

The 23 Most Popular Indian Dishes You Should Try ? Sand In My Suitcase

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[United States](#)

[Worldwide](#)

[Africa](#)

[Asia](#)

[Antarctica](#)

[Middle East](#)

[South Pacific](#)

[Experiences](#)

[Adventures](#)

[Cultural Travel](#)

[Cruises](#)

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[Food + Drinks](#)

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[Get Curry Happy! 23 Popular Indian Dishes to Try at an Indian Restaurant](#)

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Biryani. Vindaloo. Tikka masala. We crave curry.

But in Indian cuisine, 'curry' has many different meanings.

It all depends on the spices and ingredients thrown into the pot.

And don't forget the side-dishes, whose Indian food names are also foreign to our Western brains!

When we're home and not traveling, we often like to go out to Indian restaurants or order delivery or take-out of Indian food – perhaps to enjoy while watching lots of travel shows on Netflix!

Indian recipes are so complex, requiring many different spices and lots of prep and cooking time, that Indian food is not something we can easily whip up ourselves.

So what are some popular Indian dishes to try?

Which are the best Indian dishes to order?

If you love curry and the fragrant flavors of Indian food, but don't know your dal from your dosa, here's a quick primer.

Popular Indian dishes

A vast country, the Indian subcontinent has up to 36 distinct cuisines.

But for the sake of absolute simplicity, you can break down the food preferences into two regions:

North Indian food and South Indian food.

Food in North India

Spices and veggies reign (lots of vegetarian options).

North Indians prefer breads like naan over rice.

Dishes aren't as fiery hot as in the south, and you'll find more creamy creations.

South Indian dishes

Curries are hotter.

More rice is eaten, often combined with lentils.

Dishes feature a lot of seafood and coconut.

Best Indian dishes to order at a restaurant

Ok, let's now check out the 23 best Indian dishes.

You can read about them in detail below.

(Also see our 'short-and-spicy' 45-second video on 10 of our favorite Indian dishes!)

1) Biryani

Brought from Persia to India by the Mughals, biryani is a classic Indian dish.

Rice and meat or vegetables are prepared separately, then combined and slow-cooked in the oven to create this aromatic 'dry dish' (there's no creamy gravy-like sauce).

Basmati rice is typically used. The meat (goat, chicken or mutton) is usually marinated first in yogurt.

Spices such as cinnamon, nutmeg and cardamom add a delicate flavor.

You can't go wrong ordering biryani!

2) Butter chicken

Butter chicken (or murg makhani) is one of the most popular Indian curries.

Typically a mild curry, it combines onions, butter and cream in a velvety smooth tomato sauce with chicken chunks.

Butter chicken is our go-to curry. We never tire of it!

If you want something lightly spiced and easy on the heat, then this is one of the best Indian food dishes to try.

Butter chicken is an especially good pick if this is your first time eating Indian food.

3) Chaat

Originating in the north of India, chaat is an Indian street-food snack. The word 'chaat' means 'to lick' and chaat is finger-licking delicious.

There are many types of chaat, but all have a starch base (like a samosa or puffed rice), vegetables and chutney.

One of the most popular is papri chaat.

It's made with a samosa-style crust, boiled potatoes and chickpeas, topped with tamarind chutney and crunchy bits of deep-fried noodles.

4) Dosa

A thin pancake, dosa is crepe-like and slightly sweeter than naan (#9 below). Coming from the southern part of India, it's usually made from rice and lentils.

You usually eat dosas hot, dipped in various chutneys, as an accompaniment to a curry meal.

But sometimes dosas are stuffed with veggies and eaten as snacks (popular as street food in India).

Masala dosa, for example, is filled with spiced potatoes.

5) Gulab Jamun

Of course, you need

something deliciously sweet to finish off your Indian meal.

Enter gulab jamun.

This popular Indian dessert is based on two flavors ? gulab (which means rose) and jamun (which refers to purple jamun berries, similar to blueberries).

Using milk solids and flour, the dessert consists of small doughy balls soaked in rose water and green cardamom.

Think of it like Indian doughnuts dipped in mouth-watering syrup! (But, sorry, ordinary doughnuts won't ever taste as good again after you've tried gulab jamuns.)

6) Korma

Korma is

another one of the best Indian dishes to hail from northern India.

Braised meat (maybe chicken or beef) and vegetables are slow cooked in a thick mild curry sauce made with cream, coconut milk or yogurt and sometimes almonds.

It's delicately spiced with coriander, saffron, ginger, cardamom and black peppercorn.

7) Madras Curry

From the south of India, Madras curry is commonly made with chicken ? so is known as ?Chicken Madras? or ?Madras Chicken.?

No matter what you call it though, it's an intensely flavorful Indian chicken curry (a fairly hot curry).

Like roghan josh (#12 below), it's a rich dark red in color ? the color comes from the chilis used.

And it's less creamy than butter chicken and tikka masala (#14 below).

8) Mutter Paneer

This one's for the vegetarian in you.

Mutter paneer is a north Indian curry made with cubes of paneer (a soft fresh cheese like cottage cheese). It's mixed with peas and a tomato-and-onion based sauce.

Slurp it up with naan or chapatis.

9) Naan

As part of your Indian curry feast, you need one of the most famous Indian dishes ? naan.

A type of pillowy yeast-leavened flatbread, naan is traditionally baked in a clay oven (called a tandoor). It's perfect for mopping up all that delicious curry sauce!

Naan is best served warm and fresh from the oven. (When receiving it as take-out, it's often wrapped in aluminum foil to keep it warm.)

Some Indian restaurants also offer different types of naan.

We've eaten several versions ? plain naan, naan with garlic butter brushed on top and naan baked with rosemary inside.

And while we enjoy all the different versions, plain naan is probably still our favorite.

10) Papadum

One of our favorite Indian dishes to order as a starter is a serving of papadums.

We love breaking the large thin crispy wafer apart ? hearing that satisfying crackle.

A little peppery, papadums often come with coriander mint chutney.

11) Paratha

Can you ever have too much Indian bread? We don't think so.

A staple in many Indian households, paratha is unleavened flatbread, happily eaten at breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Paratha vs naan: What's the difference?

While naan (#9) is baked in a clay tandoor oven, parathas are pan-fried. They're thinner than naan

and flakier.

To eat them, tear the paratha apart with your fingers. It's delicious on its own. Or use the torn pieces to scoop up your curry sauce.

12) Raita

Raita is a must!

A side dish made from yogurt and cucumber, raita is used to cool the spicy heat from curries. Try putting a little on each forkful.

You can also dip your naan into it.

Raita is so creamy and delicious, though, that you might just want to lap it up on its own!

Make raita at home:

Mix the following ingredients in a bowl. Chill. Enjoy!

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup plain Greek yogurt

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup cucumber (grated)

1 teaspoon lemon or lime juice

2 to 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cumin

Salt to taste

13) Roghan Josh

Deep red in color, rogan josh (also spelled roghan josh) is an aromatic lamb or beef curry dish, made from chili peppers.

Thought to be Persian in origin, it's now a dish associated with Kashmir, the most northern region of India.

The meat is first browned then slowly stewed in a thick gravy of garlic, onions, ginger, chili pepper and spices.

Roghan josh is usually eaten with plain basmati rice and/or naan.

14) Saag Paneer

Like mutter paneer (#8), saag paneer is another classic Indian vegetarian dish.

Saag means 'greens' in Hindi.

And this North Indian dish is typically made from cooked spinach (though sometimes other green vegetables like mustard greens or chopped broccoli are substituted).

The soft spinach is thickened with cream or coconut milk, spices are added and cubes of fried paneer cheese are stirred into the stew

You can eat this as a side dish, or serve it with rice for a healthy vegetarian meal.

15) Samosas

The most popular Indian food in the world? Samosas are right up there!

Eaten as an appetizer, a samosa is a fried or baked pastry filled with spiced potatoes, peas and onions.

Meat varieties have ground lamb, beef or chicken too.

They often come with mint sauce or tamarind chutney on the side.

They're such a hit that you can usually find frozen pre-made samosas in your grocery store.

But they won't compare to what you can get from a good Indian restaurant.

Or you can try making your own ? here's a great recipe for making the perfect samosas.

16) Tandoori chicken

You've probably heard of tandoori chicken?

When it comes to famous Indian food, tandoori chicken is at the top of the list.

The chicken is prepared by marinating it in yogurt and spices like turmeric, cardamom, coriander, fresh ginger, garlic, red chili and lime juice. Then it's grilled in a tandoor clay oven.

It comes out juicy and oh-so-delicious ? and is a great dish for a main course.

17) Tikka masala

Marinate chunks of (typically) chicken in yogurt and spices, perhaps garam masala. (Garam masala is a blend of ground spices, usually including coriander, cumin, cardamom, cloves and black pepper.)

Roast over charcoal in a tandoor oven. Then mix the chicken with a creamy orange-colored sauce made from tomatoes, paprika and red chili.

Say hello to chicken tikka masala!

One of the most popular Indian dishes, tikka masala is a good choice if you don't like hot food, as it's a mild curry.

Okay, but it looks similar to butter chicken. So what's the difference between tikka masala and butter chicken?

Butter chicken is usually less tomatoey and creamier than chicken tikka masala. Also, butter chicken comes from Delhi.

Chicken tikka masala, on the other hand, is supposedly an Indian food dish invented in Britain in the 1960s.

Not sure what to choose? Go with butter chicken.

18) Vindaloo

Bring on the heat! Vindaloo (shown on the right in the above picture) is a classic hot curry, made with diced chicken or lamb, garlic, hot chilis and wine or vinegar.

When Portuguese explorers made it to Goa in the 15th century, they brought the dish with them.

The word vindaloo is a mispronunciation of a Portuguese dish of meat marinated in wine-vinegar and garlic.

Franciscan priests then adapted the dish ? they couldn't get wine-vinegar in India so they got inventive and made their own from palm wine.

Like Madras curry, vindaloo is one of the hottest Indian curries.

(Don't say we didn't warn you!)

5 More tasty Indian food dishes

Chapati

A thin unleavened flatbread made from flour, salt and water (break off pieces to scoop up the food from your plate).

Dal

A mushy dish made with split peas, lentils or beans, served on the side.

Keema

Fried or stewed minced beef (or pork, chicken or lamb), often used as a filling for samosas.

Pakora

Fried fritters, stuffed with potatoes, onions, cauliflower and other veggies, enjoyed as an appetizer or snack.

Pasanda

A mild curry sauce made with cream, coconut milk and almonds, originally served with lamb, but now often accompanying prawns or chicken.

So now you know the best curry dishes and top Indian foods to order at an Indian restaurant!

You know your dal from your dosa, your Madras from your masala?

Okay, you get the picture! Enjoy!

Get the Indian food cookbooks

Check out these Indian food recipe books on Amazon. (And just so you know, as an Amazon associate, we earn from qualifying purchases.)

Do you like Indian food?

How hot do you like your curry?

You can let us know in the Comments section below! (And you can read comments by other readers too.)

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Flavors of Croatia: Croatian desserts are oh-so-delicious! The peach cookies (with a

rum-and-peach-jam filling) are especially decadent.

Flavors of Canada: Wine please! Discover the best wine clubs in Canada.

Pssst! Pin this Indian food deliciousness for later!

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About the authors

Luxury travel journalists and SATW, NATJA and TMAC "Best Travel Blog" award winners, Janice and George Mucalov are the publishers of Sand In My Suitcase. Between them, they've traveled to all 7 continents. See About.

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Sohail

Sunday 25th of December 2022

Varieties of the Shahi (Mughal) dishes are best served with beef, e.g., beef biryani, beef korma, beef kofta.

Perhaps you have only tried the Indian side of the North cuisines? I must say that your list covers almost all the best of the North Indian dishes. One missing dish, however, is "Nalli Nihari" (beef/goat). You might need to try an Indian restaurant of Pakistani origin to get an authentic taste of it :).

Anyway, good read.

Janice and George

Friday 30th of December 2022

Thank you for pointing out Nalli Nihari! This slow-cooked mutton or goat curry sounds delicious! Stewed in a myriad of aromatic spices, we understand it was traditionally cooked for the Mughal kings.

We will definitely try to taste this dish in future :-).

Tathagata

Saturday 24th of December 2022

Awesome post!

But being an Indian Bengali, I'm very sad you might not have tasted a single authentic Bengali dish. Not even a dessert ?.

Please make it a point to try finding and tasting some of them? Some of the top ones? Authentic Bengali biryani, muri ghonto, mustard hilsa fish, katla fish, Bengali mutton curry with potatoes, poppy seeds potato and lentils, Rasogolla (most famous), misti doi, pithe and more.

Janice and George

Saturday 24th of December 2022

Oh, you're making us hungry with your comment! We will follow your advice and look for authentic Bengali food to devour :-).

Emma

Sunday 25th of September 2022

I enjoyed the explanations that accompanied those different dishes but wanted to ask about another dish.

I have been to a couple Indian restaurants and they served Chicken Josh. I don't think it was Rogan Josh as the coloring was more similar to the coloring in butter chicken. Any thoughts about what this "chicken josh" might be - could it simply be butter chicken? Or something else?

Thanks for the good read!

Janice and George

Monday 26th of September 2022

Maybe it was "chicken rogan josh"?

Traditionally made with lamb, rogan josh can also be made with chicken.

If the color was different, the restaurant could have used different spices and fewer chili peppers.

There are many different recipes for the "same" Indian dish, and different restaurants may put their own twist on what they cook up :-).

Soumik Ghosh

Thursday 8th of September 2022

The writers should have travelled to West Bengal and especially Kolkata, where a plethora of Bengali dishes would beat the dishes mentioned by them in the article hands down at any given time.

No. I am not regional. But stating the hard fact. Bengali dishes are always number one.

Nevertheless, the article is a very good read.

Janice and George

Monday 12th of September 2022

Hello Soumik,

One day, we'd love to travel to the Bengal region of the Indian sub-continent!

In the meantime, we'll have to try and satisfy ourselves by eating Bengali food, some of which can be hard to come by here at Indian restaurants in Canada :-).

Anyway, glad you found our article a "good read" -- thanks!

Abhishek

Saturday 16th of July 2022

I enjoyed reading your blog, and I must say that you have picked some of the best Indian food. It's impressive that you know so much about these dishes. I don't know if you have tried them all, but anyway great job!

Janice and George

Monday 18th of July 2022

Yes, we've actually eaten all these Indian dishes, except maybe dosa??

Thanks for your kind comments!

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