

Exploring Indian Delicacies - Beyond Curries

Indian food is more than just Curry and Naan, even if that's mostly what you'll see in Indian restaurants. There's a whole world of rice dishes, vegetables, fish, pickles, salads, desserts and snacks out there. You might not have run into them yet, and some of them will be a lot different from what you're used to thinking of as Indian food. However, they're tasty, healthy in many cases, and are a great way to try new things. Let's take a look at some of the most delicious options in Indian food - it's not all just curry!

The first thing you should know, and one that surprises a lot of Westerners who don't know their Indian food yet, is that there are multiple regional styles in India, and the food is all pretty different. I was pretty surprised when I found out that dishes from Eastern India included a lot of fish, and that the Southern Indian dishes are more dependent on coconut than the ones I'm used to seeing, and that North Eastern Indian food is surprisingly similar to Chinese cuisine.

In the West, there are a number of different regions, so where the dish is from will dictate whether it's heavy on fish and coconut, tends to be very sweet, or uses a lot of millet and sorghum. In general, the Indian restaurants we encounter in the US are mostly based in variations on Northern Indian food, and only a small percentage of that. There's so much more to the cuisine of India, and we shouldn't miss out.

If you're tired of the same old curries, perhaps you should think about trying some other options. Southern Indian restaurants are becoming more popular, and cuisines are becoming more varied even in standard restaurants. Try pani-puri, a snack featuring small fried puffs that are filled with onions and a thin (cold) spicy broth. Another excellent snack food from India is samosa-chaat, with a fresh samosa atop a bed of spiced potatoes.

Idli-sambhar is a popular breakfast food in some regions of India, and features small puffs made from lentils and fermented rice broth, which are cooked in a steamer. These idli are eaten with a spicy soup called sambhar, which is usually based in vegetables and dal, or beans. Try your favorite regular curry dishes with dosa - a large flat pancake or crepe made from rice and black lentils which is popular in Southern India. This popular food is eaten for breakfast or as a snack or dinner accompaniment, and can be accompanied by sambhar, chutneys (relishes), pickles, fried chili, spiced yogurt or beans and lentils. Masala dosa is popular in Udupi, and is made by filling a dosa with fried onions, potatoes and spices.

There are lots of great breads in India, too - more than just the ubiquitous North Indian naan. Roti or chapatti is a thin whole wheat bread often made at home. Paratha is a flat bread that can be filled with spiced potatoes, meats, cheeses or other foods. Puri and bhature are deep fried bread like items. Try interesting desserts, as well. From carrot halwa to yogurt shrikand, they tend to be very sweet, and are often but not always milk based. There are an enormous number of great Indian recipes out there, if we're just willing to give them a try.