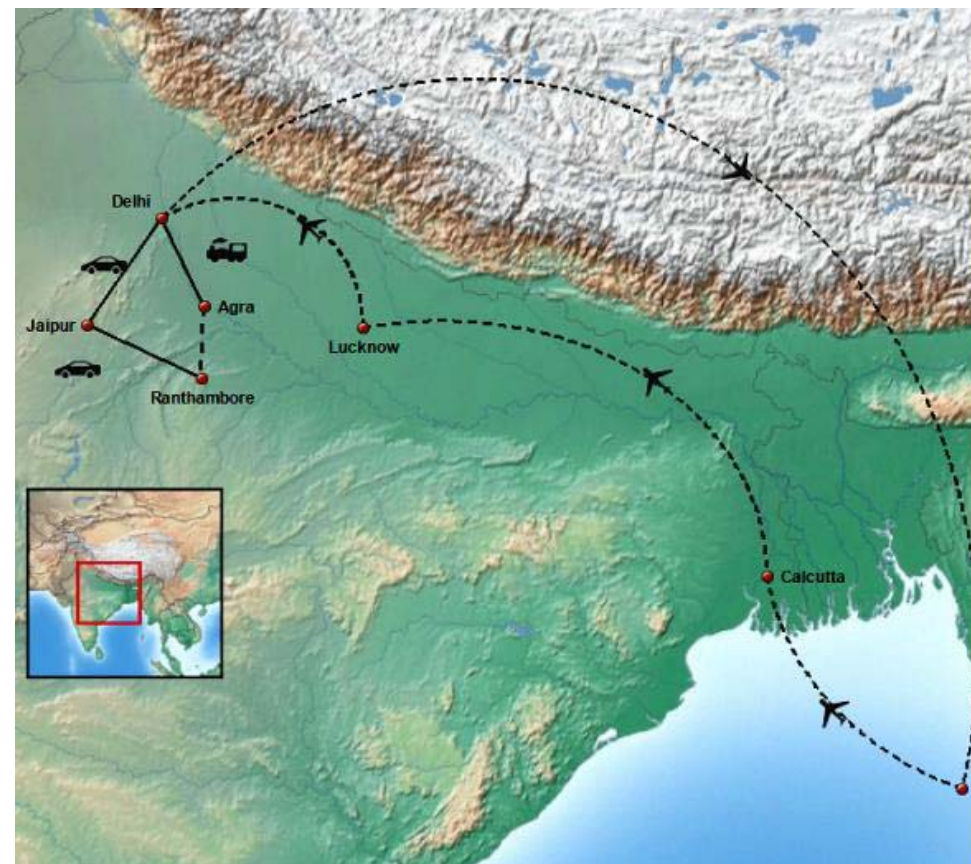




This tour is a gastronomic discovery of India and much more. Learn about the aromatic spices, travel like a local and try (safe) street food as you walk through the bustling bazaar. Savor local cuisine, pin down authentic Indian recipes and get a wonderful introduction to the culture, traditions and historic sites as you travel with us.

Come and experience India with your senses – taste the amazing food from the different places, see the amazing sites both natural and man-made, hear the musical traffic, smell the highs and lows while feeling like you are learning something new. Above all come and enjoy the journey.

Kolkata – Lucknow – Delhi – Agra – Jaipur – Ranthambore – Delhi
11 days / 10 nights



Day 01 - Kolkata

On arriving at the Kolkata Airport, you will be welcomed by our representative and taken to your hotel.

Kolkata (Calcutta) is a city of glaring contrasts - a curious blend of the old and new. A mere village in the 17th century, Kolkata largely originated due to the expansionist ambitions of European powers, especially the British Raj, during which period Kolkata was for some time the capital of India. Kolkata is a unique hub of culture and heritage and is referred to as the intellectual capital of the country, as well as the 'City of Processions' and the 'City of Joy'.

Superior Room - The Lalit Great Eastern or Similar None

Day 02 - Kolkata

After an early breakfast, visit the famous Kolkata flower market under the iconic Howrah Bridge, where you will see a large range of fresh flowers. We then descend to the river banks to for a panoramic view of the heritage Howrah Bridge, the longest bridge in Asia.

Bengal (the state) is a foodie's paradise, and especially Kolkata (its capital), where various adventurers have left their astronomical imprints. A walk-through the market will familiarize you with the ingredients that go into the making of some authentic Bengali food. After picking fresh ingredients, you will learn about traditional Bengali recipes either from a family cook or the owners of one of the finest restaurants of the city. Enjoy authentic Bengali sweets after the meal.

Please mention to the cook if you have any allergies. All the food is bought fresh and cooked in front of you.

After lunch enjoy an orientation tour of the city, including a visit to the Victoria Memorial, Kolkata's imposing white marble dream inaugurated by the Prince of Wales in 1921, and St. Paul's Cathedral. We drive past Fort William, Eden Gardens, Dalhousie Square, Writer's Building, St John's Church and the Governor's Residence.

End the tour at the Indian Coffee House - a favourite hang-out place among the students and youth, although one can see several old-timers frequenting the coffee house on a regular basis. The place became a meeting place for poets, artists, and people with genuine interests in art and culture. In the evening, dinner is organized at Aaheli, for an authentic Bengali cuisine. Bengalis are renowned for their love of good food, especially fish, meat and chicken.

They have developed a menu, which comprises the cuisine from the two parts of Bengal - The East and The West. The Bengali cuisine should be

enjoyed course by course in generous portions. Aaheli strikes a fine balance of spices from the old cuisine of "Thakurbari" to the present day. Try their Mochor chop, Nawabi Mangsho Pulao and Bhetki paturi (where Indian Salmon is marinated with Indian spices and mustard then wrapped and steamed in banana leaf)

Overnight: Superior Room - The Lalit Great Eastern or Similar

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 03 – Kolkata to Lucknow

After a buffet breakfast, our representative will transfer you to the Kolkata domestic airport to board the flight to Lucknow.

Indigo Airlines, 6E339 Kolkata-Lucknow 09:30-12:15hrs Economy Class

Upon arrival you in Lucknow, you will be met by our representative who will take you to the hotel.

The historic culture of Lucknow is still very much alive and the city retains its old world charm. Popularly known as the 'City of Nawabs', Lucknow is famous for its traditional cuisine and fine arts. The city was greatly influenced by the Mughals and the Mughal touch can be found in many aspects of its culture. Be it the cuisine, the delightful music and dance forms, or the conversation and language, everything has a touch of royal splendour that once flourished in Lucknow.

Enjoy a light lunch at the hotel.

After lunch, visit the grave of Walter Burley Griffin, the American architect who designed Canberra, Australia's capital city. Griffin spent the last 15 months of his life in India where he designed the zenana (the quarters for elite Muslim women) for the palace of the Raja Jahangirabad. He also formed a strong personal bond with the young Raja of Mahmudabad (who shared Griffin's interest in the preservation of habitat and wildlife) designing for him a library to hold a rare collection of books and manuscripts.



Enjoy a heritage walk through Old Lucknow with a guide. Discover Old Lucknow - set out from the Gol Darwaaza and walk along the lanes of the Chowk, Lucknow's oldest market place, exploring the history of the buildings and hearing anecdotes about them. Our tour ends at the Akbari Gate.



Enjoy a heritage walk through Old Lucknow with a guide. Discover Old Lucknow - set out from the Gol Darwaaza and walk along the lanes of the Chowk, Lucknow's oldest market place, exploring the history of the buildings and hearing anecdotes about them. Our tour ends at the Akbari Gate. Dinner will be a lavish spread where you will learn about authentic Awadhi Cuisine, especially the preparation with exotic spices and garnishing with dry fruits. This cuisine was introduced to India by the deputies of the Mughal Emperor, namely, the Nawabs of Awadh, who were originally inhabitants of Persia (modern day Iran). They enjoyed a particular diet of grains, fruits, dry fruits and vegetables that were available in their country. So the Mughlai style of cooking was further refined in Lucknow by the Nawabs by adding exotic flavours of saffron and dry fruits.

We will visit Coquina - an artisanal kitchen that offers a combination of traditional and modern cooking by knowledgeable individuals, who are cooks by passion and not by profession. You will learn about this Passion Cuisine, cook for yourselves under supervision and then enjoy the meal.

For 10 or more, dinner is planned at Lucknow's **Khajurgaon Palace**. Khajurgaon is owned by the former royal family of Raja Amresh Kumar Singh. The palace is one of the few remaining Lucknow vintage properties from the British era that is still well preserved and known for its quintessential Awadhi architecture. The huge *durbar* hall with beautiful paintings and murals in natural colours and its Belgian chandeliers create a beautiful backdrop to the evening. The dinner, which is hosted by the family, is traditional Lakhnavi from the word go, together with a narration of Lucknow's royal history by one of the family members. Enjoy cocktails, followed by a home cooked Awadhi meal, that brings alive the city's famed culinary traditions. **Overnight: Superior Room – Golden Tulip or similar**
Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner



Day 04– Lucknow to Delhi

After breakfast at the hotel, enjoy a guided city tour of Lucknow. Driving past the Tombs of Sadat Ali and the Begum, reach the architecturally special Asafi Imambara, the world's biggest hall that is without any pillar support, wood, iron beams or concrete walls. Also see the Asfi Mosque, the Rumi Darwaza and the Turkish Gate. Enjoy a Tonga ride (horse driven carriages) to the Husainabad Imambara ending at a Lucknow residency where British residents lived and see the picture gallery exhibiting excellent full-sized portraits of the Nawabs of Audh.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant - The Royal Café, and try the fusion cuisine once served to American and British soldiers during World War II. Later, our representative will transfer you to Lucknow railway station to board the train for Delhi. Lucknow Shatabdi Exp Lucknow-Delhi 15:35-22:05hrs Air conditioned chair car

Dinner will be served onboard the train. Upon arrival in Delhi railway station you will be met by our representative who will take you to the hotel.

Overnight: Standard Room – The Residence or similar

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 05 – Delhi

After breakfast, take a guided day tour of Delhi. 7

Explore the fascinating and living legacy of the Indo-Islamic culture and lifestyle of Old Delhi with your guide. Wander through the narrow and busy streets of the mile-long market Chandni Chowk, popularly known as Silver Street with its shops and bazaars.

Visit Jama Masjid with its tapering minarets and wonderful marble domes; this is the largest mosque in Old Delhi and can accommodate 20,000 people. Take the opportunity to experience a rickshaw ride at the markets.

Old Delhi Bazaars have colourful and interesting street food. They have the oldest shops that still sell many original delicacies. Savor a few of the local delicacies before visiting a private home (Masterji Kee Haveli) in Old Delhi for a cooking demonstration and tasting of traditional home-style Indian vegetarian cooking.

In the afternoon visit Humayun's Tomb, this was built in the 16th century and is considered the architectural forerunner of Agra's Taj Mahal. Drive past the President Palace, India Gate and see largest community kitchen at the Sikh temple.

Dinner is planned at the Indian Accent - The Manor awarded as the best restaurant for the 21st century. Savour the contemporary menu created by Chef Manish Mehrotra. He is innovative and creates a unique amalgamation using the freshest local produce. Mehrotra combines home style nostalgic tastes with unusual ingredients from across the world.

Overnight: Standard Room – Justa The Residence or similar

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 06 – Delhi to Agra

After breakfast, travel to Agra - a place where various rulers contributed to the rich heritage. In terms of ambiance the Mughal period left the greatest influence. The Mughals, besides being great rulers, were also great builders who reserved their best architectural wonders for Agra.

Lunch is South Indian cuisine at Dasaprakash.

In the afternoon, visit Agra Fort which is strategically situated along a bend on the Yamuna River. Built in the 16th century AD by three generations of Mughal emperors, it is a superb synthesis of stern military fortifications with delicate interior details.



Experience the beauty of the Taj Mahal at sunset (closed on Fridays).

The Taj Mahal is a tribute from a great emperor to the memory of his beloved wife. It was 22 years in the making (1631-1653). Widely regarded as the earthly replica of paradise, the Taj Mahal is likened to “a vision, a dream, a poem and a wonder.”

In the evening, you will be taken to Peshwari restaurant for dinner. Peshawri brings to Agra an award winning menu of delicacies cooked in the clay tandoor that is reminiscent of the rustic charm of dining in the warm tents under a starry sky in the cold desert terrain of the North West Frontier. Experience a lavish spread of delicious kebabs – vegetarian and non-vegetarian foods that are cooked in many different ways.

Enjoy a range of Indian breads, from the decadently indulgent to light and the fluffy breads and of course, the inimitable Dal Bukhara. All of which can be paired with an exclusive collection of wines and other beverages (on direct payment).

Overnight: Superior Room

Radisson or similar

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner



Day 07 – Agra to Ranthambore

After breakfast, drive to the heritage site of Fatehpur Sikri. The architecture of Fatehpur Sikri is a combination of Hindu and Muslim styles, expressing Akbar's vision of synthesizing the two cultures.

Lunch is at The Bagh.

After lunch transfer to Bharatpur railway station to connect with your train to Ranthambore .

Kota Jan Shatabdi Express, Bharatpur – Sawai Madhopur 15:50 - 18:02hrs Air conditioned chair car.

Upon arrival you will be met and taken to your hotel

Overnight: Deluxe Room – Ranthambore Kothi or similar

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner



Day 08 – Ranthambore

Enjoy morning and evening safaris in Ranthambore National Park. Originally a hunting ground of the Maharaja of Jaipur, Ranthambore National park is located at the junction of the Aravalli and Vindhya hill ranges. It was declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1957 and the habitat consists predominantly dry deciduous forest. It is home to animals like the jackal, mongoose, sloth, bear, leopard, and of course, the tiger.

Overnight: Deluxe Room – Ranthambore Kothi or similar Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 09 – Ranthambore to Jaipur Early in the morning, enjoy one more safari to track tigers and other wild animals in the National Park.

After breakfast, travel to Jaipur (3 hrs) in an air-conditioned vehicle and check in to your hotel. Enjoy lunch at the charming and intimate Samode Haveli hidden deep in the folds of the busy streets of old Jaipur. The exquisite former dining hall that serves as a restaurant is bedecked with colourful hand-painted murals. Their traditional Rajasthani cuisine especially the Rogan josh and lal maas (Rajasthani lamb) is a must try for foodies!

Later in the afternoon, take a city sightseeing tour of Jaipur visiting the City Palace and Observatory (Jantar Mantar). Jaipur is the capital of Rajasthan and its centerpiece is the City Palace, home even today of the royal family, and known for its clutch of excellent private museums that display royal memorabilia, particularly armaments, art, books, costumes and textiles. Lying adjacent to the City Palace is the medieval Jantar Mantar Observatory – built by Maharaja Jai Singh II, an inveterate astronomer who's curiously shaped and oversized implements are astonishingly accurate to this day.

In the evening, walk, mingle and talk with the locals whilst sampling some of the regions culinary delights: try pakoras, aloo tiki, samosa and sweets from some of the city's most popular street food vendors. Also visit Niro's - a gourmet's delight and a hot favorite with celebrities for over six decades. Niro's is the perfect rendezvous for the best meal in town. Their epicurean cuisine includes a mouth-watering range of the finest Tandoori and Mughlai food, as well as desserts and snacks.

Overnight: Deluxe Room – Alsisar Haveli or similar

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner





Day 10 – Jaipur

After breakfast, travel to the ancient capital of Amber to see the fabulous Amber Fort.

Originally built in the 11th century AD and expanded in size and scope by succeeding dynasties and their rulers, Amber is a fortress town of visual awesomeness. Ride up to its imposing hilltop location on elephant back (if available) and explore the maze of passages, corridors, pavilions, ornamental gardens and ramparts. On the way back, you may like to stop at Anokhi Museum, where you will see a collection of old costumes with hand blocked prints that are typical to Rajasthan (*closed on Wednesdays*).

Lunch is at Anokhi Café – a cafe that offers healthy and tasty fresh food with an international flavour. Food here is made from fresh seasonal organic produce grown locally at Anokhi farm. In the afternoon, relax and unwind by the pool or shop in the bazaars of the pink city (Jaipur).

The evening is reserved for a special cooking demo/dinner with Thakur Durga Singh, the current custodian of Dera Mandawa who is a keen observer of history, culture, religion, and current affairs. Try hands on cooking experience with the lady of the house. Learn to make Indian breads, Rajasthani barbeques and eggplant or potato dishes. The inquisitive tour members can have endless conversations with Thakur Durga Singh on a number of his pet projects like rain-water harvesting, biogas plants, solar heating and, even, healthy cooking. He would be more than delighted to share his experiences with you.

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner



Day 11 – Jaipur to Delhi

After a leisurely breakfast, drive back to Delhi and transfer to the international airport for your flight to your next destination. (Depending on flight details, we could offer an additional night or day use room in Delhi).

TOUR PRICES:

(Based on Twin Share / AUD / per person)

From \$4,200 twin share to April 2015

Single Supplement from \$1,100

Please contact us, if you wish to make a group booking of 10 or more people at one time.

We can also arrange international airfares, stop-overs, travel insurance and extension tours.

PRICE INCLUSIONS:

Accommodation on twin-share or single occupancy basis for 10 nights in the mentioned hotels/similar

Meals: Buffet breakfast, lunch and dinner as mentioned in itinerary

Transportation by an air conditioned vehicles

Accompanying English speaking local guide throughout the itinerary

Portage at airports and railway stations

Entrances for monuments (single entry) as per itinerary

Half day tour of Kolkata including bazaar walk

Half day tour of Lucknow including heritage walk

Full day tour of Old and New Delhi

Rickshaw Ride in Old Delhi

Half day tour of Agra including Agra Fort and Taj Mahal by sunset

Enroute tour of Fatehpur Sikri from Agra - Bharatpur

3 games drives in Ranthambore in shared jeep

2 Half day tour in Jaipur including City Palace, Observatory, Albert Hall and Amber fort on Elephant back

Special Experiences –

- 1.Kolkata Bazaar Walk
- 2.Lucknow Heritage Walk
- 3.Old Delhi Spice Market Walk
- 4.Guided Bazaar Walk in Jaipur
- 5.Visit to textile museum

Cooking demonstrations

- 1.Kolkata
- 2.Lucknow
- 3.Delhi
- 4.Jaipur

Train ticket Lucknow – Delhi; Bharatpur–Ranthambore by an air conditioned chair car.

Tips, Gratuities, Still Camera fees, Bottled water; portage at airports, hotels and railway stations.

All currently applicable taxes

PRICE EXCLUSIONS:

Any pre/post dinner drinks or drinks of any nature along with the meals unless specified

Any vehicle arrangements on free days or days at leisure.

Video camera fee at monuments

Items of personal nature like drinks, laundry, telephone calls etc

Any other meals than those mentioned in the itinerary

Liability for change in itinerary due to reasons beyond our control like change in flight and train schedule; cancellation of flights, political disturbances, natural phenomenon, etc

Any other item not specifically mentioned above as 'INCLUDED'

GENERAL CONDITIONS:

Check-in time is 1400hrs and check-out time is 1100hrs / 1200hrs

India: Cuisine

The finest of India's cuisines is as rich and diverse as its civilization. It is an art form that has been passed on through generations purely by word of mouth, from guru teacher) to vidhyarthi (pupil) or from mother to daughter. The range assumes astonishing proportions when one takes into account regional variations. Very often the taste, colour, texture and appearance of the same delicacy changes from state to state.

The hospitality of the Indians is legendary. In Sanskrit Literature the three famous words 'Atithi Devo Bhava' or 'the guest is truly your god' are a dictum of hospitality in India. Indians believe that they are honoured if they share their mealtimes with guests. Even the poorest look forward to guests and are willing to share this meager food with guest. And of particular importance is the Indian woman's pride that she will not let a guest go away unfed or unhappy from her home. Indians are known for their incredible ability to serve food to their guests invited or uninvited.

Food customarily forms the crowning part of most festivities and celebrations. Whatever the occasion Indians eat with great gusto and are adept at finding reasons to feast and make merry. At traditional and festive meals, the thali (plate) or banana leaf is decorated with rangoli (a design drawn with white and coloured powders around the edges).

Cuisines of India:

The unforgettable aroma of India is not just the heavy scent of jasmine and roses on the warm air. It is also the fragrance of spices so important to Indian cooking - especially to preparing curry. The word "curry" is an English derivative of "kari", meaning soice sauce, but curry does not, in India, come as a powder. It is the subtle and delicate blending of spices such as turmeric, cardamom, ginger, coriander, nutmeg and poppy seed. Like an artist's palette of oil paints, the Indian cook has some twenty-five spices (freshly ground as required) with which to mix the recognized combinations or "masalas". Many of these spices are also noted for their medicinal properties. They, like the basic ingredient, vary from region to region. Although not all Hindus are vegetarians, you will probably eat more vegetable dishes than is common in Europe, particularly in South India. Indian vegetables are cheap, varied and plentiful and superbly cooked.

Broadly speaking, meat dishes are more common in the north, notably Rogan Josh (curried lamb), Gushtaba (spicy meat balls in yoghurt), and the delicious Biriyani (chicken or lamb in orange flavoured rice, sprinkled with sugar and rose water). Mughlai cuisine is

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rich, creamy, deliciously spiced and liberally sprinkled with nuts and saffron. The ever popular Tandoori cooking (chicken, meat or fish marinated in herbs and baked in a clay oven) and kebabs are also northern cuisine.

One regional distinction is that whereas in the south rice is the staple food, in the north this is supplemented and sometimes substituted by a wide range of flat breads, such as Pooris, Chappatis and Nan. Common throughout India is Dhal (crushed lentil soup with various additional vegetables), and Dhali, the curd or yoghurt which accompanies the curry. Besides being tasty, it is a good "cooler"; more effective than liquids when things get too hot. Sweets are principally milk based puddings, pastries and pancakes. Available throughout India is Kulfi, the Indian ice cream, Rasgullas (cream cheese balls flavoured with rose water), Gulab Jamuns (flour, yoghurt and ground almonds), and Jalebi (pancakes in syrup). Besides a splendid choice of sweets and sweetmeats, there is an abundance of fruit, both tropical – mangoes, pomegranates and melons – and temperate apricots, apples and strawberries. Western confectionery is available in major centres. It is common to finish the meal by chewing Pan as a digestive. Pan is a betel leaf in which are wrapped spices such as aniseed and cardamon.

Bengali

The traditional society of Bengal has always been heavily agrarian; hunting, except by some local tribals, was uncommon. The rearing of animals was also not popular. This is reflected in the cuisine, which relies on staples like rice and dal, with little place for game or meat. Fish is the dominant kind of meat, cultivated in ponds and fished with nets in the fresh-water rivers of the Ganges delta. More than forty types of mostly freshwater fish are common, including carp varieties like rui (rohu), katla, magur (catfish), chingri (prawn or shrimp), as well as shuftki (dried sea fish). Salt water fish (not sea fish though) Ilish (hilsa ilisha) is very popular among Bengalis, can be called an icon of Bengali cuisine. Almost every part of the fish (except fins and innards) is eaten; the head and other parts are usually used to flavour curries. Khashi (referred to as mutton in Indian English, the meat of sterilized goats) is the most popular red meat. Other characteristic ingredients of traditional Bengali food include rice, moshur dal (red lentils), mug dal (mung beans), shorsher tel mustard oil, mustard paste, posto (poppy seed) and narkel (ripe coconut). Bengal is also the land of am (mangoes), which are used extensively—ripe, unripe, or in pickles. Ilish machh (hilsa fish), which migrates upstream to breed is a delicacy; the varied salt content at different stages of the journey is of particular interest to the connoisseur, as is the river from

which the fish comes.

Sweets occupy an important place in the diet of Bengalis and at their social ceremonies. It is an ancient custom among Hindus to distribute sweets during festivities. The sweets of Bengal are generally made of sweetened cottage cheese (chhena), khoa (reduced solidified milk), or flours of different cereals and pulses.

Awadhi

The Lucknow Dastarkhwan would not be complete unless it had the following dishes: Korma (braised meat in thick gravy), Salan (a gravy dish of meat or vegetable), Keema (minced meat), Kababs (pounded meat fried or roasted over a charcoal fire), Bhujia (cooked vegetables), Dal, Pasanda (fried slivers of very tender meat, usually kid, in gravy). Rice is cooked with meat in the form of a Pulao (fried rice) or served plain. Lucknow is known for its large varieties of Pulaos, Yakhni Pulao and Korma Pulao are the popular ones. There would also be a variety of breads: Rotis, Naans, Sheermals, Rumali Roti, Paranthas, Kulchas and Taftans. Desserts comprise Gullati (rice pudding), Kheer (milk sweetened and boiled with whole rice to thick consistency), Sheer Brunj, (a rich, sweet rice dish boiled in milk), Muzaffar (vermicelli fried in ghee and garnished with almonds and saffron) and Halwas garnished with Malai (cream). The varieties of dishes would increase with one's status.

Utensils are made either of silver or copper. Kababs are cooked in a Mahi Tava (large, round shallow pan), using a Kafgir which is a flat, long handled ladle for turning Kababs and Paranthas. Bone China plates and dishes were also used in Lucknow since the times of the Nawabs. Water was normally sipped from copper or silver tumblers and not glasses. The seating arrangement, while eating, was always on the floor where beautifully embroidered Dastarkhwans were spread on mats or carpets or even Chandnis (white linen). Sometimes this arrangement was made on low-raised wooden tables called Takahts.

Punjabi

Punjabi people are robust people with robust appetites and their food is like the Punjabis themselves, simple, sizeable and hearty with no unnecessary frills or exotic accompaniments. The Punjabi tandoori cooking is celebrated as one of the most popular cuisines throughout the world. Huge earthen ovens are half buried in the ground and heated with a coal fire lit below it. Marinated meat, chicken, fish, paneer, rotis and naans of many types are cooked in this novel oven and the results are absolutely scrumptious!

Punjab has imbibed some aspects of its cuisine from external influences. Connoisseurs of the cuisine say that the gravy component of Punjabi cuisine came from the Mughals. The most popular example

is the murg makhani. It served the state well to combine this influence in its cooking since it had a lot of pure ghee and butter. Murg makhani also provided a balance to tandoori chicken, which was dry because it was charcoal cooked. Nans and parathas, rotis made of maize flour are typical Punjabi breads. Of course, over the years the roti has been modified to add more variety, so there is the rumali roti, the naan and the laccha parathas, all cooked in the tandoor.

Winter, in Punjab, brings in the season of the famous makki ki roti (maize flour bread) and sarson ka saag (mustard leaf gravy). No meal is complete without a serving of lassi (sweet or salted drink made with curd) or fresh curd and white butter which is consumed in large quantities. The other popular dishes, which belong exclusively to Punjab, are ma ki dal, rajma (kidney beans) and stuffed parathas.

Mughlai

Having reigned over India for so long, the Moghuls left a deep and long lasting influence on Delhi's cuisine. The Mughlai cuisine is literally 'fit for royalty'. With its rich sauces, butter-based curries, ginger flavoured roast meats, and mind-blowing sweets, it has captured the fancy of food lovers all over the world. From a tangy shorba or soup to the rose petal strewn kulfi, Mughlai food offers a rich fare that is irresistible. Although available throughout the country, the best place to try this royal cuisine is in Delhi.

Rajasthani

The ancient princely state of Rajasthan gave rise to a royal cuisine. The Rajas who went on hunting expeditions ate the meat or the fowl that they brought back. Even today, Rajasthani princely feasts flaunt meat delicacies that are incomparable.

In contrast are the vegetarian Rajasthanis. Their food cooked in pure ghee is famous for its mouth-watering aroma. Rajasthani cooking was also influenced by both the war-like lifestyles of its inhabitants and the availability of ingredients in the desert region. Food that could last for several days and could be eaten without heating was preferred, more out of necessity than choice. Scarcity of water and lack of fresh green vegetables also had their effect on Rajasthani cooking.

Dried lentils and beans from indigenous plants like sangri, ker etc. are staples of the Rajasthani diet, as wheat and rice do not grow very well in the desert land. Gram flour is an integral cooking ingredient and is used to make delicacies and so are powdered lentils. Bajra and corn are used all over the state for making rotis and other varieties of bread. In Rajasthan, bajre ki roti (millet bread) and lahsun ki chutney (hot garlic paste) combined with spring onions are the staple diet of the locals as these are believed to be safeguards against

the hot winds. In the desert belt of Jaisalmer, Barmer and Bikaner, cooks still use very little water and instead use milk, buttermilk and clarified butter as alternatives.

The balance to using these milk products is provided by the appropriate use of digestives, especially asafetida, black rock salt, ginger and ajwain. The favoured spices are fenugreek seeds, kasuri methi (dried fenugreek leaves) and aniseed. A distinct feature of the Maheshwari cooking is the use of mango powder, a suitable substitute for tomatoes, scarce in the desert, and asafetida, to enhance the taste in the absence of garlic and onions.

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