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## Around India in 80 dishes

Let's go where chorizo meets chocolate, 'bhapa doi' is a cheesecake and ripe mango is core to a curry.

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Cod with Champagne and Chinese Honey at Hakkasan, Mumbai.

There's no business quite like the food business at this point of time in urban India. In the 15-odd years since [Rahul Akerkar](#) opened Indigo in Mumbai and redefined stand-alone dining in the country (read [Q&A: Rahul Akerkar](#)), food has evolved from a mere

matter of sustenance into something like art. In directional spaces across the country, chefs are delivering food that focuses as much on presentation as taste, articulating thoughts and ideas as wide-ranging as science and sustainability.

**For an interactive graphic on our favourite dishes, [click here](#).**

But the choice is bewildering. When you have just that one dinner, or two, in a city, where do you go? Follow the celeb chef? Or search for the hole-in-the-wall? Go for grunge? Or home in on luxury?

And once there, the crucial question: What do you order that encapsulates the restaurant, provides a dining memory like no other and gives you bragging rights to, well, dine out on back home? We aren't talking about the classics here, the Britannias and the Peter Cats (though *daulat ki chaat* sneaks its way in), but the cutting-edge: the most innovative use of imports, the rediscovery of low-access Indian cuisines, the reimagination of the familiar, when maple syrup meets *kokum* and risotto is cooked in coconut milk, mustard shows up in a dessert and green pineapple in a soup.

To answer those questions, our writers in Mumbai, New Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Goa and Kolkata scoured menus, sifted through their own dining experiences, talked to chefs and the cognoscenti and came up with the most exhaustive guide to that eternal question: What do we eat right now?

## Delhi

### ► Mutton Sukka with Ragi Appam



Photo: Pradeep Gaur/Mint

A stand-out from their deceptively understated menu, this dish epitomizes the western coast in every delicious bite: fork-tender morsels of mutton, a spicy covering of freshly ground coriander seeds, green chillies, ginger and coconut, served with a dainty *ragi appam* and a squeeze of lime. Purists would opt for rice *appam*, a muted canvas to the meat of the dish. Unpretentious yet bold in flavour, the dish truly justifies Café Lota's presence within the Crafts Museum. Be warned: though listed as a small plate, it is a noble portion for an appetizer).

**Café Lota, Pragati Maidan. Rs.270**

### **Dentice all' Acqua Pazza**

It takes great skill to put together a dish that is fresh, delicate and compliments the flavours of the fish. Yet the star of the dish is the light broth. The crunchy leeks, the fragrant celery and the soft, earthy mushrooms are all held together by the superbly cooked, delicate and moist bit of snapper. It's the interplay of the different elements of the dish, as well as its startling simplicity, that makes this a real standout.

**Artusi Ristorante e Bar, Greater Kailash-II. Rs. 900**

### **► Tagliolino Gamberi e Limone**



Photo: Pradeep Gaur/Mint

Artusi is one of those rare places where you can get fresh pasta made in-house, and there's no better way to taste the difference than to try it with a simple sauce high in flavour—though dripping with golden butter and spiked with lemon, the sweetness of the prawns still shines through. Refreshing and rich at the same time.

**Artusi Ristorante e Bar, Greater Kailash-II. Rs. 870**

### **Old-fashioned Peking duck**

The making of a Peking duck is arduous, but China Kitchen gets it right. The duck is doused in a special marinade and hung for 12 hours before being placed in the oven. The chef brings the duck to the table, deftly carves it close to the bone, and spreads the duck slices in a fan-shape on a platter. All so precise. The flour pancakes in a steamer basket are soft and easy to roll, and you simply assemble it by spreading hoisin sauce, adding the succulent duck and topping with traditional accompaniments like scallions, cucumber and radish. And did we mention the crackling? Just as well, because words cannot do it justice.

**The China Kitchen, Hyatt Regency, Bhikaji Cama Place. Rs. 3,588**

### **Chashu Ramen**

The ramen, or Japanese egg noodles, can be served in many different forms. Guppy by ai's Chashu Ramen, which has been on its menu since the restaurant opened in 2013, is the perfect meal in a bowl. The stock or soul of the bowl is its broth, which has a pork and 'shoyu' or miso base stewed together for 72 hours. The balance of this salty, fatty and ever so slightly sharp (because of the sesame oil finish) broth makes this an absolute winner. The noodles, the seaweed, vegetables, pork pieces and, of course, the obligatory half-egg take it to another level. Even in summer, with the mercury going above 40 degrees Celsius, your liver would forgive you for having this dish.

**Guppy by ai, Lodi Colony. Rs. 900**

► **Lamb Confit with Red Onion Jam and Glazed Vegetables**



This charming bistro scores heavily on ambience—white linen, wine glasses and candles in intimate settings. On winter evenings, this is best paired with their melting lamb confit, cooked down in a wine sauce. Unfortunately, there's a caveat—they don't always get it right.

**Le Bistro du Parc, Defence Colony. Rs. 850**

**Malleswaram 18th Cross 'dosa'**

This oddly named 'dosa' is quickly acquiring the kind of fan-following you would not expect a simple 'dosa' to have. Till you eat one. Thick, yet perfectly crisp, and slathered generously inside with the most aromatic 'ghee' (clarified butter) and gunpowder combination you can imagine.

**Carnatic Café, New Friends Colony. Rs.140**

**Chandra Ji's Mutton Curry**

**Monkey Bar, Vasant Kunj and Connaught Place. Rs. 440**

**Jardaloo Marghi Ma Salli**

A combination of the best flavours of Parsi food—a vinegar-born sourness, a chewy sweetness from the soaked apricots, spicy from the ‘sambhar’ and garam masalas, and a sharp sting from the red chilli powder—all come together in this authentic chicken dish. And if the complex flavours aren’t mind-bending enough, the crisp potato ‘salli’ (sticks) add a layer of crunch, ranking this as one of the best Parsi dishes in Delhi.

**Rustom’s Parsi Bhonu, Aurobindo Marg. Rs. 395**

► **Bheeda Par Eeda**



Courtesy Sodabottleopenerwala

How good can eggs and okra be? This good, Parsi style. It comes to the table in an unfussy aluminum baking dish, the sunny-side-up baked eggs almost entirely hiding the thinly sliced okra. The yolk runs a little when you cut through, coating the okra, which is just undercooked enough to retain bite and offer a textural contrast to the eggs. Remarkably enough, the lightly spiced Bheeda Par Eeda is not eggy, nor overwhelmed by the okra; instead the two come together in a surprise that leaves your palate wishing the serving size was larger.

**SodaBottleOpenerWala, Cyber Hub, Gurgaon, and Khan Market, New Delhi.  
Rs. 165**

## Millefeuille

There are millefeuille and then there is the millefeuille made by L'Opera. For a simple dessert consisting of vanilla custard and puff pastry, this version stands out for the sheer richness of flavour. The buttery, vanilla softness (thanks to the creamy custard) is off set by the slightly salty, crunchy and delicate pastry sheets—it's diabolical in its simplicity, generous with its ingredients and certainly not for calorie-counters.

**L'Opera, various locations in New Delhi. Rs.205**

### ► **Panna Cotta ai Fichi e le Mandorle**



Courtesy Artusi

A cross between a panna cotta and a crème caramel, this wonderful little dessert combines the best of both. It comes wobbling to the table, topped with fig jam that's fresh and packed with flavour, perfectly roasted sliced almonds, and a smidgen of caramel that's taken to the edge of burning. The panna cotta is smooth and creamy, without a trace of gelatin and with just the right amount of sweetness.

**Artusi Ristorante e Bar, Greater Kailash-II. Rs.740**

### **Bhapa Doi Cheesecake**

Combine a classic *bhapa doi*, made with condensed milk and hung yogurt, on a Marie biscuit base and steam for 40 minutes to get this light slice of heaven. Pistachio and almond slivers top this slice. If you are a stickler for the right textures—neither too airy nor too dense and certainly no air bubbles—try this chilled creamy cheesecake, and you will want no other.

**Café Lota, Pragati Maidan. Rs.135**

### **Double Chocolate Decadence**

This is for people who really like their chocolate, because its layers are a) chocolate mousse cake, b) chocolate fudge cake, and c) a dusting of cocoa powder. The visually arresting layers of rust, tan and dark brown offer varying resistance as you cut through a slice, the light mousse giving way instantly and the darker fudge cake slowing the spoon down. To extract full value for money, each layer has to be included in every mouthful: The fudge cake has enough bite to make the different textures stand apart for a second before the dessert melts in your mouth.

**The Big Chill Cafe, various locations in New Delhi. Rs.294 for a slice; Rs.1,975 for a full cake.**

### **Mumbai**

#### **Dumplings**

Almost all the dim sums here have their fans, but two stand out. The vegetarian Truffle Edamame Dumplings are little parcels of loveliness, holding an extravagant mound of white truffle, edamame, porcini mushrooms and lotus roots blended with truffle oil. The silky smooth skins are slathered in butter and topped with little flecks of chopped sweetcorn and carrot. The Poached Peking Dumplings comprise broth-filled wontons in a pool of soy-chilli sauce, slivers of red chilli and spring onions. Tangy, spicy, full of flavour.

**Yauatcha, Bandra Kurla Complex, Mumbai; MG Road, Bengaluru; Ballygunge, Kolkata; Vasant Kunj, New Delhi. Truffle Edamame Dumplings (three pieces): Rs.625; Poached Peking Dumpling (three pieces): Rs.475**

#### **Pork Belly Buns**

Steamed buns stuffed with Dutch pork belly braised in a Chinese-Japanese-influenced spiced, soy sauce liquid, kimchi, apple butter and fresh greens—this melt-in-the-mouth creation is an addictive balance of buttery meat and sharp notes of crunchy house-special pickles.

**Ellipsis, Colaba. Rs.900**

#### **Avocado Tartare**





Salmon on fire: Yuuka, Palladium Hotel. Rs1,650

The most surprising dish, in terms of both taste and presentation, at Yuuka. The artistically composed vegetarian appetizer combines creamy corn *dashi*, with buttery avocado pulp, and dried carrot chips. The vibrant preparation served in a cocktail glass has a surprise layer of ice separating the *dashi* from the avocado, making it a chilled, textural treat.

**Yuuka, Palladium Hotel, Lower Parel. Rs.950**

### **Boneless Chicken Wings**

Alex Sanchez, The Table's American chef, has created a menu of small and large plates marked by global accents. A dish we keep returning for is his unique riff on chicken wings: boneless squares of well-cooked meat doused in a sweet-savoury ginger glaze.

**The Table, Colaba. Rs.550**

### **Nadroo Ke Shammi**

**The Sahib Room & Kipling Bar, Palladium Hotel, Lower Parel. Rs.650.**

## **To Die For Sushi**

This all-in-one fusion sushi is actually cream cheese, avocado and crabmeat rolls draped with white fish and topped with spicy mayonnaise and tempura batter. It's the kind of sushi you'd be embarrassed to order in Japan but one that you simply can't stop wolfing down because it reminds you of all the other deep-fried snacks you like to devour closer home.

**Saizen, Colaba.** Rs.1,200

## **Khao Phad Tom Yum Jae**

Imagine the most aromatic Tom Yum soup you've ever had, add to that a heady hit of capsaicin and fluffy fried rice loaded with veggies. This tom yum-flavoured vegetarian fried rice is that dish, the one that will make you forget all about jasmine rice and coconut milk-based gravies forever.

**O:h Cha, Lower Parel (West).** Rs.500

## **Ohn Thamin/Coconut Rice with Peanut Chutney**

The most joyous food memories are often linked to discovering something so unfamiliar that it excites all your senses in one bite. So skip the khow suey here and get the Ohn Thamin. The sticky rice cooked in coconut milk is a vegetarian party in a bowl with raisins, crunchy peanuts and deep-fried onion slivers in a curious, tangy tomato-based curry.

**Burma Burma, Fort.** Rs.280

## **Spicy Samgyeopsal**

The pork belly is marinated with bulgogi sauce and Korean chilli paste and barbecued on a hot plate right at your table till the small, slender pieces are just the right degree of crisp. The marinade adds a savoury taste to the rich pork belly, and when you dip it in the sweet-and-spicy ssamjang sauce served on the side, it makes for a great mix of flavours. Simple and superb.

**Heng Bok, Bandra (West).** Rs.1,000

## **► Tandoori Pork Spare Ribs**



Photo: Devendra Parab/Mint

**The Bombay Canteen, Lower Parel (West). Rs.550**

**Wasabi Chicken**

**Kofuku, Bandra (West). Rs.620**

**Pan Seared John Dory + Sundried Tomato + Sunflower Seed Risotto**

Salt Water Café was one of the first Mumbai restaurants to use John Dory, a fish that is meaty yet soft. For this dish, they first roast it in brown butter, cutting the richness with some sweetness and citrus; it is then marinated in sundried tomato powder and lemon juice and served on a bed of cooked sunflower seeds and a kaffir lime-enriched risotto.

**Salt Water Café, Bandra and Churchgate. Rs.830**

**Chorizo rice**

The only way to mess up a chorizo dish is by adding too many other flavours to it. This chorizo rice is just rice fried with chorizo and chorizo fat. This is, honestly, a dish you will find in most Goan homes but Imbiss somehow gets the rice to be moist, underlined when you break the yolk of the fried egg that garnishes the dish. Simplicity, cleverly done.

**Imbiss, Bandra. Rs.190**

**Braised Mutton Chaamp, Maple and Kokum Glaze and Bhindi Jaipuri, Papad Ki Subzi, Hand Pounded Churma**

Our favourites at this perennially booked restaurant are the maple and *kokum*-glazed mutton *champ* and the *bhindi* Jaipuri with a *papad sabzi* and *churma*. The fall-off-the-

bone ribs are generously seasoned with cracked black pepper, sweet and tangy *kokum* and maple glaze. A creamy *dahi* curry poured over crisped 'bhindi', and the spicy and crunchy debris of crushed *papads* lends a delicious tang to the dish.

**Masala Library by Jiggs Kalra, Bandra-Kurla Complex. Braised Mutton Chaamp: Rs.695; Bhindi Jaipuri: Rs.550**

### **Roasted Silver Cod with Champagne and Chinese Honey**

The Hakkasan classic is so much like a birthday cake. There's absolutely no way you can devour it on your own and you'll want to tell the world about it. Firm, meaty fillets of imported silver cod, that taste like they've just been fished out of the ocean, are cooked and served in the most decadent but light *beurre blanc* enhanced with the sweetness and acidity of Champagne, mirin (Japanese rice wine), lemon juice and honey. Finished with picture-perfect Chinese wolfberries, chive slivers and a deep-fried lotus stem chip, this one deserves a birthday party of its own.

**Hakkasan Mumbai, Bandra (West). Rs.3,650**

### **► Rocky Road**



This Willy Wonka-esque creation is actually a mad physics experiment which presents the classic dessert in different states of matter. There's the liquid caramel sauce; torched marshmallow chunks in an oozy place between solid and liquid; a chocolate-chip cookie ice cream made with home-made cookies, roasted peanuts and Tahitian vanilla ice cream; and Aero-like chocolate rocks made by rapid-freezing a silky chocolate mousse in liquid nitrogen. Full marks, we say.

Ellipsis, Colaba. Rs.750

### **Dark hot chocolate**

This decadent dessert is the perfect instance of Suzette's uncompromising commitment to serving the food they love. Made with just warm skimmed milk and Barry Callebaut chocolate, its perfect swirls are where childhood treats meet a dangerously grown-up beverage.

**Suzette, Nariman Point and Bandra West.** Rs.170

### **Tres leches**

Sponge cake, soaked in evaporated milk and condensed milk for 12 hours, so as to absorb all the richness, which is further enhanced by heavy cream, and another dollop of evaporated milk when it is served. Instant feelgoodness.

**Sancho's, multiple locations across Mumbai.** Rs.250

### **Raspberry delice**

The petit gateau tastes as good as it looks—it's soft, velvety and scarlet red outside is only outdone by the glossy chocolate mousse, tart raspberry purée and gooey hazelnut brownie it holds. With so many components fighting each other to the top, it's obvious the Raspberry Delice is an all-rounder.

**Yauatcha, Bandra Kurla Complex, Mumbai; MG Road, Bengaluru; Ballygunge, Kolkata; Vasant Kunj, New Delhi. Rs.350**



### **Raspberry Chocolate Sphere**

Covered in gold dust, the miniature disco ball is a study in scarlet raspberries and dark chocolate. A warm, salted dark chocolate sauce is poured over the 54% Barry Callebaut bitter cacao shell to uncover a raspberry and chocolate mousse filling with traces of toasted hazelnut and a raspberry marshmallow centre. A candied orange segment, crumbly dark chocolate soil and a hazelnut praline ice cream are the other merry makers on the plate.

**Hakkasan Mumbai, Bandra (West). Rs.500**

► **Rouge Velour**

**La Folie Pâtisserie, Fort and Lower Parel. Rs.260**

**Bengaluru**

► **Green Pineapple And Basil Gazpacho**



Photo: Hemant Mishra/Mint

A sweet, and a little sour, soup of pineapple and beetroot is served with a dollop of apple tartare that is topped with beetroot ice cream. Basil adds a peppery fragrance to this refreshing, cold soup.

**Caperberry, Vittal Mallya Road. Part of the pre-fixed menu, Rs.750 (two-course) and Rs.950 (three-course).**

**Summer Roll (Veg)**

The problem with most spring rolls is that the deep-fried casing is too often a cover, literally and metaphorically, for the limp, recycled stuffing. The Summer Roll at Phobidden Fruit, served cold, take deep-frying out of the equation and showcases the crunchy freshness of the vegetables and the lightness of the rice-paper wrapping. Dip into the sweet-sour-spicy sauce and munch away. You have summer, who needs spring?

**Phobidden Fruit, Indiranagar. Rs.175 (for four pieces).**

**Seared Scallops**

This delicate appetizer is a sure winner. Medium-sized scallops are seared on each side for a few seconds, and served with a mildly flavoured cauliflower purée, a citrus

vinaigrette for tanginess, and a romesco sauce for a nutty and peppery flavour.

**Graze, Vivanta by Taj, MG Road. Rs.550 (for three pieces).**

► **Char Siu Bao**



Photo: Courtesy Kunal Chandra

**The Fatty Bao, Indiranagar. Rs.275**

**Erachi Cutlet**

Think Kerala food and you will think grand, hearty, spicy dishes—the stews, curries and biryanis that point to the state’s rich cultural history. But tucked away in Enté Keralam’s vast menu is this dish of crumb-fried beef mince patties packed with spices. Perfect to accompany your toddy or beer. The only thing better than that is the fresh beetroot dipping sauce, which adds tartness and lightness to the dense cutlet.

**Enté Keralam, Ulsoor. Rs.195**

**Mini Mezzah Cold & Hot platter**



There are a couple of things to know about the Mini Mezzah for one person. First, it's not for one person (unless it's the only thing you will be eating that night or the next day). Second, you can chop and change the parts of mezzah, adding more of one and less of another. The platter comprises hummus, 'mutabbal', vine leaves, falafel, cheese 'sambousek' and spinach 'fatayer'. And unlimited, freshly made pita bread. The best stuff: the vine leaves, cold, tart and moist, and the spinach 'fatayer', a small triangle of pastry with a spinach filling. Unlike anything you've had. The 'sambousek', hummus and 'mutabbal' are all very good but the falafel is passable. That's the one to drop for extra 'fatayer'.

**Byblos, Indiranagar.** Rs.500

### **Brie en Croute**

**Olive Beach, Wood Street.** Rs.395

### **Laham Mandi**

Finding this restaurant is a bit of a feat—it's located in a tiny lane off a busy one-way road—but finding the star of its extensive menu is much easier. The 'laham mandi' is a cross between a biryani and 'pulao', an enormous platter of rice with a joint of mutton nestling on it. There's little masala in it, the meat and rice appear to have been simply cooked together, and the ensemble is so bland it doesn't appear Indian in any way (in fact, it's Arabian). But the magic is in the flavour—the rice, the mutton (the meat falling off the bone) and the stock/soup that they serve on the side. If you want to spice it up ask for the chutneys du jour but first sample the dish as is.

**Ta'aam, Queen's Road Cross.** Rs.330

### **Chicken Ghee Roast**

Not altogether an unusual dish—in fact, every Mangalurean kitchen would have a family recipe—this one stands out for its unapologetic sinfulness and succulence. Marinated in yogurt, coloured a fiery red from a judicious mix of hot and mild dried chillies, enhanced by roasted spices and brought together with generous lashings of *ghee*, this is a dry dish that is as good by itself, as a bar-snack with some chilled beer, or mixed with a plateful of white or red rice. When calories taste so good, they're worth the extra round on the treadmill.

**Kanua, Sarjapur Road.** Rs.415

### **Slow Cooked Lamb Massaman Curry**

Perhaps the most enticing part of the curry is the long, meaty shank, protruding gracefully from the edge of the big black bowl as it is brought to the table. But that's only before the aroma hits the olfactory senses—creamy, spicy, deep. Dig in, and the caramel-coloured, peanutty broth reveals baby potatoes, shallots and more pieces of lamb. The meat falls off the bone at the gentlest touch, but the curry is so moreish, you're tempted to cast aside the chopsticks and reach for the unfashionable fork, the better for a heartier mouthful.

**The Fatty Bao, Indiranagar.** Rs.425

► **Ambe Upkari**



Photo: Courtesy Kanua

Is it a sweet dish? Is it a main course? Or an accompaniment? Eaten with rice, 'rotis', or 'sannas'? So many questions surrounding this dish, only one answer: It doesn't really matter. The ripe mango curry is sweet, but the undertones of red chilli and mustard seeds keep the mind guessing. The mango itself is a delight—fleshy, squishy, juicy. The only way to eat Ambe Upkari is with your hand, the gravy mixed with hot rice. Mangalorean cuisine has many famous non-veg dishes, but this one stands up to the best of them.

**Kanua, Sarjapur.** Rs.295

**Alleppey Meen Curry**

Tangy, spicy, with a depth of flavour that is a refreshing contrast to the more popular—if cloying—coconut-based curries of the region, this is a summer favourite because of the tartness imparted by the judicious use of raw mango. Great with red rice or even 'appam', if you want to eschew the 'ishtew'.

**Enté Keralam, Ulsoor. Rs.395**

## **8 Hour Lamb**

Olive Beach, Wood Street. Rs.725

## **Coconut milk and prawn risotto**

How far can you stretch that Italian standard-bearer, the risotto? Well, how about as far as Thailand? Cooked in creamy coconut milk, flavoured with lemon grass, kaffir lime leaves, bird's-eye chilli and prawns, and studded with skinned cherry tomatoes, this is a risotto that manages to comfort even as it surprises, one forkful at a time.

**Olive Beach, Wood Street. Rs.395 (lunch) and Rs.495 (dinner, with a larger portion)**

## **► Pandi & Pita**



Photo: Courtesy Kunal Chandra

The dish that took the Coorg delicacy out of the Karnataka enclave and put it on the national map, this is an unusual marriage, to say the least, serving the *kachumpuli-*

spiked, dark and semi-dry pork curry with pita bread. The best part is that the pita splits evenly into two along the seam, giving you double the bread to mop up every last bit of the utterly delicious *pandi* curry.

**Monkey Bar, Wood Street and Indiranagar, Bengaluru; Vasant Kunj and Connaught Place, New Delhi.** Rs.380

### **Dahi Bheeda With Fried Onions and Rotlis**

It's not often that you have people at the table asking for second and third helpings of okra, but this delicious Parsi way seems to make the rather badmouthed 'bhindi' the belle of the ball. Fried crisp and then smothered in a generous, spiced-up yogurt mix, the okra comes into its own, the controlled mucilage revealing itself in an unexpected juiciness when you bite into it. The thin, hand-sized 'rotlis' are perfect to scoop up the okra.

Red Fork Contemporary Café, Indiranagar. Rs.220

### **Gourmet Hot Chocolate**

Hot chocolate, you think. No big deal, an overrated hangover from 'Archie' comics. One sip of the Gourmet Hot Chocolate, though, will change your mind forever. Thick, rich and creamy, it's got rum and brandy (perfect for Bengaluru's always cool evenings) and various spices. Forget the detail; sip it and allow each layer to unfold gently, allowing you to reflect on the meal you've just had and the possibilities that lie ahead. This is chocolate at its sinful best; the marshmallows, soft and melty as they are, could be easily overlooked.

Olive Beach, Wood Street. Rs.275

### **► Slow Cooked Apples and Filo Pastry Slice**



Photo: Sanjay Ramchandran

It's almost guaranteed that, after starters and mains, you won't have room for dessert at The Fatty Bao (or will think twice, given the sameness of Asian desserts). Mistake. This dish has little to do with east Asia (unless you count the soy in the soy caramel sauce) but it fits into the restaurant's ethos: presentation, flavour, depth. The star is the apple: soft but not mushy, somewhere between sweet and tart, almost like the stew you loved as a child. On top is a crackling sheet of filo; below is a bed of cake crumbs. The crème mousseline is a distraction and can be removed on request; the cinnamon ice cream, excessive. It's all about the apple, anyway.

The Fatty Bao, Indiranagar. Rs.210

## **Kolkata**

### **► Chili Pickle n Cheese Baked Crab With Kolmi Greens**



Photo: Courtesy Bohemian

**Bohemian, Old Ballygunge. Rs.349**

### **Sea Salt Roasted Dry Figs Salad**

In the heat and humidity of Kolkata, this is an instant refresher. It brings together salty-and-sweet dried figs with crunchy apples and walnuts with shavings of celery, the strong flavours playing off against the mild-tasting young Gouda. The touch of genius, though, is the piquant pomegranate dressing that holds it all together, making each forkful a burst of flavours on the palate.

**The Corner Courtyard, Sarat Bose Road. Rs.280**

### **Spinach + Ricotta Ravioli**

It isn't often that a chain produces a better take of a dish in one location—as opposed to a standardized version everywhere—but the Kolkata franchise of this restaurant does something really special with this simple, rustic plate of vegetarian pasta. It won't win any points for visual appeal, but the basic compatibility of the core ingredients—spinach, tomato, capers and an olive tapenade—and the honesty of approach shines through.

**Smoke House Deli, Ballygunge. Rs.430**

### **Pabda Rolls Stewed in Cherry Tomato and Spinach Broth**

Even in a restaurant known for constantly pushing the boundaries, this light, summery dish is a groundbreaker. It features river-fish *pabda* fillets wrapped around long beans and stewed in a tomato-spinach broth seasoned with the typically Bengali *radhuni*

(celery seeds) and *kasundi*' (mustard sauce). Served with a pilaf tossed with crushed 'bodi' (sundried lentil nuggets), this main dish calls for a siesta right afterwards.

**Bohemian, Old Ballygunge, Kolkata. Rs.449**

► **Grilled bluewater stuffed calamari**



Photo: Courtesy The Corner Courtyard

For some reason, calamari mostly features on restaurant menus as rings, whether battered or pan-fried the *desi* way with curry leaves and spices. That's why this main leaves us spellbound: whole calamari, stuffed with minced seafood—think crab and prawns—and root vegetables, dressed with a piquant, reduced arrabiata sauce that contrasts very well with a creamy Parmesan risotto. The calamari is tender, not rubbery, which, of course, wins extra points.

The Corner Courtyard, Sarat Bose Road. Rs.560

► **Osso Buco**



Photo: Indranil Bhoumik/Mint

Pan-seared with olive oil and then glazed with a good red wine, this main dish develops deep layers of flavour as it is cooked with skinned tomatoes on a slow fire till the meat—always a beef shank; osso buco literally means “bone with a hole”—is ready to fall off the bone. It comes to the table with a helping of saffron risotto, the meat and the rice singing in harmony of plenty and comfort. There is no more satisfying end to a day.

**West View, ITC Sonar, opposite Science City. Rs.1,450**

## **Goa**

### **Syrian Beef Fry**

**Gunpowder, Assagao. Rs.400**

### **Lamb Gyro Wrap**

This Lamb Gyro Wrap is the perfect thing to grab at a brunch or lunch after a night out in Goa. The yogurt-based tzatziki sauce is not too sweet, the spices are not overpowering and the pita bread is light and fluffy. But the best part of the wrap is the juices from the crisp lamb that drip into your mouth as you bite into it. Gyro wraps can be done in various styles; this one is in the traditional style of Corfu, Greece. The lamb is not cooked in a traditional gyro machine but prepared in the oven for about two and a half hours with Greek herbs and olive oil.

**Thalassa, Little Vagator. Rs.350**

### **► Inspired Chorizo Pav**





Photo: Revati Upadhyia

Smoky, tangy, spicy Goan sausages meet delicate, dark chocolate shavings in this dish that takes the local evening snack of chorizo *pav* (rosary sausages sandwiched in bread) and serves it up with the contemporary accent of dark chocolate. Almost as perfectly balanced as yin and yang.

The Black Sheep Bistro, Altinho, Panaji. Rs.195

### **Beef Carpaccio**

Perfectly tenderized and thinly sliced, very few restaurants in Goa get a beef carpaccio this right. The meat is flavoured with a delicate combination of herbs in which it is cured and the dish comes beautifully plated, served with a mild dressing and tiny toasties/crostinis to add crunch to this otherwise melt-in-your-mouth dish.

**I-95, Nagoa Saligao, Bardez. Rs.350**

### **► Luchi and Aloo Dum Cocktail Sticks**



Photo: Revati Upadhyia

This classic Bengali snack takes perfect nibble-sized form as a cocktail snack, served with a contemporary flourish. The baby potatoes are cooked down so the masala is thick and not runny, the *luchis* are fried to a convenient size, making it easy to eat them whole, and lose track of how many you've consumed.

Mustard, Sangolda. Rs.260.

### **Pistachio Kheer Sandwich**

The Pistachio Kheer Sandwich is quite literally a tower of dollops of rich rice *kheer* sandwiched between flat, crispy ginger cookies. It is spiced with cardamom and nutmeg and served with a lemony *crème anglaise* that cuts through the sweetness just perfectly. Simple, but delightfully complex.

The Black Sheep Bistro, Altinho, Panaji. Rs.150

### ► **Brownie à la Mustard**



Mustard's key concept is to explore the myriad flavours and forms of mustard as a herb/green, spice, paste and seasoning—but when it pops up in the dessert section, it's scintillating. The smear of ground mustard, served in the form of a creamy, tart sauce, is a welcome addition of spice to the sweet, gooey brownie.

**Mustard, Sangolda. Rs.200**

## **Chennai**

► **Pan-Fried Homemade Ricotta With Raisins, Strawberry and Tomato Compote**



Photo: Courtesy The Flying Elephant

The soft white ricotta with the firm, chewy fried exterior contrasts well with the zesty compote. Arugula leaves lend an added dimension of crunchy freshness. The end result is a delicate savoury starter with a hint of tart and sweet.

**Flying Elephant, Park Hyatt, Velachery Road. Rs.495**

### **Quatro Formaggi pizza**

Combining four cheeses that play off each other—fresh and smoked mozzarella, sharp blue cheese and nutty Parmesan—on their signature tomato sauce base and topped with olives and jalapeños, this pizza packs a wallop in taste. The cheapest ticket to Italy.

**Tuscana Pizzeria, Nungambakkam, East Coast Road and Nandanam. 9-inch pizza for Rs.650; 12-inch for Rs.695**

### **Baked Camembert with Honey Garlic Reduction**

Garlic and honey, reduced to a sticky thickness, and poured over Camembert, a soft cheese, and baked for intense flavours. Try stopping at one mouthful of this mains.

**On The Rocks, Sheraton Park Hotel & Towers, Alwarpet. Rs.700**

### **Salted Butter Caramel ice cream with fleur de sel**

Thick, creamy and enriched by fleur de sel, this ice cream gets the balance of the sweetness of caramel and the saltiness just right.

**Amadora, Nungambakkam. Rs.200 per scoop.**

## **Pune**

### **Fresh Zucchini salad**

The zucchini is sliced wafer thin, and sits in an elegant high heap in the centre of the plate, with the cherry tomato and lemon zest bringing a double-barrelled piquancy to it all. The zest manages to be flavourful and soft, creating, along with little granules of the Grana Padano, a nice little point-counterpoint on the palate. You'll find yourself wrestling with the staff to not take the plate away till you've mopped up every little bit of the lemon vinaigrette and basil dressing on the plate.

**Le Plaisir, Bhandarkar Road. Rs.250**

### **Mutton Tambda Rassa**

The Kolhapuri *tambda* (red) *rassa* has for long been a true test of a person's chilli-tolerance. At 96 K, they serve it mercilessly fiery and you'll find yourself asking for more, especially if they also serve the kinder *pandhra* (white) *rassa* as a side-serve. It's best eaten with *jowar bhakri* or *vade* (multigrain *puris*) and other *thali* (Rs.469) components like a *sabji*, a *koshimbir* and some *kokum kadhi*. Be prepared to sweat-and-weep and yet come out smiling.

96 K, FC Road. Rs.160

## Ahmedabad

### ► Panki



Photo: Courtesy The House of MG

Gujarati *sneks* deserve to be a meal by themselves. If *khaman dhokla* and *khandvi* seem too boring, the *panki*—a thin, fermented batter pancake cooked between banana leaves—at Greenhouse will have you marvelling at the possibilities of simple rice and *dal* grains. It's served with a bowl of thick yogurt: just right to cut the grease from the oiled banana leaves.

**Greenhouse—The House of MG, Lal Darwaja. Rs.220**

### Plateful of surprises

**Call it a 'thali' or a tasting menu, we love a composite meal. Our picks**

**The Agashiye 'thali'**



Photo: Courtesy The House of MG

Served in *kansa* (bell metal) plate and bowls, the three-course veg *thali* offers two kinds of *rotis*, four varieties of vegetables (two seasonal, one potato and one gram-based, locally called *kathor*), rice or *khichdi*, *dal* and *kadhi*, besides *kachumbar*, salted buttermilk (*chhas*), chutneys, pickles, *ghee* and jaggery. There's *farsan*, of course, and a sweet dish. It's a vegetarian meal that can convert the hard-core carnivore, and have them coming back for more. Not on the plate, but as noteworthy, are the beautifully restored interiors of the restaurant and the warm service.

***Agashiye—The House of MG, Lal Darwaja, Ahmedabad. Rs.700 (lunch) and Rs.660 (dinner).***

### **The Chef's Tasting Menu at Indian Accent**

This menu has always been about a balance between what customers define as their deepest dining desires and what chef Manish Mehrotra can do to take them on a fantastical journey. The current menu (available through summer) starts with the Potato Sphere Chaat with White Pea Ragda, combining the expected crunch with a surprising sour softness. The Duck Khurchan Cornetto is served upright in a *chai* glass full of fried *moong dal*. The chef's expertise in pushing the envelope without losing the basic form of the dish is exemplified in the Prawn Pakoda with Lime Pickle Cream and the sweet, savoury, slightly chilli Meetha Achaar Chilean Spare Ribs. The Rice-Crusted John Dory Moilee, an old star, stages a comeback, while the Bajra Parmesan Khichdi is a spicy new addition from the chef's work with the in-house spa. And for dessert, of course, there is Daulat Ki Chaat. No more needs to be said.

***Indian Accent, The Manor hotel, Friends Colony (West), New Delhi. Rs.2,895 (non-vegetarian) and Rs.2,795 (vegetarian).***

### **Tian Trailer 3**

Presentation, flavour and textures are the hallmark of this menu. Starting with the sweet and salty fishiness of the Compressed Watermelon and Salmon Salad, followed by the Miso Feta Mousse Cranberry Stuffed Olive, Prawn and Scallop, Pomelo Salad, Lemon Grass Veloute, Sambal Espuma, and on to the Sous Vide Black Cod with Nyonya Paste and Roasted Eggplant and Kaffir Lime Mash and Australian lamb Panang Curry—each of the seven courses maintains a balance between the Asian touches and the freshness of the ingredients. Palate orgasm.

***Tian, ITC Maurya, Chanakyapuri, New Delhi. Rs.5,000***

### **The Royal Vega Thali**



Royal Vega, ITC Grand Chola, Guindy, Chennai. Rs3,000

This is a selection of signature veg dishes from the Ayurveda-based, season-friendly Royal Vega menu, including Paneer Khasa (handcrafted, tomato-flavoured cottage cheese), Pithi Poori (home-made whole wheat bread spiced with coriander seeds, red chilli and fennel) and Ganika (basmati cooked with jasmine flowers), which finishes with Kanak Halva, a pudding of apricots and walnuts flavoured with rose water.

***Royal Vega, ITC Grand Chola, Guindy, Chennai. Rs.3,000***

**For an interactive graphic on our favourite dishes, [click here](#).**

*The prices mentioned are exclusive of taxes.*

*With contributions from Prerna Makhija, Dustin Silgado and Purva Mehra in Mumbai; Rudraneil Sengupta, Aparna Jain, Bikramjit Ray and Chanpreet Khurana in New Delhi; Priyadarshini Nandy in Bengaluru; Latha Srinivasan in Chennai and Revati Upadhyaya in Goa. Additional inputs by Gouri Dange, Nandita Amin, Gautam John and Ranjit Mankeshwar.*

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