will be masala variants, RTD/instant formats for quick commerce, and tea-based cocktails/ferments for younger drinkers. Wellness products will need to offer specific benefits (sleep, digestion) and balanced taste (no stevia aftertaste).



## Nolan Michael Mascarenhas

Tea is set to evolve from a comfort ritual into a wellness-driven, flavour-forward lifestyle category. Growth will be led by functional wellness teas and cold-brew/sparkling teas, driven by consumer demand for health benefits, low sugar, and daily repeatability. Functional blends focused on stress relief, digestion, immunity, sleep, and clean energy—featuring power ingredients like *ashwagandha*, *tulsi*, turmeric, and chamomile—will dominate. In parallel, cold brew and sparkling teas will explode among Millennials and Gen Z, for their refreshing profile, craft identity, and inherent low-calorie appeal.



## Pratiti Basu Chanard

Tea has always been a central part of Indian kitchens and pantries, and that is not changing. Tea will balance tradition, convenience, wellness, and innovation, appealing to both daily drinkers and adventurous consumers. Simultaneously, experimental mixology will bring tea into bars through cocktails and mocktails. Experiential gastronomy, such as tea tastings and tea garden tours, will create new ways to enjoy it, although these are likely to remain niche compared to product adoption.



## Sanjay Anand

The tea market in 2026 sits between two strong forces: the pull of tradition, and the push of wellness. *Masala Chai*, with its core emotional promise of comfort, will remain a foundational daily habit, especially with organised chains and automated brewing formats, making it scalable, consistent and accessible. On the other hand, people are also paying closer attention to sleep, digestion, inflammation, stress management and wellness. The herbal and functional tea segments continue to grow quickly because consumers perceive turmeric, tulsi, ashwagandha, and gut-friendly blends as small, daily health investments.



**81%**  
Wellness tea



**77%**  
Masala Chai and its variants



**74%**  
Herbal teas



**67%**  
Tea-based fermented drinks



**60%**  
Tea-based cocktails and mocktails

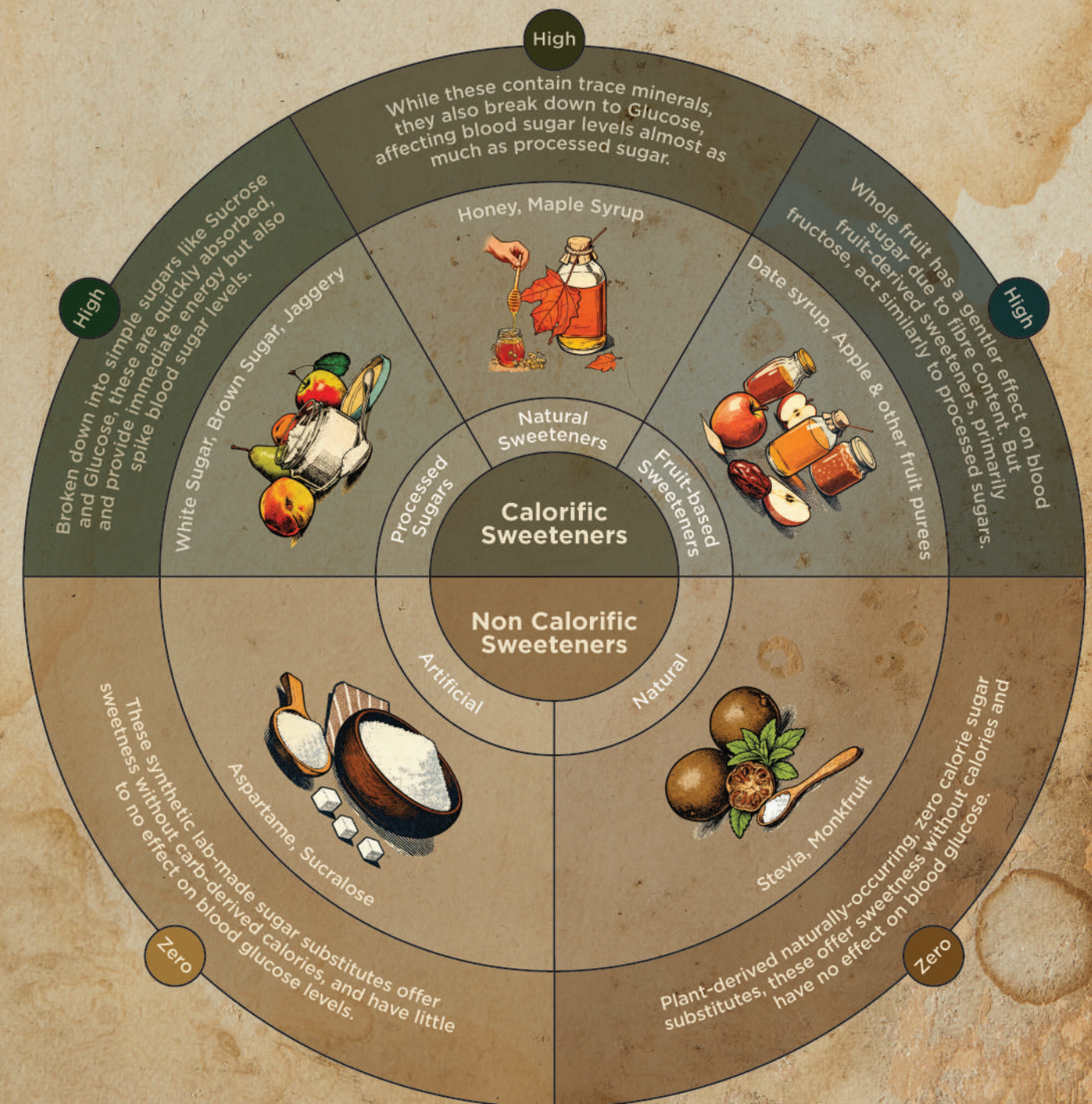
# Sweets & Desserts

The Sweets and Desserts segment in India is constantly evolving. The last few years have seen conversations shifting from a resurgence of traditions, to exotic flavours, fusion, and more. Health, however, has been a constant. As we go through 2026 the love for mithai remains strong, urban Indians are increasingly seeking healthier indulgence options.

In our Sweets & Desserts essay this year, we look at the changing narrative around sugar, and the exciting new options that lie ahead for consumers in 2026.

# Sugar Quotient Wheel

Sweetness today is more than flavour — it encompasses a spectrum of sources, functions, and effects and reflects how we navigate nutrition, science, and food choices. This Sweet Quotient Wheel presents an overview of how different sweeteners compare in composition, processing, and physiological response and serves as a ready reckoner. Each concentric layer mapping sweeteners illustrates origins, categories, subcategories based on chemical makeup, examples, and finally culminates with the glycemic load or impact on blood sugar levels.





# The Sugar Quotient:

## Recalibrating India's relationship with sweetness

India's centuries-old, complex relationship with sugar transitioned from a cherished flavour into a critical health threat in less than a century. What soured this once-sweet proposition into a painful dietary reckoning that continues to profoundly shape India's dietary and dessert landscape?

### Focus Areas

India's relationship with sugar is complex and often paradoxical. What began as a marker of ritual joy and social bonding, transformed into a daily staple. While sweetness has been a cultural and emotional constant throughout Indian history, the metabolic reckoning triggered by modern lifestyles has villainised sugar, straining India's relationship to sweet pleasures. By reframing the role of sugar in a broader context of nutrition, health and lifestyle, and redefining indulgence in a health-conscious age, India is now recalibrating its sugar quotient through awareness, innovation, and mindful pleasure.

The attraction to sweetness is a biological inclination that begins in the womb, when a developing fetus first tastes sweetness from the mother's diet and is fully established after the baby is eventually introduced to lactose (a type of simple sugar) in breast milk.

Over centuries of evolution, this biological inclination grew to be all-pervasive in global culture and society. Humans as a species, became hardwired to associate sweetness with a source of energy and comfort, and eventually a symbol of celebration, prosperity,

and hospitality. The last few decades, however, have seen a change in lifestyles and diets that have brought sugar into the firing line, challenging traditional practices, sparking heightened scrutiny of commercial products and driving innovation and discovery towards healthier alternatives.

### What Is Sugar?

In essence, sugar is a sweet tasting compound made up of carbohydrates. Found in its simple form in unprocessed whole foods like glucose (found in honey, fruits, starchy vegetables and grains), fructose (found in fruits and some root vegetables) and galactose found in milk and in complex form in processed ingredients like jaggery and table sugar. The carbohydrates in both simple and complex forms, are ultimately broken down by the body, into glucose, a form of energy

called calories. As a result, these sugars are categorised as calorific sweeteners.

Not all sweet substances are sugar. Distinct in their ability to create a sweet taste without imparting energy are non-calorific sweeteners. These alternative sweeteners, often found in zero-sugar alternatives in the market can include natural or plant-based options like stevia and monk fruit, or those of artificial or synthesised origin, like aspartame and sucralose.

While consuming sweet foods signals that the body has received a source of energy, from an evolutionary perspective, despite the absence of calories, the taste of sweetness in non-calorific sweeteners still triggers pleasure pathways. In essence, sweetness provides the brain a pause and instant feelings of happiness and contentment. And yet, sweets are the first category of food people cut back on, when concerned about health and wellness.

### The Inheritance Of Sweetness

To understand this complex and often paradoxical relationship with sugar, requires a look back into India's history with it. *"Sugar is India's gift to the world"*, says archaeologist and culinary anthropologist **Dr Kurush F Dalal**.



*"The technique of extracting sugar from cane originated here, and the name 'sugar' itself comes from the*

*Sanskrit word śarkarā."* From India, sugar made its way to China via Buddhist monks, where the Chinese refined it into its crystalline form, inspiring the name *Cheeni* (meaning 'from China').

But India's affinity for sweetness predates this. Historical texts from ancient India chronicle sweet foods like *Madhuparka*, *Panchamrit* and *Shikran* (mixtures of honey and fruits with milk, curd, and ghee) that punctuated the rituals and rhythms



*of life. "The sharing of sweets is central to Indian hospitality, ritual, kinship, and social bonding. They represent pleasure and generosity,*

*both in times of celebration and amidst hardship,"* says **Ishita Dey**, food anthropologist and author of the book *Sweet Excess*.

Dr Dalal illustrates this, sharing, *"across India's sugarcane-growing belt, women traditionally came together to prepare desserts in times of harvest and festivity. As much as this was a time for bonding, it was also a way to ensure every family—regardless of their crop's success or shortfall—received an equal share of the sweet treats."*

While sweetness was deeply embedded in Indian life, it was once a joy to be savoured rather than consumed in habit. Refined sugar remained a scarce and expensive commodity until the British Empire saw its potential. They began producing it at scale, in India as well as their colonies in the Caribbean, eventually making it a global ubiquity. And this fundamentally transformed India's relationship with it.

The once-expensive and aspirational indulgence, became cheaper and more accessible, increasing its consumption. People found reasons

to partake in its pleasures more frequently; from occasions of festivity and hospitality, sweetness found its place in meals, snacks, and the daily ritual of sugar-laden tea and coffee. The comfort of sweetness eventually permeated lifestyles so deeply that, no matter the economic status of a household, sugar became mandatory in the monthly groceries.

With time, however, this deviation from historical consumption patterns came under scrutiny. In the late 20th century, researchers and health advocates began to link excessive sugar consumption with metabolic disorders and lifestyle-related illnesses. *"Today, sweetness embodies a moral and sensory paradox: of joy and guilt, celebration and control,"* observes Dey.



### The Souring Of A Sweet Proposition

The dramatic rise in sugar consumption is frequently cited as the primary catalyst for India's diabetes crisis. The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) Diabetes Atlas 2021, says India has the largest population of diabetics in the world. A landmark 2023 study published in *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology* estimated that 101 million people in India were living with diabetes in 2021, with an additional 136 million classified as prediabetic.

However, a closer look reveals that attributing the escalating situation solely to sugar is a gross oversimplification. Sugar is merely one spoke of the diabetes wheel, explains eminent public health and nutrition expert **Dr Shubhada Kanani**.

In popular discourse, Indian mithai is typically often unfairly blamed, she observes. *"More than the mithai itself, it is the portion size and frequency of consumption that ultimately determine health outcomes"*, adding that consumers



*tend to overindulge. "Attention to one's overall dietary diversity is far more important than the occasional spoon of sugar or mithai."*

She points out that while the average urban Indian consumes more than the recommended allowance of 25 grams of sugar per day—overlooking hidden sources of sugar such as jaggery, *khaandsari* (crystal sugar), sweetened beverages, honey, and sugars in packaged foods, breakfast cereals and snacks—the true crisis lies in a far

more complex combination of issues. A cocktail of sedentary lifestyles, severely imbalanced carbohydrate and fibre intake, decreased nutritional diversity in diets, and a landscape polluted by misleading health information have created a dangerous metabolic environment, that makes Indians uniquely susceptible to conditions sugar alone cannot be demonised for.

Research indicates a drastic decline of the Indian diet, and lifestyle in the last century. Traditionally already carbohydrate heavy in nature, India's



dietary culture has seen a steady erosion of nutritional diversity thanks to a surge in consumption of low-quality, refined carbohydrates like white rice and maida, coinciding with a sharp decline in essential fibre intake—a balance of which is critical to regulation of blood sugar levels. This nutritional breakdown, severely compounded by increasingly sedentary lifestyles. A pervasive lack of accurate guidance, misguided dietary interventions, unchecked proliferation of out-of-context

health claims, exacerbated by social media platforms, have further critically undermined consumer understanding of the bigger picture.

Dr Kanani highlights the struggle against misinformation by sharing a case from her Gujarat fieldwork. *“A patient admitted to quitting sugar with great pride, but continued to snack on calorie-dense snacks like farsan and bhujia, which also influence blood sugar levels.”* Sugar being the most visible enemy, is first

to be eliminated, but in doing this consumers fail to account for the hidden, equally damaging refined carbohydrates and high-calorie fats found in popular snacks.

To truly change India’s health narrative, the focus must shift from the singular fight against sugar to a holistic understanding of metabolic health, and a comprehensive recalibration of overall eating patterns, supported by widespread accessible dietary education.

## A Re-writing Of The Script

The complex relationship between the human palate and sweetness need not suffer from being labelled as harmful. A multipronged approach, by stakeholders across the industry can rewrite the script on the role of sugar in an ideal Indian diet.

From a policy standpoint, positive changes that reflect this shift in thinking are already underway. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) launched its ‘Eat Right India’ movement (Sahi Bhojan-Behtar Jeevan) in 2018.

This massive, multi-stakeholder effort is designed to transform the entire food system, ensuring safe, healthy, and sustainable food for all Indians. Using targeted regulatory changes and educational initiatives its refocused strategy has moved

from simply counting teaspoons to a holistic recalibration of the national diet. Explicitly building on the collective action of all stakeholders—government, food businesses, civil society organisations, experts, and citizens at large—it aims to achieve comprehensive reform, including holistic re-education on proper nutrition and balanced habit-change beginning at the school level.

At a consumer level, urban consumers are beginning to pay closer attention to the many complex layers that impact health and nutrition. **Preeti Deo** notes a perceptible change taking place in the sugar quotient of the Indian palate. *“In my grandmother’s time guests were served home-made, jaggery based sweets, and sugar made very rare appearances in the*



*kitchen. My mother’s generation saw this tradition evolve into a mix-when sweets were made with both jaggery and with now-common sugar. Eventually the store-bought delicacies were added to the convenience.”* Today with awareness growing, not only are sweets offered far more selectively, but guest preferences and diet considerations are also accounted for.

However, as both Dr Dalal and Dr Kanani highlight, dietary patterns diverge significantly in India. While the discourse is shifting from sugar to metabolic health in mainstream urban and semi-urban spaces, the adoption rate is slower in rural India and equitable national reform will take its time.



## Recalibrating The Sweetness

The rise of health consciousness in Indian consumers, has been driving innovation across the board. From wearable technology to alternate sweeteners and innovation in product development, efforts to bring sweetness back to its former joyousness are underway and across verticals.

Conversations around health are moving from sugar to metabolic and holistic wellness, driving a shift towards more informed and nuanced consumption patterns. Rather than completely depriving themselves of sweet pleasures, consumers are increasingly seeking alternatives by recalibrating diets and lifestyles and seeking more thoughtfully produced sweets and desserts.

Wearable health technology or wearable tech—compact devices worn on the body to continuously monitor physiological data—is a rapidly expanding sector. By providing real-time health insights

to users and doctors, devices like fitness trackers, smartwatches, and specialised biosensors, wearable ECG monitors and even smart clothing that track body metrics like heart rate, sleep patterns, blood oxygen and more. A particularly significant category is that of Continuous Glucose Monitors (CGMs).

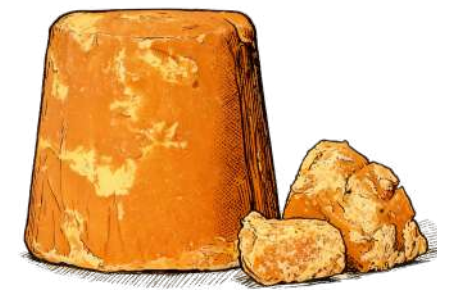
These devices, built around a thin sensor inserted under the skin to track glucose levels in interstitial fluid, offer a comprehensive, 24/7 view of blood sugar behaviour. Their immediate, continuous feedback eliminates the guesswork and anxiety associated with the traditionally prevalent ‘snapshot’ finger-prick tests. *“I had actually come to fear food”*, shares culinary chronicler **Rushina Munshaw-Ghildiyal**, who is a type 2 diabetic. *“My CGM allowed*



*me to experiment with foods like mithais, desserts and pastries to see what and how much I could safely consume.”*

*Now instead of saying ‘no’ to that laddu or half doughnut, I enjoy every bit. By visually validating mitigation strategies like balancing sweets and carbs with protein and fibre, and/or exercise, the CGM empowered me to take control, and freed me to indulge consciously without guilt or fear.”* Munshaw-Ghildiyal is not alone.

A rapidly slowly growing population of wellness and fitness conscious consumers, in addition to those with lifestyle issues are taking to wearable tech and recalibrating their diet and lifestyles choices.



## Defining The New Sugar Quotient

While India is working at a national level to develop low GI variants of wheat, rice and other foods to address interest in fortified and modified staples, a slew of brands across the dessert and patisserie segment are innovating rapidly to specifically address the changing requirements of the new conscious consumer. Not only are they investing in R&D to recalibrate the sugar quotient in their offerings but also taking the onus of educating the wider public.

Motivated by concerns over misleading practices and information in the ‘healthy dessert’ space **Aarti Laxman** founded Artinci, a zero-sugar mithai company. *“Many sugar-free desserts substitute refined-sugar with natural or unrefined sweeteners like jaggery, honey or dates. People think these are better because they are unrefined, but these calorific sweeteners have a glycemic profile very similar to refined sugar.”* To overcome the challenge she feels consumers need to understand what technical terms like Glycemic



Load (GL) imply for blood glucose management, not only to make informed choices for their health, but also be willing to value and pay a premium for products and brands committed to truly getting the formulation right.

Many companies in the FMCG and pantry staples segment are also investing in creating healthier alternatives. Parry’s, a brand long associated with sugar and jaggery sweetened products, is a prime example of the shift. According to **Saraswat Saha**, former Deputy General Manager-Marketing at EID Parry, *“innovation in alternative sweeteners will continue, but sugar is here to stay.”* To address this reality, the brand developed Parry’s Sweet Care, a clinically-proven ‘low GI sugar’ variant that maintains the same calorific value as regular sugar but has a 30% lower glycemic index—causing slower spikes in blood glucose. This achievement is based on infusing sugar with a proprietary blend of seven herbs that improves glycemic response. *“This product*



*appeals to both the health conscious, as well as the ‘the health anxious’ consumers whose concerns are heightened by recent diagnosis”*, he notes.

Another avenue the market is leveraging to address the healthier indulgence segment is innovation with non calorific sweeteners. Millennials and Gen X who are a primary demographic seeking healthier swaps and clean labels are looking to alternative sweeteners like stevia, and monk fruit to satiate the sweetness quotient of their palates.

The increasing consumer focus on low-sugar and no-sugar alternatives is also driving a significant market uptake of plant-based, non-calorific sweeteners like stevia and monk fruit (or *luo han guo*). Stevia, derived from the leaves of the Stevia Rebaudiana plant, offers intense sweetness with zero calories and is widely used in beverages and packaged foods. Similarly, monk fruit, sourced from a small round fruit native to Southern China, has gained popularity for its clean taste and natural origin.



*“In addition to using minimal and clean ingredients, and avoiding additives, we also make our regular gelatos with 30% less sugar to adhere to our core philosophy,”* share founders **Gayathri Rattha** and **Shivanie Mirchandani** of Minus 30, a popular no-sugar gelato brand based in Chennai. The global pandemic fostered an increasingly informed urban consumer who is actively more inclined to purchase a healthier product, inspiring the creation of the brand. *“We maintain our commitment to clean eating and satisfaction without guilt by using stevia, a plant-based, non-caloric substitute, in our zero sugar variants.”*

These sweeteners appeal strongly to the health-conscious and diabetic populations because they do not impact blood glucose levels, but also offer clean label brands a natural solution to satisfy the demand for sweetness over artificial chemical options.

Ultimately, reversing India’s diabetes trajectory demands a unified approach to holistic metabolic health and a profound shift in mindset that combines policy efforts, widespread dietary education across the urban-rural knowledge gap, continued market innovation with tech and product development, and most importantly consumer empowerment

based on technical literacy, and informed choices. With collective action, India can foster a sustained dietary culture to manage this epidemic and transform its health narrative.



# Sweet & Dessert Trends

Traditionally, Indians associated sweets with temple offerings and festive celebrations. However, over time, they have transitioned into daily life, shifting from occasional indulgence to everyday enjoyment. This increased frequency of consumption has brought innovation to the forefront, thanks to a constant demand for fresh concepts, new formats, and exciting flavours. A circumstance that places the Indian consumer in a delicious conundrum, of being spoiled for choice on one hand, while being cognisant of health on the other. This balancing act has been shaping buying choices, and driving market expansion and diversification. 2026 will see the Indian sweets and deserts category continue to cater to cultural heritage, western influences and health-forward innovations. Our survey this year focussed on new directions in the dessert and ice-cream categories. Read on to find out what our experts predict for 2026.

## Action Points

Reversing India’s fraught relationship with sugar demands a shift from guilt-driven avoidance to informed, mindful enjoyment. The focus must move from ‘sugar-free’ absolutism to ‘sugar-smart’ balance—grounded in **nutritional literacy, portion awareness, and the understanding that health is shaped by overall dietary diversity, not a single ingredient.** This calls for collective responsibility: **policy that educates rather than restricts, brands that innovate with integrity through low-GI and clean-label formulations, and creators who normalise moderation without moralising pleasure.**

Ultimately, the way forward lies in reclaiming sweetness as a cultural constant, not a forbidden indulgence—preserving its warmth, generosity, and emotional resonance, while adapting its place in modern life.

## Toolkit for 2026

New-age sweets and dessert industries, and also traditional mithai makers, will do well to expand their offerings to include lighter options like vegan, low-calorie, and sugar-free recipes, alongside gourmet and mini-sized versions of classic desserts. Transparency about ingredients and processes will become a key factor in building consumer trust and preference.

Innovative treats that incorporate healthier options such as millets, nuts, and natural sweeteners like jaggery and honey will continue to gain popularity. Chefs can experiment to make traditional sweets and recipes more compatible with contemporary dietary needs. Meanwhile, with global icons like baklava, mochi, and tiramisu appealing to a wider audience, **dessert makers can leverage the opportunity by playing with portion sizes, styling and plating.** Talking about portion sizes, all predictions suggest the dining industry will need to think small to win big. The dessert landscape of 2026 offers a rich canvas for content creators to frame conversations around sweet treats to go beyond products into cultural touchpoints. Stories that spotlight rituals and origins as much as textures and flavours, will break through the noise, to define narratives around identity, place, and evolving tastes.

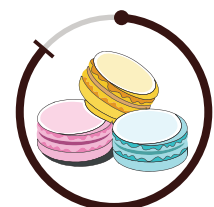




# Dessert categories

In 2026, dessert innovation in India will aspire to strike a balance between global inspiration and local heritage. Every segment—from bakery and confectionery to frozen desserts and mithai—will see a proliferation of new formats, concepts, and flavours that appeal to a wider range of consumer desires.

In this evolving marketplace, our experts predict that **Classic international desserts (79%)** will dominate the scene, alongside a rising wave of demand for **Diet and lifestyle-friendly options (75%)** such as eggless, gluten-free and vegan. **Desserts with healthier claims (73%)** will also see strong traction, reflecting the industry's pivot toward better-for-you innovation. Amid all this dynamism, our panel still believes that the broader category of **Frozen desserts (72%)** that include ice-creams, gelatos, sorbets and yogurts will continue to evolve to stay relevant.



**79%**  
Classic international desserts



**75%**  
Diet- and lifestyle-friendly desserts



**73%**  
Desserts with healthier claims



**72%**  
Frozen Desserts



## Madhushree Basu Roy

The tension between 'health' and 'sweet cravings' isn't going away, but brands that offer lightness, innovation and versatility will do well. Consumers will demand balance between celebratory but balanced, indulgence without discomfort, creativity without confusion, and flavours that feel familiar yet fresh. Older generations will remain loyal to traditional *mithais* for their emotional value, but younger consumers will look to contemporary desserts. Overall, the excitement is shifting toward fusion formats, e.g., rasmalai cheesecake, *motichoor* tarts, which will do very well in urban pockets, considering that they sit between traditions and trends, although the innovation should be meaningful and not gimmicky.



## Chef Amit Pamnani

Western desserts like brownies, choco lava cakes, cheesecakes will never go out of fashion, and Indians can never stay away from consuming Indian *mithai*. They love to experiment with new things occasionally, but will always come back to the classics. For those in the sweets and desserts business, the money should be put on classic *mithais* and desserts.



## Priya Ganapathy

Brands like Bombay Sweet Shop have turned a category like traditional sweets on its head through sheer innovation - chocolate barks, fudge, Bombay *bhel chikki*, roasted *makhana* and groundnut *chikki* to dark chocolate *kaju katli*! This has really changed the gifting category, the same way Manam has revolutionised the chocolate scene.



## Yash Bhanage

For us, this new wave of mithai isn't about chasing novelty, it's about a natural evolution. Indian sweets have always been rich in texture, technique and memory; what's changing is the perspective. Today's consumer wants balance: less sugar, more nuance, and flavours that feel familiar yet globally fluent. As palates mature, sweetness is being recalibrated to let ingredients, textures and memories shine through. At Bombay Sweet Shop, this plays out in creations like Indie Bites - 54.5% Dark Chocolate *Kaju Katli*, *Gulab Jamun* Churros and Salted Caramel Rice *Payesh*, where classic *mithai* sensibilities meet contemporary dessert formats to create experiences that feel thoughtful, exciting and unmistakably Indian.



# Ice-cream Trends

India's ice-cream category continues to evolve beyond the classics of vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry. In 2026 our experts predict a strong consumer demand for ice creams that feel as good as they taste.

Recipes and products that carry the promise of transparency—**Clean labels (82%)**, honest ingredients, and straightforward messaging will come out on top. This shift resonates across age groups and lifestyles.

**Guilt-free ice-cream options (81%)** are also becoming mainstream as more consumers demand indulgence on their terms. Similarly, **Non-dairy alternatives (74%)**, and **Smaller portions (74%)** also dominate purchase priorities, while **Extra indulgent options (74%)** are only evolving, not fading from the marketplace.



## Saloni Kukreja

Ice cream is becoming a product people always keep on hand, thanks to the ease of quick commerce. There is a definite growth in 'conscious ice cream,' because its versatility allows easy expansion of offerings to cater to low sugar, no sugar, and no dairy options. However, the demand for indulgent offerings endures. Consumers want the 'real stuff' when they indulge. Experimental flavours with a nostalgic touch, toppings and pairings that offer textural contrasts, pairings that juxtapose warm and cold combinations like brownies paired with ice cream and elevated nostalgic elements like brown butter and fudge sauce, will excite ice cream lovers. Innovative takes on classic, layered sundaes inspired by childhood will be popular too!



## Chef Abinas Nayak

The industry will bank on indulgent yet upgraded ice creams: premium, small-batch formats with bold textures (swirls, chunks, pralines) and Indian *mithai*-inspired flavours (*rasmalai*, filter coffee, *gulkand*, *nolen gur*, *peda*). Regional fruit flavours (*sitaphal*, *jamun*, tender coconut, *kokum*, jackfruit) will go mainstream. Novel formats, ice cream sandwiches, bite-sized pops, DIY topping tubs, limited-edition collabs with chefs and brands, will drive curiosity, making ice cream a space for both nostalgia and sophisticated experimentation.



## Ishika Saraf

India's ice cream scene has transformed remarkably—from the familiar comfort of vanilla and chocolate to chef-driven creations inspired by global exposure. As people travel more and experience authentic gelatos and artisanal frozen desserts abroad, they seek the same level of quality, flavour, and texture back home. I'm currently consulting for a gelato brand that's investing deeply in better ingredients, high-end machinery like Carpigiani, and authentic techniques—a sign of how seriously this segment is evolving. This shift is raising the overall quality benchmark for ice creams and gelatos in India.



## Manish Khanna

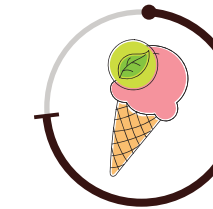
As a dessert chef, great ice-cream in 2026 will balance craft, authenticity and convenience. Consumers will increasingly expect flavours that connect (like *mithai*-inspired or regional spices), labels they trust (organic, clean), and formats that fit their lifestyles (mini-bars, snacking variants). The winners will be those who can knit together taste, texture and narrative. The shift towards functional and non-dairy options reflects consumer awareness, but indulgence and quality can't be compromised.



**82%**  
Clean label



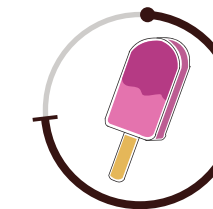
**81%**  
Guilt-free ice cream options



**74%**  
Non-dairy ice creams



**74%**  
Extra-indulgent options



**74%**  
Smaller portions

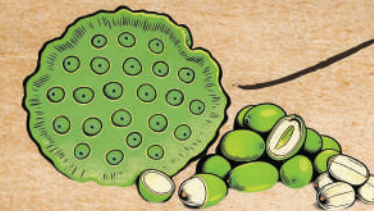
# Health, Hygiene & Lifestyle

In India, culinary conversations around health, hygiene, and lifestyle remain dynamic. These are no longer peripheral themes, but purposeful influences on consumers who are rethinking what's on their plates. Read on to find out what will shape dietary habits in 2026.

In line with these shifts, our Health, Hygiene and Lifestyle essay unpacks how science, storytelling, and social media are shaping the narrative around nutrition as Indians are recalibrating traditional culinary wisdom based on emerging scientific ratification.

# From Ancient Rituals to Modern Life

Traditional wisdom around seasonal ingredients is finding new life on our plates through modern reinterpretations. Once overlooked, these ingredients are making a comeback, now presented with a contemporary, often gastronomic twist. Today's culinary approach emphasises not only their nutritional value but also the care, technique, and creativity in how each ingredient is treated.



**Makhana**  
Macros: Carbohydrates, Protein  
Micros: Calcium



**Roasted Makhana with modern seasonings and spice blends**



**Turmeric**  
Macros: Fibre, Carbohydrates, Protein  
Compounds: Curcumin



**Turmeric collagen smoothies**



**Mahua Flowers**  
Micros: Iron, Calcium



**Chocolate covered Mahua**



**Amla**  
Micros: Vitamin C



**Juices, Smoothies, Jams and Sorbets**



**Jackfruit Seeds**  
Macros: Carbohydrates, Protein



**Gluten-free breads/pastas; jackfruit seed hummus**



# Indian Wellness Comes Full Circle

As modern India grapples with challenges of public health and wellness, a deep and renewed interest in her rich culinary heritage and age-old nutritional wisdom is being ignited.

## Focus Areas

India's wellness movement is returning to ancestral food wisdom, where flavour, function, and philosophy were always intertwined. As the country confronts both malnutrition and metabolic disorders, traditional dietary practices, fortified by modern science, are finding new relevance. This revival is being driven by a convergence of forces: the validation of indigenous knowledge by contemporary research, grassroots initiatives reintroducing forgotten ingredients, and creators using storytelling to decode the "why" behind traditional foods. Together, they are reshaping the national understanding of health as reconnection to culinary roots.

The Indian pantry has had a remedy for every season and reason. From soothing hot Pepper *Rasam* in the monsoon, and cooling *Aam Panna* in the sweltering summers, or fortifying *Gond Ke Laddoos* that aid in postpartum recovery.

India's culinary heritage is one of the richest in the world. Its mind-boggling diversity of ingredients, bolstered by ancient wisdom, laid a strong foundation for a dietary

culture that intuitively combines aesthetic and science. And yet, modern India continues to grapple with challenges of public health, nutrition, and wellness.

## The Evolving Indian Diet

The modern concept of Indian nutrition first began to take shape around Independence. Drawing on Western models that focused primarily on balancing macro nutrients, it overlooked India's traditional dietary practices of local, seasonal, and regional eating that offered a comprehensive matrix of macro, micro, functional, and therapeutic nutrients.

The first notable shifts in this foundational concept took place against the backdrop of economic growth and rapid urbanisation of the 1980s and '90s. The '80s saw an increase in food consumption in general, and the introduction of a wide variety of foreign foods that

led to a divergence from traditional diets. By the '90s dietary patterns shifted towards more starchy roots, wheat, vegetable oils, animal fats, sugars, and fruits. The globalisation of media contributed to this transformation, by exposing people to western diet culture. The next few decades witnessed the Indian diet and consequently public health, steadily erode.

The results of the 2025 Indian Council of Medical Research-India Diabetes survey (ICMR-INDIAB) reveal that across India, carbohydrates account for 62.3% of the daily energy intake. The survey also revealed that a majority of the participants were at risk for

metabolic conditions like diabetes, obesity, and hypertension.

Spurred by a growing awareness of these alarming statistics, the average Indian consumer is increasingly focusing on health and well-being. This focus, and the need to address nutritional challenges, is fueling a renewed interest in ancestral traditional wisdom. The current stardom *makhana* is enjoying, is symbolic of this cultural awakening.

A valued staple in traditional diets long before it became the hot favourite in Indian snack boxes, the origins of *makhana* or foxnut are believed to lie in the ancient region of Mithila, where legend has it their

cultivation flourished under the aegis of the Darbhanga Raj. It shot to fame in recent years when modern science ratified it as a good source of protein, carbohydrates, fibre, iron, and a host of minerals, ticking off several boxes for the modern health-conscious Indian consumer. These credentials, along with its inherent appealing texture, crunchy nature and ability to adapt to any flavour profile, are responsible for

its meteoric growth. In 2024, India's *makhana* market size was valued at INR 8.5 billion, with a projection that the market will more than double by 2033.

The unprecedented growth of this once traditional food, repacked in modern avatars, is emblematic of a strong movement towards traditional wisdom backed by modern approaches.



## A Changing Narrative Of Health & Wellness



**"One of the biggest factors contributing to this inward journey is a deeper appreciation for traditional food wisdom, which is now being corroborated by modern science. Indian food is culturally rooted, traditionally rich and automatically ticks all the boxes in terms of health, taste and nutrition,"** explains **Anushruti RK**, author of *The Sattvic Way: Ayurvedic Wisdom for Holistic Living*. As a food writer and health & well-being advocate, she has observed a shift in focus from macronutrients and calories, to the density of micro nutrition in diets. *"If food is only viewed in terms of protein, carbohydrates, fats and vitamins, the cultural and seasonal aspects of food, and the importance of consuming them at the right time, are lost,"* she adds.

In her book, Anushruti explains that diets that include all the tastes; sweet, sour, pungent, salty, astringent and bitter, are designed to optimise nutrition and digestion noting that several Indian recipes and food combinations inherently follow this balance. *"The Khichdi, for example, has all six tastes—sweet from the rice, sour from the lime, the added salt, and bitter, astringent and pungent from various spices."* That said, she notes that while eating in accordance with traditional wisdom supports nutritional balance and diversity, modern lifestyle patterns may sometimes call for mindful supplementation—particularly of Vitamin D and B12, which are increasingly found to be deficient.

She also highlights that Ayurvedic concepts like *Dinacharya* (daily regimen) and *Ritucharya* (seasonal regimen), and augmented traditional

diets for holistic wellness are traditional answers to modern concepts like chronobiology (the study of biological cycles and circadian rhythms). Published research reveals a physiological correlation between the two. For example, a high metabolic efficiency during midday correlates with the Ayurvedic recommendation that lunch should be the largest meal of the day. Similarly, an increase in cortisol levels in the early hours of the day correlates with the Ayurvedic recommendation of awakening pre-dawn to improve immunity, metabolism and stress management. Many of these practices have become fundamental cornerstones of modern-day wellness programmes.

As traditional wisdom meets modern science to support contemporary lifestyles, the very narrative and meaning of health is being reshaped.



## Lessons From The Past, Solutions For The Future

India is at a crucial juncture in its nutritional status. While on one hand, metabolic disorders are on the rise, on the other hand, malnutrition among children is also a significant public health concern. Published reports place India as home to the highest percentage of anaemic and undernourished children in the world. These issues across the age spectrum are validating the confluence of traditional wisdom with modern solutions.

According to Nutrition Expert, **Dr Ratna Raje Thar**, “we are dealing with widespread deficiencies of Type II nutrients,” such as essential amino acids and minerals like magnesium, zinc and phosphorus, which impact growth and weight gain. **“Beyond quantity, we are now looking at the quality of food, and whether the diet is rich in these micronutrients.”** This deficiency is gaining attention in several feeding programmes, including those facilitated by the Government of India like Saksham



Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, focused on providing holistic nutrition and sustainable well-being that are incorporating Ayurvedic wisdom and practices to address concerns related to maternal, infant and child health.

Dr Thar illustrates the nutritional wisdom behind some traditional foods using the example of *Poha*. **“The process of making beaten rice ensures that the B vitamins are retained in the grain. We also add turmeric, known for its health properties, fresh coconut, which is a good source of healthy fats, curry leaves, which provide various benefits, and roasted peanuts and chickpeas for protein. The dish is already wholesome and delicious, but can also be tailored to include more colourful vegetables or toasted seeds to add more nutrition.”**

Dr Thar goes on to point out that like *Poha*, the Indian kitchen has many offerings that provide simple nutrition solutions but are disappearing from domestic kitchens thanks to changing lifestyles.

**“Making and sourcing the right foods is important to encourage good nutrition at home,”** emphasising that these time-tested recipes have survived for a reason. **“Traditional ladoos made of dry fruits, nuts, sesame seeds, fenugreek seeds and more, provide various health and immunity-boosting benefits and are vital to nutritional diversity. It is important to promote them over biscuits and processed foods laden with sugars and artificial flavours.”** A solution could perhaps lie in encouraging small businesses to make them into potential products, keeping them alive in the diet while also creating livelihoods in the bargain.



## A Pinch Of Nostalgia With A Dash Of Reasoning

Storytelling has prevailed as a powerful medium to pass on traditional wisdom through the ages. It continues to shape the evolving narratives around nutrition and wellness. **“Temple prasadam (offerings) are a great example of how many of the recipes that we follow are timeless. By learning their story, you realise that these foods were put together with a lot of thought,”** observes **Rakesh Raghunathan**, chef, food historian, and judge on Masterchef India (Tamil). He adds that stories convey the vital role of the foods people consume, but they also make the process of eating more wholesome and nourishing.



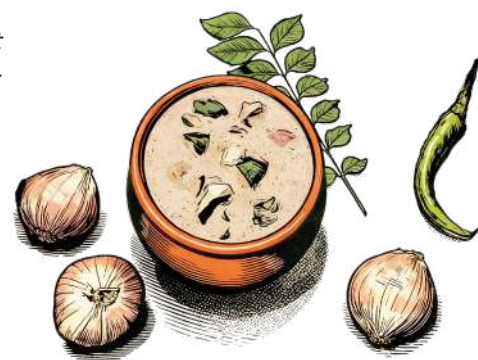
Raghunathan leverages storytelling through his social media and events to delve into the history of foods, and draw out the innate wisdom that makes them special. By sharing tidbits of information about recipes like rock sugar-flavoured *vadas*, red rice-based *payasam* and *sago*

*idlis*, he blends facts with a hint of nostalgia into an engaging narrative. **“For example, several South Indian temples serve warm pongal in the month of Margazhi (the Tamil month between mid-December and mid-January), as there is a dip in the temperature at this time. Pepper is added to it for immunity, and ghee for warmth. Similarly, ragi koozh (fermented ragi gruel mixed with buttermilk) is served in some of the temples during the hotter months, as it cools the body and is gut-friendly.”**

Apart from bringing back familiar flavours, these endeavours by Raghunathan are also aimed at spotlighting seasonal ingredients and local produce. **“It really feels like we are all eating the same carrots and beans all the time. Where are the flat beans, root vegetables like elephant-foot yams and taro? Eating seasonal and local foods is very crucial for nutrition and environmental conservation. Only when we opt for them, will farmers feel the need to grow such produce.”**

A key aspect of this movement is also the shift in focus to micro-cuisines, according to Raghunathan. **“Chefs and culinary enthusiasts are moving away from stereotypes, and people are now aware that every place has many culinary layers.”** Conversations about regional food culture today go into deep details to highlight the practices and ingredients that make them different. **“It’s no longer about how my grandmother made it, but about why she made it a certain way, and what that dish means for our community.”**

This reconnection to culinary heritage and identity is further cementing the value of age old knowledge in modern kitchens.



## Indigenous Foods To Address Nutritional Gaps

The growing interest in traditional foods is also inspiring explorations into indigenous wild edibles for their nutritional value. The North East Society for Agroecology Support (NESFAS), in Shillong, Meghalaya, is one of many grassroots organisations actively working to bring regional wild edibles back onto the plate.

In 2017, NESFAS published a study on nutritional insecurity among the Khasi community in Meghalaya. The findings revealed that across 510 households, 31% of the children were underweight and 57% were stunted, shares **Chenxiang Rimchi N Marak**, senior nutrition associate at NESFAS. The study also highlighted widespread iron and vitamin A deficiencies among the community’s women and children, raising alarm bells about the state of public health and well-being.



**“The indigenous communities in Meghalaya were always close to nature when it came to the food they ate. Over time, that equation changed, and people began viewing**

**wild and indigenous foods as lesser than the foods that came from outside,”** says Marak. The organisation is working to re-educate the community on the value of their indigenous foods through forest walks and community education programmes. **“We are trying to show the community that all their nutritional requirements can be met by what’s around them.”**

**“Wild foods, although rich in micronutrients, are often neglected when we talk about improving the nutritional status of meals,”** observes Marak, going on to share that NESFAS has addressed this by mobilising local schools, teachers, parents and farmers to include indigenous foods in school lunches.



Since 2022, meals at 26 schools in the Garo and Khasi Hill regions now include wild edibles like bayberry, fish mint leaves, Indian pennywort, and taro stems, sourced from nearby forests, kitchen gardens and local farmers, along with local minor millets. **“While we work on incorporating the traditional knowledge of the local community members, we are also conducting studies to understand the nutritional profile of many of the wild foods consumed here.”**

The work of organisations like NESFAS highlight the value of indigenous approaches and locally available food solutions in filling nutrition gaps across both urban and rural settings.

## Keeping The Narrative Authentic

Community initiatives like NESFAS are being complemented by food brands and social enterprises that work with farming and foraging communities to bring traditional and wild foods to a larger audience.

At Monks Bouffe, one such enterprise, CEO and Co-founder **Gaurang Motta**, believes that the next three to five years will see a significant growth in the adoption of these foods for health reasons.



**“What is important now is to highlight not just the products, but also the communities that produce them and the significance in their lives. Storytelling becomes a vital tool in sharing these facets.”** To do this, Motta uses social media to educate people on the merits of foods like *mahua*, *gond* (edible gum), and forest produce from Maharashtra. **“A lot of our followers are not our customers yet. But they do message us to let us know that they find our work interesting and would love to visit the places we show.”**

Motta finds that while consumer curiosity has increased, the current fixation on single ingredients as silver bullet solutions is something that needs to be addressed. **“Take the example of millets. When 2023 was declared the International Year of Millets, we saw a massive surge in millet-related enquiries and purchases.”** This interest, he observes, tapered with time. Using the example of *mahua*, a wild edible flower, he illustrates how the right messaging can change the narrative around an ingredient’s consumption. **“When we talk about a new ingredient, we share its benefits for overall health and well-being. Even if people consume just 5 grams of mahua every week for the right reasons, it is more impactful than a short-term increase in consumption and then going back to the familiar foods.”**

When it comes to local ingredients and forest-based foods, the stories brands share matter greatly. It is paramount that they focus on sharing authentic information as

well as highlighting the challenges of producing these foods. **“Brands must keep in mind that they are responsible for both the communities they work with and their consumers.”** It is vital to focus communication beyond just an ingredients’ culinary properties and contextualise its role in the lives of the forest-dwelling communities that produce it. **“Inauthentic narratives push consumers away from trying new things.”**

Organisations like Monks Bouffe are tapping the traditional wisdom of the forest-dwelling communities to bring traditional wild edibles into focus to address nutritional requirements.



## A Confluence Of Traditional & Modern

Indians conscious about health and wellness are looking to traditional wisdom, local seasonal ingredients, and time-tested recipes ratified by science and evolving with technology to meet modern lifestyle requirements.

*"The movement is here to stay. We will be going back, but with a touch of modern aesthetics,"* says Raghunathan. *"Whether this means seeing more turmeric latte than haldi doodh, only time will tell. What is important is that the core objective remains intact. Ingredients are produced and sourced in the*

*right manner and eaten for the right reasons."*

Dr Thar adds that storytelling will aid in these conversations reaching wider health-conscious audiences, with appropriate contexts. *"There is palpable fear among people as they see an increase in health ailments across age groups. Stories will become integral to their search for answers and learning the importance of traditional foods."*

It is clear that the way forward lies in a hybrid approach, where innovation will be the bridge between yesterday

and tomorrow. Whether this manifests in adding *mahua* syrup to morning brews or wild edibles to a bowl of pasta, the possibilities presented are both delicious and endless.



# Health, Hygiene & Lifestyle Trends

The conversation on health and nutrition in India has come full circle, with modern science increasingly validating traditional culinary wisdom and practices. Based on this, the Indian consumer today is reevaluating consumption at every level to better their everyday food choices. They are willing to go the extra mile: to engage with experts, to enhance their knowledge, and source quality products directly from producers, driven by a growing appreciation for authenticity and traceability. In 2025 this section examined what sources the Indian consumer was listening to for cues on health and nutrition. In 2026 the drive to understand personal health is far more nuanced than ever before, and is reshaping the dialogue around nutrition in a manner that respects the past while embracing modern insights.

Read on to see what our experts predict will be the biggest influences on health, hygiene and lifestyle in 2026.

## Action Points

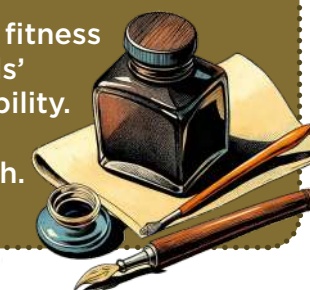
For food brands, chefs, and wellness entrepreneurs, the opportunity lies in **translating traditional intelligence into modern utility**. This means crafting accessible formats for age-old recipes, **designing nutrition-forward products** that retain emotional and cultural depth, and **leveraging storytelling** to communicate both benefit and provenance. Public programmes and startups alike must **invest in strengthening local food systems**, supporting producers of indigenous and wild foods, and ensuring authenticity in health narratives. The path forward is a balanced one, where innovation meets intuition, and ancient food wisdom evolves to nourish modern lives.

## Toolkit for 2026

The industry has been innovating to meet consumer demand for healthy alternatives, with an unprecedented variety of offerings. Food brands can continue to leverage this segment by complying with evolving government certifications, and identifying niche health-focused audiences across traditional retail as well as new D2C platforms.

The dining industry has a unique opportunity to differentiate their brand propositions by leveraging story telling around concepts like 'ingredient forward', 'locally sourced' and 'seasonal menus' through their menus and social media platforms.

Brand marketing professionals can capitalise on the rising influence of fitness culture, nutrition influencers, and Ayurveda by highlighting their brands' commitment toward consumer well-being and environmental sustainability. Engaging with subject-matter experts and content creators who resonate with these ideologies will augment brand credibility and reach.





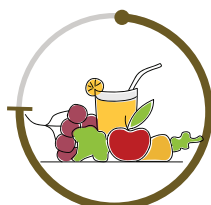
# Home Kitchens

Cooking at home remained firmly on the table throughout 2025—both literally and figuratively. However, evolving lifestyles demand balance. Consumers today seek products that deliver on every front—nutrient-rich, convenient, and responsibly sourced. Our panel of experts weighs in on choices that will influence daily food consumption at home in 2026.

In the coming year, consumers will look at **Reducing consumption of ultra-processed foods (81%)**, indicating a renewed commitment to mindfulness that extends beyond personal wellbeing. A shift that will have more consumers **Adopting climatarian diets (76%)**—choosing foods with lower environmental impact. As an extension, provenance will carry as much weight as flavour, with a growing **Support for local farmers and producers (73%)**.



**81%**  
Reducing consumption of ultra-processed foods



**76%**  
Adopting a climatarian diet



**73%**  
Supporting local farmers and producers



### CA Sujata Shukla Rajan

I see an increased interest in following practices perceived as Ayurvedic, as well as eating locally and seasonally, as families reduce consumption of ultra-processed foods to some extent. There will also be an increased focus on reducing food waste. While the usage of vegetable peels and all parts of fish are existing Indian culinary practices, processing waste using options like composting will increase slowly.



### Khushwant Jha

People are actively choosing food that feels real, responsible, and restorative. Seasonal ingredients, local produce, and traditional techniques are becoming the new luxury, allowing us to deliver food that's fresher, cleaner, and richer in story. There's a growing push to move away from ultra-processed products and replace them with nutritionally smarter, more transparent dishes. We'll also see a resurgence of Indian wisdom on the plate with ayurvedic ideas, balanced *thalis*, spices used with purpose.



### Debjani Chatterjee Alam

We are now much more aware of nature, the problems caused by food waste, and, most importantly, the need to support our farmers. In recent years, our understanding of these issues has significantly increased. While some may still prefer specific meal types, we generally support natural products and the hard work of those who produce our food.



### Ketan SS Gohel

This transformation in consumer behavior thanks to multiple interrelated factors. such as increasing media coverage of food adulteration, chemical additives, and unethical manufacturing practices has heightened public concern about long-term health implications. Because of this, consumers have become more aware & would rather buy from artisanal shops or directly from local markets.



# Commercial Kitchens

The dining out segment in India has been slowly evolving to address mindfulness and sustainability. In 2026 restaurant menus will be increasingly inspired by seasonality and purpose, as much as flavour and wellbeing. Consequently, chefs will approach crafting their plates with intent.

The statistics reflect this decisive shift in kitchen priorities. A notable 3 out of 4 respondents weigh in that restaurants will choose to **Promote local farmers and producers (77%)**. An equal percentage will work towards Cutting down on use of high and **ultra-processed ingredients (77%)**, bringing simplicity back to the plate. Meanwhile, **Seasonal buying (74%)**, and **Enhanced nutritional composition of dishes (72%)** are becoming focal points on menu design, proving that freshness and function can drive profitability.



### Chef Kunal Kapur

2026 will be the year when health, heritage, and responsibility come together on the menu. Diners are actively gravitating to food that is real, responsible, and restorative, and chefs are responding with more creativity than ever. As the industry moves away from imported luxury to celebrating local produce and regional flavours we will see a rise in the use of local and seasonal ingredients, increased adoption of sustainable practices like zero-waste cooking and mindful sourcing, and a return to traditional wisdom and culinary heritage to guide modern practices. Storytelling, forgotten recipes and celebrating ingredients that carry cultural identity forward will enrich narratives and menus alike.



### Nachiket Shetye

The one-size-fits-all era is over. Consumers today navigate food choices with a mix of nostalgia and discernment, distinguishing genuine value from mere buzzwords. Growing awareness around health, sustainability, and transparency is now a permanent driver of buying decisions, from daily staples to indulgent treats. This hasn't diminished the appetite for convenience or flavour; it has simply raised expectations. People want honest, clean products that respect both tradition and time. Winning brands will be those that marry Indian wisdom with modern practicality—seamlessly bridging how we used to eat with how we live now.



### Nikki Gupta

Sustainability will evolve into a necessity. For food businesses, success lies in embracing these shifts to create a more responsible, flavourful, and transparent culinary future. Reducing consumption of ultra-processed food and sourcing locally will shift from 'good to have' to 'expected'. Seasonal cooking, traditional techniques, nose-to-tail and root-to-leaf practices and nutrition-first thinking will flourish, driven by rich storytelling. The integration of Ayurvedic elements, food donation initiatives, and conscious portion-size adjustments will grow across the industry.



### Romil Ratra

While there is still a very large population that view eating out as an indulgence that breaks from their routine, regular healthy home-cooked food and may not necessarily want to go out to eat healthy/better, restaurant kitchens will increasingly reflect the growing consumer shift toward conscious, culturally-rooted, and nutritionally-balanced eating. Health and sustainability will no longer be niche ideals but operating principles shaping menus, sourcing, and kitchen practices across upscale and restaurants, cafés, and hotel F&B, in tier 1 and 2 cities.



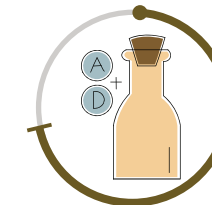
**77%**  
Promoting local farmers and producers



**77%**  
Cutting down on use of high and ultra-processed ingredients



**74%**  
Buying seasonally



**72%**  
Enhancing nutritional composition of dishes

# Food Media & Studies

Food media in India today encompasses channels as diverse as television, video, podcasting, digital, print and social media. In recent years it has become a primary source of both entertainment, as well as learning. In 2025, this section examined the primary avenues for culinary discovery and most sought-after topics on food content. In 2026 our survey casts a net on food media channels food aficionados and industry folk are going to look to for learning and discovery. As the theme of this edition suggests, storytelling has emerged as one of the most powerful tools today and nowhere is this more evident than in the food media segment.

Our Food Media & Studies essay this year, delves into India's evolving digital landscape, exploring how brands can leverage storytelling in more tangible ways like bespoke collaborations and merchandising to engage and gratify their audiences.

# Food storytelling through artefacts, experiences, and archives

Food storytelling is shifting from screens to lived experience. Beyond recipes and reels, brands are using tactile, participatory, and sensory formats – from collectible packaging and pop-up cafés to wearable merch and subscription boxes – to let audiences touch, wear, play, or archive a story. These mediums blur the line between product, art, and culture, translating a brand's essence into something people can inhabit. This visual spread maps emerging opportunities for food storytelling through artefacts, experiences, and archives, where food becomes a lens for memory, emotion, and identity.



## Tablescapes & Culinary Design Objects:

Artisan ceramics, design-forward tableware and cutlery, custom table linen, dining tools and surfaces designed to merge utility with narrative, integrate storytelling into daily dining rituals, transforming meals into multisensory experiences that communicate culture, craft, and culinary identity.



## Collaborations & Cross-Pollinations:

Chef-artist capsule collections, fashion-food crossovers, collabs are examples of creative partnerships that combine craft, aesthetics, and audiences to expand narrative reach, introduce new perspectives, and reinforce brand storytelling through culture and design.



## Print Publications:

Zines, coffee-table books, print inserts and other printed media that document, interpret, or guide food narratives encourage reflection, build credibility, and allow audiences to explore stories, histories, and movements at their own pace.



## Museums, Exhibits & Art Installations:

Curated food-themed museum exhibits, edible art installations, large-scale, public-facing experiences that center on food narratives blending culture, collective memory, and creating shared storytelling platforms.



## Keepsakes & Artefacts:

Collectible tins, recipe cards, illustrated labels, hand-crafted menus are functional objects with the potential to become collectibles, extending a food story beyond consumption, fostering emotional attachment and turning fleeting products into coveted items.



## Wearable Merchandise:

Wearable merchandise like caps, enamel pins, and even sneakers become collectible mediums by which loyal customers proclaim their love for a food brand and belonging to an exclusive inner circle.



## Immersive & Experimental Experiences:

PaChaak's plays and inclusive theatre performances like Come Eat With Me, are emerging formats of small-group participatory food experiences that allow brands to create deep lasting impressions.





# Tales of Flavour and Savour

## Exploring culinary storytelling

Tangible artefacts, experiences, and curation enriched with storytelling have blossomed as deeply resonant formats for food brands and creatives to define themselves.

### Focus Areas

Food storytelling has expanded beyond traditional and digital media into new formats that blend craft, community and commerce. Storytellers are facilitators of culture, translating taste into value. But in an age oversaturated with content, tactile and participatory forms of storytelling are emerging as most resonant forms of engagement. By fostering more active and intentional interactions, they leave a lasting impression – both physical or emotional – successfully reframing food as more than consumption, transforming it into a conduit for memory and meaning.

Pleasure always starts in the mind. Even before the first bite, the way food is contextualised can radically transform how it is experienced. But digital media platforms that democratised and transformed

conversations around food over the last decade have now reached a point of saturation. Social media is overflowing with content, food photography is ubiquitous, doom scrolling is aberrant, and brand

campaigns are increasingly blurring into one another.

In this noisy media landscape, new formats of storytelling have emerged, cutting through the onslaught by building trust and community.

### Historical Spaces For Food Storytelling

Food stories are not a product of today's digital culture; they have always held a place in India's social and cultural fabric. From *dastangoi* (the centuries-old art of Urdu storytelling) and *ovee* (Marathi folk poetry sung to the rhythms of grain mills), to myriad other oral folk traditions and even the illustrated epics in Amar Chitra Katha, these chronicles have narrated tales of feasts, harvests, and mythical meals. In more everyday ways, the kitchens of *anganwadis*, community childcare

and nutrition centers have functioned as living repositories of stories on food and health.

Unlike the atomised consumption of media today, these traditions highlight that food storytelling has long been multi-sensorial and communal in nature. Beyond just selling a product, dish or concept, their power lies in creating shared memory and collective learning. This is exemplified by contemporary food brands that are finding

success by leaning into participatory, collaborative, and culturally-rooted narratives.



### The Analog Artefact: Tangible, Collectable Stories

In a digital-first era, the tactile holds extraordinary value. Analog artefacts—ranging from print publications to limited-edition packaging and even wearable merchandise—are emerging as valuable narrative tools. They can be held, displayed with pride, and revisited over time, allowing brands to foster a sense of intimacy and connection that goes beyond the transactional.

Over the last decade, The Bombay Canteen has leveraged this with tremendous success through a series of stunning cocktail books in collaboration with the branding agency Please See. The most recent retrospective volume, brimming with stories, illustrations, and selected signature cocktail recipes, chronicles their 10-year journey as a contemporary Indian restaurant deeply engaged in local culture and community. Print artefacts like these allow patrons to remember, recreate and relive some of their favourite memories and stories at The Bombay Canteen in the comfort of their own homes.

Another valuable touchpoint to carry a brand's story beyond its physical space is its reusable packaging. Mysore-based Sapa Bakery's annual Christmas Stollen is the only product they ship nation-wide, allowing them to reach people that aren't able to visit the store. **"We thought**



**if we pack it in a really beautiful tin that people want to keep, they would have this little thing at home that**

**reminds them of us,"** says Founder **Dina Weber**. Promotions include sharing the journey of each year's tin from concept and design to the final product. Beyond the beloved Stollen itself, it is these coveted tins that help drive sales through festive gifting. **"I once took four Stollen loaves to a friend's Christmas potluck and found two other people had also brought Stollen from Sapa!"**

These artefacts are enriched by their narrative depth. From Indigo Airlines' iconic brightly coloured inflight snack boxes with their quirky messaging, to Hyderabad-based Manam Chocolate's celebration tins

with vibrant illustrations by artist Namrata Kumar, it is their high design and production value that make such packaging as attractive as their edible content inside. Sapa works with designer Shalini Raman to create story-rich designs that change annually. **"In 2023, it was inspired by the iconic Danish cookie boxes, a nod to the funny cultural phenomenon of children opening them to find sewing kits or random household things,"** says Weber. **"And in 2024, the illustrations depicted pagan wintertime tales."**

In today's socially-motivated culture, both the objects one carries and the places one eats at, offer bragging rights. Recognising this, food brands like Le 15 Patisserie, Goila Butter Chicken, 23rd Street Pizza and Subko, have crafted wearable artefacts and merchandise like t-shirts, caps and tote bags. Beyond just the logo, these often carry artwork, typography, and messaging that encapsulate the brand's culture and story in relatable ways.

Much like t-shirts from iconic rock bands that served as cultural emblems, wearing merchandise from one's favourite restaurant, coffee roaster or hot sauce brand allows one to declare 'I am a part of this tribe', or 'I was here for this cultural moment.' It also aids brand discovery both online and offline.



**"When people see others wearing our restaurant's merch, they think 'What is this Naru that everyone's wearing?'. It sparks curiosity and aspiration, helping the brand story**

**travel organically,"** observes **Kavan Kuttappa**, chef and founder of Bengaluru-based Naru Noodle Bar, which has previously released two limited edition Naru t-shirts designed by artist Sachin Bhatt.

This highly sought-after ramen restaurant has built a reputation of exclusivity with its offbeat narrative. It recently took its merchandise game a notch higher with the launch of an unexpected release—black sneakers carrying the restaurant's distinct terracotta red logo and motifs. Created in collaboration with homegrown sneaker brand Comet, the success of this cross-industry launch was based on shared values and motivations between both brands' audiences. **"Many buyers were loyal Naru fans that waited for the release. Others bought them because they love how Comet shoes look and feel, or are collectors of limited edition sneakers. Each in their own way, became walking ambassadors of the brands,"** shares Kuttappa.

Through such collaborations with artists, designers and creative thinkers, every element—from visual imagery, to typography, materials, and even the eventual release campaigns—are carefully crafted to add layers to the story these objects convey, making them irresistible. Yet their purpose goes beyond feeding the image of exclusivity; they invite cultural participation. They cut through the fleeting churn of scrollable digital content, allowing patrons to engage in brand stories they cherish on an emotionally gratifying level.



## The Meal As A Storytelling Tool: Collectable Experiences

While pleasure may begin in the mind, lasting memories are forged through the senses. The meal itself continues to be a powerful medium of storytelling. The term experiential dining may seem superfluous, after all, any act of eating is an experience. But a carefully crafted meal can be as layered as a piece of poetry or prose, each element designed to engage and inspire.

For instance, The Himsagar Express, a pop-up in Hyderabad by Pune-based Chefs **Neetu Solanki** and Farhaan Sulemani, took diners on an edible journey on the eponymous train route in September 2025. *"Himsagar is the longest train route in India. It passes through 12 states,"* explains Solanki, who was excited by its potential for culinary storytelling.



*"Each of the 12 courses, positioned as stops on the route, drew from the food culture of that state, layering ingredients, techniques, flavours, and even traditional tableware to enrich the experience."*

Thematic and conceptual pop ups have been popular formats for experiential dining in recent years. Adding experimental elements, like performance, theatre and art, is an emerging approach to engage diners seeking food for thought.

PaChaak, a travelling production company, invited diners into a multi-course meal within a play, called New India Lodge. Set in 1940s India,

each course was presented through a band of colourful characters—a Gujarati tradesman, a Malayali family, a Punjabi bride—and their accompanying stories. Complete with an elaborate set and costume design, it blurred the lines between diner and actor, reality and fiction.

Similar artistic formats are manifesting in the beverage space as well. In Bengaluru, cocktail bar Soka collaborated with artist Indu Antony to interpret *Vāsane*—her project archiving the city through twelve distilled scents—into a sip-and-sniff cocktail menu. Based on distinct Bangalorean emotions or experiences—a banana-leaf meal, a Sunday in Cubbon Park, or tea and sponge cake from a local Iyengar bakery—each drink was a sensory portal into nostalgia and surrealism.

Through the evocative combination of commensality and suspended disbelief, these experiences allow diners to partake in experiences they may not have access to in real life. They don't merely offer a novel night about town, they reinforce the role of food and drink as a creative medium through which to spark imagination, memory, belonging and empathy.

This is what theatre artist **Sri Vamsi Matta** applies in his play, *Come Eat With Me*, centered on Dalit foodways.



*"The first thing I knew about my show was that I'm going to call people in, and we're going to eat together. I*

*started with the question, will they come, or will they not? In trying to answer it, the piece expanded to include personal stories and oral histories."* Food and caste are irrevocably intertwined, and this performance creates a space seldom found—particularly in contemporary urban settings—to unpack the lived experiences, which shape one community's identity but are alien to so many others. In the final act, his audience shares a meal, including a chicken curry made using his mother's recipe. *"When you're breaking bread together, your vulnerabilities recede. By the end of a two-hour-long show talking about food, we're all just a group of hungry people. And that is a great equaliser!"*

Moving beyond a conceptual meal, these emerging multi-sensory, multi-disciplinary formats don't just tell stories about food, they turn the very act of eating into a narrative tool. By placing diners within the story as active participants, they leave a deeply resonant and memorable impact.



## The '& Friends' Model: Community, Conversation & Collaboration

In the current digital media culture, everyone—from large brands to independent creatives—is expected to speak to a large public audience to drive discoverability. Yet increasingly, it is in the quieter, more private spaces where people are feeling truly heard; where their stories are free to evolve from a place of curiosity, creative collaboration and community.

Online, these spaces are found in exclusive subscriber channels on Instagram, groups and communities on Whatsapp, as well as platforms

like Substack, Patreon, and more. Through direct and informal conversations, brands or creators interact with a subset of loyal audiences, making them feel like active and valued members of an inner circle.

Offline, these spaces take the form of collaborations and community events, such as, 'Great State & Friends' (by Maharashtra- and Goa-based craft brewery Great State Aleworks), 'Maki & Friends' (by Chef Aarohi Sanghvi of Bengaluru-based Maki Patisserie) and 'Kobo &

Friends' (by fermentation educator Payal Shah of Kobo Fermentary). Increasingly known as the '(brand) & friends' or 'friends of (brand)' model, these feel less transactional and more like a house party hosted by an interesting acquaintance.

In Mumbai, **Anisha Oommen**, founder and editor of Goya Media, co-hosts Bombay Adda, a series of mixers, with close friend, collaborator, and animal healing practitioner, Pooja Vir. The idea behind this was simple: to spend an afternoon with a food friend passing through the

city (like cheesemaker Namrata Sunderesan or chef Sadaf Hussain), over conversations, cook-alongs or tastings in someone's home. *"Since these are underground, not ticketed events, we don't structure them too much. It's very intimate, everyone gathers on the couch or floor. As a result, both the 'expert' and the 'audience' are relaxed, uninhibited with their questions and can engage candidly."*



Typically five people are invited to join an *Adda*, and each is

encouraged to bring one or two more, creating a roomful of new-yet-familiar acquaintances. *"We always end up with folks across different age groups and professional backgrounds. An older person may share things that they saw growing up, or a younger person may relate it to trends that they are experiencing. It's quite beautiful to hear the varying perspectives that emerge."*

The '& friends' model democratizes who participates in the storytelling. Going beyond usual suspects like founders and chefs, it brings

together varied voices from across disciplines, allowing a rich cross-pollination of audiences and ideas through shared cultural experiences.



## The Voice Of Someone We Trust: Curation vs. Creation

Curation, or the process of selecting, organising, and presenting a collection of ideas, has long been a premise of museums and galleries. Platforms like Google Arts & Culture have successfully leveraged this online to showcase exquisite culinary explorations. Last year also saw such curated immersions taken offline through cultural spaces like Lucknow-based Sanatkada's exhibit Bawarchi Khane, and Science Gallery Bengaluru's show Calorie.

These curation-first formats are proof that food is increasingly moving past consumption. *"I'd always seen artists, designers, or musicians as the shapers of broader cultural discourse. As a chef, I used to feel like the kitchen was my only platform for creative exploration,"* says **Elizabeth Yorke**, co-founder of food systems collective Edible Issues, and one of the curators of Serendipity Arts Festival's Culinary Arts discipline. *"But cultural spaces like this offer food thinkers and practitioners room to play and experiment with ideas. They allow us to lean into our individual curiosities and philosophies across disciplines, driving the food conversation in new directions."*



Mei, channels her personal taste into an Instagram series called Tinned Fish Talk, unboxing, tasting, and sharing recipes with tinned seafood. Her transparent, learn-as-you-go approach feels less promotional and more participative. What began as a personal exploration of a niche food obsession, positioned Liao as an interpreter of value in a crowded digital space, leading to collaborations with several brands in the segment.

Driven by the currencies of trust and relatability, content consumers are gravitating to distinct personalities, whose philosophy and taste they resonate with, to help them filter stories worth their attention.

Closer home, food writer and recipe developer **Aysha Tanya** reflects this, through her Instagram page Malabar Tea Room, and substack newsletter,



The Tea. *"Books play such a big part in my life, I wanted to make a series of reels about that,"* she says, about a recent brand collaboration with audiobook platform Audible. In one video, she recounts spending

hours listening to the audiobook of *How To Eat*, by Nigella Lawson, while cooking her favourite Nigella recipe. In another, she talks of being inspired by Nora Ephron's collection of essays on hosting dinner parties. Her curation feels personal, and resonates with her viewers.

While Audible does not exclusively distribute audiobooks on food, this thoughtful collaboration allows them to capitalise on Tanya's distinct voice and perspective, as well as her audience loyalty. *"My DMs are full of messages about books, so I pitched my channel as a small community of like-minded people with shared interests,"* she explains.

Here, curation itself becomes an act of storytelling: selecting what to share, where and how, so the stories feel like natural extensions of the people telling them. Working with such voices offers brands a way to step beyond product-promotion and into cultural participation, positioning themselves as more thoughtful, embedded, and credible entities. This circle of trust, between the audience, the creator, and the brand, is why such storytelling flourishes.

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In an overstimulating media landscape, where content is being produced faster than it can be consumed, a storyteller that prioritises quality curation over quantity of creation, stands out. What they choose to share, recommend, and contextualise is what matters—something brands are increasingly recognising.

New York-based recipe developer Meijie Liao, known online as Day with



## The Tales We Savour

Today, just serving good food or designing a quality product is no longer enough. It is also insufficient to tell a unique story - after all every story is unique in its own way. Success lies in combining formats that feel meaningful and relevant,

with mediums that breathe life into stories, that nurture connection and anchor identity.

Ultimately, it is about situating food in broader cultural, artistic, and intellectual ecosystems. When told

with heart, stories have the power to make people feel like they are part of something bigger. Those are the stories worth telling.



# Trends in Food Media & Studies

Across India, recent years have seen an increasing number of both professional chefs and passionate food lovers delving deeper into the country's culinary heritage. A growing desire to explore food from diverse perspectives is bringing forward untapped reservoirs of traditional knowledge and wisdom. This exploration will only continue in 2026 and beyond, manifesting in the form of documentaries, short films, and publications deep diving into various aspects of food. As interest continues to develop the exploration will also grow to encompass structured mentorship programs, new learning pathways, books, podcasts, short-term courses, and immersive experiences that will foster new learning and discoveries.

In this section, our experts weigh in on which media channels will shape the next wave of food studies and exploration.

## Action Points

*As the boundaries between media, art and food increasingly blur, there is immense opportunity for multi-sensory and multi-disciplinary food storytelling. Most resonant are the participatory formats that turn loyal patrons from passive consumers into ambassadors and co-creators of brand stories, in ways that feel authentic and organic to them.*

*In the digital space, brands will find success by partnering with cultural curators that lean into their personal tastes and philosophies, creating a circle of trust. Beyond digital campaigns, tangible, story-rich artefacts, including wearable merchandise and collectable packaging, will allow brand identities to blend seamlessly into daily life, extended recall.*

*The future of food storytelling lies in translating flavour into forms and formats people can savour over time.*

## Toolkit for 2026

Social media continues to be a powerful channel however, increasing noise on these platforms exacerbated by AI content has been causing fatigue in audiences. Consumers today are craving content that is raw and real. Food brands that adapt simpler, cleaner narratives, rich with story telling will stand out.

Taking a cue from the same, F&B marketing teams should focus on creating meaningful dialogue through collaborations, events and opportunities with partners that resonate with their audiences.

For the dining industry, this means creating opportunities that allow for story telling, by curating niche themed events and dining experiences that offer unique new conversations around ingredients, cuisines, flavours, memories and more.



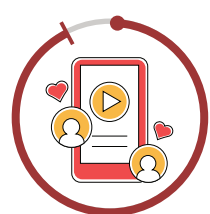


# Food Media Channels

As the appetite for food content grows exponentially, the food media ecosystem is diversifying faster than ever. Culinary storytelling has become both a cultural bridge and a gateway to learning.

According to our experts, **Short-form video content and reels (93%)** will dominate watch time for aspiring home cooks to build culinary skills, although the line between education and entertainment will blur. Serious students of food will turn to **Digital food publications and websites (82%)**, and **Podcasts about food and related topics (75%)** for deeper immersion.

Parallely, they will continue to engage with culinary communities via **WhatsApp groups (68%)** to actively exchange knowledge and experiences around culinary culture.



**93%**

Short-form video content and reels



**82%**

Digital publications and websites around food



**75%**

Podcasts about food and related topics



**68%**

WhatsApp groups for knowledge exchange and community building



## Karishma (Kim) Pais

Media consumption is booming. Today, it is cheap, easy and fast to stream data onto not just TV sets but also personal phones. Mass consumption of easily and freely available information will only grow, with these formats catching the attention of consumers with a demanding attention span. With everybody needing to eat food, content will continue to be universally appealing. A growing number of curious consumers who want to learn more about their food, where it comes from, and these will drive the growth in this sector.



## Elton Fernandes

Food has always been about visual and sensory cues. F&B professionals are representatives of the space and their thoughts and experience are deeply valued. As an industry professional and social presence, it is important to make an impact using short and long format video and further enhance presence through podcasts and offline workshops. With the onset of AI and AI avatars however, this will prove to be a challenging time for food professionals to keep up. Going more local and providing deeper knowledge and actual practical tips will be the key to garner more following.



## Pooja Khanna

Watching food shows and documentaries remains the most accessible entry point—platforms like Netflix, YouTube, and regional streaming services are producing high-quality culinary content that goes deep into techniques, cultural contexts, and food science. It's no longer passive entertainment; it's active education that sparks curiosity and provides foundational knowledge before hands-on investment.



## Chef Koushik S

F&B professionals are chasing channels that deliver speed, depth, and relevance. Reels and WhatsApp win on immediacy. Publications, long-form videos, and workshops win on skill-building. TV and text-only formats lag because they don't match the pace or practicality of modern kitchen learning. The industry is leaning into content that's fast to consume and directly applicable in service environments.



# Food Studies

Today, the food media ecosystem—comprising celebrity chefs, influencers, home-grown creators, and seasoned F&B professionals—curates a constant stream of inspiration and insight. This explosion of content across social, streaming, and podcast platforms, has made learning immersive, entertaining and accessible, inspiring the professional segment to move beyond existing areas of specialisation and delve into diverse aspects of cuisine both local and global, to expand their horizons.

Our panel felt F&B professionals aiming to up their game in 2026, would choose to **Watch a food show or documentary (87%)**, deep dive by **Listening to a podcast (81%)** or **Signing up for a food workshop (75%)**. **Reading a book or publication on food (73%)** stays a trusted source of learning.



## Deepa Chauhan

Food, the one daily activity that divides yet unites all of humanity has never been studied with more enthusiasm. Given today's interconnectedness, as well as various mediums of expression and consumption, culinary curiosity will find many avenues of fulfilment. The focus will be on experiences rather than theoretical studies. With practitioners of world and micro cuisines becoming increasingly accessible and visible, industry professionals will embrace hands-on learning, of technique and traditional knowledge systems by observation of nuance over textbook learning.



## Chef Ranveer Brar

Food is only powerful when it tells a story. India, with its diverse flavours and beautiful contradictions, has so many stories waiting to be told. Today, conversations have evolved beyond recipes written with pen and paper to talk about ingredients, places, people, and the culture behind food. Thanks to all the new platforms and media, India's story is being told in a million voices. And what makes me happiest is the new global receptiveness towards our cuisine. For me, travel is a massive part of who I am, my story. Without it, I wouldn't be half the chef I am. My menus come from real people, dishes I've eaten on the road and their stories.



## Shruti Taneja

An entire generation is realising they don't know how to cook effortlessly like their grandmothers. Between liberalisation and globalisation, cooking as essential knowledge has been deprioritised, creating a genuine hunger for connection to culinary heritage. Aspiring cooks of 2026 will try to reconstruct broken inheritance. Food shows, documentaries, and books will dominate because they're accessible, repeatable, and allow learning at one's own pace. Food educators, content creators, and workshop facilitators who have become custodians of culinary heritage will prioritise authenticity and depth over viral appeal to create accessible pathways for learning.



## Sushil Dwarkanath

With the influx of a new breed of chefs into the industry, the style of food is changing rapidly. Innovation is taking the front seat. Chefs driven to expand knowledge and get creative through pop-ups and collabs will look to short videos, although well-directed cooking shows on OTT platforms will always be trending, especially when it comes to exploring regional cuisines from India and the world.



**87%**

Watch a food show or documentary



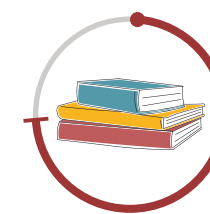
**81%**

Listen to a food podcast



**75%**

Sign up for a food workshop



**73%**

Read a book or publication on food



Godrej  
VIKHROLI  
Cucina

## Obsessed with **food**, inspired by **community**, driven by **trends**

A vibrant online community of food enthusiasts from brands, chefs, and food critiques to content creators, and everyday food lovers. Sharing a passion for all things culinary, Godrej Vikhroli Cucina aims to engage and cross-pollinate ideas in the exciting realms of the food industry

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# Food & Travel

Recent years have seen culinary tourism growing exponentially. In 2025, we observed travel becoming less about ticking off sights, and more about slowing the pace to savour flavours. Travellers took more frequent, possibly exploratory, immersive breaks that focused on 'best cities for food' or 'culinary experiences' with travel planning lists including recommendations from fellow food lovers on best picks for dining, street food and other local flavours. Last year, the survey revealed food travellers would gravitate to local food experts when planning itineraries. Goa grabbed the top spot domestically and Japan internationally for culinary adventures. This year, it crystal gazes to examine how culinary itineraries will be shaped by destinations that offer immersion into local food, especially street food.

In keeping with the rising focus on immersive experiences, the essay for the Food and Travel section, examines how Indian destinations can leverage local culinary propositions to transform taste into opportunity.

# Culinary Destinations

Culinary storytelling has fundamentally merged food and travel into a quest to taste the world, one story and one memory at a time. This shift is driven by the modern traveller's accelerated quest for sensory, intimate experiences, positioning gastronomic journeys as the ultimate expression of taste and status—especially among India's growing high-net-worth and middle-class segments.



## Japan

A cuisine shaped by seasonality and ritual, where *kaiseki* artistry, tea ceremonies, and meticulous knife work transform simple ingredients into expressions of harmony, respect, and centuries-old cultural philosophy.



## India

A tapestry of hyper-regional flavours—Kerala's spice-laden coast, Goa's Indo-Portuguese blends, Rajasthan's royal kitchens, and Nagaland's smoked traditions—preserving ancestral techniques, community memory, and deeply-rooted culinary identities.



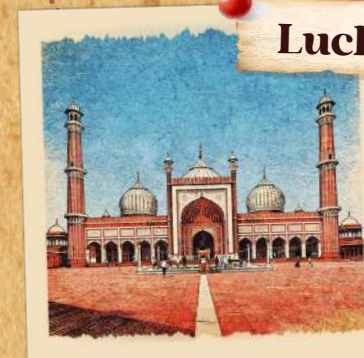
## Australia

A modern cuisine reconnecting with ancient Aboriginal food wisdom—finger lime, wattleseed, lemon myrtle—reimagined through contemporary chefs who spotlight native ingredients, sustainable foraging, and Australia's relaxed yet innovative dining culture.



## Singapore

A vibrant crossroads where Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Peranakan traditions converge, celebrated through beloved hawker dishes, bold street flavours, and a UNESCO-recognised culture that turns everyday meals into shared national identity.



## Lucknow

A culinary legacy shaped by Nawabi refinement—*galouti kebabs*, aromatic *biryanis*, and slow-cooked *dum pukht* dishes—kept alive through royal kitchen lineages, bustling eateries, and immersive heritage food walks.



## Dubai

A global table where Emirati staples like machboos meet Michelin-led fine dining and multicultural influences, creating a city that celebrates luxury, diversity, and world cuisines within a single, ever-evolving food landscape.





# The Geography of Flavour

## Travel as an edible narrative

Food has become a story worth travelling for. Destinations with a strong culinary ethos can strategically leverage this opportunity.

### Focus Areas

*In 2026, travel is set to be a seamless fusion of cultural immersion, personalised tastes, innovation, and technology. Experiences rooted in culture and food defy digital replication, and endure as the magnetic force drawing discerning travellers to new destinations. The resurgence of slow, intentional, conscious travel is compelling the hospitality industry to adapt swiftly, unlocking fresh opportunities for local communities, and fostering economic growth at the grassroots.*

Throughout history, eating has been a communal act, layered with terroir, identity, and emotion. Even today, it offers richer cultural insights and

memories than any guidebook or souvenir. When combined with travel this makes for edible narratives both rich with flavour and context, putting

culinary travel at the crossroads of taste and status in the social media driven world of today.

## Food Storytelling: Catalyser Of Travel

The plate has moved from being the destination, to an essential ingredient in culinary storytelling. Food is no longer confined to checkboxes on a travel bucket list. Indian travellers today are not only picking destinations based on food offerings, but planning itineraries around eating at local restaurants, exploring local cuisines, streetfood, cooking experiences and ingredients.

Food storytelling, which can be simultaneously intimate and universal, is a narrative technique that employs a sensory lexicon of taste, flavour and emotions to communicate culinary explorations. Shows like MasterChef Australia in the early 2000s, first catalysed the trend of travelling to taste, by igniting the imagination of a generation of travellers. As food

and travel merged, the primary goal for many shifted to exploring the world, fork and spoon in hand, a phenomenon that was accelerated post-pandemic by a rush of revenge travel and eating.

Noting a fundamental shift in the traveller's psyche, **Samreen Tungekar**, Managing Editor of Travel+Leisure India & South Asia,



observes, **"today, travellers aren't just looking for a meal; they are looking for a connection. Whether at a Michelin-starred kitchen in Dubai, or a boutique stay in the heart of Ladakh, the most successful culinary propositions are those that have rich stories."**

Forward-thinking tourism boards that recognised this, successfully

leveraged gastronomy as a powerful advantage early on, crafting immersive narratives around culinary culture, indigenous cuisine, provenance, and fine dining based on the propositions their countries offered.

With the rise in travellers seeking culinary utopia, the time is ripe for Indian destinations to use strategies deployed by global tourism bodies as blueprints to articulate their own edible narratives to string scattered opportunities of consumption into meaningful cultural engagement.



## Authoring Authenticity: The Dialogue of Indigenous Identity

One of the earliest movers, Tourism Australia is a prime example. Not just because they leveraged culinary storytelling to build resonance, but also for reinventing their narrative time and again to strategically align campaigns around varied culinary propositions that differentiated them from more traditional tourism narratives.

Early efforts focused on positioning Australia as a destination for gourmet food and drinks. They launched the 'Restaurant Australia' campaign in 2013 to boost Australia's reputation as a premier culinary destination and spotlighted unique native Australian ingredients as a differentiator. The epitome of the initiative was Noma Australia, a highly sought-after, ten-week pop-up in collaboration with Chef René Redzepi. By creating an exclusive menu from native Australian ingredients, Redzepi showcased the country's unique provenance through a high-profile, modern culinary lens, generating massive international attention.

**Nishant Kashikar**, Country Manager for India and Gulf at Tourism Australia, explains the impact of Australia's long term approach.



**"Sharing the diversity of exceptional culinary experiences available has long been a part of how we share Australia's tourism story with the world."**

Noting that immersive experiences now help to shape and influence travel choices more than ever he adds, **"food has emerged as one of**

**the most powerful ways for travellers to build an emotional connection with a destination."** This reinforces the power of experiences, grounded in authenticity, to drive sustained interest for destinations.

Kashikar, going on to share that future strategy remains focused on inviting the world down under, adds **"Australian cuisine is a vibrant fusion of global influences and native ingredients, shaped by our country's multicultural population and diverse landscapes. Tourism Australia aims to firmly reinforce Australia's position as a destination offering exceptional culinary experiences by sharing stories and real local voices."**

India, with its unparalleled culinary diversity, is perfectly positioned to take a myrtle leaf or ten from Australia's success story. By focusing on a varied spectrum of offerings, from immersion into local regional cuisines to exclusive, ingredient-focused fine dining, India can apply the Australian blueprint of showcasing varied narratives in its food story to create a layered tourism proposition capable of

attracting every segment of the global foodie traveller.



**"Every single tour to India, regardless of its theme, is a food tour!"** exclaims **Sarah Meikle**, Director of All India

Permit Tours, who has made it her mission to redefine the vocabulary of Indian cuisine for outsiders. She observes that India's potential as a premier food tourism destination lies in its ability to shatter preconceived notions. **"Many travellers arrive with a limited perspective, they are quickly overwhelmed by the sheer expanse of the offering,"** she said.

**"Food is intrinsic to the Indian cultural experience and you simply cannot escape it... so we don't. All my itineraries include everything from street food tours to fine dining,"** Meikle explains. A key focus of her tours is dismantling the Western misconception that spice in the Indian context rather than equating to heat equals flavour. Adding that the vegetarian choices offered in India blows their minds.



## Packaging Provenance: The Taste Of Terroir

India stands as one of the most biodiverse regions on Earth, yet it has barely harnessed its potential. While Australia has leaned into a distinct, modern culinary identity, destinations like Italy and broader Europe have long leveraged the 'terroir-driven' narrative, a philosophy where food is an unadulterated reflection of the soil, ancestral wisdom, and the land itself. By framing legacy, memory, and sustainability as tangible experiences, these regions have turned their geography into a powerful tourism asset.

Industry experts, such as Tungekar, point to Spain as the contemporary gold standard for this repositioning. **"By highlighting the specific culinary differences across cities like Barcelona, Madrid, Seville, Cordova, and Valencia, Spain allows travellers to engage with the unique friction between local regional identities."** Every meal becomes enriched by the voices of local farmers and historic food markets.

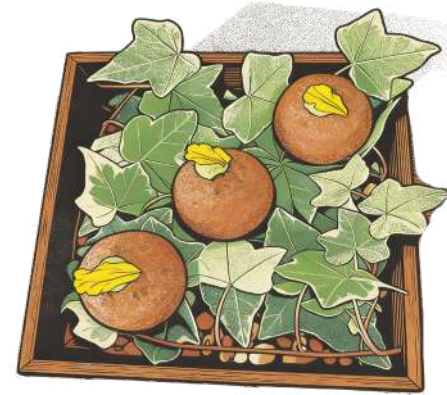
A landmark moment for this movement in India occurred at the Republic Day State Banquet on January 26, 2026. Hosted at

Rashtrapati Bhavan, Chef Prateek Sadhu of NAAR presented a Himalayan-inspired tasting menu that served as a masterclass in mountain heritage. The curation was a sensory journey through Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and the Northeast, spotlighting foraged and indigenous ingredients like *Jakhiya*, *Timru*, and Yak cheese. From the *Nimbu Saan* (a Kumaoni hill lemon salad) to the main course of *Gucchi* and Solan mushrooms, the menu elevated earthy grains like *Ragi* and *Jhangora* to the heights of fine dining. The experience

culminated in a Himalayan *ragi* and Kashmiri apple cake topped with sea buckthorn cream. By elevating rustic, rural ingredients and foods this menu has bridged the gap between authenticity and luxury gastronomy and served to further shift the global perception of Indian cuisine.

This menu, and Sadhu's restaurant, NAAR, in leveraging "Himalayan-forward" as a concept, exemplifies the potential of the terroir

proposition to package up local cuisines. Not only does it echo the European and Spanish models, but also provides a clear roadmap for India to similarly leverage its diverse micro-regions. From the high-altitude deserts of Ladakh and the rain-washed valleys of Kerala to the arid sands of Rajasthan and the sun-drenched coastlines of Tamil Nadu, India's varied terroirs offer an inexhaustible well of stories waiting to be packaged into provenance.



## Curating The Crossroads: The Heritage Chronicle

Beyond identity and provenance, the unique heritage of a place also offers the opportunity to build a culinary narrative. Singapore stands out for its masterful packaging of local authenticity. Lacking vast geographies or agricultural provenance, this independent island nation that is both a sovereign country and city-state, distilled its heritage into a beautiful narrative and made the whole city a living museum of culinary culture.

The city elevated its unique urban strengths, community heritage and world-class street food into a powerful narrative of heritage preservation. Having identified its unique community-driven hawker markets as a powerful cultural USP, the Singapore Tourism Board elevated the city's community-driven hawker markets from simple food courts into a powerful narrative of heritage preservation. Moving beyond spontaneous exploration, they crafted a deliberate story where a bowl of *Laksa* or Hainanese Chicken Rice became an engagement with the nation's culinary identity.

They also drew on the island's multicultural culinary fabric, enriched with Chinese, Malay, Indian, Peranakan, and Sri Lankan influences, to frame a nuanced narrative of migration and third culture cuisines. Fusion dishes like Fish Head Curry and Chilli Crab became edible embodiments of a shared national language in this framework.

The Singapore Tourism Board elevated all of this to the world through the Singapore Food Festival and campaigns like 'Passion Made Possible', that allowed travellers to 'taste' the destination before arrival. Crucially, the tourism body also intelligently tailored offerings for different geographies. Case in point showcasing diverse vegetarian options in India-specific campaigns to proactively dismantle myths about the city's food scene.

Following its recent designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, Lucknow is perfectly positioned to emulate this model by packaging its iconic Ganga Jamuni culinary culture for global recognition.

The 'Lucknow *ke Bawarchikhane*' (Lucknow's Kitchens) exhibit, featured at the Sanatkada Lucknow Festival in 2024, offered a beautiful template close to home. A masterclass in culinary curation, the exhibit transcended simple food tasting to frame Lucknow's gastronomy as a living archive. It utilised sensory installations, such as; an ancestral home kitchen setup featuring traditional tools and utensils, an installation inspired by the histories of generational khansamas, artistic recreations of old-world *dastarkhwan*s and a meticulous mapping of the legendary street food vendors of the city. Like ancestral kitchen setups,

interactive cooking videos, miniature models, and a meticulous mapping of legendary street food vendors, into an immersive epicurean journey through the city's storied kitchens.



**"Sanatkada's work in Lucknow is path breaking,"** comments **Anubhuti Krishna,** curator of the pioneering

Lucknow with Anubhuti. **"They began with offering home-style food at the festival, then made it available through Naimatkhana, their well-regarded restaurant that specialises in traditional, home-cooked food derived from old Lucknow families."** Krishna who shot to fame with her path breaking immersive trips into Lucknowi culture and cuisine a few years ago, goes on to add **"bringing the Bawarchikhane of the city to the people was a masterstroke. It allowed me to fully showcase the depth of the city's culinary history beyond eating our way around it. From the utensils they had curated from heritage family kitchens, to the khansama installation and to the detailing of stories behind everything, it offered a tactile window into Lucknow's culinary heritage."** Krishna concludes that this is an example other cities can emulate to showcase their culinary history. **"While eating local food is always possible, such initiatives are wonderful to turn consumption into meaningful cultural engagement."**

## Designing The Dialogue: The Curated Chronicle

While Australia, Europe and even Singapore drew on various existing gastronomic propositions there are also destinations that do not have such options. Dubai rather than relying on indigenous offerings has transformed itself into a bastion of fine dining, to serve up the world on a platter. Over the last decade they have applied a unique model of curated gastronomy to successfully attract celebrity chefs, and world-class restaurants, to position itself as a nexus of innovation and luxury. Its masterstroke was securing its own Michelin Guide, to validate its gourmet credentials.

Tungekar highlights Dubai's brilliance in positioning itself as a destination that successfully showcases the best of every cuisine, rather than just a hub for Emirati cuisine. **"What makes Dubai successful is story telling, through the people the stories actually belong to,"** she observes citing restaurants like *Fil'ia*, with its all-women kitchen, or *Sufret Maryam*, which offers Levantine cuisine based on a Palestinian mother's recipes. **"These aren't just restaurants; they are spaces designed with open kitchens and memorabilia that make them feel like a living room."**

Dubai's strategy is defined by a balance between ultra-luxury validation and accessible discovery. The Dubai Food Festival has become a marquee event promoting a vast spectrum of international food, while the Ramadan Street Food Festival adds a culturally-steeped-moment that spotlights traditional dining. This dual focus ensures the destination appeals to the full spectrum of the modern foodie traveller. Additionally by offering high-quality Indian cuisine through restaurants like *Ranveer Brar's Kashkan* or *Himanshu Saini's Trèssind Studio*, Dubai taps directly into the Indian traveller's desire for culturally accessible social currency.

While Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Goa, and Lucknow each offer unique strengths, several Indian cities beyond these traditional capitals of taste are emerging as prime contenders to emulate Dubai's culinary tourism strategy. Hyderabad, already dubbed the 'Dubai of India', stands out as a frontrunner. With its rich Nizam-era heritage, rapid economic growth and world-class infrastructure Hyderabad is mirroring Dubai's trajectory. By pairing luxury real estate and commercial investment with a sophisticated fine dining scene to position itself as a premier destination where modern luxury and deep-rooted food culture converge.



## Hungry For More: The Power Of Edible Narratives

There has perhaps been no better time for culinary travel in India. The nation, having found a new, confident voice, is repositioning itself by successfully packaging heritage, memory, and innovation. While the Indian traveller is hungry for immersive culinary experiences. Destinations that nurture and celebrate their culinary identity can leverage this shift. Packaging culinary propositions into rich narratives not only offers fantastic global marketing propositions, but also contributes to local economies and prevents homogenization of local cultures. This in addition to feeding the culinary traveller's desires and promoting economy will ensure local culinary cultures remain vibrant, evolving legacies.

Tungekar, whose publication drives both the Delicious Dining Awards and India's Best Awards, recently awarded Odisha with the title of Best Domestic Culinary Destination sits at a unique vantage point of

travel trend watching. She observes that several Indian destinations are already centering their dialogues around local culinary offerings. **"The Northeast, specifically Meghalaya, thanks to attention from mainstream champions like MasterChef India runner-up Nambie Jessica Marak is finally dismantling the 'exotic' reputation once attached to it,"** she notes.

Citing Kerala as another prime example, she lauds the work of researchers and chefs like Regi Mathew. **"They have broadened the traveller's understanding of South Indian culinary culture beyond singular frames of idli-dosa or Malabar parotta. We are now seeing the nuances of Syrian Christian and Mapla cuisine, and even the vibrant culture of local toddy shops, taking center stage."** She goes on to spotlight how the emergence of the street food scenes of Bhopal and Indore have put Madhya Pradesh on the map, and initiatives like the Food

for Thought Fest have drawn out the regional depth of the region.

The future for these culinary-rich destinations lies in 'behind-the-scenes' access, emphasises Meikle. **"Visitors do not want manufactured experiences; they want raw and genuine, the more authentic, the better."** Her itineraries that prioritise interactions with growers, makers, and home cooks to provide a fluid, authentic connection regularly sell-out. **"At least one cooking class is included, and if there is the chance to dine in someone's home, that's the icing on the cake."**

**"It would be rare to host a guest in India who didn't want to make the most of the cuisine, that's half the reason to come here!"** observes Meikle. She does however highlight the challenge that the 'alphabet' of the cuisine itself presents. Many Indians don't realise that most foreigners are not familiar with Indian dishes. Menus that educate and



help make choices would allow for ordering beyond the safe options. "I've been fortunate to meet and work with extremely committed and passionate Indian food advocates who have shown my guests the 'real India' and that's what makes people come back."

The final piece of this puzzle lies with the storytellers themselves according to Krishna, "While experts provide essential perspective, it is the wisdom and real voices of those who have preserved these cultures for ages we must tap into. Whether it is the grandmothers in home kitchens, the khansamas on the street, or the maharajins at home, we must record their knowledge before it is lost forever."

The future of travel lies in the taste of place. The coming era of culinary tourism will be driven by a quest for deep, shared meaning and flavourful narratives. As travellers increasingly look past the plate, India's success in showcasing itself as a culinary destination will rest on her ability to leverage her vast offerings of culinary heritage, terroir, fine dining and sustainability into a compelling narrative.

Drawing a parallel closer to home, India's emerging vanguard is emulating this model by humanising the dining experience through 'identity-centric' concepts. A prime example is Ikk Punjab, which leverages its heritage from the moment a guest enters. Designed

like the home of a well-travelled Punjabi family and filled with personal memorabilia, the restaurant uses its menu to provide historical context for pre-partition dishes that might otherwise be unrecognizable to modern diners. "It is about putting the teller, the identity, and the person whose story it is at the very center of the experience," she highlights, concluding that, ultimately, the primary factor for success in culinary branding is humanising the narrative; when you put a face to the story, it resonates more deeply with the guest.



# Trends in Food & Travel

Thanks to the internet and social media bringing the world onto the plate in the last decade, food and travel have become some of the most popular ways to express individuality. Food and travel have also slowly converged, giving rise to a specific segment of 'epicurean' or 'foodie' traveller. A tribe that picks destinations for their culinary attributes, often circumventing conventional sightseeing altogether, to seek out local food stories and flavours. From food trails, exploring wine in Europe or tea in Assam, cooking classes, immersive dining experiences that allow travellers to discover local cuisines, shopping for culinary souvenirs as edible mementos and more, they see travel as a sensory exploration of taste and culture. This growing demand for fresh concepts and new formats around exciting local flavours will drive opportunities for local economies to leverage.

Against this evolving backdrop, we asked our experts to weigh in on the most exciting culinary experiences and destinations that would captivate Indian vacationers in 2026.

## Action Points

Immersive narratives spotlighting local businesses, culture, and food will draw travellers looking for meaningful holidays. Curating tailored experiences for diverse profiles—from foodies and pilgrims to nostalgia seekers and culture enthusiasts—will forge local partnerships, enhance accessibility, and build credibility. Blending technology with human expertise will not only dispel AI/internet accuracy fears, but resolve complex travel needs and cultivate lasting trust.

## Toolkit for 2026

In 2026, the travel landscape is being reshaped by passion driven itineraries. This shift creates an opportunity for the **hospitality industry** to develop collaborations with local historians, culinary specialists, food entrepreneurs, artisanal producers, and more, to create immersive, region-specific culinary travel propositions to differentiate themselves.

A fatigue from AI-generated itineraries that create echo chambers and fuel overtourism offers **content creators** the opportunity to go off the 'eaten' path to uncover lesser known foodie destinations, and design niche, culinary-experience and story-rich itineraries. A growing interest in sustainable tourism presents a strategic opening for **local home chefs and food producers** to curate exclusive, community-led experiences centred on transparency and human connection.



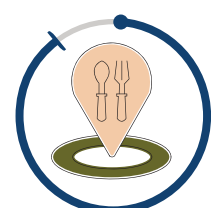


# Culinary Itineraries

Recent tourism industry reports show that more Indians are travelling for culinary discovery than ever before. When asked which local culinary experiences would influence epicurean traveller itineraries in 2026 our panel was excited!

They foresee the focus moving from iconic dishes at popular restaurants, to more immersive exploration of local culinary cultures. Curated lists of **Famous local restaurants and eateries (90%)** and guided **Food tours (87%)**, that combine storytelling with various local food offerings will be high priority for the foodie traveller interested in discovery at a hyper-regional, local level.

Meanwhile, **Culinary events (81%)** like food festivals and special pop-ups, and **Sustainable culinary experiences (81%)** comprising farm-to-table restaurant concepts, and eco-friendly retreats will enrich foodie itineraries in 2026.



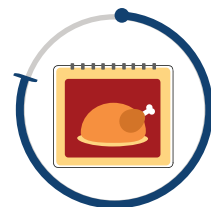
90%

Famous local restaurants and eateries



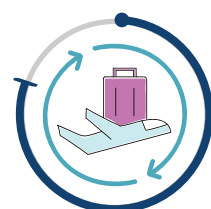
87%

Food tours



81%

Culinary events



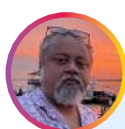
81%

Sustainable culinary experiences



**Sweta Biswal**

The food industry as a whole is undergoing a dynamic transformation, with progressive state government policies acting as a strong catalyst. In Odisha, recent years have witnessed a surge in curated food festivals that celebrate local culinary traditions. This synergy in people and policy has led to the rise of 'farm-to-table' pop-ups and immersive culinary tours woven around heritage trails. There has also been increased interest in heritage eateries, connecting with local food experts, and guides, reflecting a growing appreciation for authenticity, sustainability, and regional gastronomy.



**Anurag Mallick**

Food lovers will increasingly turn to cooking classes, F&B appreciation sessions, workshops and online courses. While books, articles and podcasts will influence their choices, the foremost factor driving their thirst for knowledge will be self-exploratory food trips and expert-led culinary excursions. Of course any kind of recognition, awards or acclaim—for bars or restaurants—will influence where people choose to take culinary pilgrimages. Naar, the Gaggan pop up in Mumbai are examples of this.



**Dipali Khandelwal**

Foodie travellers are increasingly looking for experiences that take them off the beaten path. Hands-on, authentic, and culturally-rich experiences in rural and local settings will be popular. Farm-to-table meals, visits to local markets, vineyards, eating in people's homes are becoming a real draw. The growing curiosity for regional specialties, lesser-known dishes, tribal and foraged foods, have travellers willing to go to remote locations to experience them. They are also interested in being part of the process of food preparation itself, whether it is foraging for ingredients, or helping hosts in their kitchens.



**Chef Vikas Khanna**

Today, my India, from the golden streets of my beloved Amritsar to the hidden corners of the Northeast, has become the focus of the world. Global travellers are arriving with a deep hunger to discover every facet of her—beyond landmarks to immerse themselves in our culture, traditions, and home kitchens. In this era of hyper-regional discovery, fueled by the magic of storytelling and crazy, bold flavours, our incredible diversity offers so much! We are finally center stage. I am shamelessly inviting everyone: come, sit at our table and taste our heritage. From sustainable farm-to-table rituals to intimate home-dining, it is a most beautiful journey of gratitude and ancestral connection that India offers.



# Top Indian Street Food Destinations

Street food will always be fascinating. With digital media driving a frenzy of stories from the fantastic to the bizarre, recent years have seen an unprecedented rise in interest around its chatpata offerings inspiring a growing number of Indian foodies travelling just to discover local street food.

Our panel identified **Lucknow (93%)** as the must-do on the street food explorer's bucket list (not surprising, given its recent recognition as UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy and its layered, syncretic street food culture. With Punjabi cuisine seeing a resurgence, **Amritsar (91%)**, will be next on the list with a rising interest in discovering Punjabi flavours beyond the ubiquitous Butter Chicken, while **Kolkata's (82%)** historically multi-faceted street food culture will also draw street food lovers.



**Charmaine O'Brien**

I think all places like Lucknow, Amritsar, and Kolkata are already known for their street food. It would be good to see newer street food destinations like Vizag, Assam, and Sikkim emerge as new street food destinations to explore.



**Gurpreet Singh Tikku (Mr. Tikku)**

You understand a city better at a chaat corner than at a five-star hotel! Street food is a city's soul on a plate, revealing its people through tradition rather than trends. In Lucknow, street food is *tehzeeb*, patience, and perfection—from Tunday *Kebabs* to basket *chaat*, it's royal history with mass appeal. Amritsar is pure emotion on a *tawa*; its butter-soaked *kulchas* and *lassi* hug you like family. Meanwhile, Kolkata's street food is poetry in motion—*puchkas* and *kathi rolls* balancing nostalgia with unmatched affordability. (Kolkata offers a wholesome meal for Rs. 20.) These aren't Instagram fads, but living stories of how India lives, loves, and eats. Every lane feels like a food story waiting to be told.



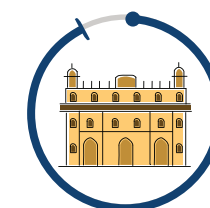
**Geetika Sasan Bhandari**

Street food is the cultural beating heart of a city. Constantly evolving, it continues to incorporate influences and inspiration over time, much like the city itself. It reflects the tastes of the common man and the pulse of the city itself. Lucknow, Amritsar, and Kolkata offer a street food lineage and legacy that is far richer and older than modern fine dining options. In fact, street food offerings in these cities are celebrities in themselves - they don't need big culinary names to back them! Not to mention, there is a certain standard to the offerings in all these cities, so be it *kebabs*, *kulchas*, or *puchkas*, you know you can sample your way through a variety of options across the length and breadth of the city.



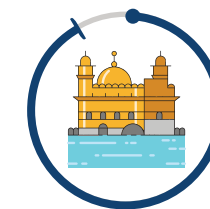
**Rocky Singh**

*Chaat* has become a very big segment. The small establishment sector has shown remarkable organisational ability. From *dhabhas* at *Murthal -Gyani, Gulshan* etc, to many smaller players who are champions in specific items like *dhokla* or *khaman* stalls on Gujarat. *vada pao* in Mumbai, or *chola bhatura* in Delhi, are suddenly very big players, having elevated themselves. Their pricing has gone up (although it remains competitive), but so have their standards. Spaces are more comfortable, with AC and improved hygiene. Consequently, footfalls have increased. This will only continue.



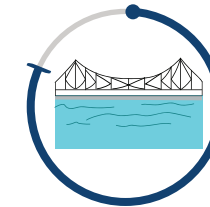
93%

Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh



91%

Amritsar, Punjab



82%

Kolkata, West Bengal

## Emerging Conversations

The public nutrition narrative in India is transforming constantly. Rising urban pressures and escalating cost of living are prompting consumers to scrutinise their choices more closely. Last year, in the emerging conversations segment, we focused on sustainable fishing and palm oil, reflecting a growing attention to impact. This year, the spotlight shifts decisively to protein, a subject that is quickly becoming the central pillar of India's evolving food discourse.

This year's Emerging Conversations essay evaluates how this pivot is reshaping the landscape of India's food economy.

## Protein sources in Indian diets

The Indian diet derives protein from a variety of sources ranging from traditional staples, animal-based foods, and modern alternatives, reflecting both cultural preferences and evolving nutritional choices.

### Pulses & Legumes



High-protein vegetarian staples; rich in amino acids; essential in traditional Indian diets; support tissue repair, energy, and balanced nutrition.

### Dairy



Key source of vegetarian protein; provides calcium and essential amino acids; includes both traditional and fortified/enriched products for higher protein intake.

### Meat



Animal-based proteins; complete amino acid sources; form part of traditional thalis and support growth, muscle repair, and overall nutrition.

### Whole Grains



Grains with higher protein content than refined rice; traditional Indian staples that provide fiber, vitamins, and slow-release energy alongside protein.

### Leafy Greens & Vegetables



Plant proteins often overlooked; contain moderate protein; cost-effective, nutrient-dense, and versatile in cooking.

### Protein Powders & Shakes



Commercial supplements for bridging protein gaps; popular among athletes, fitness enthusiasts, and general consumers for convenience and targeted nutrition.

### Plant-Based & Functional Proteins



Emerging alternative protein sources; derived from legumes, nuts, or supplements; used in meat substitutes and beverages.



# Proteinification By Design

## Tracking the modern paradox of protein

A cornerstone of human nutrition, protein has emerged as a market disruptor, with surging demand fueling a new era of industry innovation.

### Focus Areas

*In 2025, protein moved out of gym bags and into the Indian kitchen, recast as 'basic wellness' rather than a niche supplement. Legacy food players quickly reformulated staples, dialling up protein without disrupting familiar formats. In 2026, the narrative will pivot from rapid expansion to endurance, testing which brands can sustain trust, visibility and margins once protein simply becomes a baseline expectation. However, for most of India, protein is a key government policy question, demanding sharper focus on access, awareness and quality to tackle malnutrition and chronic disease, while unlocking long-term growth for agri-food and nutrition businesses.*

India's heightened interest in protein is reshaping the country's food culture. Consumers, motivated by health, fitness and dietary needs, are increasingly seeking out protein-rich solutions to optimise nutrition. This burgeoning appetite for protein is driving welcome discourse around its evolving status, and has heralded a call to streamline nutritional claims

and their regulation. Simultaneously, it emphasises the urgent need to address India's protein gap and improve nutritional literacy amongst stakeholders across the board.

Representing more than just a change in dietary trends, this has resulted in a fundamental restructuring of the food industry.

As the boundaries of food science expand, the traditional protein landscape is being redefined by a synergy of sustainable biotechnology and health-conscious consumerism. Heeding this, the Indian food and beverage industry has green-lit innovation through investments in research, product development and food marketing strategies.

### Protein: Of Primary Importance

The word protein draws from the Greek *proteios*, meaning 'of first rank', and traces its origins to protos, or 'first'. Found in living matter, protein exists as chains comprising permutations of amino acids. A nexus of creation in animal bodies, it is critical in cell production, tissue repair, and hormone and enzyme synthesis. In the human diet, when digested, it contributes calorific energy fuelling vital functions.

The required daily intake (RDA) of protein is estimated between 0.8 - 1.5 grams per kilogram of ideal body

weight. However, needs are highly individualised, varying by gender,

age, activity, and health conditions, among other factors.



### India's Protein Gap

India's population is broadly divided into those relying solely on dairy and plant-based sources of protein like pulses and lentils, and those who supplement these staples with animal proteins such as meat, poultry, eggs, and seafood. Yet, mounting research reveals a stark reality: India remains significantly protein-deficient, with neither group consistently meeting their physiological requirements. An ICMR-INDIAB study published in Nature Medicine substantiates existing data regarding India's nutritional gap, clearly linking high-carbohydrate consumption and the nation's rising metabolic health crisis empirically. The study highlights that the typical Indian diet is overwhelmingly 'carbohydrate-heavy' (deriving over 62% of total calories from low-quality refined cereals like white rice and wheat) and protein deficient (at a mere 12%), which is well below the recommended threshold for metabolic health.

While increasing the intake of protein-rich foods seems an obvious remedy, the reality is more nuanced. Simply raising volume does not account for the complexities of protein quality, bioavailability, and deeply ingrained dietary habits of the Indian population.

*Dal*, for instance, is a cultural cornerstone commonly regarded as a primary protein source by Indians. While a large serving of nutritionally-dense lentils could contribute

meaningfully to the RDA, the reality on the Indian plate is quite different, as the standard bowl of dal is often significantly diluted. Yet this lack of density is far from the main culprit. This shortfall is a symptom of a much larger systemic shift.

An analysis of pan-Indian eating habits over time reveals deeper fissures in nutritional habits. The *thali* - though regionally diverse - once elegantly balanced macronutrients and micronutrients through an amalgamation of grains, pulses, dairy, and seasonal vegetables. However, with the drastic alteration of the average Indian's relationship with food over time, the synergistic effect of combining diverse whole foods to maximise nutrient intake is eroding. Driven by socio-economic factors such as rising incomes, higher costs, shifting palates, a disconnect from cooking, and a demand for convenience as well as an evolving social perception of 'aspirational' eating, this has resulted in a shrinking plate that has severely compromised nutritional density.

The once-vast repertoire of the Indian diet has shrunk to a few polished cereals. Millets, for instance, some of which are noteworthy protein sources, have been sidelined by white rice, while the waning use of seasonal vegetables and leafy greens has further compromised dietary diversity. This decline has effectively stripped today's plate

of both nutrient-dense secondary proteins and their accompanying culinary wisdom. The recognition of India's widening protein gap has triggered a paradigm shift across market segments.

'High-protein' has morphed into a powerful consumer buzzword that is a reflection of a significant cultural shift in India. **Shantanu Raj**, Head of Marketing at Godrej Jersey, observes



*"The conversation around protein is no longer confined to the gym; it has moved into the Indian kitchen. Consumers are transitioning from a calorie-focused mindset to one led by nutrition, viewing protein as vital."*

Sharing that this has accelerated a direction the brand was already moving towards, Raj adds, *"We are full steam ahead on strengthening protein-rich propositions, both by clearly highlighting the protein contribution of our existing portfolio and by innovating in newer formats."*



### Proliferation Of Proteinification

Proteinification is now pervasive across supermarket aisles and grocery delivery apps. Leveraging cultural familiarity, brands are flooding the market with 'new-and-improved' staples that repackage traditional basics as high-protein necessities to capture the health-conscious market.

Dairy, an inherently protein-dense category, has been the most agile in capitalising on this momentum. Beyond recalibrating staples like milk, yoghurt, and *paneer* into high-protein iterations, the industry has rebranded heritage formats like *lassi* and buttermilk with whey-enriched formulas, successfully commodifying the intersection of traditional taste and modern 'high-quality' functionality.

Observing that modern consumers are increasingly looking for products that offer multiple nutritional cues such as higher protein and lower sugar contents as well as functional ingredients in the same products, Jersey plans to introduce high-protein dairy and dairy-based beverage formats that align with these expectations. *"We are seeing a fundamental shift where homemakers are looking at dairy not just as a traditional staple, but as a functional tool for family wellness, immunity, and sustained energy throughout the day. Our focus is on offerings that seamlessly integrate into daily routines while meeting evolving nutritional priorities."* While new offerings will include higher concentrations of milk solids, Raj

highlights their commitment to taste. *"The goal is to ensure consumers never have to compromise between taste, convenience, and nutrition, so factors like digestibility and texture are equally crucial, alongside transparent communication and strict adherence to FSSAI standards."*

Concluding with an acknowledgement of the price-sensitivity of the Indian market, Raj notes that Jersey intends to fulfill these consumer wants all while bearing costs in mind. In a move to democratise protein, Godrej Jersey is focusing on making it accessible and affordable for the average household. Raj, emphasising that this is a core mission for the brand, states, *"We want to strip away the*

'premium' tag often associated with high-protein products. By offering a high-quality, 30g protein paneer at a ₹99 price point, we are ensuring that better nutrition is available to all."

In this new era, whey is no longer a byproduct but a prized output. Surging consumer awareness and demand for whey-based isolates and flavoured supplement powders, has valorised the entire milk stream. This industry optimisation has converted a by-product into a linchpin of modern functional nutrition.

Market movements towards high-protein have effectively repositioned snacking into a proteinification opportunity as well. The snacking segment is undergoing a radical transformation. Protein-conscious consumers can now navigate a landscape of 'functional indulgences',

ranging from protein-fortified khakhras and namkeens to high-protein biscuits and baked goods.

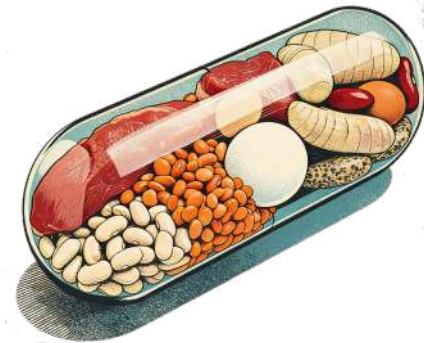
At Godrej Yummiez, this has translated into a stronger focus on educating consumers about the protein already present in familiar formats they love. Campaigns like 'Protein toh bas bahana hai, inko Yummiez khana hai' reflect this shift, where the objective is not to medicalise snacking, but to reframe it as both enjoyable and nutritionally



meaningful. "Products delivering up to 16 grams of protein per serving, supported by clean-label thinking and IQF technology, demonstrate how indulgence and functionality can be designed together," shares Anushree Dewen, Head of Marketing and Innovation at Godrej Foods Ltd,

speaks to the evolution of snacking.

Brand-led, education-forward marketing campaigns like these connect familiar snacks supporting consumers' macronutrient needs with their protein content, in effect, demystifying the concept of protein goals. "The larger opportunity lies in making protein-forward choices feel accessible and non-intimidating, especially within formats that already have high cultural acceptance," concludes Dewen.



nutritional necessity and economic reality.

"When it comes to information on macro values (protein, calories), we understand there could be a plus-minus. We may not have the exact lab-tested macros for all dishes, but at least we can offer directional guidance. Ultimately, the platform and restaurants both have good intentions, and we operate from the perspective that 70-80% accurate knowledge is better than no knowledge at all," Maloo concludes.

## Protein: Home-Delivered

The demand for protein is reshaping e-commerce and food-tech trends with equal force. Recognising that health has become a strong driver of purchasing decisions, industry leaders have now pivoted to bridge the gap between convenience and nutrition by integrating nutritional metrics directly into the ordering flow.

Swiggy has recently launched 'EatRight', a dedicated category that zooms in on nutritional fine print, providing users with clear insights into the specific protein content (in grams) of dishes and calories of dishes, as well as specific markers of No Added Sugar on everyday indulgent items.

"Health is an expansive and very personalised concept. When conversations around protein and weight loss began growing, they offered clear outcome propositions and specific goal-oriented points of evaluation," observes Deepak Maloo, VP of Food Strategy, Customer Experience & New Initiatives.



Maloo goes on to elaborate that the platform now categorises protein demand into two distinct cohorts: Core and Emerging Consumers. For the Core Consumer, a high-intent user who views protein as a primary metric, Swiggy has pivoted from a 'dish-

search' to a 'nutrition-search' model, allowing users to filter specifically by protein content, such as 15g, 30g, or 45g. Conversely, the Emerging Consumer represents a demographic seeking healthier alternatives without sacrificing taste. For this group—particularly vegetarian—the specific source of protein, such as pulses and soya are the primary hook. Additionally Swiggy is also testing value-driven propositions like '20g of protein for under ₹200' in a strategic effort to bridge the gap between



## Bottoms Up: Liquid Protein

Proteinification has extended into restaurants and 'third spaces' as well, with brands leveraging 'functional wellness' as a key differentiator. Starbucks India has partnered with Superyou, the Indian high-protein snack brand, to offer a range of fermented yeast-protein cold-foam flavoured beverages that promises to deliver between 11g and 18g of protein per beverage. Mumbai's Café Mokai serves a 'Walk on the Clouds' Collagen Matcha. The 'high-performance' beverage developed in collaboration with Wellbeing Nutrition has become a staple of the urban casual dining experience. Upscale establishments in Delhi and Bangalore, such as The Grammar Room and Garden Café by Foodstories, are further cementing this trend by embedding protein-enriched menu items into their core offerings through strategic wellness partnerships.

Café strategist Deepali Gupta highlights the symbiotic chain of influence driving this trend.



"They're tweaking things to adapt to people's lifestyles and wants today." Observing that consumer habits are increasingly shaped by an 'aspirational mindset' catalysed by social media reinforcing trends like high-protein and turning nutritional choices into a form of social currency, Gupta notes that an opportunity to meet a niche need exists here. By aligning with this digital reinforcement, establishments develop inventive menu offerings



thereby boosting their cultural relevance and capitalising on 'Instagrammable' wellness.

That said, Gupta views this 'hype' as transient, largely hinged on an establishment's ability to maintain a sense of exclusivity. Highlighting the 'theory of satiation,' a psychological phenomenon where the initial thrill of a novelty wears off once curiosity is satisfied, she concludes, "once you've tried it, you're okay. Unless you really like it, or you truly believe it offers a tangible health benefit, you won't stick with it."

## The Conundrum Of Plant Protein

The quest for protein has also engendered a race in the plant-based meat alternative sector. Manufacturers are engineering analogues for every craving, from kebabs and nuggets to ground meat and eggs, utilising soy, pea, and mung bean isolates.

While these alternatives offer clear sustainability benefits, Dr. Gurmeet Singh, Professor at Trans-Disciplinary University Bangalore, cautions against adopting a Western lens to nutrition in India. With a background in chemical engineering, Singh, who is focused on researching food, health, and sustainability, notes that while plant-based meats are strategic tools in the West to pivot consumers away from animal protein in the interest of sustainability, and applying these borrowed solutions to the Indian context is misguided.



"We don't need to mimic meat for the Indian population, we need to increase the palate of protein-dense foods on the plate with options that are tasty and textured."

Despite significant strides in the plant-based segment, many Indian firms are misdirecting energies by prioritising imitation meat. Given India's low per capita meat consumption, the objective should shift from replacement to category augmentation, facilitating a seamless increase in protein density across a population that is already predominantly vegetarian.

Singh advocates enhancing the nutritional density of the Indian plate by mastering protein's ingredient science with locally-instituted technology. The goal should be to transform Indians' everyday meals, not by forcing behavioral shifts but by expanding the gambit of available options that smoothly integrate into the existing diet while bolstering nutritional yield.

Hello Tempayy, for instance, bypassed the imitation meat trap to focus on enhancing the plant-based range by introducing tempeh to the Indian palate. "In India, meat is not at the center of the plate", notes founder

Siddharth Ramasubramanian. Having identified a critical market gap, he introduced tempeh — a traditional Indonesian fermented soy product — as a protein-dense, tasty and textured vegetarian offering. "We were very clear early on that we wanted to bring in a vegetarian source of protein."

The Indian kitchen has long suffered from a choice deficit. High-density vegetarian protein has been limited to a few usual suspects like paneer or dal. Hello Tempayy addressed this through protein diversification rather than substitution by introducing tempeh in forms that are both familiar and palatable. "We are in the protein-addition, not protein-alternating business. It was very clear to us that consumers are looking for more choices, not replacements," Ramasubramanian points out.



## A Resurgence In Traditional Protein-Rich Foods

Parallel to the proteinification trend is a resurgence of interest in heritage protein-rich foods. The consumer and the industry are re-evaluating the Indian pantry through a modern macronutrient lens and rehabilitating traditional high-value ingredients like *sattu* and *makhana* that have been long overlooked as affordable, highly-nutritious indigenous choices.

Bihar's *sattu*, a generational staple, once denigrated as 'food of the poor', has been rebranded as India's 'OG Protein Powder' due to its 15% protein content, and traditional *sattu*-based beverages are being hailed as the original 'desi protein shake'. Similarly, *makhana* has evolved from a ceremonial offering into a global snack phenomenon, challenging processed snacks by

merging local heritage with global flavours like 'Perky *Pudina*' and 'Smoky BBQ'.

This digital-led revival, evident in 89,000+ and growing posts for #sattu on Instagram, is allowing a new generation to rediscover traditional wisdom through modern formats like *sattu tikkis*, energy bars, and protein-dense *barfis*.



# Trends in Emerging Conversations

Each year, certain food categories gain momentum for their potential to reshape consumer priorities and industry focus. In 2026, our panel of experts suggest that health-forward conversations - particularly around nutrition and superfoods - will dominate India's food landscape. Fibre is expected to take center stage as awareness grows of its link to gut health, mental well-being, and longevity. Meanwhile, homegrown superfoods such as turmeric, moringa, and millets continue to attract global attention, with scientific validation of their benefits accelerating domestic innovations.

Read on to find out what our panel has to say about these hot topics in 2026.

## The Path Forward

Even as protein-fortification becomes a mainstay, reaching the point where even 'high-protein water' is a retail reality, a growing chorus of health professionals is urging caution. **Ishitaa Bhatia**, a dietitian specialising in intuitive eating and behavioral nutrition, expresses concern over the dangers of singling out a lone nutrient and overplaying its importance at the expense of dietary balance. "At what point do you stop?" she asks, highlighting the risk of fostering 'food fears' where consumers become anxious about any meal or snack lacking a high-protein label. She argues that the industry has a responsibility to 'draw

the line'. "At some point **allow food to simply be food. We can have a section of protein-rich products, but it isn't necessary that protein be integrated into every single food that doesn't typically have it.**"



the line". "At some point **allow food to simply be food. We can have a section of protein-rich products, but it isn't necessary that protein be integrated into every single food that doesn't typically have it.**"

Taking a broader lens, the race to bridge India's protein gap should not be at the cost of consumer health. Recalibration poses a legitimate risk of overcorrection, with excessive

intake having the potential to destabilise macronutrient balance, placing undue stress on key organs like the kidneys. Furthermore, there is also the risk of the trend going down the same path as the 'low-fat' fad of the 1990s, where a marketing buzzword masked poor nutritional profiles with bold claims.



There are critical gaps in India's nutritional literacy, beginning with a fundamental lack of awareness regarding daily requirements and protein quality. **Nayantara Menon Bagla**, nutrition coach and founder of bone broth brand Broth Bish, poses an essential question on food, nutrition, and social structure within the Indian food system. "There's **a huge discrepancy in the Indian food system between those who cook, and those who understand nutrition.** How do you bridge that?", she asks. Speaking based on her personal history as an alum of the Oberoi Group's STEP program for culinary education, she highlights the lacunae in her formal training that forced her to turn to alternative sources

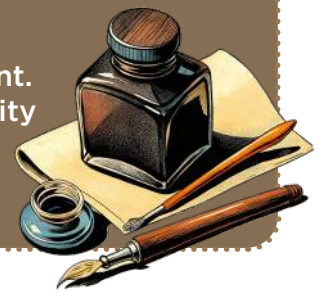
of learning to understand the fundamentals of nutrition.

These fissures are exacerbated by custodians of the Indian kitchen - be it professional chefs or home cooks - who often operate solely on a legacy of taste and tradition and hold a profound resistance to disrupting the status quo on the plate, effectively siloing science to medical and fitness circles. "People may be aware, but **actually getting mom, the cook, or any person who's in charge of the kitchen to change, involves breaking inter-generational patterns of the way food is consumed,**" underlines Bhatia.

The path forward is clear. Consumer health must remain the 'North Star' of India's protein conversation. The industry must prioritise holistic nutrition over marketing hype. By aligning innovation and genuine public health needs with manufacturing ethics and regulatory transparency stakeholders can ensure that the effort to bridge India's protein gap leads to long-term wellbeing.

## Toolkit for 2026

The demand for nutritionally superior foods is paving the way for innovation that unites clean ingredients, functional cooking techniques, and strong sensory appeal. In 2026, food brands should look to address measurable health benefits in their labelling, particularly those addressing age- and lifestyle-related concerns such as obesity and type 2 diabetes. Clean-label positioning will remain essential, as transparency continues to drive consumer trust. Health-food businesses should explore opportunities to align more closely with the healthcare ecosystem, positioning food as a proactive tool for wellness management. Wellness influencers should prioritise authenticity and scientific credibility to build trust with a skeptical but engaged audience. Content should focus on real-life stories over polished aesthetics or 'miracle' claims.



## Action Points

With protein entering the language of basic wellness across India, from metros to fast-modernising tier-2 and tier-3 cities, consumers will be more mindful of their everyday food choices. There is an immense opportunity for content creators to **spark deeper conversations on meal design, seasonality, sustainability and individual health needs,** translating science into culturally resonant formats.

Restaurants and cloud kitchens will be expected to **collaborate with nutrition experts,** tighten recipes, and disclose menu macros with greater transparency, turning nutrition information into a trust asset rather than small print.

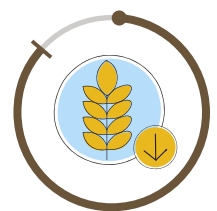
For large food companies, the next frontier lies in **policy partnership:** nudging higher protein norms in schemes like mid-day meals and allied programs, which can simultaneously address under-nutrition and unlock long-term demand for agri, dairy and next-gen food industries.



# Health & Nutrition Trends

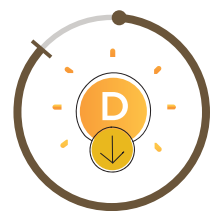
Across India, consumers are beginning to reassess their diets and lifestyles, aligning daily choices with long-term nutritional needs.

We asked our experts to weigh in on which nutritional deficiencies, apart from protein, will inspire the health narratives in 2026. Our panel believes **Fibre deficiency (87%)** due to excess consumption of processed foods, will top the list. **Vitamin D deficiency (87%)** due to limited sun exposure, will also become a theme of concern, particularly in urban populations whose lives are largely indoors. Meanwhile, **Vitamin B12 deficiency (81%)**, especially in vegetarians, will drive supplement usage. In 2026, nutrition education will be as critical to consumer wellbeing as the nutrients themselves.



87%

Fibre deficiency



87%

Vitamin D deficiency



81%

Vitamin B12 deficiency



**Ruchi Shrivastava**

Recent years have shown there is an immense and serious need to look into the nation's health. I hope that with the media making it a focus issue and people embracing it, there will be scope of larger discussion around citizens' health, especially that of children, women, and senior citizens.



**Pawan Agarwal**

As we move into 2026, India faces a 'processing paradox' where urban convenience is fueling hidden hunger. Front-of-pack labels are helpful, but they won't fix a broken food environment alone. To truly transform our culture, we must turn schools into the frontline of nutrition. By embedding the 21 habits of routine, healthy choices, and mindful living into the daily curriculum, we move beyond teaching to rewiring the next generation's instincts. When ten minutes of daily nutrition education meets consistent repetition, we don't just change a school lunch; we change the DNA of Indian society.



**Prerna Kumar**

By 2026, India's health food conversation will expand beyond protein to a holistic nutrient consciousness, covering Vitamin D, Iron, B12, Calcium, and gut microbiome balance. Consumers will look for natural, culturally rooted, and functional foods that address these gaps without compromising taste or convenience. Ayurvedic ingredients and ancient grains will re-emerge as powerful, everyday solutions.



**Uttam Muthappa**

The next evolution of health food isn't about what we add, like protein, but about what we've lost. Today's consumer is realizing that the 'convenience' of the packet has come at the cost of essential vitality, leaving us starved of sunshine vitamins, the fiber our ancestors thrived on, and the vital minerals that sustain women and children. The demand for 'No Preservatives' is no longer just a preference; it is a reclamation of health. With lab-testing now offering an immediate window into what we are consuming, we are entering an era where the deficiencies of processed life are not just visible, but instantly correctable.



# Trends In Superfoods

In 2026 and beyond, ancient food wisdom will offer a blueprint for innovation. As popular perceptions around health and wellness practices evolve towards preventative over curative, the food industry is increasingly inspired by ingredients celebrated by traditional medical and diet systems that offer functional and nutritional benefits.

Our panel weighed in on traditional Indian superfoods that will see greatest adoption by industry players in 2026. **Turmeric (91%)** continues its golden reign, with brands leveraging its science-backed benefits across beverages, snacks, and supplements. **Ragi (91%)**, is reclaiming centre stage, inspiring innovation while **Moringa (89%)** with its strong micronutrients profile is following closely. Meanwhile, **Makhana (89%)**, Bihar's heritage ingredient, is fast emerging as a premium, better-for-you alternative in the snacking segment.



**Odette Mascarenhas**

We are no longer trying to force-fit exotic grains like quinoa into our diets. Instead, we are turning back to our traditional superfoods. *Makhana*, curry leaves, *amla*, *turmeric*, *ragi*, and moringa have always had a traditional space and context with ancient wisdom behind them; they are now moving to the centre of health-food conversations, with innovation happening to bridge the gap between traditional practices and modern convenience.



**Chef Kunal Arolkar**

I am also keen to see us using our indigenous spices, and local berries, local edible flowers, and personally I am excited about nutmeg, apple, starfruit, and similar fruits which can be candied or pickled beautifully.



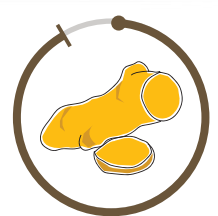
**Dr Ratna Raje Thar**

We must recognise the inherent richness of traditional Indian diets, which historically provided every necessary micronutrient. The disconnect occurred when we swapped functional, Ayurveda-influenced eating for Western patterns. To fix this, we must return to 'superfoods' that are being forgotten, indigenous proteins like silkworms, dried fish, local black rice, sesame seeds or forest vegetables. Even simple elements that we take for granted, like ridge gourd peel chutney or salted lime peel pickle are nutritional powerhouses. Real health lies in these local treasures, from oilseeds to natural fats, not in imported trends.

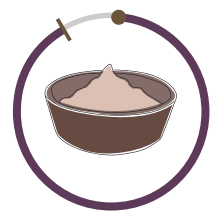


**Prashant Issar**

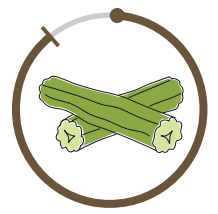
Restaurants play a vital role in keeping the dialogue around disappearing foods alive. By featuring these ingredients on seasonal menus and sharing their stories, we transform dining into a platform for cultural preservation, health education, and sustainable food systems. At Ishaara, our ingredient-forward philosophy is a celebration of India's vast biodiversity. Through collaborations with researchers, home chefs, and regional producers, we innovate while remaining deeply rooted in tradition. Our mission is to keep these endangered flavours on the table by sourcing directly from local farmers, foragers, and tribal communities, ensuring these ingredients remain viable for generations to come. Traditional Indian diets were inherently wise: holistic, regional, and sustainable. They were built upon indigenous superfoods that served as repositories of health and wellness. By honouring these traditions, we do more than just serve a meal; we offer our guests a wholesome, meaningful dining experience that preserves our collective culinary soul.



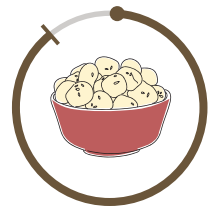
91%  
Turmeric



91%  
Ragi



89%  
Moringa



89%  
Makhana



Turn everyday meals into family favourites



# Panel of Experts

In alphabetical order (A-z)



## **Aarti Laxman**

Founder, Artinci

## **Chef Abinas Nayak**

Chef & Consultant

## **Ahmedaki Laloo**

Chef & Founder, A'Origins

## **Chef Ajay Chopra**

Celebrity chef, Menu and restaurant consultant, Zion Hospitality

## **Chef Ajeet Kalbag**

Chef & Partner, White Copper Hospitality Pvt Ltd

## **Ajit Balgi**

Bar consultant & Sommelier, The Happy High Bartending Academy

## **Alka Jena**

Food blogger, Food stylist & Photographer, Culinary Xpress

## **Chef Amit Pamnani**

Chef & Owner, Desserts by Pihu

## **Amita Baviskar**

Professor of Environmental Studies, Sociology & Anthropology, Ashoka University

## **Amitabh Bhatia**

Head of Marketing, Stovekraft, Pigeon, Gilma, Black+Decker

## **Amrita Gangatirkar**

Founder, Nashik Heritage Trails

## **Amrita Raichand**

Actor & Celebrity Chef

## **Anand Bharadwaj**

Founder, Sweet Kaaram Coffee

## **Anand Virmani**

Co-Founder & Master Distiller, Nao Spirits & Beverages

## **Anant Iyer**

Director General, Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC)

## **Chef Ananya Banerjee**

Chef, TV host, Content Creator, Food Curator & Author, Bangla Gastronomy

## **Aniruddha Patil**

Founder, Pune Eat Outs!

## **Anisha Oommen**

Founder & Editor, Goya Media

## **Annu Sunny**

Co-founder, Graamyia Spices

## **Anubhuti Krishna**

Writer, Curator & Editor

## **Anurag Mallick**

Travel & Food writer, Culinary consultant

## **Anushree Dewen**

Head of Marketing and Innovation, Godrej Foods Ltd

## **Anushruti RK**

Author, The Sattvic Way

## **Archish Kashikar**

Independent researcher, Mead-maker & Sustainability auditor, Green Key

## **Archit Puri**

Food writer & Podcaster, Naan Curry Podcast

## **Chef Ashish Bhasin**

Chef & Culinary consultant

## **Aslam Gafoor**

Hospitality professional and columnist

## **Chef Auroni Mookerjee**

Chef & Writer

## **Chef Dr Avin Thaliath**

Chef, Entrepreneur, Food historian & Food writer

## **Aysha Tanya**

Food writer & Recipe developer

## **Chef Balpreet Singh Chadha**

Chef & Consultant

## **Bhavesh Sawariya**

Co-founder, Graamyia Spices

## **Bindu Gopal Rao**

Freelance writer & Photographer

## **Charmaine O'Brien**

Food writer, Researcher & Author, Eating the Present, Tasting the Future: Exploring India through Her Changing Food

## **Chetna Chopra**

Culinary Director, Omo

## **Chenxiang Rimchi N Marak**

Senior Nutrition Associate, North East Society for Agroecology Support (NESFAS)

## **Debjani Chatterjee Alam**

Food writer, Recipe developer & Home chef, Debjanir Rannaghar

## **Deepa Chauhan**

Custodian of Sindhi cuisine & Consultant chef

## **Deepak Maloo**

VP, Food Strategy, Customer Experience & New Initiatives, Swiggy

## **Deepali Gupta**

Cafe strategist

## **Dilpreet Singh Mehta**

Country Commercial Director, Dufry Retail India Pvt Ltd

## **Dina Weber**

Founder, Sapa Bakery

## **Dipali Khandelwal**

Food and culture researcher

## **Divya Prabhakar**

Founder, Bengaluru Oota Company (BOC)

## **Elizabeth Yorke**

Co-founder, Edible Issues

## **Elton Fernandes**

Industrialist, El The Cook

## **Chef Faiziya Soomar**

Chef & Owner, The Cutchi Memon Table

## **Farhaan Sulemani**

Chef & Consultant

## **Farzana Contractor**

Editor, Publisher & Photographer, Upper Crust Magazine

## **Fiona Arakal**

Co-founder, Ishka Farms

## **Garima Tiwari**

Culinary Custodian of Regional Cuisine Chhattisgarh

## **Gaurang Motta**

CEO & Co-founder, Monks Bouffe

## **Chef Gaurav Gidwani**

Founder, Cinnamon Hospitality

## **Gayathri Rattha**

Co-founder, Minus 30

## **Geetika Sasan Bhandari**

Editor-in-Chief, Namaste.ai

## **Gitika Saikia**

Northeast food curator & Storyteller

## **Dr Gurmeet Singh**

Professor & Dean, Research & Outreach, The University of Trans-Disciplinary Health Sciences & Technology

## **Gurpreet Singh (Mister Tikku)**

Founder, Mister Tikku Experiences

## **Hamavand Chinoy**

Whisky Innovator & Director, South Seas Distilleries

## **Harish Varadharajan**

CEO, Fragaria Fruits Pvt Ltd

## **Chef Harpal Singh Sokhi**

Celebrity Chef & Restaurateur

## **Chef Hussain Shahzad**

Executive Chef, Hunger Inc Hospitality

## **Insia Lacewalla**

Food and travel writer & Founder, W.E.

## **Isha Mayer**

Digital Editor, ELLE Gourmet India

## **Ishika Saraf**

Chef & Entrepreneur, Donuterie, Bakehouse, Sitara Chocolates

## **Ishitaa Bhatia**

Consulting nutritionist & Founder, The Nutrition Project, WellFed Children's Nutrition Clinic

## **Ishita Dey**

Culinary anthropologist & Author, Sweet Excess

## **Karishma (Kim) Pais**

Culinary explorer and chronicler

## **Kartikeya Sinha**

Chef & Supper club host

## **Chef Kavan Kuttappa**

Chef & Founder, Naru Noodle Bar

## **Kavita Rajwade**

Co-founder, IVM Podcasts

## **Ketan SS Gohel**

Co-founder & Owner, Brewbot Craft Brewery, Analog Bar & Kitchen

## **Chef Khushwant Jha**

Chef & Owner, Fyrvia Media

## **Chef Koushik S**

Judge on MasterChef India (Tamil), CookuWithComali, Annapoorani, Kwatle Kitchen

## **Chef Kunal Arolkar**

Pastry Chef & Founder, Foodybreaks Academy & Bakery

## **Chef Kunal Kapur**

Restaurateur & Celebrity chef

## **Kunal Vijayakar**

Broadcaster, YouTuber, Food writer

## **Dr Kurush F Dalal**

Archaeologist & Culinary anthropologist

## **Larissa Amanda Valladares**

Home chef & Owner, Incendiary Kitchen

## **Lipaa Shah**

Entrepreneur, Home chef & Author, Food Fiesta - An Effortless Daily Menu Guide

## **Lubna Rafiqi**

Founder & Owner, SAGG Eco Village

## **Madhushree Basu Roy**

Bengali cuisine expert, Art Director & Co-founder, Pikturinama

## **Mahrukh Mogrelia**

Owner, Mahrukh's Kitchen

## **Manish Khanna**

Pastry chef & Founder, Brownie Point

## **Chef Manish Mehrotra**

Chef & Restaurateur, Nisaba

## **Marina Balakrishnan**

Founder, Ootupura

## **Mayank Bhatt**

CEO & Founder, All In Hospitality

## **Megha Agarwal**

Independent food consultant & Stylist

## **Mitra Walke**

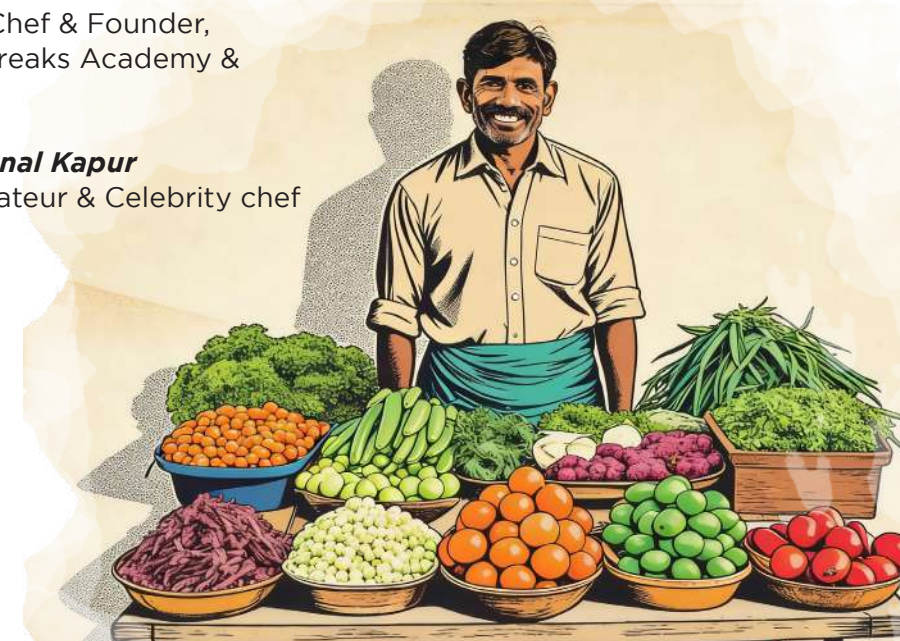
Owner, Misho Foods

## **Dr Mohsina Mukadam**

Food Historian

## **Mudraa Keswani**

Food critic & Content creator



**Mukund Naidu**

Artisan cheesemaker & Dairy consultant, Artisan & Gourmet LLP

**Nachiket Shetye**

Food entrepreneur, Culinary innovator & Co-founder, Kytchens

**Nalini Parthiban**

Founder, Sweet Kaaram Coffee

**Natasha Serena Bandlish**

Photographer & Writer

**Nayantara Menon Bagla**

Nutrition Coach & Founder, Broth Bish

**Neetu Solanki**

Chef & Consultant

**Chef Nikesh Asem**

Chef & Owner, Hentak, Cjakhum & Taste Of Manipur

**Nikita Dudani**

Food blogger, All Plate Dishes

**Nikki Gupta**

Brand strategist & Business consultant

**Nina Doshi**

Home chef

**Nishant Kashikar**

Country Manager - India & Gulf, Tourism Australia

**Nolan Michael Mascarenhas**

Culinary alchemist, Juror & Curator

**Odette Mascarenhas**

Food curator, Times Food Critic, Culinary chronicler & Author, The Culinary Odyssey Of Goa

**Pawan Agarwal**

Former CEO, FSSAI & Founder, Food Future Foundation

**Payel Sen**

Senior Producer, CNBC-TV18

**Pinky Chandan Dixit**

Founder, SOAM & Aamchee

**Pooja Khanna**

Sellout Head - Modern Trade, Crompton

**Poornima Somayaji**

Founder, Restaurant Aragma

**Dr. Poorvi Bhat Khandige**

Clinical nutritionist, Naturopathic physician & Wellness educator

**Prashant Issar**

Founder, Ishaara & Director, Bellona Hospitality Services

**Pratiti Basu Chanard**

Founder, WhatsUpGoa

**Preeti Deo**

Author, Paat Paani

**Prerna Kumar**

Founder, ChaiVeda

**Priya Ganapathy**

Travel & Food writer, Culinary consultant

**Chef Raashika Kulshrestha**

Chef, Consultant & Entrepreneur, RAASA

**Chef Rahul Wali**

Culinary consultant, R.W. Hospitality Services

**Rajan Sethi**

Managing Director, Bright Hospitality Pvt Ltd

**Rajnuash Agarwal**

Owner, Mharo Khet

**Rakesh Raghunathan**

Food historian & Judge, MasterChef India (Tamil)

**Chef Rakhee Vaswani**

Chef & Founder, Palate Culinary Studio

**Rakshay Dhariwal**

Owner, Pass Code Hospitality, Maya Pistola Agavepura, India Cocktail Week

**B Ramakrishnan**

Founder, OPOS Visionaries Pvt Ltd

**Chef Ranveer Brar**

Restaurateur & Celebrity chef

**Dr Ratna Raje Thar**

Nutrition expert

**Ravi Miglani**

Professor, Home chef & Food blogger, This Professor Cooks

**Chef Regi Mathew**

Chef, Partner & Co-founder, Kappa Chakka Kandhari Foods Pvt Ltd

**Rocky Singh**

Brand Ambassador, Swiggy

**Romil Ratra**

Hotelier, Restaurateur, ED & CEO, Graviss Hospitality

**Roopa Nabar**

YouTube presenter & Author, My Romance With Food: Varan Bhaat to Biryani

**Roxanne Bamboat**

Food and travel writer & Content creator

**Ruchi Shrivastava**

Owner, Greed Goddess Media

**Rukshana A Kapadia**

Content creator, Food writer & Co-founder, Ammolite Ideators

**Ruma Singh**

Wine & Spirits journalist and educator

**Rupa Balachandar**

TV host & Food writer

**Ryan Fernando**

Elite performance & Celebrity nutritionist

**Sadiq Gaziyani**

Coffee roaster, Drum Coffee Roasters

**Saloni Kukreja**

Chef, Entrepreneur & Content creator

**Samreen Tungekar**

Journalist, Managing editor, Travel + Leisure India & South Asia

**Sanjay Anand**

Director, Food & Beverage Business Review, Hammer Publications

**Chef Sanjna Sridhar**

Chief Culinary Officer, Cookd

**Sankalp Vishnu**

Food critic & Culinary architect

**Sara Premkumar**

Owner, MahaRas

**Sarah Meikle**

Director, All India Permit Tours

**Saraswat Saha**

Former Strategic Marketing Manager, EID Parry

**Chef Sarfaraz Ahmed**

Corporate chef, Tresind, Avatara & Carnival by Tresind

**Sargam Thakkar**

Founder, FlourPower Bakes & Confections, Fluiditea Kombucha

**Sayantani**

Food writer and blogger

**Shantanu Raj**

Head of Marketing, Godrej Jersey

**Sharavana Raghavan**

Founder & Principal Consultant, Vitral Brand Expertise

**Sharmila Ribeiro**

Functional nutritionist & Author, Everyday Love - A Mother's Guide to Healthy Cooking For Kids

**Sharmila Vaidyanathan**

Independent food researcher and writer

**Chef Shaun Kenworthy**

Chef, Consultant & Concept strategist

**Chef Shazia Khan**

Owner, The Studio Cafe & Cooking Studio, Samara Homestay & Cafe

**Shilpa Sharma**

Curator of regional cuisine experiences & Co-founder, Mustard

**Shital Kakad**

Recipe developer, Home chef, Food studio owner

**Shivanie Mirchandani**

Co-founder, Minus 30

**Shonali Sabherwal**

Nutritionist - Lifestyle diseases

**Shruti Gupta**

Hotelier & Restaurateur, Monsoon

**Shruti Taneja**

Founder, Nivaala

**Dr Shubhada Kanani**

Public health and nutrition expert

**Shubhra Shankwalker**

Home chef and Specialist of Gaud Saraswat Brahmin cuisine

**Siddhaarth (Sid) Jalan**

Partner, Bebida Hospitality

**Siddharth Ramasubramanian**

Founder & CEO, Vegolution, Hello Tempayy

**Smita Verma**

Chef & Co-Founder, The Bihari Studio

**Smitha Menon**

Independent food & travel journalist

**Sneha Dutta**

Founder-Director, Merge Media

**Sohel Sarkar**

Freelance journalist and writer

**Sonal Naik Nimbalkar Mahurkar**

Culinary consultant and specialist of Royal Maratha cuisine

**Soumitra Velkar**

Owner, Hungry Cat Kitchen

**Sri Vamsi Matta**

Interdisciplinary Theatre Artist

**CA Sujata Shukla Rajan**

Food blogger & Author, Bhog Naivedya

**Supriya Arun**

Nutritionist & Author, Traditional Recipes For Pregnancy & Motherhood

**Sushil Dwarkanath**

Co-founder, Director and Head of Academics, Slurp Culinary Academy

**Sweta Biswal**

Food researcher & Author, Beyond Dalma: A Holistic Foray Into Odia Food

**Tanisha Laura Phanbuh**

Founder, Tribal Gourmet

**Tarannum Manjul**

Food blogger and journalist

**Tarannum Sehgal**

Founder & Executive chef, Espressos Anyday Cafe

**Tripti Bhatia Gandhi**

Founder & CEO, Detales Brand Communications

**Urvi Khanna**

Research & Development Head, QD, Cafeteria & Co, Ricos

**Uttam Muthappa**

Chef, Curly Sue Pork

**Vaibhav Bahl**

Co-Founder & CEO, Conosh

**Varun Bajaj**

Hotelier and owner, Amrit Bhawan & Director, Ekart

**Chef Varun Inamdar**

Celebrity chef; Winner of two National awards

**Vijeta Singh**

Restaurateur

**Chef Vikas Khanna**

Restaurateur, Celebrity chef & Film-maker

**Chef Vikas Seth**

Chef & Culinary Director, Embassy Leisure

**Chef Vicky Ratnani**

Celebrity chef & Founder, Speak Burgers

**Yash Bhanage**

Founder & COO, Hunger Inc Hospitality

**Yogita Uchil**

Food evangelist

**Chef Zarin Mirza**

Chef, Instructor & Freelance consultant

**Zeba Kohli**

Chocolate sommelier, Educator, TV Host & Author, Chocolate



# Food Calendar 2026

▲ Commemoration days | \* Cultural days | ♥ Festivals | ■ Indian food observance days | ◆ International food days

## January

- 13 ♥ Lohri (North India)
- 14 ♥ Pongal (South India)  
♥ Uttarayan (West India)  
♥ Makar Sankranti (North India)  
♥ Undhiyu Day (India)
- 15 ♥ Magh Bihu (East India)
- 18 ♥ Popcorn Day (USA)
- 23 ♥ Basant Panchmi (India)  
♥ Saraswati Puja (India)

## February

- 05 ◆ World Nutella Day (USA)
- 09 ◆ World Pizza Day (Global)
- 10 ■ Dal Divas, World Pulses Day (India)
- 14 \* Valentines Day (Global)
- 17 ♥ Chinese New Year (China)  
◆ Pancake Day (USA)
- 27 ◆ World Protein Day (USA/Global)

## March

- 03 ■ World Dosa Day (India)
- 04 ♥ Holi (India)
- 19 ♥ Navratri, Chaitra Ugadi, Gudi Padwa, Cheti Chand (India)  
♥ Eid Al-Fitr (Global)
- 20 ♥ Nowruz (Parsis, India)  
Pakhala Dibasa (Odisha)
- 26 ♥ Rama Navami (India)
- 27 ◆ International Cheese Day (Europe)
- 30 ■ World Idli Day (India)
- 31 ■ Sabzi Tarkari Din (India)

## April

- 05 ♥ Easter Sunday (Global)
- 15 ♥ Vishu (Kerala), Putthandu Tamil New Year (Global)
- 22 ■ Achaar Day (India)
- 30 ◆ National Bubble Tea Day (USA)

## May

- 05 ■ Papad Badi Day (India)
- 15 ■ Masala Day (India)
- 22 ■ Hamburger Day (USA)

## June

- 05 \* World Environment Day (Global)
- 07 ■ Vishwa Poha Divas (India)
- 12 ■ International Falafel Day (Global)
- 14 ■ World Gin Day (Global)
- 18 ◆ International Sushi Day (Global)  
Sustainable Gastronomy Day (Global)
- 19 ♥ Dumpling Festival, Dragon Boat Festival (China)
- 24 ■ Pulao Biryani Day (India)

## July

- 06 ■ World Biryani Day (India/Global)
- 07 ■ World Chocolate Day (Global)
- 10 ▲ National Fish Farmers' Day (India)
- 11 ■ French Fries Day (USA/Global)  
World Kebab Day (Global)
- 20 ■ Icecream Day (USA/Global)
- 22 ■ National Mango Day (India)
- 26 ■ World Tofu Day (Global)
- 30 ♥ Chai Pakoda Day (India)

## September

- 02 ◆ World Coconut Day (Global)
- 04 ♥ Janmashtami (India)
- 05 ◆ World Samosa Day (India/ Global)
- 24 ■ Chutney Day (India)

## November

- 01 \* World Vegan Day (Global)
- 03 ◆ World Sandwich Day (Global)
- 08 ■ Diwali, Deepavali (India)
- 14 ▲ World Diabetes Day (Global)
- 16 ♥ National Chicken Day (India)
- 18 ◆ Akshaya Navami, Amla Navami, Amalaka Ekadashi (India)
- 22 ♥ World Kimchi Day (Global)
- 26 ▲ National Milk Day (India)

## August

- 01 ■ International Beer Day (Global)
- 15 ♥ Navroz Parsi New Year (Global)
- 23 ♥ World Vada Pav Day (India/ Global)
- 25 ■ Instant Ramen Day(Global)  
♥ Nuakhai Harvest Festival (Odisha)
- 26 ♥ Tomatina Festival (Spain)
- 30 ♥ Narali Purnima (India)

## October

- 01 ◆ International Coffee Day (Global)  
World Vegetarian Day (Global)
- 10 ◆ World Egg Day(Global)  
World Gulab Jamun Day (India/Global)
- 15 ■ Laddu Day (India)
- 18 ♥ Ayurveda Day (India, Global)
- 20 ▲ International Chefs Day (Global)  
World Butter Chicken Day (Global)
- 21 ♥ Durga Pujo (India)
- 25 ◆ World Pasta Day (Global)

## December

- 09 ■ Indian Breads Day (India)
- 23 ▲ Kisan Diwas, National Farmers' Day (India)
- 25 ♥ Christmas (Global)

# Curator & Editor-in-Chief



**Rushina-Munshaw Ghildiyal**  
Managing Director, A Perfect Bite Consulting

In addition to curating, designing, managing and editing the report, Rushina contributed two essays in this edition - **The Menu as Memoir: Tracing India's Culinary Identity Through the Bill of Fare** in the **Dining Out** section, and **Chronicles in a Cup: The Evolution of Chai-Nashta** in the **Beverages** section.

## Editors



**Chandra Shekhar Ghildiyal**  
Creative Director, A Perfect Bite Consulting

Shekhar oversaw the planning, design, management, collection, analysis and reporting of the final survey trends.



**Shivani Unakar**  
Independent Food Researcher and Writer

Shivani oversaw the editorial planning, management and review of all the essays in the report. She also authored the the essay **Tales of Savour and Flavour: Exploring Culinary Storytelling** in the **Food Media and Studies** section.

## Associate Editors



**Shreshtha Chhabra**  
Independent Food Researcher and Writer

Shreshtha provided research and creative support to the editorial team. She also authored the essay **GI Tagging: Documenting India's Food Diversity** in the **Regional Perspectives** section.



**Soumya Arjun**  
Independent Food Researcher

Soumya provided research, planning, logistics, communication and editorial support for the survey.

# Editorial Contributors



**Cindrella Asher**  
Director -Travel & Hospitality, PR Pundit Havas Red

Cindrella contributed the essay titled **The Geography of Flavour: Travel As An Edible Narrative** in the **Food and Travel** section.



**Sharmila Vaidyanathan**  
Independent food researcher & writer

Sharmila contributed the essay titled **Indian Wellness Comes Full Circle** in the **Health, Hygiene and Lifestyle** section.



**Vikram Achanta**  
Co-founder & CEO, Tulleeho, BarX

Vikram authored **The Global Impact of Indian AlcoBev** in the **Global Perspectives** section.



**Dr. Poorvi Bhat**  
Naturopathic Physician & Nutritionist

Dr. Poorvi contributed the essay titled **The Sugar Quotient: Recalibrating India's Relationship With Sweetness** in the **Sweets and Desserts** section.



**Sohel Sarkar**  
Independent writer, editor & communications consultant

Sohel contributed the essay titled **From The Chulha To The Instant Pot: The Changing Story Of India's Kitchens** in the **Dining In** section.



**Zoya Naaz Rehman**  
Student & aspiring food scholar

She contributed the essay titled **Proteinification By Design: Tracking the Modern Paradox of Protein** in the **Emerging Conversations** section.



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Notes

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Creative Visualisation Only

*Godrej*



**Survey design**  
*Rushina Munshaw-Ghildiyal*



**Research and data analysis**  
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