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BY: CHEF MOHIT SONDHI - BAKERY & PATISSERIE

Pastry is flour mixed with shortening and flavoring ingredients to produce a coherent mass, used for pies and other dishes in North American, European, and Middle Eastern cuisines. Basic additions are fat, a little salt, and water. Pastry-making, pâtisserie in French, has developed as a special branch of cookery. Specialized products of the pastry cook or pâtissier include delicate flour and sugar confections (cakes, cookies, waffles, meringues, frostings, glazes, and fillings) combined in small pastries for snacks, taken with tea or coffee or after meals. By extension, the

word pastry is sometimes used collectively to indicate sweet, flour-based items for dessert.

Defining pastry types is difficult, as there are numerous variations. Three basic ones are shortcrust or pie pastry, puff pastry, and flaky or rough





puff. Short-crust pastry is one part fat (butter, lard, or commercial pastry fat) to two of flour by weight. The

fat is cut or rubbed into the flour until the mixture resembles breadcrumbs, a little ice water is added, and the mass is pressed together with minimal working to make a dough.

French pâte brisée is similar, but uses a little more fat and is mixed with egg. Variations include sweetened pâte sucrée and pâte sablée (very rich, similar to cookie dough). Short pastries are

crumbly when cooked and used for many pies and tarts.

Puff pastry or pâte feuilletée fine, is an elaborate, layered pastry with a tender melting texture and excellent flavor. Equal proportions of butter to flour by weight are used. About a fifth of the butter is cut into the flour, and water is added to make a dough. This is allowed to rest in a cool place, and then rolled out; the remaining butter is then placed as a block in

stay strong and fight outbroak the center of the sheet of dough, which is folded over it. It is rerolled and folded in three, a process known

as a "turn."

Four turns are made with rests between, giving a dough with thin, even layers of fat between leaves of dough; air pockets also get trapped in the layers. Well-made puff pastry has up to 240 layers, and expands up to eight times its original thickness during baking. It is used for napoleons, cornets (cone-shaped pastries often filled with whipped cream or ice cream), and other



fine pastries, sweet or savory, in the French tradition. Yeast-leavened doughs are turned with butter in the same way to make croissants and Danish pastries.

Flaky or rough puff pastries, French demi-feuilletées, are less well-defined. They usually have fat-to-flour ratios that are higher than that of short-crust but lower than that of puff pastry. They are made with the general method used for making puff pastry, but the butter may be spread over the dough in one batch or incorporated in three fractions, one each time the dough is turned.

Quick versions are made by cutting the fat into peasized lumps, adding water to make a dough, and then giving it three or four turns. The dough has a light and layered effect but does not rise as high as puff pastry. It is also used in similar ways, especially with meat dishes such as beef Wellington.

Many other pastry recipes exist. Chouxpastry uses a very different method. Water and butter are heated together; the result is mixed with flour, and eggs are beaten into the mass. The paste produced is soft and supple, and is piped to make cream puffs, chocolate éclairs, and other shapes, or flavored with cheese for the French gougère.

English cookery includes hot-water crust: water and lard heated to the boiling point and mixed with flour,



giving a malleable, strong paste that is raised while hot to make tall pies of pork or game; and suet crust, made of flour, beef suet, and water, and used for suet puddings and dumplings.

In Central Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, strudel and phyllo pastries are made from a dough of flour, a little butter or oil, and water, which is worked to form an elastic mass that is stretched into a paper-thin sheet.

When the pastry is ready for use in baking, its surface is brushed with melted butter. Strudel pastry is rolled around fillings such as apples or poppy seeds, while phyllo is often cut into sheets and stacked in layers with nuts to make sweet dishes, or with spinach and cheese for savory ones.

Indian cookery involves pastry made from flour with a little ghee (clarified butter) or oil. This is used to enclose savory fillings for samosas (turnovers), and is deep-fried, providing the crispness that baking gives to pastries from the European traditions.

Some types are cooked alone and drenched in sugar syrup to give sweet pastries. Chinese cookery also includes a few plain short-crust—type pastry recipes, notably that used for moon cakes, filled pastries traditionally eaten to celebrate the Moon (or Mid-Autumn) Festival.

Protein content of the flour is important: too much, and the pastry is tough and shrinks; too little, and it is very mealy. A medium protein content is best. Development of gluten (the protein complex that gives texture to bread) is inhibited by cutting in the fat, a process which coats the flour particles, preventing the water from reaching the proteins. In flaky and puff pastries, turning encourages limited

gluten development in horizontal sheets for the characteristic texture.

Fat choice is also important. Butter gives a good flavor but produces a less short texture than lard, which gives a flaky texture. Lard has a coarse crystal structure that coats the flour particles more effectively and is one hundred percent fat, unlike butter, which contains a little water.

Some cooks consider a mixture of lard and butter to give the best balance of flavor and texture. Margarine and specially tailored vegetable fats are often substituted on grounds of cost, nutrition, or ethics. Oils give very crumbly pastry. Keeping pastry cool during working is also important, otherwise the fat becomes oily and the texture suffers.

During baking, the water in pastry vaporizes and allows crisp flakes of dough to form. In puff pastry, water vapor and air trapped between the layers expand and force them apart, making the pastry rise; a similar effect produces the characteristically hollow texture of chouxpastry.

The ingredients of pastry make it an energy-dense food, and the use of fats such as butter and lard gives it a high cholesterol content, but it is so important and convenient as an edible container that it seems likely to remain popular.

Many types of sweet pastry that developed were intended to be treats, not everyday food; it is only the abundant wheat and fat production of modern agriculture that has made them so accessible.



# **Explore the world through 9 different breads**



BY CAROLYN BOYD, JOEL PORTER, AND REBECCA SEAL

French baguettes, South Asian chapati, German pumpernickel, and six other loaves tell tales of culture, cuisine, and history.

APPROXIMATELY 14,400 YEARS ago, a baker in current-day Jordan burnt a round of unleavened bread. In 2018, it was found—charred and initially unidentifiable—in an ancient fireplace in the Black Desert. Up until this moment, bread consumption was thought to have started much later, after the advent of grain farming around 10,000 years ago.

However, this discovery suggested hunter-gatherers were making bread long before they settled around arable farms. In short, it shook up accepted notions of just how long bread has been in our lives.

To kick out coronavirus

• focus on hand
washing

• follow coughing
etiquette

• don't touch your face
• ensure physical
distance and

• stay home during
locked down

Despite a 21st-century craze for low carbs and a rising populace of gluten-avoiders, bread seems to be making a comeback. Perhaps it's the popularity of The Great British Baking Show or the fact that, in unsettled times, the simple act of mixing flour, water, maybe some yeast, and human effort produces a food at once tasty and comforting. From southern American cornbread to south Asian roti, bread has a permanent place on our plates and in our hearts. Here are some ways to taste it around the world.

#### Asian roti, on the road

A roti flatbread (also known as chapati, phulka, or maani) may seem simple: an unleavened bread that can double as both a plate and spoon for whatever it's eaten with. But the roti tells a complex story of early farming and trade routes, as well as slave trading, indentured servitude, and mass migration. While it's been part of diets in India and Pakistan for centuries, over the last 500 years of European colonization, roti followed the communities dragged away from their homelands in south Asia. Today it's a



A woman makes stuffed roti at the Kalasan Nursery Farm near the town of Karsog in Himachal Pradesh, India



Roti is usually cooked on a hot griddle, which browns it and gives it a bit of crunch

staple in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and important to people of South Asian descent in South Africa and across the Caribbean.

#### Twice-baked loaves in Sardinia

As far back as 3,000 years ago, Sardinian shepherds would head into the hills laden with parcels of pane carasau to sustain them. Also known as carta di musica—meaning "music sheet"—in reference to its thinness, it could keep for up to a year. Recently, archaeologists have found traces of this bread—still a Sardinian staple—in many of the megalithic stone dwellings scattered across the island. It's made from durum wheat dough rolled into paper-thin circles and baked in wood-burning ovens. As they puff up like balloons, the still-soft rounds are each split into two discs, flattened, and baked a second time until crisp.



Carasau is a typical, paper-thin Sardinian bread

#### Make peace with Lebanese man'oushe

There are plenty of places in Beirut, Lebanon, to get man'oushe, a za'atar-speckled flatbread traditionally served in the morning. But if you like your breakfast to have an impressive civic legacy, head to the Souk el Tayab farmers' market. It was founded in 2004 by Kamal Mouzawak as a means of uniting communities splintered along ethnic and religious lines after years of conflict, while also empowering women in particular to profit from their regional produce. Under the banner Make Food, Not War, the market has also helped to keep ancient culinary traditions—like proper man'oushe-making—alive.

#### Cornbread down south

Until industrial milling came to southern United States in the early 20th century, nobody used wheat

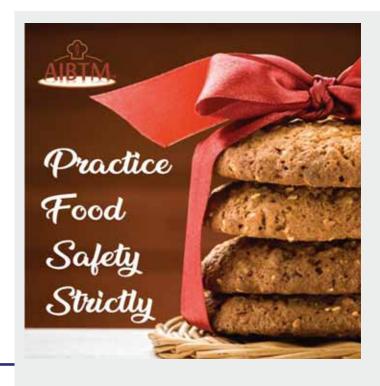
flour or sugar for cornbread; stone- or water-ground cornmeal had enough flavor and texture when mixed with just eggs, butter, buttermilk, and maybe a leavening agent. But the new steel mills ground corn more finely, and the heat of the rollers robbed it of its



A baker whips up a batch of cornbread at the Skylight Inn BBQ in Ayden, North Carolina



In the southern U.S., cornbread is traditionally made in a cast-iron skillet



flavor, resulting in bland, crumbly cornbread. In response, some cooks began adding wheat to hold it together, and sugar for taste. Others, however, dismissed the result as a cake. Today, if you want to start an argument in the South, this is a topic that'll do it.

#### Germany's goblin bread

The etymology of German pumpernickel bread is a little silly: "pumpern" means "to break wind," and "nickel" means "goblin." It's said the name came about due to the bread's indigestibility—a little unfair given how nutritious it is.

Germans love bread. On average, they each eat more than 175 pounds of it a year, but, surprisingly, not much pumpernickel. "The market importance in Germany is rather small," explains Bernd Kütscher, director of the German National Bakers Academy and head of the German Bread Institute. "But rye breads can be found in every region. They're ideal for traditional German dinners—a slice with ham, sausage, or cheese."

Most rye breads are made from milled flour, but pumpernickel uses a coarser, crushed whole-berry rye. Also, like many rye breads, it's made with sourdough starter instead of baker's yeast, which keeps it from becoming inedibly dense.

Assuming it wasn't invented by a goblin with an upset stomach, where does pumpernickel actually come from? "Westphalia, a region in western Germany," says Bernd. "Legend has it that during the Soest Civil War [1444–1449], a baker forgot the bread dough

AIBYM SOUR SOUR SOUR AND SOUR AND SOUR CONTINCT

he'd left in the cooling oven and found it the next day." Today's pumpernickel, like the absent-minded baker's, takes a long time to prepare (up to 24 hours). Even after it's baked, you can't tuck in straight away. "The finished bread must cool for at least one day before it can be cut," says Bernd. But for those who like their bread robust, it's worth the wait.

#### The ceremonies of challah

With its slightly sweet taste and shiny finish, challah, the traditional special-occasion bread of the Jewish diaspora, tastes a bit like a French brioche. But the loaves that star in Sabbath dinners and other ceremonial occasions are kosher and dairy-free.

"In the old days, to differentiate between day-to-day bread and shabbat bread, they added what were [then] expensive ingredients to the dough, like eggs, oil, and sugar," says Uri Scheft, owner of Tel Aviv, Israel's Lehamim Bakery and author of Breaking Breads: A New World of Israeli Baking.

"The ritual is to bless the wine and then the challah, then sprinkle the bread with salt, and pass each person a piece."

Scheft claims the best challah is made by slightly underkneading, underproofing, and underbaking,



Molly Yeh, a popular food blogger who lives on her husband's family farm in Minnesota, prepares challah bread



Challah gets its fluffy, pull-apart texture from underbaking and underproofing

which results in a cottony, tender loaf. And while challah is often formed from three braided strands of dough, Scheft has seen numerous design (and recipe) variations. "In Djerba, Tunisia, the challah is shaped as a kishlaya (flower)," he says. "In Colombia, they add chocolate and streusel."

#### Georgia's cheesy bread

There are at least 53 different kinds of khachapuri, a traditional Georgian cheese-stuffed bread. It's not hard to understand khachapuri's popularity.

Men make cheese-filled khachapuri at the Nartaa restaurant in the city of Sukhum, Georgia

Although each region has its own version, the one thing almost all share is that they're filled or topped with a large amount of melted cheese (plus optional ground meats, potatoes, greens, or herbs). And they're often served as a side, despite being at least the size of a small pizza.

The boat-shaped adjaruli khachapuri, which originated near the Black Sea, is probably the most famous, and the easiest to find outside Georgia.

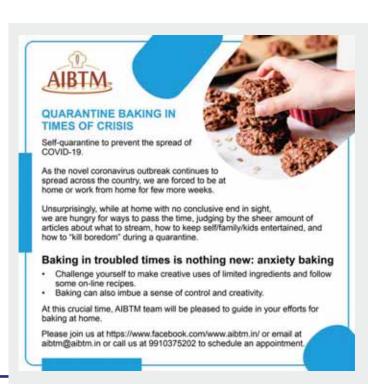
It's also even more unctuous than the basic dough and cheese version, given that, fresh from the oven, an egg is broken onto the bubbling cheese, cooked until barely set, and topped with a pat of butter.

#### In Paris, prize-worthy baguettes

Best served slathered in cool, creamy butter, perhaps with a slab of brie or top-quality ham, the baguette is as quintessentially French as a beret and a bottle of rosé. Indeed, the country is said to consume around 10 billion baguettes every year. Yet it seems not all are created equal.

While the official ingredients of a baguette de tradition are flour, salt, yeast, and water, artisan bakers will painstakingly source their flour from specialist mills and work the dough in specific ways to produce a superior pain.

Traditionally, five slashes (grignes) are made along the top of the loaf to let the carbon dioxide escape; the exact pattern varies from baker to baker and is akin to a signature.



Sourcing the best baguette in France would be a challenge—there's just too much sold there daily. But limit your search to Paris, and help is at hand via an annual competition designed to suss out city's best loaf. For the past 26 years, the Grand Prix de la Baguette has sorted the soggy from the crispy and

the doughy from the fluffy.

To enter, boulangeries from across the city submit two baguettes of identical weight and length to be scrutinized by a panel of chefs, bakers, and food experts. The winner receives €4,000.





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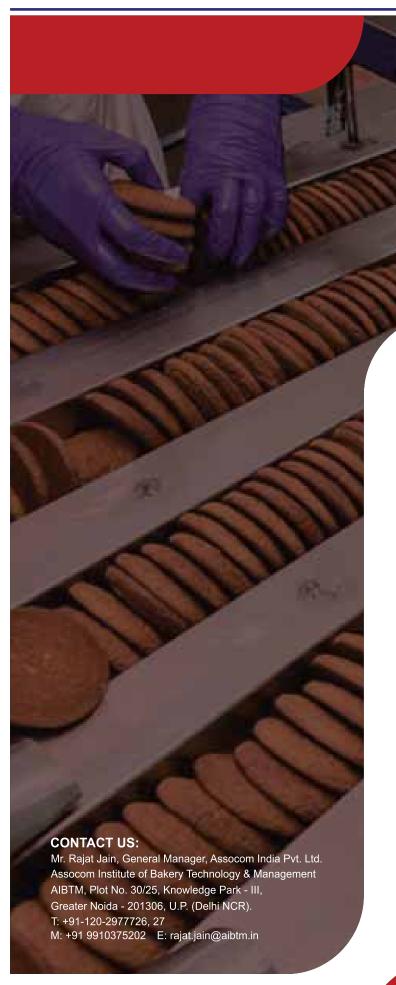
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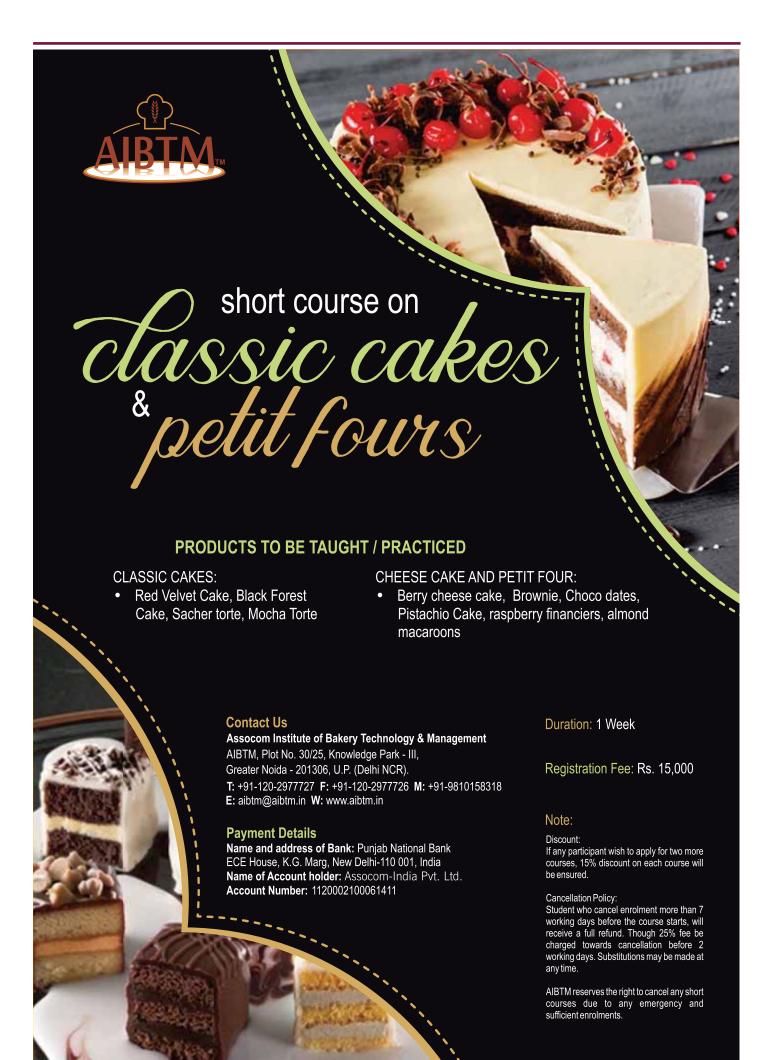
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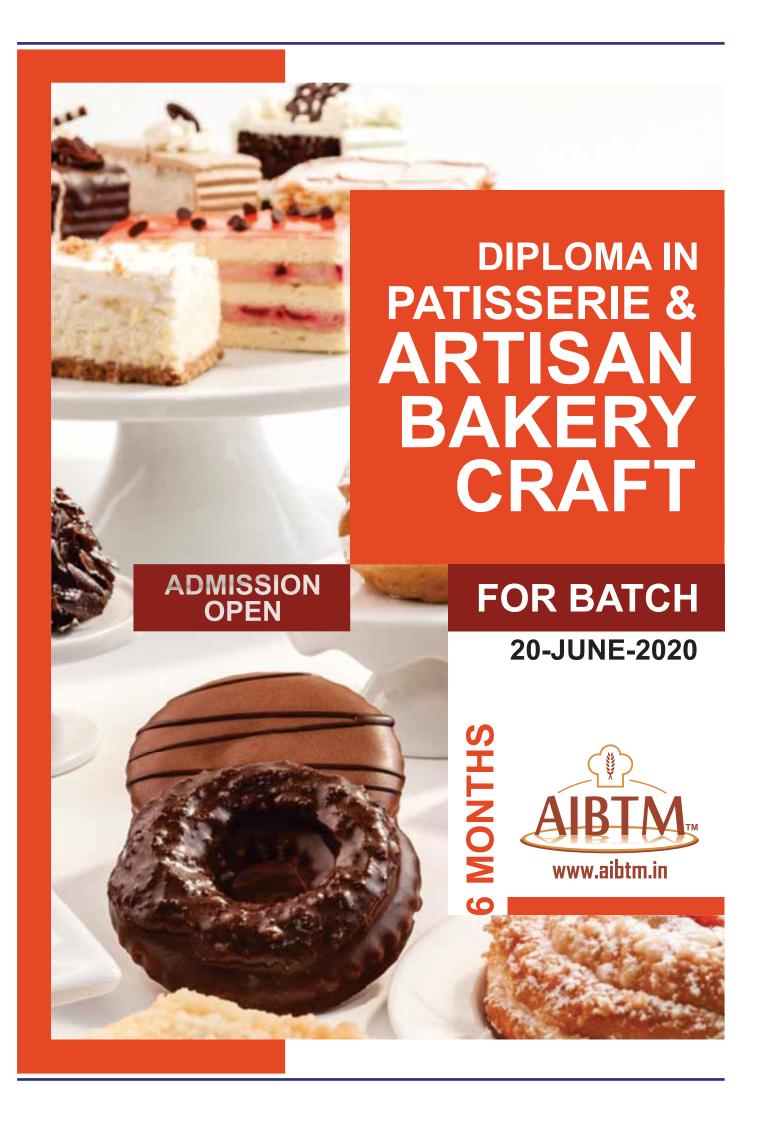
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