



India 101: The Culture and Cuisine

Indian cuisine encompasses many diverse regions. It is a country of 40 languages, 1600 dialects, and 29 states each with its own style of food. Indian food makes up less than two percent of the ethnic food market in the United States. Yet, it has had the fastest growth rate, particularly in large cities where there has been a noted shift in the way Indian food is served and perceived.

The immigrant Indian population in the US increased tenfold between 1980 and 2015, making it part of the largest immigrant group (second only to the Mexican population whose restaurants are mostly Americanized). Americans are developing an appetite for Indian culture and cuisine, a growing fascination seen in American movies, music, and dance. According to a 2015 report in the Business Insider, "The time is right for Indian food to hit its stride." Indian food is the next big thing once someone can figure out how to make it compatible with becoming a brand without sacrificing what makes it special. (Hint --- Tandur has the answer!)

At Tandır, the food is authentic, based on global styles of Indian cuisine: Tikka Masala is a milder, creamy dish mixed with tomato and spice. It is the national dish of England where it originated. Vindaloo originated in Portugal and migrated to India to become one of the spicier dishes. Korma is an aromatic sauce with subtle spices like cardamom and saffron. Kadai is a juicy, thickened gravy of tomatoes, peppers, and onions.

Tandoori is an ancient cooking technique that dates back some 5,000 years. The Tandır oven can reach 900 degrees within the walls of its clay cylinder. Tandoori chicken takes marinated pieces of chicken (or other meats or vegetables) that we call Tikka and cooks it at 550 degrees in this special oven. The unique flavor comes from infusing moisture and spices with radiant heat, hot air convection, internal cooking from the heated metal rod, and the smoking of grilled food juices that drip onto the surface. The result is the flavor that could only be Tandır.

Naan Bread is the beloved flat bread of Indian food that resembles Pita bread. It is cooked in the Tandır oven. Roti is the traditional flatbread that we use to make our wraps. Although sandwich “wraps” don’t really exist in traditional Indian food, our Roti is a fun way to eat Indian food stuffed inside warm, flaky bread.

The Spices of India are enticing, bold, and healthful. Garam Masala is a blend of ground spices. Most spices are roasted to release their flavors before grinding them into a custom blend. Some of the spices that may be used in a Garam Masala include coriander, cardamom, cumin, cinnamon, fennel, and allspice berries. Turmeric and saffron are the golden spices that give a yellow color to the rainbow of Indian spices. Mustard seeds are typically cooked whole, rather than ground. Chili pepper turns up the heat and can be adjusted to taste. What about curry? That is a bit of a trick question. In India, curry does not refer to a spice. It is a dish of meat, vegetables, or beans like lentils or chickpeas prepared in a flavorful sauce.

