

# The Pioneer Fresh

FOOD | LIFESTYLE

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+**7** Recipes  
to Warm  
Your Winter

Yuletide's  
Flavours,  
India-Style

**12**  
Delights of  
Christmas!

From Allahabadi Cake to  
Stollen — your sweetest  
guide to the season



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**"In this liminal space between tradition and innovation, Fresh hopes to become the magazine you return to—month after month—to taste life a little more deeply."**



The content, images and recipes you'll find in the pages of Fresh have been created, sourced and powered by Team IFN

## Where Food Finds Its Moment...

There is a quiet joy in opening a food magazine—an intimacy that feels almost ritualistic. As I welcome you to the inaugural issue of *Fresh*, I'm reminded that we stand at a rare intersection: the 160-year editorial legacy of *The Pioneer* meeting the vibrant culinary universe of IFN (India Food Network). For over thirteen years, we at IFN have lived food. Creating and incubating recipes, videos, and ideas that have inspired millions. Now, that spirit finds a new home in *Fresh*, a food and lifestyle magazine crafted with intention, imagination, and a voracious appetite.

My love for food has always stemmed from its ability to shape memory, and purpose. In the current milieu, when life often feels hurried, I believe a magazine like *Fresh* offers something grounding—an invitation to pause, savour, and reconnect. And because trust is central to how we approach food, every recipe you see here has been cooked, tested, refined, and verified in our very own IFN test kitchens. If it isn't delicious, doable, and dependable, it doesn't make these pages.

This debut December issue is our festive greeting to you. Inside, you'll find 'The 12 Delights of Christmas'—a joyous assortment of cakes, cookies, and confections, that is our cover story. We spotlight the latest kitchen gadgets and gizmos to help your culinary creativity soar. And we journey to Kolkata, wandering through its iconic bakeries in search of that quintessential plum cake—an edible emblem of the City of Joy's beloved "Bada Din", India's grandest Christmas celebration. We also step into the quieter, more intimate world of chefs' own homes, asking them how they celebrate Christmas. Away from the organised chaos of their professional kitchens. Revealing treasured rituals, and the dishes they reserve for the people they love most.

Paying heed to the fact that the season is as much about beauty as it is about flavour, we bring festive inspiration for your home as well. From expert-led ideas for creating enchanting tablescapes, to a curated look at candles infused with food-forward fragrances. Scents that stir memory, warmth, and yearning in a single, shimmering breath.

*Fresh* is imagined as more than a magazine; it is a companion. A place where tradition meets curiosity, where stories simmer alongside recipes, and where every page reminds you that food, at its core, connects us. In this liminal space between the familiar and the new, we hope to kindle the spark of discovery, and delight.

Here's to the journey ahead. And may this issue inspire you to cook, create, and savour with renewed passion!



Raul Dias

EDITOR

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# Contributors



## ROXANNE BAMBOAT

*Your must-have Christmas dish?*  
“A rum-soaked Christmas pudding!”

More popularly known as ‘The Tiny Taster’, Roxanne is a food and travel writer based in Mumbai. She’s a culinary enthusiast and an avid traveller and has written for various publications in the last 12 years. She’s also a travel consultant who curates unique experiences to various destinations across the world. [@thetinytaster](#)

## PHORUM PANDYA

*Your favourite festive fragrance?*  
“Easy! A cinnamon-orange home scent.”

This independent journalist and food writer swapped her full-time job for the “reckless life of a freelancer!” Terrible at crossing roads, she loves to chase a juicy story across the globe.

She has a thing for quirky headlines, airport transits, quaint cafés and catching the sunrise.

[@phorumpandyaa](#)



## HARLENE BHASIN

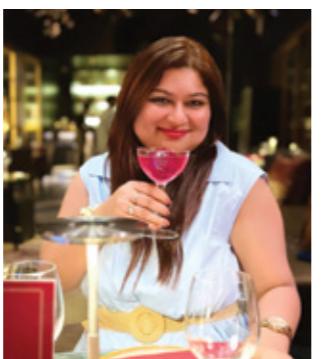
*Your go-to healthy holiday treat?*  
“I’d have to say, dark chocolate almond date clusters.”

A clinical nutritionist with over 15 years of experience, Harlene is an avid fitness enthusiast and mom to a teenage boy. Her life is about the 3Ws - Work, Workout and Worship. She is an Annapurna (Goddess of Nutrition) in the true sense of the word, with her life, profession and passion, all centered around food. [@harlenezhealthclinic](#)

## PROMITA MUKHERJEE

*Your ideal Christmas getaway?*  
“Kolkata—the only place to be...”

A seasoned travel and lifestyle editor who writes on food, travel and fashion, Promita likes doomsscrolling food delivery apps at midnight. A beach bum, she spends her weekends with her fur babies Haachi and Mamma, drawing up food and travel recommendations for friends and family. [@calcuttacliques](#)



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## Cheese lover or just curious?

indulge your senses and discover  
the world of artisanal cheeses.

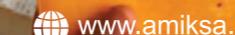
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On the cover, the Allahabadi Cake

Photography: Vipul Varyani  
Preparation: Swapnil Shinde  
Production: Salil Dhurandhar



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Sip a Story!



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Bengaluru- 560080, Karnataka, India

## AUROVILLE

Main Auroville Road,  
Kuilaipalayam, Bommayapalayam,  
Tamil Nadu- 605101, India

# What's "Wow"ing Us This Month!

A sun-washed escape to Greek islands

**OPA Kipos** in Mumbai transports you straight to the Mediterranean with Greek stone flooring, a dramatic Atlas sculpture, and a star-pin ceiling glowing like a Santorini night. White-and-blue interiors and bougainvillea accents keep the vibe breezy and bright. The menu is rich with mezze platters, salads, fresh seafood, and playful cocktails rooted in myth. Add in plate-smashing and lively performances, and you get a spirited Greek getaway right in the Lower Parel neighbourhood.



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**TBH's (To Be Honest)** Mix Veggie Chips are a vibrant snack made from five veggies—golden and purple sweet potatoes, jackfruit, beetroot, and okra. Vacuum-cooked to retain 90% nutrients and 40% less fat, they're crisp, flavourful, and palm-oil-free, seasoned with just rock salt. At ₹135 for 60g, they're available across Blinkit, Instamart, and Nature's Basket, making healthier snacking easy and guilt-free.



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Compiled by Shreya Mukherjee

# PANJAB'S WINTER TRADITIONS

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Compiled by  
Shreya Mukherjee

# Appliances Your Kitchen Deserves

## Old-school baking with a modern touch

The **Milton OTG** is the modern answer to nostalgic home-baking. With powerful heating, an adjustable thermostat of up to 250°C, and ample space for large cakes, cookies, *tikkas*, and casseroles, it's a baker's delight. The auto shut-off and customisable timer keep things foolproof, while the racks and trays make multitasking easy. Its compact, stylish build and clear glass door make monitoring simple even in smaller kitchens. At ₹ 2,288 on Amazon, it's an easy pick for beginners and seasoned bakers gearing up for festive treats.



## Powerful performance for effortless prep

For anyone tired of kneading or mixing by hand, the **Agaro Stand Mixer** is a true upgrade. With eight speed levels, a pulse function, and attachments including a dough hook, whisk, beater, and splash guard, it handles everything from bread dough to cake frosting. Its 5L bowl is perfect for large festive batches, and cleanup is a breeze. Priced at ₹ 11,495 on Amazon, it's a great pick for families and hobby bakers alike.



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PHILIPS  
Spiralizer

MILTON  
Spiralizer

AGARO<br

# The 12 Delights of Christmas!

Wander through a galaxy of festive flavours—where snow-dusted Western classics twirl with India's soul-stirring holiday traditions.

With *Fresh* Editor RAUL DIAS as your guide, savour a season steeped in wonder, warmth and mouthwatering cheer



## THE YULE LOG

The Yule Log may have begun as a European winter tradition celebrating the solstice, but in India its chocolate-swirled presence has become a Christmas essential. Light sponge rolled with buttercream or ganache and dusted with icing sugar "snow," it brings a touch of storybook whimsy to our tropical Decembers. Indian pâtisseries now infuse local twists. Think, dark chocolate spiked with orange zest, coffee cream inspired by South Indian filter brews, and even subtle hints of *nolen gur* in Kolkata. A Yule Log on the table instantly evokes the promise of indulgence, celebration, and that fleeting winter magic we crave each December.

**Where to buy:** Tuilleries Pâtisserie (Delhi), Kookie Jar (Kolkata), La Folie Patisserie (Mumbai)

1

## THE GINGERBREAD HOUSE

Nothing says Christmas cheer like the gingery warmth of a gingerbread house, a tradition born in Germany but embraced wholeheartedly in India. The bold flavours of ginger, cinnamon, and clove are instantly familiar to Indian palates. Here, we have begun building edible houses as a bonding ritual, decorating them with local candies and colourful sprinkles. From full houses to crisp cookies iced with playful motifs, gingerbread captures the childlike spirit of the season.

**Where to buy:** Bombay Baking Company (Mumbai), Defence Bakery (Delhi)



2

## SUGAR COOKIES

Simple, buttery, and endlessly cheerful, sugar cookies are the blank canvases of Christmas baking. In India, they've become a staple for home bakers and families eager to involve children in festive fun. Bright royal icing, edible glitter, and vibrant sprinkles allow creative expression—from Christmas trees and snowflakes to *kolam*-inspired patterns and *desi* motifs. Their sweetness is gentle, making them a universal crowd-pleaser. With winter markets and bakeries offering beautifully boxed assortments, these cookies have become little tokens of joy in India's expanding Christmas repertoire.

**Where to buy:** Kookie Cake Crumble (Mumbai), Freddie's Baking Studio (Bengaluru), Redmoon Bakery (Delhi)



3

## PEPPERMINT BARK

Crunchy, creamy, minty. Peppermint bark is an American holiday icon that arrived in India through chocolate boutiques and quickly found its fans. While peppermint isn't a traditional Indian flavour, it pairs naturally with the milk chocolates and dark chocolates we love. Many Indian chocolatiers add their own spin with layers tempered to perfection and flecks of *desi*-inspired toppings like candied orange peel or toasted almonds. Its festive colours, ease of gifting, and refreshing bite make it a December hit, especially for those who like their sweets slightly cool and crisp.

**Where to buy:** Chocolate Confusion (Mumbai), Zitter Chocolates (Chennai), Mozimo Chocolates (Chandigarh)



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## PUMPKIN PIE

The quintessential American holiday dessert, pumpkin pie feels unexpectedly at home in India thanks to its familiar warmth of cinnamon, nutmeg, and ginger. These spices echo the masalas we use in everything from *halwa* to *chai*, making pumpkin pie instantly comforting. Indian bakers often use the locally loved "*kaddu*" purée, giving the pie a deeper earthiness. Its custard-like texture, flaky crust, and mellow sweetness make it a fresh yet rooted addition to India's Christmas menu. Especially among those who enjoy experimenting with global flavours.

**Where to buy:** Toujous (Mumbai), Crave by Leena (Bengaluru), Petite Pie Shop (Gurugram, Delhi)



5

## THE CHRISTMAS PUDDING

Few Christmas rituals are as theatrical as a flaming pudding! That iconic blue flame dancing atop a brandy-soaked dome. This British classic travelled to India with colonial households and stayed on through generations of Anglo-Indian and Goan families. Dense with dried fruits, candied peel, and warming spices, it tastes like winter distilled. In India, many households steam their puddings weeks in advance, allowing them to mature, deepen, and become heady with spirit. Served with custard or buttered rum sauce, a flambéed pudding brings old-world charm to Indian Christmas tables.

**Where to buy:** American Express Bakery (Mumbai), Katy's Kitchen (Mumbai), By The Way Bakery (Mumbai), Gaylord Bakery (Mumbai)



6

## STOLLEN

Germany's festive fruit bread, stollen, is a marzipan-centered log dusted with snowy sugar. But today, it has found its place in India's rising sourdough and artisanal bread movement. Its chewy texture, candied fruits, aromatic peel, and buttery crumb make it less a "bread" and more a celebratory confection. Indian bakers have embraced stollen for its craftsmanship, often infusing it with homegrown dried fruits and nuts. Perfect with tea or mulled wine, stollen adds a European air to India's December mornings.

**Where to buy:** SAPA Sourdough & Pastry (Mysuru), Liliyum Patisserie (Bengaluru)

7



9



## ALLAHABADI CAKE

A legend from Prayagraj, the Allahabadi cake is India's most distinctive Christmas creation. Invented by local Anglo-Indians, it brilliantly uses *ghee* instead of butter and *petha* (candied ash gourd) in place of peel, giving it a rosy tint and incomparable aroma. Flavoured with nutmeg, cinnamon, ginger, cloves and the region's own spice instincts (see *recipe on page 24*), this cake is both hearty and fragrant. It tells a story of ingenuity. Of Indian kitchens recreating British fruitcakes using what was locally available. Today, it's a cherished family tradition and a cultural treasure.

**Where to buy:** The Sweet Room by Andrea (custom orders, Prayagraj), Bushy's (Prayagraj)



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## FUDGE SQUARES

Fudge is universal comfort; creamy, rich, and deeply nostalgic. In India, fudge squares evoke memories of Lonavala holidays, Parsi bakeries, and school fetes. For Christmas, bakers turn them celebratory with walnuts, cranberries, and swirls of white chocolate. They cut clean, pack beautifully, and please every palate, making them ideal for festive gifting. Indian fudge often carries a slightly softer texture than American versions thanks to our love of milk-based sweets, giving it that melt-in-the-mouth charm.

**Where to buy:** Good Food Concept (Mumbai), BonBar Bakery (Delhi), Atmosphere Studio (New Delhi)

Pics: Vipul Varyani, Toujours, unsplash.com and iStock



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## MINCE PIES

These tiny British hand pies may sound meaty, but the "mince" refers to a fruit-and-nut mixture cooked with spices and citrus. In India, they've become a December staple in bakeries influenced by old colonial traditions. Their buttery shells cradle a jammy filling reminiscent of our own fruit preserves and *murrabas*, making them surprisingly familiar. Many Indian bakers brighten them with local ingredients like homemade apple preserves or citrus zest. Served warm with icing sugar, mince pies are little pockets of festive nostalgia.

**Where to buy:** Sassy Teaspoon (Mumbai), Wenger's (New Delhi)



## MARZIPAN

Goan, Anglo Indian and East Indian households have long shaped Christmas nostalgia with marzipan — dyed, moulded, and sculpted into glossy fruits and other shapes. Though marzipan began in Europe, its cashew-rich Indian versions stand proudly apart from the almond marzipan of the West. Tiny mangoes, bananas, oranges, and berries emerge from family moulds, brushed with colour and gleaming like edible jewels. These figurines are often exchanged as festive tokens, embodying both craftsmanship and sweet childhood memories.

**Where to buy:** Misree (New Delhi), Hearsch Bakery (Mumbai), Maska Bakery (Mumbai)

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12

## GUAVA CHEESE (PERADA)

One of Goa's most beloved sweets, guava cheese, or *perada*, is a glorious ruby slab of concentrated guava pulp, sugar, and lime. Though not traditionally tied to Western Christmas, it has become a staple of Goan December gifting. Its chewy, jewel-like texture and tropical perfume offer a distinctly Indian counterpoint to the spices and dried fruits dominating the season. Served in neat diamonds, it brings sunshine to the winter table and reminds us how Indian Christmas has evolved into its own delicious identity.

**Where to buy:** Ann Dias (Mumbai), Lazarus Coelho (Goa), Pedro Pao (Goa)

(with inputs by Shreya Mukherjee)

# PAST PERFECT—KOLKATA STYLE!

In this warm, memory-soaked journey through the city's festive past, writer PROMITA MUKHERJEE revisits Kolkata's Christmas rituals, iconic bakeries and the beloved plum cake that defined generations

The year is sometime in the 1960s. It's a crisp, foggy winter morning in Kolkata. The smell of *luchi* floats through the air even as households slowly wake up to their Sunday routine. A dainty Studebaker Commander glides out of the garage from a narrow lane in north Kolkata. Not too far away, a highway-hardened Hindustan Ambassador roars out. The destination for both is the same – Sahebpara, loosely translated to mean the areas of Chowringhee, Esplanade and Park Street. The occasion: Christmas, which is around the corner. Hence a cake must be

bought. The choices? The same two, mostly – Flurys or Nahoum & Sons. Decades later, a little girl would repeat what her parents did while growing up in the City of Joy – just that she would always choose Nahoum for the plum cake and Flurys for the birthday cake.

#### Cakes as Childhood

It would be the same routine for a Parsi girl for whom cakes were an integral part of childhood. Because Christmas and December meant cakes from all relatives. "Grandma would get us a cake from Nahoum, the Flurys cake came from grandpa



while dad got us a cake from Saldanha Bakery," food writer Rukshana A. Kapadia, Co-founder, Ammolite Ideators Food Service Consultants, fondly reminisces. Growing up in Kolkata in the 90s, some things were a given. You always shopped at Shriram Arcade or Metro Plaza, you always went to Scoop for ice cream, Mocambo or Trincas for a fancy dinner, to the clubs for Christmas and New Year parties and you always bought your cakes from Flurys and Nahoum.

There is nothing that screams Christmas more than the cakes – especially something that has

remained unchanged in shape and taste over the decades – the plum cake. And the celebrations are not limited to the Christian community alone. As journalist and food writer Vir Sanghvi says, "Christmas is big in Goa and other places with a large Christian community. But in Kolkata it is a secular festival. It isn't just Christians who celebrate it. For instance, the best plum cake used to come from Nahoum, which was a Jewish bakery. Like everything else there in the days when old Mr Nahoum ran the bakery, it was a labour of love."

#### Baking for Bada Din

For Anand Puri, the owner of the legendary Trincas, it is the Dundee cake that still holds a special place in his memory. "There used to be a lot of Christmas cakes that used to come home. The Nahoum plum cake, Dundee from Britannia, some came with sugar crusting, some with marzipan with a tinge of almond, but I always remember the Dundee cake that used to be baked upside down in a tin container and we would have it that way. It smelled like Christmas. Everyone in the family had their own way of eating it. I preferred straight from the box," says Puri.

For the city's now tiny Anglo-Indian community, this was the time when a

(previous page, clockwise from top left) Flurys's plum pudding, regular plum cake, almond iced plum cake, the bustling interior of Flurys. (this page, clockwise from left) Bada Din celebrations in Park Street, Anand Puri, a vintage Trincas ad, Alisha and Debra Alexander. (next page) Nahoum's plum cake and its busy store interior



visit to New Market was mandatory. Ingredients like dry fruits, tutti-frutti, red and green dyed orange peels, glazed red cherries, green and black raisins, rum, etc., had to be bought. Then they would create their own batter and mix dry fruits. Back in the day, most people didn't have ovens at home to bake cakes. Cakes had to be made and distributed to friends and family as well for "Bada Din". So, there would be beelines outside small bakeries with the batter to bake them in their ovens. "When we were young, we would stand like a hawk over the process so that they 'don't get ripped off, men!" says journalist Stephanie Sweeney, laughing.

Debra Alexander, the owner of yet another iconic bakery, Saldanha, remembers it all too well, as if it were just yesterday. The 58-year-old gave up her banking job to follow in her father's footsteps to run the bakery started by her grandmother and where she literally grew up. "Back in the day, a lot of families would come with their ingredients to bake their cakes. Unfortunately, it started getting difficult as the business expanded and the demand increased. Hence, we started referring them to bakers around," says Debra, who along with her daughter Alisha

Alexander (a Le Cordon Bleu alumna), now runs the bakery.

#### **Memories That Linger**

For Rukshana, bakeries like Saldanha, Great Eastern Bakery, Nahoum and Flurys still hold a special place in her heart. Cakes, and especially plum cakes, have been a part of her growing up, the way it has been for most denizens of the city. As Sanghvi puts it: "It's worth remembering that plum cake for Christmas is mostly a British thing (not so common elsewhere) and

Kolkata was the city most connected to British tradition."

Rukshana feels that while the packaging has improved these days and the cakes certainly look better and more polished, she yearns for the times when plum cakes "helped us extend Christmas and the spirit of Christmas." She still remembers fondly the cake from Flurys that would be covered in hard marzipan icing, and each bakery had its own flavour. Then there were cakes made at home as well. In her house, the tradition was tossing a coin in the



batter, and then the excitement that followed while cutting the cake as to who would get the coin were some of the warm memories that she carries with her.

Sanghvi, whose plum cake favourite was always Nahoum, remembers being confused as a child by the difference between plum pudding and plum cake. "That's my earliest memory. And I am still not sure what the difference is! But as a child I used to get inordinately excited when they flambéed it," he says.

Vikas Kumar, executive chef at Flurys, says the recipe of their iconic plum cake has remained unchanged over the decades. "The only thing that has changed is the number of plum cakes we make every year. I'm sure the main recipe is at least 100 years old, and we have changed nothing of it," he assures.

It's the memory of the plum cake that has propelled Puri from Trincas to come up with a whole new cocktail named Christmas Cake this season. "We have used all the flavours you get in a Christmas cake," he says.

That's the thing about Christmastide — you always associate it with memories. And after all, is there anything that smells sweeter than memories of times gone by?

Pics Courtesy: Rashbehari Das, Flurys, Nahoum & Sons, Trincas and Saldanha Bakery



*Christmas*

Mumbai's East Indian community keeps Christmas alive through kitchens rich with bottle masala, timeless roasts, rustic breads and warm toddies—traditions that echo through old Bandra villages and generations of festive hospitality, reminisces RAUL DIAS

I've always believed that Christmas tastes different depending on whose home you're in. Growing up Goan in Mumbai, my festive table was shaped by the familiar flavours of *sorpotel*, *sannas*, *bebincá* and roast meat. But my most vivid Christmas memories—the ones that still glow warm at the edges—came not from my own kitchen, but from the kitchens of my East Indian neighbours and friends. Their dishes, simmered in tradition and built on a heritage older than the city itself, were an invitation into a world I felt privileged to witness.

#### **Table Talk**

If you've ever been welcomed into an East Indian home at Christmas, you'll know that their celebrations centre around food as much as faith. There's joy in every simmering vessel, sentiment in every spice. And nothing embodies that spirit more than their version of pork *sorpotel*. At first glance it resembles its Goan counterpart (soft nuggets of pork and offal cooked to a deep, celebratory red) but one spoonful reveals the difference. The East Indian rendition leans on their famed bottle masala, that mystical blend of over twenty sun-dried spices ground into a velvet-fine powder, and it always includes chopped onions cooked down till they melt into the gravy, imparting a whisper of sweetness to the dish. Goan *sorpotel* never uses onions, and that makes all the difference in the world: East Indian *sorpotel* is rounder, deeper, earthier, with a kind of gentle warmth that coats the tongue rather than assaults it.



(left to right) an East Indian Christmas spread, sorpotel and chitiaps.

That bottle masala, that's always referred to in reverent tones, is the soul of many other festive dishes. I remember standing in our genial neighbour, Aunty Muriel's kitchen as an eight-year-old, watching her tip the precious spice mix into a simmering pot of *khuddi* curry. The aroma would burst forth instantly: smoky, spicy, faintly sweet, an olfactory Christmas carol of its own. *Khuddi* always tasted like celebration—bright, red, tangy—its spoonful's staining the fingers and lingering on the lips. And then there was *lonvas*, a milder, coconut-and-vinegar-based curry essentially designed to comfort you between the fierier dishes. Even *lonvas*, subtle as it was, carried a tiny whisper of bottle masala, because an East Indian festive table feels incomplete without that signature note.

Nothing, however, ever prepared me for the grandeur of their stuffed roast suckling pig. The first time I saw one—laid out on a long wooden table in a Bandra home—I felt something close to awe. The skin, lacquered to a perfect sheen, crackled under the knife. The stuffing hidden within was an aromatic treasure chest of minced meat, bread, liver, raisins, herbs, and of course, the barest hint of bottle masala to give the mixture its unmistakable East Indian stamp. The pig would be the centrepiece of Christmas lunch, the dish that demanded silence for a moment before the carnage of carving began.

#### **Breaking Bread**

But Christmas wasn't only about gravies and roasts. The breads were just as important. My personal favourite was always *fugias*—light, deep-fried globes of dough that puffed like golden balloons. Interesting fact: the name *fugia* comes from the Marathi word for balloon, *fugga*! They were sweetish, chewy, dangerously addictive, and impossible to stop at just one. *Chitiaps* were the more delicate



cousins: thin, lacy rice flour pancakes made on a special pan, perfect for scooping up curries like a pork vindaloo or simply savouring with a drizzle of ghee. And then there was the famed wedding rice, a subtly sweet, festive preparation studded with spices and caramelised onions, often served at community feasts and celebratory tables.

Christmas, of course, calls for a drink that matches the season's warmth. While Goans like me grew up on a steady supply of rum toddies, the East Indian answer to winter's embrace was *khimad*. It's a gently spiced hot toddy-like concoction made by infusing country liquor—often the potent *mahura*—with warming spices. On a December night in Bandra's leafy lanes, a steaming mug of *khimad* could thaw even the chilliest soul.

#### **'Nosh'talgia Unlimited!**

What moves me most about East Indian Christmas food isn't only its flavours—it's the generosity that accompanies it. This cuisine has always been kept alive not by restaurants but by families, neighbours, and tightly knit village communities. Bandra's old enclaves—



(clockwise from top left) khimad, fugias and mutton khuddi curry

Pics Courtesy: Chef Freny Fernandes of Freny's, Raul Dias and unsplash.com



(top left to right) old homes and murals dot Bandra's quaint Ranwar Village. (bottom) pork vindaloo and fugias

Ranwar, Chuim, Chimbai, and Pali Villages—were where I tasted my first East Indian Christmas. Each lane felt like a festive postcard: wooden cottages, bougainvillea-laden balconies, ladies dressed in the colourful, traditional *lugra* saris and the soft glow of lanterns.

One cottage in particular remains etched in my memory: a charming old one-storied home belonging to my friend and former colleague, Stardust Gonsalves. With its sloping red-tiled roof and windows framed in ageing wood, it looked like something pulled straight out of a storybook—a gingerbread house come to life. At Christmas, it sparkled with twinkling lights and, naturally, the most beautiful Christmas star you could imagine. And yes, I always joked that no star could shine brighter than Stardust herself.

Inside, the warmth was tangible. Meals at Stardust's home were a symphony of East Indian flavours: a *sorpotel* gently bubbling on the stove, *fugias* stacked in a towering, irresistible pile, and *khimad* warming guests from the inside out. The laughter was loud, the rooms full, and every plate passed around felt

like a continuation of an age-old tradition. I wasn't East Indian, but in those moments, embraced by the hospitality of Bandra's villagers and families, I felt like I belonged to that world as much as anyone.

Perhaps that's why, even today, East Indian Christmas cooking stirs something in me that's almost tender. It's a cuisine I never grew up eating at home, but one I grew to love deeply through the kindness of those who shared it with me. Each dish reminds me of childhood evenings spent at Aunty Muriel's; of Christmas lunches in Bandra's cosy village homes; of Stardust's gingerbread cottage glowing like a beacon of warmth.

In a city that's constantly reinventing itself, East Indian Christmas food remains a beautifully anchored tradition—a reminder of Mumbai's indigenous soul. If you've never tried it, let this be your nudge. Christmas may mean different things to different people, but for me, it will always be tied to those East Indian kitchens—where nostalgia is stirred in every pot, and love, like bottle masala, is always added by the heaping spoonful.



# 5 Recipes to Spark Celebration

India's Christmas table is shaped by countless regional stories imbued in food and drink. TEAM *FRESH* brings you five recipes inspired by some of the season's most beloved traditions straight from IFN's recipe vault!

## Mulled Wine

Our spiced mulled wine takes a classic winter drink and infuses it with warm Indian aromatics, the kind you'd find in festive Anglo-Indian homes.

 Serves  
4

### Ingredients

Red wine | 750 ml bottle  
Maple syrup | 3 to 4 tablespoons  
Orange | 1 large, sliced  
Star anise | 2 whole  
Cinnamon sticks | 2 sticks

### Method

- In a saucepan, combine red wine with maple syrup, sliced oranges, star anise, and cinnamon.
- Place the pan over a low flame, allowing the mixture to warm slowly and release its festive fragrance.
- Keep it just below a simmer for 15 to 20 minutes so the spices infuse the wine with their flavours without boiling away its character.
- Give it a quick taste and adjust sweetness or spice to suit your style, more maple for sweetness or extra cinnamon for warmth.
- Strain into heatproof mugs, garnish with a citrus slice, and serve up an elegant Indian-accented mulled wine moment.

Recipe by Team IFN



 View the  
recipe  
video here!

## Sweet Potato and Pumpkin Soup

Though simple and universal, this comforting soup reflects the kind of seasonal produce which relies on hearty winter cooking.

 Serves  
2

### Ingredients

Sweet potato | 4 cups, peeled and chopped into chunky pieces  
Pumpkin | 4 cups, peeled and chopped into chunky pieces  
Oil | 4 tablespoons  
Cumin seeds | 2 teaspoons  
Black peppercorns | 1 teaspoon  
Garlic | 4 cloves, chopped  
Ginger | 2 tablespoons, chopped  
Green chillies | 4, slit  
Onion | 2 medium, chopped  
Coriander powder | 2 teaspoons  
Turmeric | 1 teaspoon  
Red chilli powder | 1-2 teaspoons  
Salt to taste  
Water | 4 cups (adjust as needed)  
Coconut milk | 1/4 cup (for garnish +

extra for consistency if preferred  
Roasted peanuts | 4 tablespoons, crushed  
Spring onions | 4 tablespoons, chopped  
Bird's eye chillies | optional, finely chopped for heat

### Method

- Peel and chop your sweet potatoes and pumpkin into generous chunks. No need for tiny pieces; big cuts give the soup its rustic charm.
- Warm some oil in a deep pot and toss in cumin seeds, peppercorns, garlic, ginger, and green chillies. Let them crackle and perfume your kitchen.
- Add the onions and sauté until they are golden at the edges. That slight caramelisation is where the flavour quietly begins.
- Pour in just enough water to cover the vegetables, and bring them to a gentle boil. Let the vegetables soften.
- Blend it smooth using a hand blender right in the pot. Watch the soup transform into a silky, sunset-orange puree.
- Finish with coconut milk, then ladle into bowls and top with roasted peanuts, spring onions, and a hint of bird's eye chilli if you like the heat.

Recipe by Team IFN

[View the  
recipe  
video here!](#)



# Allahabadi Spiced Cake

This ghee-laden "wonder cake" pays homage to a cherished regional and community classic that has travelled across generations.



Serves  
10-12

## Ingredients

(8-inch round or 9x5 loaf)

### Dry Mix

All-purpose flour | 200 g  
Baking powder | 1½ teaspoon  
Salt | ¼ teaspoon  
Ground cinnamon | 1 teaspoon  
Ground nutmeg | ½ teaspoon  
Ground cloves | ¼ teaspoon  
Ground ginger (saunth) | ½ teaspoon

### Fruit & Nuts

All-purpose flour | 200 g  
Raisins (mixed black + golden) | 120 g  
Chopped dates | 60 g  
Chopped candied peel | 50 g (or 50 g petha), finely chopped  
Chopped almonds or cashews | 60 g  
Rum, brandy or orange juice | 80 ml (for soaking)

### Wet Mix

Ghee | 150 g (soft, not melted)  
Castor sugar | 150 g  
Eggs | 3 large (room temperature)  
Vanilla extract | 1½ tsp  
Warm milk | 40-50 ml (only if needed to loosen batter)

## Method

1. In a bowl, combine the raisins, dates, candied peel or petha, and chopped nuts with the rum, brandy, or

View the  
recipe  
video here!

orange juice. Mix well, cover, and let it sit overnight (or at least 3-4 hours).

2. Preheat the oven to 160°C (fan 150°C). Line your baking tin. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, salt, and all the ground spices until evenly combined.
3. In another bowl, beat the ghee and castor sugar for 3-4 minutes until pale, creamy, and soft. Add the eggs one at a time, whisking well after each addition, then stir in the vanilla extract.
4. Gently fold the dry mix into the creamed mixture, working slowly to maintain the batter's lightness. Toss 1-2 tbsp of the flour into the soaked fruits, then fold them into the batter. If the mixture feels stiff, loosen it with warm milk a little at a time.
5. Spoon the batter into the lined tin and smooth the top. Bake for 70-85 minutes, checking every 10 minutes from the 65-minute mark. The cake is ready when a skewer comes out with a few moist crumbs.
6. Let the cake cool completely in the tin.

### Additional Tips

- \* Brush with a little warm honey or rum once cooled.
- \* Rest 24 hours for the best flavour.

Recipe by Ann Dias



# The Egg'less' Nog

This unctuous and creamy recipe reimagines a holiday staple with a coconut-y twist...



Serves  
4-5

## Ingredients

Coconut milk | 1 litre  
Wakefield vanilla-flavoured custard powder | 3 tablespoons (about 30 g)  
Sugar | 60-70 g (adjust to taste)  
Nutmeg powder | ¼ teaspoon  
Ground cinnamon | ¼ teaspoon (plus extra for dusting)  
Vanilla extract | 1 teaspoon  
Pinch of salt (optional, but enhances flavour)

## Method

1. In a small bowl, whisk together 30 g custard powder with 100 ml cold coconut milk until smooth and lump-free.
2. In a saucepan, add the remaining 900 ml of coconut milk and 60-70 g of sugar. Heat on medium until just beginning to steam (do not boil).
3. Lower the heat and slowly pour in the custard slurry, whisking continuously. Cook for 3-4 minutes until the mixture thickens slightly. The nog should be pourable and

creamy, not pudding-like.

4. Turn off the heat and stir in the nutmeg, cinnamon, vanilla extract, and the optional pinch of salt. Taste and adjust sweetness or spice as desired.
5. For a traditional feel, chill for at least 2 hours; it thickens a little more as it cools. If you prefer it warm, serve immediately.

6. Pour into glasses or mugs and finish with a light dusting of cinnamon on top.

### Additional Tips

- \* If it becomes too thick after chilling, whisk in a splash of coconut milk before serving.
- \* You can use soy milk or oat milk for an even creamier texture.
- \* The flavours deepen after refrigeration, so even if you want to serve it warm, cool it after cooking, refrigerate it for 2-3 hours or overnight and then warm it before serving.

Recipe by Raul Dias

View the  
recipe  
video here!



[View the  
recipe  
video here!](#)

# Kerala Roast Chicken

This bold, and fiery roast chicken brings the unmistakable depth of flavour that defines Christmas tables in Kerala's Christian households.

 Serves  
2-4

## Ingredients

Whole chicken | 1 small,  
approximately 2 kg

### Marinade

Lemon juice | from 1 whole lemon  
Ground turmeric | 1 teaspoon  
Red chilli powder | 2 tablespoons  
Salt to taste

### Stuffing

Hard-boiled egg | 1, peeled  
Potatoes | 2, peeled and diced  
Oil | 1 tablespoon  
Raisins | 1 tablespoon  
Curry leaves | 1 sprig  
Onion | 1 large, sliced  
Green chilli | 1, sliced

Ginger | 1 tablespoon, minced  
Garlic | 1 tablespoon, minced  
Ground turmeric | ½ teaspoon  
Ground coriander | 2 teaspoons  
Red chilli powder | 1 teaspoon  
Salt to taste

## Method

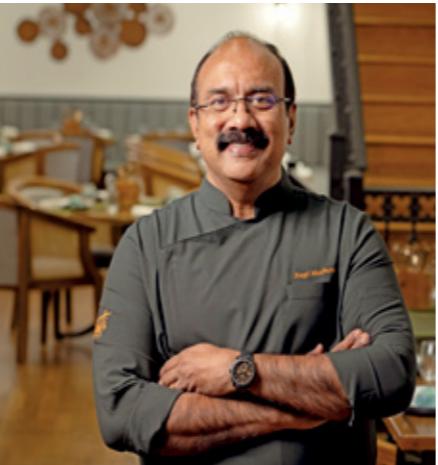
- Rub the whole chicken with lemon juice, turmeric, red chilli powder, and salt. Coat evenly and let it rest for at least 30 minutes.
- Chop the onions and green chillies, and dice the potatoes. Now, in a large plate, combine raisins, curry leaves, onions, green chilli, ginger, garlic, diced potatoes, and boiled eggs. Add turmeric, coriander, red chilli powder, and salt.
- Spoon the cooled stuffing into the cavity of the marinated chicken, making sure it is packed well. Tie the legs if needed to hold everything in place.
- Place the chicken on a baking tray and roast at 170°C for 35–40 minutes, until golden and cooked through.
- Plate the chicken alongside butter-garlic carrots, Brussels sprouts, and roasted baby potatoes.

Recipe by Team IFN



Pics: Vipul Varyani (photography), Swapnil Shinde (preparation) and Sallu Dhurandhar (production)

# Festive Chef Tables



**REGI MATHEW**  
Culinary Director and  
Owner, Kappa Chakka  
Kandhari in Chennai and  
Bengaluru; co-founder,  
Chatti by Regi Mathew in  
New York

**'Time spent  
with friends,  
family over  
food and jokes'**



Christmas celebrations begin with cake after midnight mass. The next day, our Syrian Christian breakfast includes steamed banana, appam with mutton stew, or kallappam with chicken curry. Aval vilayichathu (beaten rice with jaggery and coconut) and banana is another classic of our community, originally from Central Travancore. Lunch is a lavish feast with cutlet and sallas, bread and chicken or duck roast, appam with fish moilee, red rice, kachiya moru, beef ularthiyathu, pork fry, kodampuli fish curry, cabbage thoran and pazham nanachathu for dessert. As a child, I remember cake-making with my mother and caring for the duck that would be served for Christmas. I love it when friends and family gather to chat, crack jokes and cook together. For me, Christmas is incomplete without carols.

**PAUL KINNY**  
Culinary Director, St Regis  
Mumbai

**'Good food,  
good music  
and gratitude'**

For me, Christmas is an intimate celebration with my family. We reflect on the year and share our gratitude. We keep it simple — good food, good music and uninterrupted time with those who matter most. On Christmas day, we cook a classic chicken roast along with East Indian essentials like



fugias and potato chops. My wife makes traditional East Indian sweets such as marzipan, milkcream, kulkuls, guava cheese, date-and-walnut rolls, boros and doughnuts, which are also shared with loved ones. Everyone knows the holiday season in hospitality is a whirlwind, but I take it as a reminder to pause and spend unhurried time with my family. I look forward to grounding myself before the chaos of the New Year. Christmas always stirs nostalgia. I remember sitting on the kitchen floor with my mother, the tiny room warm from the wood chulha, stuffing nevries with coconut and rava, then frying them. We made hundreds. That's where my love for sharing joy through food began.



**RACHEL GOENKA**  
Founder & CEO, TCSC  
Hospitality Pvt Ltd (The  
Sassy Spoon, House of  
Mandarin, Baraza & Sassy  
Teaspoon, 8ish)

**'Christmas  
time is one  
happy disaster'**



**C**hristmas at home is pure, happy chaos. It's fairy lights, over-the-top decorations and plenty of food. My mum goes into full festive mode every year — no corner of the house is spared. My sister and I have officially claimed the roast chicken; that's our Christmas territory. Since my kids were born, the gingerbread house has become a ritual. It's less 'Pinterest' and more happy disaster, but that's what makes it special. December is my excuse to slow down without guilt. Christmas almost always happens in Goa — bare feet, beach-tousled hair, long lunches and zero sense of time. Everything I love about Christmas circles back to the table: proper Goan food like sweet rice, *sorpote*, roast beef and beef rolls packed with bacon and ginger.



**GRACIAN  
D'SOUZA**  
Chef & Restaurant  
Consultant

**'Look forward  
to sorpotel,  
ginjinha'**

**A**s a Catholic, Christmas is one of the biggest festivals for my family. Growing up, we travelled to Goa to spend the holidays with our grandparents. Our Christmas rituals are a blend of Goan, Portuguese and English food traditions. We begin macerating the fruit for rum cake in the first week of December. Christmas starts for us around December 22 and continues until December 31, with a spread of various cuisines. On Christmas Day, it's *porchetta*. We get it prepared in Goa, along with roast pigling and wine. *Ginjinha*, a sour cherry liqueur, is a family recipe. We enjoy our *sorpote*, roast chicken and avoid overly spicy dishes that week.



**SABY  
(SABYASACHI)  
GORAI**  
Chef Consultant

**'Celebration  
is always with  
kitchen family'**



**C**hristmas became important to me for two reasons: I attended a missionary school, Ascender God Church in Asansol, and my mother was from Kolkata — a city that celebrates Christmas with unmatched enthusiasm. We had a baker in the family who made plum cake. Our bloodline has Anglo-Indian and German roots, so *kobiraji* cutlet and devilled eggs with an outer mutton coating were part of our Anglicised meals. I left home for Goa at 16 to work at Colva Beach Hotel by Mahindra Holidays. I've never had an off on Christmas or New Year's in my 30-year career. So, Christmas is always celebrated in the kitchen with my team. Mulled wine made together, turkey sandwiches or turkey rolls from leftover turkey, and sitting around a fire roasting marshmallows — it's simple, but hearty.



**JOHNY VINESH**  
Co-founder and Executive  
Pastry Chef, Lavonne  
Academy of Baking Science  
& Pastry Arts

**'Our family  
celebration  
is simple with  
mom's kulkul  
and cookies'**

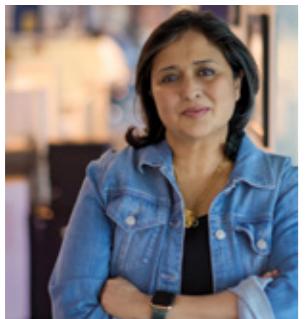
**M**y parents are Malayali Christians, and I grew up a Catholic boy in Bengaluru. Christmas meant a large gathering at my aunt's home with my grandma and the families of her nine daughters. One aunt ran Golden Bakery, and I always



looked forward to the cake she brought. Each aunt prepared a specialty — from *kulkul* (deep-fried, curled Goan pastry) to *achappams*. Unfortunately, over the years, everyone moved away, and many elders passed on. Now, with Lavonne, it's a busy time. Our Christmas cake and other goodies are extremely popular. My wife Juni handles the decorations. At home, we celebrate quietly with my parents. It's no longer as elaborate since it's not a holiday for me anymore. Mom makes cookies, *laddus*, *kulkul* and *kozhukkatta* — rice flour toasted with coconut and jaggery. It's super hard to chew, but Malayalis love it.

# Yes Chef!

By MONISHA ADVANI



**At the time of making a reservation at a restaurant, I'm often politely asked "Any allergies or dietary preferences?" My response is consistent - I am allergic to hunger and prefer to not leave a table hungry. That pretty much sums up my qualifications to write this column. Of course, I sound facetious if I didn't back the quip with a deep appreciation for the hands that feed me. And on top of the heap are the hands that lead those that feed. I am therefore utterly grateful, sometimes in awe and always curious for the role played by the chef.**

I met Chef Prateek Sadhu on an October evening in 2017. Masque had just opened to some placid reviews. A friend had suggested we form our own opinions. I value objectivity and, above all, a good meal.

Seated at a table where we were literally the only three guests that evening, we had the undivided attention of the captain of the kitchen. With some tentativeness, Prateek introduced himself and the courses that followed. I must admit, that first meal was forgettable. It was good, expected, but not outstanding. Nothing screamed innovation. But the real dividend was Prateek himself. A uniquely relaxed demeanour, proud of his efforts but not arrogant, he stood by our table for a chat for over an hour. Right through that evening, one thing came across clearly – Prateek was a listener. He spoke carefully, listened intently, almost like the forager he is since applauded to be. Only the foraging this time was through the chatter of his guests, who admittedly dropped enough examples of meals had before in the company of celebrated chefs. Yup, *mea culpa!* He soaked what had worked for us, where the underwhelming tones were, what elevated the experience, and, most importantly, where the story was behind every dish. I could see that twinkle in his eye. He was rewriting his script. He was learning.

We became friends that evening and remained in contact over social media. A few weeks later I stopped by the restaurant and dropped off some organic vinegar from Madikeri, and we discussed how this exotic potion broke down the toughest proteins. He nodded indulgently.

(top right) Chef Prateek Sadhu.  
(right) one of the chef's meticulously plated dishes



We made a deal that afternoon. The next time I ate at Masque, if the meal hit the right notes, I owed him homemade mutton *biryani*. Incidentally, this playful wager has since become a staple bribe I make to budding chefs!

He called me a month later and asked me to come in for the revised tasting menu. Almost a decade later, I still remember each course... the ode to Mumbai – a lobster and mango ceviche with a drizzle of *kasundi*; the flaky *katlam* bread served with hand-churned butter – from his childhood memories in Srinagar; and the star – the humble mackerel, painstakingly deboned, lightly poached and charred on the surface, served on rye toast dressed with a Kashmiri chilli paste...

His menu told a story. Of a land of birth, to a journey to acquire technique, to the city he called home.

And he effortlessly waxed eloquence as he took me course by course on this food trip.

Next day, three kilos of mutton *biryani* were delivered to the Masque kitchen. From that inflection point, Prateek has never looked back. His temperament has always underscored his ambition and not the other way around. That speaks volumes for someone who could be encashing on many coveted milestones that have been deservedly earned. And yet, he finds a way to harness the inertia on his own terms.

The glory years of building Masque side by side with the dynamic restaurateur and my dearest friend Aditi Duggar saw them rise from season to season. It was fairytale-like, something we often joked about chronicling. On the eve of Masque entering the 'World's 50 Best' list for Asia, they seemed invincible.

The pandemic happened literally a week later, stopping the world in its tracks. Closer to home, it gave a forced pause to both partners, at the end of which they respectfully opted for different paths. And, expectedly, both have flourished in their choices.

At a time when Prateek was the toast of the town, the culinary world, a rising star, he just disappeared. On a sabbatical for most of 2022,

following a punctuated trail of guest appearances in kitchens around the world, he contemplated what next. When he announced NAAR in 2023, there was a scramble to find it on Google Maps... and that was met with heightened scepticism. In Kasauli? A long winding road to reach an outpost isolated from civilisation? All for a meal? Was India ready for such a destination experience? Let's be honest, destination restaurants have existed in India but with cleverly mapped logistics near an Ahmedabad, or within the growing city limits of a Bengaluru, or a Goa – where one holidays to eat.

While I remained ambivalent about his choices, early chatter spoke of the facilities, struggle to reach, lack of bookings. Truthfully, I was curious. NAAR was not just about food and Prateek's story. It was his first major business bet. And he had gone all in with his hard-earned equity as a chef. I wished him. And he said come...see what he had built.

Two years on, I have been to NAAR five times. Taken the flight from Mumbai to Chandigarh, re-routed and endured detours, but made it a fixture I will not miss. My only regret? I wish I hadn't waited almost a year to get there. I let go of objectivity and allowed others' experiences to guide my choice. Till I didn't.



(clockwise from top left and next page)  
NAAR in Kasauli which means 'fire' is much more than just about the chef's story and his evocative food



NAAR means fire. And, true to its name, all meals are cooked on sustainable wood fires in an open kitchen that has a small, enthusiastic and proud crew. Almost all of them have travelled from world cities to find their spot in this food revolution being helmed by Prateek and his partners. There is something professorial about how Prateek leads them to the garden patches in the valley that the restaurant sits perched above. He knows retention is tough – the location is bound to get the better of each of them at some point. But while he has their attention, one can see how selflessly he invests in making sure they turn up, listen, learn and move out in better form than when they arrived.

For that has been his journey too. He consistently listens, learns and moves.

For now, he's back in the mountains, where he was born. The challenges each day keep him engaged, even triumphant with small victories. He knows he's adding to a legacy that started in his mother's kitchen. He pays a silent homage to every restaurant he's worked in. And values each guest, even when some of them seriously ask him – *yeh one by two ho saka hai?*

As for the restaurant NAAR – it is sold out almost every day. People arrive from all over for the experience. And return for the hospitality. And

the meal – each course is flawless, unique, locally sourced and telling a story. The last meal I had there was on 24 November 2025. It was a collaboration with Chef Chalee Kader from Bangkok. The meal was orchestrated with precision to showcase what NAAR has grown into – an international standard for India to be proud of and the world to experience. From a *laksa* created with hand-pulled noodles and *tempura* goat's brain, to delicate slivers of wild boar grilled to moist perfection, seasoned with *thecha* made from Bird's Eye chilli, to a curry duck *pulao*... winter never stood a

chance before such a warm serve. Appropriately, it was also NAAR's second anniversary.

If this sounds like a gushing piece, let me clarify that I have held back on the numerous occasions when Prateek has been at the receiving end of scathing feedback from me. There have been meals that were clumsy, even lazy. There have been times when he's played to the galleries and forfeited his own voice in the kitchen. But there's never been a time when he hasn't listened.

To Prateek Sadhu, I say today and always, YES CHEF!



Pics Courtesy: @pankaj\_anand

# Merry Moodboards

India's top visual stylists share modern, luxurious décor ideas that PHORUM PANDYA brings together, creating a refined, festive guide for elevating your home and table with effortless glamour

## SUJATA BISWAS Co-Founder, Suta

Sujata Biswas — co-founder of the beloved homegrown saree label Suta — believes India's most timeless textile can moonlight as festive décor with striking elegance. Sarees passed down generations carry a nostalgia and sheen that translate beautifully into table runners, tablecloths, napkins, mats, pocket squares or even delicate fabric florals.

She recommends classic reds and greens for traditional Christmas styling, or luminous brocades and golds

as thematic anchors. For a more modern luxe aesthetic, she leans towards cooler palettes — teal, ice blue, soft pink — which contrast dreamily with fairy lights and winter evenings. A jamdani runner layered over crisp linen, she notes, makes any table look instantly editorial.

Biswas recalls being in Vienna and spotting Banarsi sarees used as curtains — an unexpectedly opulent gesture that transformed the room with old-world charm. "A saree, whether draped or displayed, is a piece of art," she says — and in festive décor, it becomes a statement of heritage luxury.





## ALOK VERMA

**Founder & Food Stylist, Secret Sauce Studios**

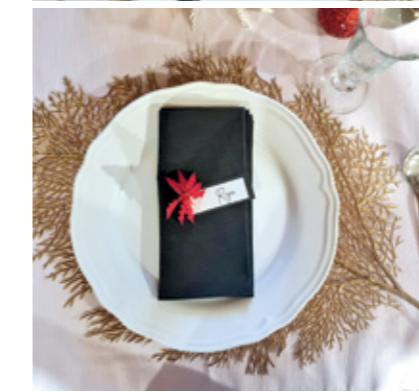
For Alok Verma, the creative force behind Secret Sauce Studios, this year's tablescape language is softer, quieter and deeply intentional. The classic reds and greens make way for winter whites, sage, sand, ivory-dusted beige and frost-washed pastels that whisper luxury rather than announce it. Paired with ivory linens, matte-gold cutlery, smoked glassware and charcoal stone plates, the palette exudes a serene, modern opulence. Metallics return too, but only in their most restrained, brushed forms. Think champagne gold over festive sparkle.



Drawing from a lifetime in Mumbai's culturally rich neighbourhoods, Verma notes how India's festive aesthetic beautifully fuses global cues with local craftsmanship. Terracotta votives on Scandi tables, Kashmiri papier-mâché ornaments alongside minimalist Western baubles, and handcrafted Indian ceramics mingling with smoked European glassware define the new-age Indian Christmas.

At Secret Sauce Studios, food always leads design. Menus dictate palettes — mulled wine and winter citrus call for deeper tones and stone textures; saffron desserts and roasts glow under warm lighting. A lavender mulled wine shoot from last year even inspired a tablescape of violet accents and grey stoneware.

This season's luxe narrative is richly tactile: boucle, linen, wool throws, untreated wood, hammered metal, handmade ceramics and terrazzo boards. Lighting provides the final flourish — tall clustered tapers, floating candles and diffused amber lamps that soften skin, enhance food and elevate every photograph. And scents — orange rind, cinnamon, pine, nutmeg, oud — anchor the home in winter nostalgia.



## AMI KOTHARI

**Tablescape Artist, Hosting Specialist & Founder, Dining Couture**

Ami Kothari — renowned tablescape artist and founder of Dining Couture — sees this festive season defined by a calm, curated elegance. Her preferred palette: beige, ecru, sage, mushroom, taupe and warm monochromes, all elevated with brushed gold or antique brass for a refined, global finish. For richer settings, she favours pomegranate, beetroot, emerald and gold, while pale pink paired with gold and white creates a soft, romantic glow.

Her modern-luxe philosophy champions reusability without compromising beauty. Dried florals, reusable textile runners, terracotta, artisanal pottery, natural wood, green candles, fairy lights and neutral serve ware work seamlessly across occasions. "Choose décor that transforms," she advises. "A lantern dressed with a red bow becomes Christmas-ready, and once removed, slips elegantly into Diwali or everyday styling."



Fresh flowers remain timeless — uplifted effortlessly with ornaments or baubles. Height, she emphasises, is the secret to a dramatic tablescape: sculptural candles, tiered platters, footed bowls and risers create visual abundance and guide the eye. For sit-down dinners, however, low centerpieces maintain intimacy, reserving taller elements for buffets and grazing spreads.





## SCENT-SATIONAL!

Craving something delicious without taking a single bite? These indulgent food-inspired candles curated by ROXANNE BAMBOAT serve up festive comfort, nostalgic aromas and pure joy—perfect for gifting or treating yourself with

They say you eat with your eyes, but scent is just as powerful—one whiff of something familiar can stir memories, lift your mood and spark instant hunger. While you can't eat everything that smells delicious, today's new-age candles get tantalisingly close. Gone are the days of simple wax sticks perched on dining tables. Modern candles come scented, stylised and downright playful, often mimicking your favourite treats with surprising accuracy.

Here are a range of delectable candles guaranteed to make your home smell festive—and possibly make you crave dessert:



### Gingerbread Bakery

from Bath & Body Works

This holiday favourite smells exactly like warm gingerbread cookies, brown sugar and cinnamon spice. Packaged in a festive jar with a decorative lid, the three-wick candle (approx. 200g, ₹ 1,999) instantly brings Christmas into your space. This brand also offers two more dessert-inspired picks: Cookie Butter Truffle (411g, ₹ 1,999) and Sugared Snickerdoodle (200g, ₹ 1,999). Both three-wick candles deliver cosy notes of vanilla, warm spices and freshly baked cookies—ideal for those who want their home to smell like a bakery.



### Blueberry Cheesecake

from The Sass Bar

Are creamy, fruity desserts your weakness? Then this candle is irresistible. It smells just like a rich blueberry cheesecake, and the jar is topped with realistic wax blueberries for a playful touch. Priced at ₹ 775 for 185g, it's the next best thing to digging into the real dessert.

### Strawberry Martini Cocktail Candle

from NishhIndia

For cocktail lovers, this novelty candle is as charming as it is fragrant. It smells exactly like a strawberry martini and is shaped like one too—complete with tiny wax strawberries perched on top. Available in two sizes, the small (130g) is priced at ₹ 850 and the large (260g) at ₹ 1,049. It's fun, flirty and perfect for gifting.

### Cherry Pineapple & Lime

from House of Aroma

If fruity desserts are more your jam, this lively fragrance blends sweet cherry, tangy pineapple and zesty lime. It smells like the first bite of a tropical cherry pie. The single-wick candle comes in a 150g jar priced at ₹ 599—an affordable way to brighten your mood and your home.



### Chai Scented Candle

from Euphoria Gifts

Chai isn't just a drink—it's an emotion. This candle captures that comfort beautifully, shaped like a classic cutting-chai glass with a wax Parle-G biscuit perched inside. The cinnamon-based fragrance is warm, nostalgic and soothing. Priced at ₹ 399 for 200g, it's a delightful ode to India's favourite pick-me-up.

### Grapefruit & Mangosteen

from Niana

Fresh, light and summery, this candle blends grapefruit and mangosteen with soft peach notes for a bright, refreshing fragrance that works year-round. The elegant clear-glass jar holds 502g of wax and is priced at ₹ 925.

### Iced Matcha Latte

from Rad Living

Matcha continues to trend worldwide, and Rad Living has bottled the café experience inside a candle. Designed to look like a real iced matcha latte, it offers the earthy, herbal scent of pure matcha with a soft milky undertone. Available in three sizes—Petite (100g, ₹ 499), OG (200g, ₹ 799) and Grande (350g, ₹ 999)—it's ideal for anyone who begins their day with matcha.



# TRY A Winter Reset!

Winter often wraps life in a gentle contradiction, the desire to slow down under a thick blanket with something warm in hand, and the pressure to keep up with the bright swirl of festive gatherings, indulgent meals, late nights and year-end responsibilities. Beneath this seasonal tug-of-war, our bodies quietly work harder than usual: maintaining warmth, digesting richer foods, repairing after late nights, keeping our skin from drying out, and fortifying our immunity against a backdrop of cold air and thriving winter viruses. It's no surprise that immunity becomes more vulnerable

In this winter-ready guide, nutritionist HARLENE BHASIN explores how seasonal nourishment, ancient spices, and mindful eating can help you stay energised, balanced, and resilient through the festive chill

now, when the mucosal lining of the respiratory tract weakens and digestion naturally slows. Add indulgent treats, alcohol and erratic timings, and the immune system feels stretched.

Winter nourishment, therefore, becomes more intuitive than restrictive—choosing foods that support warmth, strength and steady energy. Fortunately, winter offers exactly what the body needs: immune-boosting produce, warming spices, grounding root vegetables, healthy fats and protein-rich staples that build resilience from within.



“Winter foods aren’t just comforting—they’re biologically aligned to protect, warm and strengthen the body.”

## Ingredients That ‘Give’ Winter Wellness

Spices such as ginger, turmeric, cinnamon, cloves and black pepper become powerful winter allies, adding not only comfort but genuine physical warmth, encouraging better circulation, calmer digestion, reduced inflammation and stronger respiratory health. Ginger soothes sore throats and supports digestion, while turmeric’s antioxidant strength pairs best with black pepper for better absorption. Cinnamon warms the body and stabilises blood sugar, and cloves and black pepper support respiratory wellness while enhancing nutrient uptake.

Nature delivers an entire winter pharmacy in its produce. Citrus

fruits—bright oranges, kinnar, grapefruit, lemons—come loaded with vitamin C for immunity and fresh winter skin. *Amla*, with even more vitamin C than citrus, supports immunity, digestion and hair health despite its cooling nature. Root vegetables like sweet potatoes, carrots, beets and turnips provide fiber, antioxidants and steady energy, while leafy greens such as spinach, *methi* and *sarson* offer iron, folate and mineral-rich nourishment that supports liver function and blood health.

Healthy fats shine in winter. *Ghee* becomes especially valuable for digestion, nutrient absorption, joint lubrication and maintaining body heat—one teaspoon on an empty stomach can be a simple winter ritual. Nuts and seeds—almonds, walnuts, pistachios, sesame seeds and flaxseeds—deliver minerals, healthy fats and warmth, echoing traditional treats like *til* sweets and *chikki* (nut brittle). Avocado and olive oil support hormonal balance, skin health and steady energy. Protein, essential for building immune cells, becomes even more



## Winter Staples Worth Adding

**Amla** — more vitamin C than an orange

**Ghee** — supports heat, joints & digestion

**Methi** — mineral-rich winter green

**Ginger** — boosts circulation and fights sore throats

**Sesame** — traditional winter-warming seed



crucial in the cold. Lentils, beans, eggs, chicken, fish, yogurt (preferably at room temperature during the day), paneer and tofu create nourishing bases—especially when paired with warming spices.

And because nearly 70% of immunity lives in the gut, fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, idli or dosa batter, kimchi, sauerkraut and homemade pickles take on a key role. They improve digestion, enhance nutrient absorption and help the body resist winter infections.

Warmth, inside and out, is central to winter digestion. Broths (bone or vegetable) soothe the gut lining, while herbal teas made from ginger, tulsi, chamomile or cinnamon-clove bring comfort. The classic *kadha*—ginger, tulsi, black pepper, cloves, cinnamon—remains a time-tested winter remedy.

#### In Rhythm with the Season

A winter-friendly meal builds itself intuitively: a warming spice, a seasonal vegetable, a protein source, a healthy fat and something warm to sip. *Masoor dal* enriched with ghee and served with *methi sabzi*, sweet potato soup paired with grilled chicken, or a turmeric-scented millet *khichdi* with sautéed spinach offer warmth, nourishment and comfort in perfect balance.

Supporting these foods with simple lifestyle habits grounds your winter beautifully—choosing warm over cold foods to protect digestion, staying hydrated even with reduced thirst, keeping regular mealtimes to stabilise energy and immunity, and giving sleep priority so the body can repair after festive evenings.

Winter wellness is never about avoiding celebration; it's about moving through it with awareness and nourishment. When you eat in alignment with the season, you glide through cold days and lively nights feeling steadier, warmer, more energetic and wonderfully resilient.

# Winter Immunity Booster Kadha



[View the recipe video here!](#)



Serves  
1-2

#### Ingredients

Water | 2 cups  
Fresh ginger | 1-inch piece, crushed  
Tulsi/mint leaves | 5 to 6  
Cinnamon | small stick  
Black peppercorns | 4 to 5, crushed  
Cloves | 3 to 4  
Turmeric powder | ½ teaspoon (or 1-inch fresh turmeric root, grated)  
Honey or jaggery | 1 to 2 teaspoons (optional)  
Lemon juice | a few drops (optional)

#### Method

1. Coarsely crush the black peppercorns and cloves using a mortar and pestle.
2. In a saucepan, bring 2 cups of water to a boil.
3. Add ginger, tulsi/mint leaves, cinnamon stick, turmeric, crushed peppercorns, and cloves.
4. Lower the heat and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes, until it has reduced by half.
5. Strain into a cup. Add jaggery while boiling or honey once slightly cooled.
6. Finish with a few drops of lemon juice if desired, and sip warm.

Pics: Vipul Varyani (photography), Swapnil Shinde (preparation), Sali Dhurandhar (production) and iStock

# Winter Vegetable Millet Khichdi

Coriander powder | 1 teaspoon  
Black pepper powder | ½ teaspoon  
Garam masala | ½ teaspoon (optional)  
Salt to taste  
Water | 4 to 4.5 cups

#### Garnish

Chopped coriander  
Lemon juice  
Ghee | 1 teaspoon (optional)

#### Method

1. Rinse and soak the millet and dal together for 20 to 30 minutes.
2. Heat ghee in a pressure cooker or pot. Add cumin, mustard, bay leaf, ginger and garlic.

3. Add the onions and sauté for 2 to 3 minutes, then add the tomatoes and cook until soft.

4. Add all the chopped vegetables, turmeric, coriander powder, black pepper and salt. Sauté for 3 to 4 minutes.

5. Add soaked millet and dal. Mix well. Pour 4 to 4.5 cups of water, stir and bring to a boil. Cook for 4 to 5 whistles on medium heat, or simmer in a pot for 25 to 30 minutes.

6. Once done, open and mix. Add garam masala, lemon juice and coriander. Drizzle ghee on top and serve hot.



Serves  
3-4

#### Ingredients

##### Grains & Lentils

Little millet | 1 cup  
Moong dal | ½ cup, washed

##### Vegetables

Sweet potatoes | 1 cup  
Carrots | 1 cup  
Green beans | ½ cup  
Cauliflower florets | ½ cup  
Green peas | ½ cup  
Tomato | 1 small (optional)  
Onion | 1 small (optional)

##### Tempering & Spices

Ghee (or oil) | 1.5 tablespoons  
Cumin seeds | 1 teaspoon  
Mustard seeds | ½ teaspoon  
Bay leaves | 1-2  
Ginger | 1-inch, grated  
Garlic | 2-3 cloves (optional)  
Turmeric powder | ½ teaspoon

[View the recipe video here!](#)

Fresh  
discovers  
Darcy &  
Company



## A Slow December

This December marks 250 years of Jane Austen — the original feminist and romantic, a literary force who shaped the way the world understands love, courage, and quiet rebellion. In that spirit, it feels perfectly timely to spotlight a brand inspired by Mr. Darcy one of her most iconic characters. Darcy & Company, a micro-bakery based in Pondicherry, is bringing 'sense and sensibility' back to breakfast. Specialising in small-batch granola made with activated nuts and seeds, locally sourced grains, and thoughtfully chosen ingredients, the brand champions a slower, more intentional approach to food. Their granola is baked only to order — no mass production, no shortcuts — just honest, beautifully crafted nourishment. At a moment when breakfast often feels rushed, Darcy & Company offers a gentle shift: an invitation to savor. So this season, pour a bowl of granola, press play on *Pride & Prejudice*, and sink into a slow December — sunlight, soft pages, and a morning that lingers.

**Wholesome. Thoughtful. Intentional. Crafted in Pondicherry.**

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