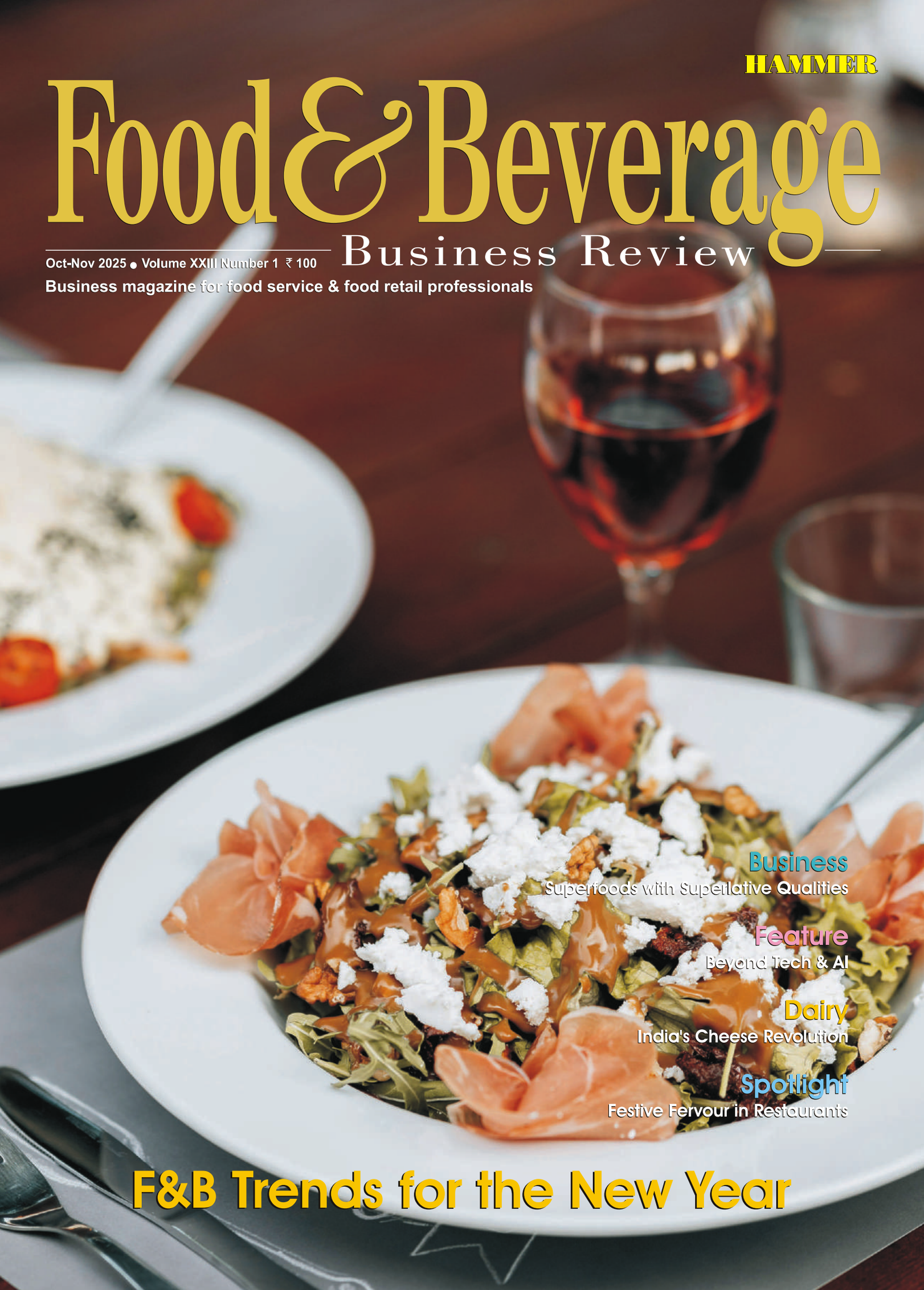
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Food & Beverage

Business Review

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Business magazine for food service & food retail professionals



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As the year draws to a close, 2025 stands out as a milestone for India's evolving food and hospitality sector. It has been a year of defining shifts, bold regional flavours, comfort-food trends, rising wellness menus, AI-enabled operations and a food business expanding across both metros and emerging destinations.

Our cover story explores the future of F&B trends. With diners' preferences shifting rapidly, driven by lifestyle changes, global exposure, health focus, sustainability and new technology, the food landscape is also constantly evolving. Chefs and F&B leaders are adapting with innovative techniques and global flavours, shaping the key trends that will define the coming year.

As health consciousness rises worldwide, superfoods are making a strong entry into restaurant kitchens. From millets, amla and ashwagandha to a growing range of fermented ingredients, diners' demand for nutrient-rich, functional foods is reshaping menus. The business story explores the expanding market for superfoods and why their presence in F&B outlets continues to surge.

Our feature story highlights that even as technology and AI streamline operations, the true essence of dining lies in human connection. A chef's smile, a warm greeting and the stories behind each dish create experiences no algorithm can replicate.

India's cheese landscape is undergoing a remarkable transformation, and our special story takes you through this journey. From being a quiet supporting ingredient, cheese has now become a key driver of innovation, profitability and genuine excitement across India's food and hospitality world.

Finally, our trending story captures how restaurants across India embrace the festive season with comforting classics, creative twists, vibrant décor, music and regional specialties that bring people together in a joyful spirit.

As we look ahead, we remain inspired by an industry evolving with creativity and passion.



Rajat Taneja

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Indian Culinary Forum Hosts 22nd Annual Chef Awards 2025



The Indian Culinary Forum (ICF) celebrated the spirit of culinary excellence at the 22nd Annual Chef Awards 2025, held at The Ashok, New Delhi, ahead of International Chefs Day. The grand event brought together an esteemed gathering of master chefs, hospitality leaders, academicians and industry stalwarts.

Often hailed as the 'Oscars of the Indian Culinary Industry', the Annual Chef Awards recognised outstanding talent across 15 distinguished categories. The evening was graced by Mugdha Sinha, IAS, Managing Director, India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), as the Chief Guest, along with several eminent personalities from the culinary and hospitality fraternity.

This year's edition honoured 17 chefs for their remarkable achievements. Among the Top Awards, Chef Umesh Mattoo received the Lifetime Achievement Award, Chef Julia Carmen was presented the Jury Choice Award, Chef Sandeep Kalra (Air India) won the Golden Hat Award and Chef Shailender Singh (Pride Hotel) received the Silver Hat Award. The prestigious Shri Anil Bhandari Memorial – Chef of the Year Award was jointly conferred upon Chef Ankit Gaurav (Country Inn & Suites) and Chef Karan Mehta (Le Meridien).

The 10 MasterChef Awards were decided through a rigorous four-day culinary competition featuring over 150 chefs from across India, hosted at the Institute of Bakery & Culinary Arts (IBCA) and the Banarsidas Chandiwala Institute of Hotel Management and Catering Technology, New Delhi.

Speaking on the occasion, Chef Davinder Kumar, President of the Indian Culinary Forum, said, "The Annual Chef Awards are a proud celebration of excellence and dedication within India's culinary community. Through these awards, we honour the relentless passion and creativity of chefs who continue to shape India's gastronomic identity. Each year, this platform reflects how Indian cuisine beautifully blends tradition with technology to achieve global recognition."

The 22nd Annual Chef Awards 2025 once again underscored the ICF's mission to recognise talent, encourage knowledge sharing and promote Indian culinary heritage globally. Supported by the ITDC and The Ashok Hotel, New Delhi, as Exclusive Hospitality Partners, the event stood as a testament to India's growing influence on the world's culinary stage.

Winners of the 22nd Annual Chef Awards (Master Chef)

Master Chef International Cuisine: Jaskaran Singh, India Habitat Centre

Master Chef Oriental Cuisine: Timothy Lepcha, India Habitat Centre

Master Chef North Indian Cuisine: Naman Sanjay Mahorla, Pride Plaza, Aerocity

Master Chef East/West/South Indian Cuisine: Chef Abhishek Sengupta, Manipal University, Jaipur

Master Chef Kebab: Nitin Kumar, India Habitat Centre

Master Chef Indian Sweets: Daman Prakash, The Ashok Hotel

Master Chef International Confectionery: Pawan, Marriott, Aerocity

Master Chef Baker: Devender Yadav, Pullman & Novotel Hotel, Aerocity

Master Chef Butcher: Tara Subba, India Habitat Centre

Student Chef of the Year – Female: Harpreet Kaur Malik, The Ashok Hotel - Male: Shresth Agrawal, Vedatya Institute

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Innovation Meets Tradition at the 2025 Kaohsiung Food & HoReCa Show, Taiwan



The 19th edition of the Kaohsiung Food Show 2025, held concurrently with the 11th Kaohsiung HoReCa show, was held from October 23 to 26 at the Kaohsiung Exhibition Center in Kaohsiung,Taiwan. The twin shows brought together nearly 330 exhibitors from Taiwan and 14 other countries and regions, attracting over 19,000 visitors from 52 countries and regions. The top five international visitor groups came from Japan, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and South Korea, reflecting the event's growing global appeal. Together, the two exhibitions offered a vibrant showcase of culinary delights, fresh agricultural and aquatic produce, innovative catering equipment and a wide range of hotel and restaurant supplies, all under one roof.



The show opened on an impressive note with a distinguished gathering of dignitaries and international representatives. The inaugural ceremony was graced by Susan Chi-Chuan Hu, Deputy Director General, International Trade Administration (MOEA), Felix H. L. Chiu, Executive Vice President, Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) and Chi-Mai Chen, Mayor of Kaohsiung City. The occasion was further enriched with the presence of ambassadors and trade commissioners from partner countries, reflecting the event's growing global significance and cross-border collaboration in the food and hospitality sectors.

This year's Kaohsiung Food Show spotlighted two central themes, 'Agri & Seafood Delicacies' and 'Smart Solutions,' reflecting Taiwan's strength in both culinary craftsmanship and advanced food technology. A host of leading brands took part, including the century-old pastry brand Jiu Zhen Nan Food Co., Taiwan's leading satay sauce brand Hao Di Yi and cuttlefish ball producer, HongYu Foods, together representing the rich flavours of Taiwan's food culture. Among the standout highlights was Zhenfu Foods, one of Taiwan's finest squid processors, which showcased an exciting range of flavourful squid-based snacks, capturing strong interest from local and international buyers alike. Aligned with global food trends, the newly introduced Fresh Living Area at the 2025 Kaohsiung Food Show showcased organic, plant-based, low-sugar and other functional food innovations.

The Kaohsiung HORECA emerged as a dynamic platform showcasing the latest innovations in hospitality and catering technology. Industry leaders such as Sun-Mate Machinery (bakery equipment), Jaw Feng Machinery (vacuum packaging machines), Hundred Machinery (food automation systems), commercial oven brand UNOX, presented cutting edge solutions designed to enhance efficiency, reduce labour and support smart kitchen operations. A well-known company Hong Chiang Technology drew strong attention with live demonstrations of its next-generation automated express food delivery systems and AI-navigated food delivery robots, highlighting the growing integration of robotics and artificial intelligence in the modern foodservice industry.

The exhibition featured a lively lineup of side events, including the 2025 Taiwan Foods Procurement Day (Kaohsiung), celebrity chef demos, live product launches and food auctions, creating an engaging mix of business and entertainment. Serving as a one-stop sourcing platform, the Kaohsiung Food Show connected international buyers with healthy food trends, premium snacks and innovative food technologies, offering fresh opportunities to explore Taiwan's dynamic food and hospitality market.

Building on the success of this year's edition, the next Kaohsiung Food Show and Kaohsiung HoReCa will be held from October 22 to 25, 2026, promising an even larger showcase of global flavours, technology and business opportunities.



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Lucknow Joins UNESCO's Creative Cities of Gastronomy



The City of Nawabs has carved its name on the global culinary map, officially earning the title of UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy on World Cities Day. The announcement came during the 43rd Session of the UNESCO General Conference held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, marking a historic recognition of Lucknow's rich and evolving food culture.

The honour places Lucknow among 70 gastronomic hubs worldwide and expands the UNESCO Creative Cities Network to 408 members across more than 100 countries. This milestone makes Lucknow the second Indian city after Hyderabad to be recognised for its culinary heritage.

Celebrated for its refined Awadhi cuisine, intricate street food traditions and a legacy that marries hospitality with poetry, Lucknow's culinary culture stands as a living reflection of its royal past and vibrant present. From the legendary kebabs and biryanis born in royal kitchens to the bustling lanes of chowk serving chaat and mithai, every bite tells a story steeped in history and artistry.

UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay remarked that, "The newly designated cities exemplifies how culture and creativity drives sustainable urban development, foster investment and strengthen community bonds." The recognition is expected to bolster Lucknow's position as India's culinary capital, paving the way for international collaborations, culinary tourism and new employment opportunities within the hospitality sector.

Calling it a proud moment for both Uttar Pradesh and the nation, Tourism and Culture Minister Jaiveer Singh said, "The global honour reinforces Lucknow's timeless contribution to India's growth and cultural identity." For a city that has long turned food into art and dining into an experience, this accolade serves as a global acknowledgment of Lucknow's enduring soul.

Luna et Sol Shines Bright as Mumbai's Newest Dining Destination



The city's culinary scape just got brighter with the opening of Luna et Sol, a contemporary European restaurant and bar in Lower Parel that promises a riveting experience blending fine dining, art and atmosphere.

Located at Lodha World Crest on Senapati Bapat Marg, Luna et Sol, meaning "Moon and Sun" offers a dining journey that shifts with time and mood. The interiors are designed to transform through dynamic ceiling projections, recreating scenes of snowfall, rainfall, golden skies and starlit constellations, making each visit a sensory spectacle.

The restaurant's design features two expansive bars and a striking 'Red Room', while its culinary direction draws inspiration from French, Italian and Swiss Alpine cuisines. At the helm is Chef Jason Hudanish, who focuses on ingredient-driven cooking and artisanal preparation. Guests can expect handmade breads, fresh pastas, risottos, wood-fired vegetables, seafood and rich Alpine-inspired classics that celebrate authenticity and craftsmanship.

The bar program, led by Corporate Mixologist Aniket Rawool, takes creativity to celestial heights with signature cocktails inspired by the nine planets. Each beverage is crafted with local botanicals and small-batch spirits, combining storytelling with bold, layered flavours.

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Festive Spirit Soars as Hotels Across Capital Host Cake-Mixing Ceremonies

Eros Hotel New Delhi

With the city slowly embracing the magic of festive spirit, Eros Hotel New Delhi ushered in the season with a joyful cake-mixing ceremony. The luxury hotel embraced the festive cheer with a spectacular celebration attended by hotel staff, renowned food and beverage influencers and distinguished guests, all in the presence of General Manager, Davinder Juj.

The entire hotel was decked out in festive lights, Christmas décor and balloons. The fun-filled event took place at the poolside lawn, with long tables brimming with a wide array of cake-mixing ingredients. The table was filled with an assortment of ingredients such as almonds, cashew nuts, dates, apricots, raisins, orange peel, black currants and pistachios, along with a delightful array of spices like cinnamon powder, ginger powder, cardamom powder and clove powder.

Chef Diwas Wadhera and Juj led the ceremony and performed the first step of the traditional cake mixing ceremony. Donning red aprons, guests and staff members enthusiastically participated in the event,



officially marking the beginning of the harvest and festive season.

Talking about the ceremony Davinder Juj, General Manager, Eros Hotel New Delhi said, "Christmas is almost around the corner and to commemorate this festival we organised the annual cake mixing ceremony. Through this age-old ritual, we aim to ignite the spirit of joy and togetherness, ensuring that the season continues to bring positivity, prosperity, success and good fortune to all."

The ceremony was followed by a high tea and delectable refreshments that perfectly complemented the flavours of the ceremony.

Pullman New Delhi Aerocity

Pullman New Delhi Aerocity marked the beginning of the festive season with its much-anticipated annual Cake Mixing Ceremony, a cherished tradition that brought together guests, heartists and culinary experts in a vibrant celebration and Christmas cheer.

The event was inaugurated by Manish Dayya, General Manager, Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity, who welcomed everyone with heartfelt words on the joy of togetherness and the spirit of the holidays. "The Cake Mixing Ceremony is a wonderful reminder of what this season represents- warmth, gratitude and shared happiness," he said while addressing the gathering.



Adding to the excitement, Pastry Chef Saikat Sarkar led the ceremony with his creative flair, blending an indulgent mix of fruits, nuts and spirits with a signature combination of festive spices. The lively afternoon saw guests and team members enthusiastically participate in the ritual. The event concluded with a delightful high tea, where guests relished an assortment of sweet and savoury treats while soaking in the joyful ambience of the season.

The LaLiT New Delhi

The LaLiT New Delhi welcomed the festivities with its annual cake-mixing ceremony. The celebration began on a festive note as guests were greeted with the warm glow of twinkling lights and long tables, beautifully set up with colourful ingredients and the participants were invited to take part in the traditional ritual of cake mixing.

Under the guidance of Ravi Kant, Cluster Executive Chef, North, The LaLiT Suri Hospitality Group, guests donned cheerful aprons and



gloves to take part in the lively mixing session. The tables brimmed with an indulgent assortment of dry fruits and nuts, from raisins, cashews, almonds and pistachios.

Reflecting on the occasion, Chef Ravi Kant shared, "At The LaLiT New Delhi, we believe in curating engaging experiences that bring people closer through food and culture. The traditional cake-mixing marks the beginning of the upcoming festive season and this is a joyous celebration of flavours and textures we curated for our media friends, partners and guests."

The afternoon concluded with a sumptuous high tea, featuring a spread of festive delicacies, savouries and beverages that perfectly complemented the spirit of the celebration.

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Mharo Khet: Rajasthan's 40-Acre Organic Farm Retreat Redefines Conscious Travel

Mharo Khet, a 40-acre organic farm retreat near Jodhpur, is quietly transforming the way travellers experience Rajasthan. More than just a stay, it is an immersive journey into the rhythms of the land, where food, design and culture come together to celebrate mindful living and rural beauty

Founded by Rajnush Agarwal, a biomedical engineer and Vedika Prasad, a psychology graduate and former athlete, Mharo Khet was born out of a shared passion for sustainability, design and authentic connection. Conceived during the stillness of the pandemic, Mharo Khet began as a personal project before blossoming into a chemical-free, regenerative farm, opening its gates to visitors in 2021 through curated farm tours and intimate culinary experiences. Mharo Khet entered a new chapter in 2025 with the launch of 10 private cottages, following a soft opening in May and a full launch in September.

"This is not a resort," the founders emphasise. "It's a living, breathing farm – an immersive experience shaped by the land itself." Guests are encouraged to wander through the fields, rest beneath ancient *khejri* trees or simply watch the light shift across the desert horizon.

At the heart of Mharo Khet is Paeru, a nine-course, open-air dining experience set within a tranquil guava orchard. The cuisine is plant-forward and produce-driven, guided not by rigid tradition or fusion trends, but by what is fresh, seasonal and thriving in the



soil. Nearly 95% of the ingredients are grown on-site, harvested just hours before being served.

Mharo Khet's offerings go beyond restful accommodations and exquisite meals. Guests can participate in complimentary farm walks, learning about regenerative agriculture while tasting edible flowers and freshly plucked vegetables. Hands-on experiences include cooking classes with foraged ingredients, cocktail-making sessions using garden-grown infusions and wellness rituals like traditional Indian head massages under flowering trees.

Mharo Khet stands as a refreshing alternative to conventional luxury resorts, offering intimacy instead of opulence, authenticity over excess. It represents a new wave of Indian hospitality that values intentional design, local connection and ecological responsibility.

Crazy Cock Single Malt Whisky Wins 'Best in Show' at the 7th IWS Awards

At the seventh edition of the IWS Awards, held at the Taj Lands End, Mumbai, Crazy Cock Indian Single Malt Whisky was crowned Best in Show in the Indian Single Malt Whisky category, reaffirming its position among the finest whiskies in India and indeed, the world.

Crafted at South Seas Distilleries, Crazy Cock Single Malt represents over a century of distilling heritage, craftsmanship and quiet obsession. Established long before India's growing love affair with homegrown single malts, South Seas Distilleries today stands among a rare few whose legacy can be mentioned alongside renowned names such as Yamazaki Distillery of Japan and Glenturret Distillery of Scotland.



The IWS Awards, hosted by Vinexposium Paris, the world's leading international wine and spirits platform, celebrated excellence across the global beverage landscape. The event was graced by Grace Ghazale and curated by Sonal C. Holland, Chairperson of the IWS Awards.

Over the decades, South Seas Distilleries has carefully curated an exceptional collection of bourbon and sherry casks, making it home to India's largest private cask collection. Every drop of Crazy Cock Single Malt is drawn from these exclusive casks, sourced from around the world and matured to perfection under expert supervision.

At South Seas, time serves as the ultimate craftsman. Each cask matures gracefully under the tropical Indian climate, imparting the whisky with remarkable depth, richness and character. Hand-bottled in limited quantities and never mass-produced, Crazy Cock Single Malt reflects an uncompromising dedication to artistry and quality.

"The distillery has always been obsessed with quality and meticulous in its attention to detail. Its unique location between the mountains and the sea allows our whiskies to benefit from tropical maturation, creating rare Indian single malts of unparalleled richness and bold character, admired by connoisseurs worldwide," said Hamavand Chinoy, Director, South Seas Distilleries.

Crazy Cock Indian Single Malt Whisky is available exclusively in select domestic markets and duty-free locations, offering discerning whisky enthusiasts a rare opportunity to experience one of India's most distinguished spirits.

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Globus Spirits Limited has the launched TERAI India Craft Vodka, the world's first vodka filtered using amethyst crystals. With this innovation, the company reinforces its commitment to redefining premium spirits in India by combining pioneering techniques with world-class craftsmanship.

This handmade Vodka has been cultivated from grain to glass at the TERAI distillery in Behror, Rajasthan. Made using locally sourced rice & bespoke production methods to create a bright distillate, uniquely finished by filtering through amethyst crystals for a smooth & playful vodka. This exclusive process sets a new benchmark for the premium vodka category and offers consumers a truly elevated drinking experience.

Speaking on the launch, Shekhar Swarup, Joint Managing Director, Globus Spirits, said, "At Globus Spirits, our vision is to create world-class products that blend Indian tradition with global innovation. TERAI India Craft Vodka, with its unique amethyst crystal refinement, is a first for the world and a bold step in our premiumisation journey. We are confident it will resonate strongly with discerning urban consumers who seek authenticity, craftsmanship, and distinction in their spirits."

TERAI India Craft Vodka has debuted in Jaipur and Udaipur, Rajasthan. The brand will soon expand to Delhi, Gurgaon, Goa and Mumbai.

Novy by Chefs Ashay Dhopatkar and Neha Lakhaniy Opens in Gurugram



Gurugram welcomed Novy, a dining destination that redefines how diners engage with food. Conceptualised by Culture Cauldron chefs Ashay Dhopatkar and Neha Lakhani, the restaurant brings together global inspirations with a distinctly modern European sensibility.

The name Novy is derived from "novelty" and the Scandinavian word for "new" which captures its ethos of constant reinvention. Novy's menu reflects ease, exploration and imagination, moving fluidly across flavours without the constraints of rigid culinary labels. Its interiors echo the same spirit: a warm 70-seat dining room that balances intimate corners with open, airy seating, enriched by soft lighting and artisanal details.

Leading the culinary direction is Chef Ashay Dhopatkar, whose international experience spans continents and Michelin-starred European kitchens. "At Novy, we wanted to genuinely approach food without being confined to any single cuisine and to create comforting flavours by combining unexpected elements like Lamb Chops with Fermented Black Garlic and Bihari Mustard Oil, or Tibetan Momos with Kolhapuri Pandhra Rassa. Flavours that aren't forced together, but simply work in harmony, even our bar nibbles explore distinctive yet balanced tastes," says Chef Ashay Dhopatkar.

Pastry Chef Neha Lakhani, a Le Cordon Bleu Ambassador and alumna says "At Novy, we wanted desserts that bring joy, from a nostalgic Delhi Falooda served with Jello to a rich Pistachio Tiramisu that begs for just one more bite!"

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Good Flippin' Burgers® Debuts in Chennai with Three New Outlets

India's Most Loved Burger Brand, Good Flippin' Burgers®, has officially made its way to Chennai. Known for its fluffy buns, juicy patties and bangin' sauces, the cult-favourite brand has expanded its flippin' empire to the South with three exciting new outlets: two dine-in stores in Anna Nagar and T. Nagar and a cloud kitchen in Perungudi.



Founded in Mumbai in 2019 by Sijo Mathew, Sid Marchant, and Viren D'Silva, Good Flippin' Burgers® was born out of a shared passion to make some seriously good burgers available to everyone. Six years later, the brand has become a household name and the highest-rated burger brand on Zomato, Swiggy and Google, loved for its consistent quality and fresh flavours.

With 66 stores now across Mumbai, Delhi, Pune, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai, Good Flippin' Burgers® continues to redefine the burger experience in India with its promise of freshness, flavour and deliciousness.



The brand's entry into Chennai marks a major step in its pan-India growth journey, with each outlet thoughtfully designed to bring its signature experience closer to local neighbourhoods.

Sharing his excitement, Viren D'Silva, Co-founder, Good Flippin' Burgers®, said, "Chennai is a city that truly celebrates food, from its iconic filter coffee and street-side snacks to its growing appetite for global flavours. We've always admired how Chennai's food culture blends authenticity with experimentation. The city's younger audience, in particular, is curious, well-travelled and values quality, which aligns perfectly with our philosophy of serving food using quality ingredients and authenticity. Expanding here felt like the most natural next step in our journey."

The Chennai menu brings together the brand's cult favourites, including the Cluckinator with over 2 million served and the most popular ordered burger on the menu and the Cheese Bomb, with over 1 million served. It also features the OG Smash, Hot Smash and the indulgent Kerfuffle, along with a range of wraps, tenders, wings, sides, refreshing Flippinades, creamy milkshakes and indulgent thiccshakes.

With a growing team of over 700 people nationwide and a presence across six major Indian cities, Good Flippin' Burgers® continues to raise the bar in the country's QSR landscape– creating food that's real, reliable and ridiculously good.

Chef Ajit Bangera and Ashish Thadani Launch 'Firo': A Modern Indian Dining Experience in Chennai

Renowned culinary veteran Chef Ajit Bangera, with over four decades of experience, has collaborated with Ashish Thadani, founder of Ciclo Cafe, to launch Firo, a modern Indian restaurant located in Chennai's RA Puram. The duo shares a deep passion for food and a vision to create a concept that blends expertise, innovation and global appeal.





"Both of us are passionate about food and that's what inspired us to come together and create Firo," said Chef Bangera, who previously served as Executive Chef at ITC Grand Chola, Chennai and ITC Ratnadipa, Colombo, and was instrumental in creating the award-winning restaurant brand Avartana. After an illustrious career at ITC Hotels, his foray into the standalone restaurant space marks a new chapter in his culinary journey.

Commenting on this shift, Chef Bangera observed that India's standalone dining scene is 'rapidly evolving' and increasingly open to creativity and experimentation. He credited the strong operational foundation and vision of restaurateurs like Ashish Thadani as key motivators in his decision to venture into this segment.

Sharing insights on the concept, Thadani described Firo as a 'truly global' idea designed for contemporary diners. He believes that the Chennai market is ready for such innovation. On future expansion plans, he added, "Our focus right now is to establish the brand and ensure it's well-received. Once that happens, everything else will follow naturally."

With Firo, the partnership between Bangera and Thadani promises to redefine modern Indian dining, rooted in tradition yet inspired by the global buzz.

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The Suryaa Origami Contest Blooms with Creativity at CHE 2025







The Chandiwala Hospitality Ensemble (CHE) 2025, organised by Banarsidas Chandiwala Institute of Hotel Management and Catering Technology (BCIHMCT), New Delhi, marked its 24th edition on October 15 to 17, 2025. Over the past 25 years, CHE has evolved into a prestigious national platform celebrating culinary artistry, innovation and hospitality talent.

This year's gathering revolved around the inspiring theme "Sanskriti se Samriddhi"– emphasising that true prosperity stems from embracing India's rich cultural and traditional heritage. The theme encouraged participants to reflect the essence of Ek Bharat Shreshth Bharat through innovative expressions of culinary and artistic traditions, nurturing sustainable and culturally rooted practices for the future of hospitality.

One of the most captivating events was The Suryaa Floral Decoration & Towel Origami Contest -2025, sponsored by The Suryaa Hotel, New Delhi. The competition showcased the artistry and precision of students who transformed simple materials into stunning decorative masterpieces. Each creation reflected originality, attention to detail and the elegance of presentation essential to the hospitality industry.

The judges commended the students for their creativity, dedication and skill. The winners of the coveted rolling trophy were Priyanka Roy and Amrita Mehar from BCIHMCT, New Delhi. The first runner-up were B. Divya Sree and Gnana Pavan from Regency College of Culinary Arts and Hotel Management, Hyderabad, while the second runner-up were Sonam Singh and Aakasha Gogia from Vedatya Institute of Hotel Management, Gurugram.

Dutch Courage Spirits Unveils Premium International Portfolio

Dutch Courage Spirits Private Limited made a debut at ProWine Mumbai 2025. The company, co-founded by Sudip Majumder, unveiled a curated portfolio that brings together some of the world's most acclaimed premium spirits under one banner – setting the tone for a new era in India's evolving beverage landscape.

Co-Founder and Director of Dutch Courage Spirits, Sudip Majumder has had an illustrious career spanning several decades, he has been instrumental in building and transforming beverage operations for leading global names such as IDV (now Diageo), Bacardi, LVMH (Travel Retail) and reputed Indian entities like JM Baxi & Co. and Dhall Foods. Majumder's expertise has guided the India launches of legendary brands including Glenfiddich, Glenmorangie, Smirnoff, Bacardi Carta Blanca, Bacardi Breezers and Belvedere, redefining how India experiences premium spirits.

At this year's ProWine Mumbai 2025 showcase, Dutch Courage Spirits made its much-anticipated soft launch, unveiling the exquisite selections of international premium products. The company announced its association with Don Santos, a premium handcrafted 100% Agave Azul Tequila and also, exclusive India distribution rights for two celebrated Northern Irish distilleries: Boatyard Distillery and Hinch Distillery.



The event drew global attention, with Joe McGirr, founder of Boatyard Distillery, and Eugene Walsh, Export Director of Hinch Distillery, joining Sudip Majumder at the Dutch Courage Spirits booth. Attendees were captivated by the diversified and robust portfolio of products present.

Hinch Distillery impressed with its robust lineup, including the Distiller's Cut, Single Malt Irish Whiskeys aged in Bourbon and Oloroso casks at the historic Killaney Estate near Ballynahinch. From Boatyard, the highlights included the Boatyard Double Gin and its signature Sloe Gin, crafted by steeping wild-harvested sloe berries for six months in a bespoke County Fermanagh gin. And, Don Santos, a premium handcrafted 100% Agave Azul Tequila in three refined variants – Blanco, Reposado and Añejo. Produced at one of Mexico's exclusive distilleries.

With these launches, Dutch Courage Spirits has not only introduced new labels, but it has also set the stage for a spirited renaissance in India.

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A Celebration of Italian Culinary Excellence

The Week of Italian Cuisine in the World 2025 was held in November, continuing the global initiative promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Italian Trade Agency. Since its inception in 2015, the program has highlighted the best of Made in Italy gastronomy through embassies, consulates, cultural centres and trade offices across continents.

Spotlight on Italian Gelato

In India, this year's edition focused on Artisanal Italian Gelato.

The Italian Trade Agency (ITA), New Delhi, collaborated with Unione Italiana Food (UIF) - the largest direct food industry trade association in the European Union - and ACOMAG, representing manufacturers of gelato machinery and display systems.

Together, they partnered with APCA (Academy of Pastry & Culinary Arts, Gurgaon) and SEP (School For European Pastry, Gurgaon & Mumbai) to organise masterclasses titled "Exploring the Art of Italian Gelato Making."

The sessions were led by Ms. Carlotta Fabbri, President of the Gelato Products Group of UIF and Master of the Art of Italian Gelato Making. Her training aimed to raise awareness about artisanal gelato while upgrading the skills of students, trainers, chefs and culinary professionals.

"Gelato is more than dessert – it's a culture that blends creativity, tradition, and science," said Ms. Fabbri during one of the sessions.





The Growing Gelato Ecosystem

Artisanal gelato remains one of the most iconic gastronomic treasures of Made in Italy, known for quality and craftsmanship. With over 100,000 outlets globally, the gelato industry links agriculture, manufacturing, education, tourism and trade - generating more than €1 billion in annual turnover, 70% of which comes from exports.

The sector continues to grow steadily, recording +2.4% annual growth in Italy and nearly +10% abroad.

In India, brands like Frozen Fun and Minus Thirty have redefined the frozen dessert scene. Their founders shared their entrepreneurial journeys at a networking evening hosted at the Italian Embassy Cultural Centre on November 4th, adding an Indian flavour to the Italian celebration.

Webinar on Italian Pastry Traditions

The week concluded with a virtual masterclass titled "Exploring the Art of Italian Pastry Making," organised in collaboration with CAST Alimenti. The session was designed for students and educators from Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, offering insights into Italy's pastry traditions, regional specialties and evolving modern techniques.

Chef Silvia Federica Boldetti, a faculty member at CAST Alimenti, led the training. An internationally acclaimed pastry chef and chocolatier, she holds several accolades - including winning The Pastry Queen world championship for female pastry chefs in 2016 - and in 2018, becoming the first woman to be awarded the title of AMPI Master Pastry Chef.

"Teaching Italian pastry means passing down emotion, precision, and patience," shared Chef Boldetti, inspiring students across borders.

Enduring Legacy

With every passing year, the Week of Italian Cuisine in the World continues to strengthen cultural bridges through food. For India, the 2025 edition reaffirmed the timeless charm of Italian culinary craftsmanship and its growing connection with Asia's emerging gastronomic community.

India's participation this year also builds momentum towards SIGEP 2026 in Rimini, one of the world's largest exhibitions for artisan gelato, pastry, chocolate and coffee. The forthcoming edition sees India as a 'Guest Country'. The showcase is expected to further strengthen global collaboration and highlight Italy's leadership in dessert craftsmanship.









Chef Asif Qureshi



Courtyard by Marriott Bengaluru Hebbal has appointmented Mohd. Asif Qureshi as Master Chef-Nazaara. With over two decades of rich culinary experience across leading hospitality brands in India and abroad, Chef Asif brings his expertise in Indian, Mughlai and Awadhi cuisines to further elevate the hotel's dynamic culinary offerings.

Asif joins Courtyard by Marriott Bengaluru Hebbal from JW Marriott Bengaluru, where he served as Chef de Cuisine, curating exquisite dining experiences that celebrated Indian flavours with a contemporary touch. His illustrious career also includes key tenures at The Den Bengaluru, The Zuri Whitefield Bengaluru, ITC Fortune Select Trinity Bengaluru, Radisson Blu Paschim Vihar New Delhi, ITC Chola Sheraton Chennai, Radisson Hotel (GRT) Chennai, and ITC Maratha Mumbai. Internationally, he has led culinary teams at Daalchini Restaurant, Dubai and Move N Pick Hotels, Madinah, Saudi Arabia.

Renowned for his mastery of traditional Indian cuisines, Asif is passionate about infusing authenticity into every dish while seamlessly incorporating modern techniques and global influences. His approach combines deep-rooted culinary traditions with innovation, creating memorable dining experiences that resonate with today's discerning guests.

Anirudhya Basu



A seasoned hospitality professional with over 17 years of experience across India's leading luxury hotels, including Hilton Hotels & Resorts, The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore and Taj Hotels, Resorts & Palaces, Anirudhya Basu has been appointed as the Director of Food & Beverage at Hyatt Regency, Chennai. He managed high-volume banquets, premium dining formats, and multi-outlet operations across these brands. Each assignment added to his ability to identify gaps, guide teams with steady direction and deliver experiences that feel thoughtful rather than routine. In his new capacity, he will lead all F&B operations, including restaurants, bars, banquets, in-room dining and culinary events. His role will focus on elevating the hotel's dining identity, introducing innovative gastronomic concepts and ensuring every guest experience reflects Hyatt's signature warmth and world-class standards. An alumnus of the Institute of Hotel Management, Kolkata, Anirudhya is celebrated for his progressive leadership style, commitment to team development and ability to seamlessly blend creativity with hospitality. He is passionate about curating experiences that transcend dining, moments rooted in local flavours, global inspiration and the Hyatt philosophy of care.

Chef Suresh Venkataramana



Total Environment Hospitality announced the appointment of Chef Suresh Venkataramana as Culinary Director. In this role, he will set menu direction, culinary standards, and kitchen operations across the group's hospitality portfolio, including Windmills Craftworks and Oota, while partnering with brand, supply chain, and operations teams to consistently deliver high quality at scale. Chef Suresh brings over 28 years of experience across hotels and restaurants in India and overseas. His career includes a decade in the UK, working across hotel and restaurant kitchens and training under Michelin-starred chefs, where he refined his craft in fine dining and kitchen leadership. He will report to Ashish Saxena, Chief Executive Officer at Total Environment Hospitality. His association with Total Environment Hospitality in the past included a stint as Executive Chef at Windmills Craftworks, Bangalore (2013-2018), where he helped shape multi-outlet operations and menu engineering. He also played a key role in setting up Oota Bangalore and served as the Director of Culinary Operations at Windmills Craftworks, Dallas.

Chef Karthikeyan K



The Den Bengaluru has officially appointed Chef Karthikeyan K as its new Executive Chef. With more than two decades of acclaimed culinary experience, Chef Karthikeyan brings a career defined by excellence and a strong commitment to global hospitality standards, ensuring seasoned leadership for the hotel's culinary operations. Over the years, he has held key positions with some of the world's most respected hospitality brands, including the Taj Group of Hotels in India, Lotus Hotel in Dubai and major properties under Radisson Blu Carlson Group, Westin, Le Méridien, JW Marriott, Renaissance and Hilton. In his new role at The Den Bengaluru, Chef Karthikeyan has been entrusted with a clear mission, to redefine the hotel's culinary identity. His focus will centre on championing high-quality local ingredients and implementing strong sustainability practices. This strategic direction is set to elevate The Den Bengaluru's standing as a premier dining destination for discerning guests in the region.

Chef Karthikeyan aims to redefine the hotel's culinary identity by strengthening its focus on local produce, quality control and operational efficiency.

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F&B Trends
....for the new year

Changing food habits have been a routine practice as far as Indian diners are concerned. A remarkable transformation, year-after-year, in the culinary preferences of diners over the past decade has made it mandatory for the chefs to predict the choice of the diners in the forthcoming days. The evolution of food culture has been open to global flavours as well as catering to the health issues of diners, besides their concern for sustainability. With all these in mind **Ashok Malkani** views the F & B trends, including changes in the cooking techniques, due to innovative technology, in the new year.

People's' food preferences are constantly changing due to their shifting lifestyles, urbanisation and globalisation. Today, the complex interplay of health consciousness, technological innovations, evolving cultural norms, environmental concerns and shifting lifestyles are playing an important role in the changing food trends. Satiating the taste buds of the diners also plays an important role in the food & beverage outlets adopting innovative dishes. The evolution of food culture in India is marked by a growing openness to global flavours, innovative cooking techniques, and diversified dining formats, which keep changing year-after-year.



Delectable and appetising food and drinks have always evoked joy and exultation. London-based food futurologist Morgaine Gaye predicts that joy evoking cuisine will be the preferred choice of diners in 2026.

Ritesh Sen, General Manager – Food & Beverage, The Fern Hotels & Resorts, predicts, "The coming year is likely to witness a steady yet significant evolution in F&B trends rather than drastic changes. At The Fern Hotels & Resorts, we anticipate a stronger shift towards mindful dining, with guests increasingly prioritising sustainability, local sourcing and health-conscious menus. The reasons behind this shift stem from growing environmental awareness, a renewed focus on wellness post-pandemic and the advent of younger, more experimental diners who seek authentic culinary experiences. We also foresee technology playing a bigger role, with contactless dining and smart menus. Overall, the emphasis will continue to move from indulgence to experience-driven, responsible dining that balances taste, transparency and traceability."

Suresh Rajan Pillai, Chef De Cuisine, Marriott Executive Apartments Hyderabad states, "We're going to see some real changes in 2026. Three big things are happening. First, sustainability isn't just a nice-to-have anymore–guests want to know where their food comes from, whether we use seasonal produce and how we reduce waste. Second, people are smarter about healthy eating now. They want foods with good protein, better gut health benefits and less sugar, but they don't want to sacrifice taste or comfort. And third, kitchens are getting smarter with technology–think better planning tools and equipment that helps us cook more consistently while cutting down on waste and costs."

Harkaran Singh, Founder, The Evren, Vagator, Goa, disclosed, "The coming year will see a sharper return to mindful indulgence. Diners are no longer chasing novelty for novelty's sake; they're seeking emotional connection through food. Provenance, sustainability and design-led storytelling will shape menus more than ingredients alone. Restaurants that evoke a sense of place - not just serve on a plate - will define the new luxury."

Satya Kumar, Executive Chef, Sheraton Hyderabad Hotel, avers, "Health, tech and sustainability will lead the change. Guests will prefer cleaner, protein-rich and low-sugar foods. Smart kitchens and AI will improve faster cooking equipment, and systems that reduce food waste. Guests will also see more personalised menus and digital experiences. Guests will prefer local, seasonal and eco-friendly ingredients. These will be in focus as people eat more mindfully. Farm-to-table and low-waste cooking will continue to grow."



Ritesh Sen

Gurpreet Singh Sodhi, Director of F&B, Sheraton Grand Palace Indore, declares, "The coming year will see drastic changes driven by AI-led personalisation, global fusion menus, sustainability and functional foods focusing on gut health and immunity."

Piyush Paul, Director of Food and Beverage, IHCL Goa, affirms, "Conscious dining is on the rise. Guests increasingly seek clean, provenance-led cuisine with global sophistication and local integrity. At IHCL Goa, we see heightened appetite for culinary storytelling: ingredients rooted in communities, reinterpreted with contemporary flair."

He adds, "Beverage programs, too, are evolving with craft cocktails, low-ABV options and artisanal brews gaining prominence. Technology will further elevate personalised dining, while experiential concepts from chef-led interactions to destination-driven dining will define luxury."

Mandar Kothekar, Head Chef, Fairfield by Marriott Mumbai Andheri West, says, "I believe significant shifts are very likely in the new year. Some of the key drivers are:

Sustainability, transparency, supply-chain traceability: these are becoming mainstream, not niche.

Craving for new experiences: Consumers are seeking flavour adventures, so novelty, global fusion and sensory play are gaining ground.

For the chefs/restaurants, it means that we'll need to be more advance in menu development (e.g., faster cycle of seasonal/ new flavours); more transparent about sourcing and sustainability; more capable



of offering customised or functional-based dishes; more experiential in presentation and service."

Zorawar Kalra, Founder & Managing Director, Massive Restaurants Pvt. Ltd states, "The coming year will see a reset, not a tweak. Three forces for this will be:

Value-luxury Mindset: Guests want memorable, not merely expensive food. Michelin-level craft applied to comfort formats (chef's counters, tasting menus hidden in casual spaces).

Techno-craftsmanship: AI for demand forecasting, prep sequencing and waste analytics; chefs double down on artistry and storytelling.

Culture-as-Currency: Diners will choose dishes that signal identity – regional Indian references meeting global techniques. Think Gujarati thepla mille-feuille, butter-chicken yakitori, millet cacio e pepe.

Net-net: Fewer 50-item menus, sharper narratives; smaller dining rooms, bigger experiences are predicted in the new year."

Flavours

Food spreads joy but this becomes overjoy when it is flavourful. Gen Z, according to connoisseurs, is driving a growing appetite for adventurous flavours, mashups and textures. Reimagining flavours, it is believed, will continue into 2026. According to Rubix's NEXT Flavor Report, 67% of Gen Z want more floral-infused foods and drinks. floral notes such as lavender, rose and elderflower are expected to find a place of pride in the coming year. Besides flavour, savouriness in sweet dishes is predicted.

Piyush Paul declares, "Joy is becoming a powerful driver of dining choices. Guests seek flavours that spark delight. Be it comfortingly familiar or refreshingly surprising. Classics like rich chocolate, citrus brightness, smoky umami or tropical fruits trigger nostalgia and warmth, while bold global influences such as yuzu, miso and gochujang excite the palate with playful discovery.



Zorawar Kalra

In beverages, vibrant botanicals, crafted spice profiles and natural sweetness deliver uplifting sensory moments."

He adds, "Savoury elements are being introduced into sweet dishes. Classics like chilli-chocolate, mango-chilli sorbets, pepper-infused caramel, jalapeño cheesecakes and even spicy macarons are gaining popularity for their surprising yet balanced flavour play. Diners love the complexity and the heat that enhances sweetness, making every bite more dynamic and experiential."

Harkaran Singh states, "Food is attaining an emotional status. The flavours of joy are bright, familiar and nostalgic - citrus, curry leaves, coconut and spice - ingredients that awaken memory and comfort at once. Our guests respond instinctively to dishes that tell a story they can feel: a tang of tamarind that reminds them of childhood or a smoky lime that captures the sea breeze at sunset. International flavours too have found a home in India. Fermented notes from Southeast Asia, Mediterranean herbs - all are now seamlessly woven into Indian kitchens. But the trend isn't import, it's interpretation. We are always experimenting."

Suresh Rajan Pillai avers, "people eat with their emotions now–they want food that makes them feel good, surprises them or brings back happy memories. The flavours that work best are rich and savoury (like mushrooms and ghee), bright and citrusy (like lime and yuzu), pleasantly spicy (just enough heat to excite you) and subtle floral notes (like rose or tea) that feel calming. At Mazzo, our hotel's rooftop restaurant, we're doubling down on this philosophy with our newly launched menu that celebrates bold Southern Indian flavours."

He continues, "Indian diners are becoming more adventurous but still want flavours that feel approachable. Southeast Asian cooking–especially Malaysian and Indonesian dishes–are really taking off. Things like laksa-spiced fritters or vegetables with sambal paste work beautifully as starters. Middle Eastern small plates continue to be popular. The beverage scene is exciting too–sparkling teas and fruit-based mocktails are becoming the go-to for people who want something sophisticated without alcohol. For desserts, we're seeing beautiful mashups like cardamom-yuzu tart or tamarind caramel–combining Indian spices with classic European techniques in

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ways that feel both familiar and new."

He disclosed, "Sweet dishes are now being mixed with savoury items and becoming popular as desserts. At our hotel, we've had great success with unexpected combinations like mango panna cotta with black pepper and toasted coconut–the pepper actually makes the sweetness more interesting, and guests keep ordering it. Our chocolate tart with cardamom and salt has become a favourite because the savoury elements make it feel richer and more complex."

Satya Kumar says, "Guests today are choosing flavours that lift their mood and offer comfort. In 2026, joyful, mood-elevating flavours like citrus, umami and gentle heat will lead the way. Citrus brings freshness and energy – seen in dishes like Lemon Butter Grilled Fish and Yuzu Chilli Prawns. Umami-rich flavours like miso, soy and truffle create satisfaction and depth – reflected in Truffle Mushroom Risotto and Ramen Bowls. Mild heat from ingredients like Korean gochujang or peri-peri adds excitement without overpowering– such as in Gochujang Chicken Skewers. Overall, diners are looking for flavours that are comforting yet exciting, connecting food to emotion and experience."

He adds, "Desserts with savoury or spicy twists have become quite popular. Examples include: Bird Eye Chilli and Kaffir Lime Chocolate Mousse – well-received for its warmth and depth; guests appreciate the mild spice kick."

Zorawar Kalra declares, "Post-wellness fatigue, diners chase mood-positive flavours that feel light, bright and honest. Citrus and florals are among the preferred flavours. Some of the others are spicy warm like Kashmiri chilli, Guntur, Szechuan pepper. International flavours which have become permanent features on Indian menus are Korean (gochujang, gochugaru, ssam sauces), Japanese (yuzu, ponzu, furikake, shio-koji, matcha beyond dessert), LatAm (aji amarillo, cotija notes, tajín, chamoy), Levant (za'atar, toum, tahini in savoury and sweet) and SE Asia (laksa pastes, pandan, kaffir lime)

Gurpreet Singh Sodhi states, "Comfort flavours like chocolate, caramel, tropical fruits, and nostalgic Indian profiles such as cardamom and jaggery will trend as emotional triggers, during the new year."

He adds, "Savoury elements are moving into sweet applications. It's becoming a lasting trend. Desserts with chilli chocolate,



Chef Satya Kumar

sea-salt caramel, miso brownies and pepper gulab jamun appeal to adventurous palates."

Mandar Kothekar avers, "Emotional benefit is increasingly important for diners. When consumers decide what to eat or drink, they're not just looking at nutrition or taste, they're looking at exciting and joyful experiences. Consumers increasingly seek multi-sensory experiences. For example, flavours that combine sweet + spice, savoury + umami + sweetness, texture contrasts. In other words, flavours that feel like a treat but are aligned with wellness."

Ritesh Sen, affirms, "Food and drinks have always been an emotional experience and joy is increasingly becoming a key factor in consumer choices. In the year ahead, we expect guests to lean towards comforting, nostalgic flavours that evoke a sense of familiarity and happiness, alongside fresh, locally inspired options that offer a touch of discovery. We've observed guests gravitating toward authentic Indian regional cuisines, seasonal ingredients and natural, refreshing beverages that balance indulgence with wellness. Flavours that remind people of home, tradition and warmth often create the most joy especially when presented with



Piyush Paul

a modern twist. In essence, the pursuit of joy through food will be about reconnecting with one's roots while celebrating new experiences a blend of comfort and creativity on every plate."

He adds, "Flavours today have transcended borders, and Indian diners are embracing global influences like never before. At The Fern Hotels & Resorts, we've observed growing interest in pan-Asian flavours as well as Mediterranean and Middle Eastern profiles, which blend beautifully with Indian palates. The appeal lies in how these international flavours are being adapted to suit local tastes This trend reflects the evolving preferences of well-travelled diners who seek authentic global experiences without compromising on comfort or familiarity."

He disclosed, "The blending of savoury and sweet elements reflects today's diner's curiosity and openness to experimentation. We've seen spicy and umami flavours finding their way into desserts from chilli-infused chocolates and pepper-flavoured ice creams to salted caramel with Indian spices like cardamom and cumin."

Health & Wellness

Everyday dining choices are becoming acts of change. The ever-evolving customers' choices are changing towards dishes and drinks with functional benefits like gut health. Plant food too, according to aficionados, will move beyond niche appeal to become a mainstream option

Piyush Paul informs, "Diners are far more mindful of what they consume. Today everyone's priorities balance, clean nutrition and ingredient transparency. Sugar reduction, gut-friendly foods, plant-forward menus and mindful indulgence are key considerations. Functional beverages enriched with botanicals, probiotics and natural adaptogens are becoming preferred choices over high-calorie cocktails or sodas.

In the coming year, wellness will continue to guide decision-making. sustainable sourcing, low-processed cooking techniques, allergen awareness and immunity-supporting ingredients will remain top priorities. Ultimately, diners want food and drinks that not only taste exceptional but also nourish the body and elevate long-term wellbeing."

Ritesh Sen states, "Health consciousness has become a defining influence on dining preferences and this shift continues to



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shape the way guests choose their food and beverages. At The Fern Hotels & Resorts, we've seen a clear movement towards balanced, mindful eating where guests look for nutritionally rich, locally sourced and minimally processed meals without compromising on flavour. As we move into the new year, consumers are expected to be increasingly concerned about gut health, natural immunity and clean ingredients. There's also a rising interest in plant-forward menus, low-sugar and gluten-free options and functional beverages such as cold-pressed juices, kombucha and herbal infusions. Overall, dining in 2026 will be driven by the desire for wholesome indulgence food that not only tastes good but also contributes positively to one's overall well-being."

He adds, "At The Fern Hotels & Resorts, we've observed guests becoming more conscious of where their food comes from, how it's sourced and its environmental impact. This awareness is leading to a growing preference for locally sourced



Gurpreet Singh Sodhi

ingredients, seasonal produce and plant-forward dishes that support both health and sustainability."

Mandar Kothekar informed, "Health consciousness is now mainstream and influencing almost every decision. Some of the key influences are:

High-protein Intake: Plant-based or flexitarian diets.

Mental Wellness / Stress Relief: Foods & beverages that support brain health, mood, sleep.

Sustainability and Sourcing: More interest in how food is grown, packaged, transported."

Zorawar Kalra states, "Wellness will continue to shift from calorie-policing to function and provenance. The big three concerns will be:

Gut health (ferments, prebiotic fibres)

Glycemic load (millets, native grains, jaggery where it fits)

Clean protein (eggs, paneer, seafood, plant proteins without ultra-processing)

Besides this there will also be Portion intelligence (more half plates, tasting-size desserts and NA pairings (that don't sugar-bomb the meal) and label literacy (where guests would want to know where exactly the food has come from)."

Gurpreet Singh Sodhi adds, "Consumers will continue to seek balanced indulgence – low-sugar, high-protein, plant-forward dishes with natural ingredients and mindful portions."

Harkaran Singh declares, "Health is no longer about restraint; it's about balance. Guests are conscious of gut health, hydration, and clean sourcing. They want – and will continue to want– food that restores, not just impresses. Expect more fermented broths, cold-pressed oils, millet-based grains and mindful cocktails that blend botanicals, herbs, and low sugar. At Mila Patio, the Bar at The Evren, we call it "drinking well."

Satya Kumar avers, "Health consciousness is now a major factor in how guests choose their meals. Diners are looking for balanced, protein-rich, and low-sugar options without compromising on taste. By 2026, the focus will move toward gut health, clean ingredients, and portion control. Guests will expect menus that clearly show nutritional value and use natural, locally sourced produce.

Menu adaptations planned for the coming year:

• Introducing more protein-forward dishes



Chef Mandar Kothekar

with eggs, lentils, and lean meats.

• Offering more low-sugar and gluten-free desserts.

• Adding fermented foods like yogurt-based dips and kombucha for gut health.

• Emphasising seasonal and clean-label ingredients across menus."

Suresh Rajan Pillai apprises, "Being health-conscious is mainstream now, not just for fitness enthusiasts. People want to see clear protein options on the menu–whether it's eggs, lentils or lean meats. They're interested in gut health, so fermented foods, probiotic yogurt, and pickles are having a moment. Less sugar and smaller portions are becoming standard requests. We're responding by creating menu sections focused on balanced eating–think protein bowls with eggs and greens, flavourful fermented chutneys as condiments and mini desserts so you can enjoy something sweet without overdoing it. The trick is making healthy food exciting, not boring or restrictive."

New Technology in Kitchens

Behind the scenes, technology in the F&B kitchens is becoming – smarter and faster. The trend is expected to continue in the future. Kitchens in the USA are adopting robotics and using cruise lines and QSR chains. Technology predicted for Indian F&B kitchens include automation and robotics.

Suresh Rajan Pillai says, "Kitchens are getting smarter in practical ways. We're using tools that help predict exactly how much food we'll need so we don't overbuy or waste ingredients. Modern ovens and cooking equipment help us cook more consistently–every dish comes out right, every time. There are also smart gadgets for chopping and portioning that save time and let chef's focus on the creative stuff. Waste-tracking systems show us exactly where food is being wasted

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Chef Suresh Rajan Pillai

so we can fix it and save money. These aren't fancy robots taking over–they're practical tools that help us work smarter, serve better food, and reduce waste."

Satya Kumar disclosed, "For 2026, we're focusing on smart kitchen technology to improve efficiency and consistency. We're adopting AI-driven forecasting to manage reduce waste, like Winnow, and using combi-ovens and precision cooking tools for consistent results and faster turnaround. Automated prep systems and waste tracking software will help cut costs and improve sustainability. Overall, these tools will make operations faster, more accurate and cost-effective while maintaining quality."

Harkaran Singh believes, "Precision and preservation will drive innovation. From digitally assisted prep systems to zero-waste inventory management, tech will help chefs spend less time measuring and more time creating. But in experiential spaces like The Evren, technology stays invisible- supporting the craft, not replacing it."

Zorawar Kalra zeroes in on the following technology adoptions for 2026:

AI prep orchestration: This converts bookings + dish mix into mise-en-place timelines; cuts overtime and waste.

Computer-vision yield tracking: It auto-measures trim and plate waste.

He adds, "Other technology-advanced methods include Precision heat: induction as baseline; combi-ovens with humidity profiling; smart tandoors with temperature telemetry. Besides this, small-format fermentation & carbonation will also be in vogue.

"Robots will be useful for repetitive tasks (fry, dispense, wash). The chef remains the storyteller."

Mandar Kothekar reveals, "Several kitchen/restaurant technologies are trending for 2026. Some of them are:

Smart Kitchen Equipment: e.g., ovens, combi-units with WiFi/remote monitoring, recipe control, automation.

Guest-facing Digital Experience: Apps, kiosks, digital ordering, data-driven personalisation in dining.

Waste-analytics / IoT sensors for kitchen operations: tracking leftovers, energy usage, food waste."

Piyush Paul states, "The new year will see restaurant kitchens embrace smarter, more intuitive technology. While still at a nascent stage, technology driven inventory and menu planning systems will minimise waste and enhance precision. Advanced kitchen automation to high-efficiency combi ovens will ensure consistency and speed during peak operations. Smart allergen tracking and





Harkaran Singh

digital HACCP compliance will support safer dining. Meanwhile, immersive technology will elevate culinary skill development.

"Together, these innovations streamline back-of-house workflows, enhancing creativity and delivering exceptional guest experiences with greater reliability."

Ritesh Sen affirms, "In the coming year, restaurant kitchens are expected to continue adopting technologies that enhance efficiency, consistency and sustainability. These include energy-efficient kitchen equipment, induction-based cooking systems and digital inventory and procurement tools that help monitor ingredient usage and reduce waste. Hotels are also increasingly using POS-linked kitchen display systems to streamline orders and communication between service and kitchen teams. Temperature-controlled storage units and improved food safety monitoring systems are being implemented to maintain hygiene standards. Overall, the focus will remain on technologies that support operational efficiency, sustainability and food safety rather than full-scale automation."

Gurpreet Singh Sodhi sums up, "AI-based inventory systems, energy-efficient smart ovens, induction-based cooking lines and robotic prep assistants are likely to be introduced in the restaurant kitchen during the new year."

Conclusion

There are going to be changes in various segments of the F&B industry during the coming year to streamline the kitchen operations and also to introduce new dishes that would sate the ever-changing appetites of the diners. ■

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Superfoods with Superlative Qualities
....enter restaurant kitchens

Health consciousness among the diners, not only in India but all over the globe, has increased the exigence of superfoods in F&B outlets across the globe. Besides usage of superfoods like millets, amla, ashwagandha et al. there is also an increase in usage of fermented superfoods. Ashok Malkani views the market for superfoods and gives a broad perspective of the how and why the demand for superfoods is increasing.

Superfoods are gaining traction in Indian F&B outlets, driven by a growing consumer demand for health-focused options. Today, even global hospitality brands are serving cuisine with ingredients termed as superfoods. An oblivious person may ask: What are superfoods?

Vilas Dhankute, Executive Chef of Grand Mercure Bangalore, informs, "Superfoods are foods that are packed with nutrients like vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, fibre or probiotics, which may offer health benefits beyond basic nutrition. They are becoming popular because people are increasingly becoming health-conscious, seeking nutrient-rich, clean foods, with millets and fermented foods, fitting perfectly into this shift."

Zorawar Kalra, Indian Restaurateur, Founder and Managing Director of Massive Restaurants Pvt Ltd., explains, "Superfoods are foods which are typically plant based but also sometimes include dairy and some fish. The term, superfoods, refers to nutrient-dense fibre minerals or probiotics and other beneficial components. In India, its popularity has been driven due to a shift towards preventive healthcare and wellness. Social media pushing turmeric lattes, moringa powders and chia puddings has also added to its popularity. Government campaigns like the International Year of Millets 2023, have contributed in putting traditional Indian grains back on the table."

Gaurav Anand, Cluster Director of Culinary, Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Manyata Business Park, adds "Superfoods range from berries, leafy greens, nuts, seeds, whole grains, to traditional spices–that are valued for their role in promoting overall health and well-being. In the hospitality industry, these ingredients have gained prominence as guests increasingly seek menus that balance indulgence with wellness. Their popularity has accelerated with the global shift toward immunity, holistic lifestyles and

functional dining, making superfoods a natural fit for hotels looking to deliver elevated and health-forward culinary experiences."

Rajeev Ranjan, Assistant Manager of Food and Beverages, Sheraton Grand Palace Indore, enlightens, "Superfoods are rich in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytonutrients. While not a scientific classification, they are recognised for their potential to boost immunity, reduce inflammation and prevent chronic diseases. Their popularity stems from rising health consciousness, social media influence and a shift toward natural, preventive nutrition."

Shivani Sharma, Chefpreneur and Founder, Gourmestan, Mumbai, shares, "Superfoods are associated with wellness benefits, in exchange for relatively fewer calories. A growing awareness of nutrition, coupled with rising cases of lifestyle diseases and food sensitivities, has driven up the demand for certain ingredients that are presumed to offer high doses of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. However, it is important to note that these foods cannot, in isolation, be a magic bullet; they must be consumed as part of a varied diet. Today, there is a shift from buzzy ingredients to a more holistic understanding of superfoods, with many seeking out locally produced foods that offer substantial nutritional benefits but haven't received the preferential marketing hype. Millets are one such superfood that have multifaceted benefits, not just for human health but also the environment."

Anurag Narsinghani, Director of Culinary, J.W.Marriott New Delhi Aerocity, disclosed, "At JW Marriott New Delhi Aerocity, we've woven superfoods like quinoa, moringa, chia seeds and amaranth into salads, breakfast bowls and desserts. Guests appreciate the balance of taste and nutrition–especially international travellers, who often commend how these local, wholesome ingredients elevate traditional Indian flavours with a healthful twist."

Dwipen Goswami, Executive Chef, Vivanta Goa Panaji, states, "We've been incorporating superfoods in our menus since the concept gained popularity. I, being a keen learner on superfoods, was happy to offer guests wholesome, nutritious bowls with innovative recipes and unique presentations. We received appreciation for our customised superfoods from our guests, and their constant requests encouraged us to design menus with superfoods at different outlets like banquets, restaurants, in-room dining or breakfast buffets. Today, we have a special menu featuring superfoods at our outlet, Qmin. The responses are encouraging, and feedback is simply excellent."

Ishijyot Surri, Executive Chef and Founder, Mulk, Miniyaturk & SJI Gourmet, disclosed, "Coming from a Punjabi background, I grew up eating superfoods that the world is touting about now. From a glass of *haldi-doodh* (turmeric milk), for immunity, to *amla murabba*, for digestion or a bowl of curd rice to calm the stomach, I had my meals inspired by my grandmother's pantry. They certainly never were buzzwords back then – they just were part of regular life. Now – as I operate restaurants and create menus – I observe how these same foods are rediscovered and reinvented across the world. To me, superfoods are just nutrient-rich, culturally connected foods that provide more than energy – they provide wellness. And that is what has made them popular! People these days eat with a purpose: healing, energy and prevention."

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Chef Gaurav Anand

Market for Superfoods

Growing health consciousness among consumers and increasing knowledge about nutritional importance of superfoods like quinoa, chia seeds and moringa has motivated people to include superfoods in their diet. Also, increasing lifestyle disorders like diabetes and hypertension has made them lay emphasis on preventive care, thus spurring the demand for superfoods.

India superfoods market which, according to IMARC Group, was valued at $ 5.9 billion in 2024 is expected to reach $ 12.5 billion by 2033, exhibiting a CAGR of 8.7% from 2025-2033.

Superfoods are becoming popular all over the globe. According to Mordor Intelligence the global superfoods market, which is estimated at $3.04 billion in 2025, is expected to expand to $19.39 billion by 2030 growing at a CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) Of 8.26%.

Vilas Dhankute, declares, "The global superfoods market is expanding rapidly, growing at about 7–8% every year, which shows how strongly guests are shifting towards healthier eating.

Millets are seeing a steady global growth of around 5% a year, making them a key ingredient to watch. Interestingly millet-based packaged foods are growing the fastest at nearly 9% every year, which means they are becoming mainstream both in homes and on hotel menus."

Zorawar Kalra states, "India's superfoods and functional foods market is valued at over Rs.10,000 crore and growing at 15–20% annually, driven by urban consumers, D2C brands and exports. The millets market alone has seen ~30% growth in retail sales since 2023."

He adds, "Fermented foods are a major growth category from traditional curd (flavoured yoghurt} to kombucha startups."

Gaurav Anand stressed, "The Indian superfoods market is experiencing notable growth. This growth is fuelled by rising health awareness, preventive care trends, urbanisation, increasing disposable incomes and the influence of digital media and health influencers encouraging inclusion of superfoods, like quinoa, chia, *moringa, turmeric*, amla and millets, into daily diets."

Rajeev Ranjan avers, "The global superfoods market was valued at $193.26 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach $276.48 billion by 2030, growing at a CAGR of 6.1%. In India, the superfoods market is also expanding rapidly, driven by urbanisation, wellness trends and increased disposable income."

Shivani Sharma says, "Sources reveal that the Indian superfoods market will reach USD 12.5 billion by 2033, up from USD 5.9 billion in 2024. Fermented foods, superfood powders and locally produced ingredients such as turmeric and *moringa* are the most popular."

Ishijyot Surri, informs, "The superfoods market is booming– reaching a nearly $200 billion market across the globe. India (with millets, *moringa* and *makhana*) is also experiencing growth. In my own restaurants (Mulk, Miniyaturk & SJI Gourmet} we are experiencing the same, Items that utilise these ingredients are outselling traditional "comfort food" among younger diners."

Superfoods' Entry into Restaurant Kitchens

Increased health consciousness among diners as well as the viral trends and shared information on social media has increased



Zorawar Kalra



Chef Vilas Dhankute

the popularity of superfoods making it necessary for restaurants to incorporate dishes with superfoods in their menus.

Today, several restaurants are incorporating superfoods like berries, nuts, leafy greens and quinoa in their menus. These ingredients are often featured in a variety of dishes like quinoa salad, berry and yogurt parfait or a salmon entree with a side of kale.

Anurag Narsinghani declares, "Post-pandemic, guests at JW Marriott New Delhi Aerocity are consciously choosing healthier, nutrient-rich dishes. They prefer balanced meals with plant-based proteins, whole grains and superfoods. Wellness-focused menus, cold-pressed juices and gluten-free options see growing demand–reflecting a mindful shift toward nourishment, immunity and guilt-free indulgence without compromising flavour."

He continues, "The challenge in the dining options lies in balancing nutrition with indulgence. Superfoods can alter texture or taste, so our chefs experiment with techniques–slow roasting, fermenting and natural pairings–to retain authentic flavour. The goal is mindful dining that feels luxurious, not restrictive, merging health with culinary delight, at our dining places. At JW Marriott New Delhi Aerocity, we infuse wellness into Western classics. Our signature Saffron Risotto with Grilled Asparagus and Aged Parmesan pairs well with the warmth of saffron with creamy Arborio rice. Guests love its golden hue, subtle spice and how it transforms comfort food into a wholesome indulgence."

Shivani Sharma declares, "Many restaurants are adapting Indian foods, especially indigenous ingredients that are less commonly spoken about – from the

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superfoods context– onto their menus. This push is encouraging the discovery of new ingredients, new techniques and opening up a world of nutritional gains among conscious consumers."

She continues, "Several Indian foods – like turmeric, *moringa, amla* (Indian gooseberry), *ashwagandha, ghee* et al.– are being recognised for their unique health benefits in the global scenario. Millets and *makhanas* are also slowly increasing their hold."

Dwipen Goswami states, "The global health crisis has taught people the importance of good food and superfoods have gained massive popularity post pandemic. Immunity, healing and prevention have become crucial while choosing one's diet. There's a significant focus on immunity building and clean eating, reflecting a shift from reactive medicine to preventive nutrition intake. The hotels' kitchens are also giving classic Indian dishes a twist using ingredients like *moringa*, *amla* or turmeric."

He adds, "At Vivanta Goa Panaji, *moringa* leaves and powder are used with Hummus, smoothies, breakfast *upma* and soup at buffet. *Moringa* pods are an essential part of our *Sambhar*, while raw turmeric adds a nutritious boost to our smoothies. *Amla* is featured in our seasonal detox drink at breakfast. Additionally, we extensively use amaranth and spinach, holy basil, millets, garlic, sprouts, *shakarkand*, raw banana, chia seeds, flax seeds, *makhana* in our menu. Our turmeric smoothie with pineapple and coconut milk is a popular favourite especially among our vegan guests."

Vilas Dhankute informs, "Superfoods like millets are finding their way into more and more restaurant menus, especially in fine-dining and wellness-driven spaces. Guests today are not just looking for taste, but also for health and sustainability. In this connection I may add that superfoods are packed with antioxidants, fibre and essential minerals, and when it comes to fermented ones, they bring in probiotics as well. For our guests, that translates into food that not only tastes good but also supports digestion, boosts immunity and helps in overall well-being. As a chef, it feels rewarding to serve dishes that are comforting to the palate and nourishing to the body."



Rajeev Ranjan

He adds, "In a fine-dining setting, we usually feature 3 to 5 millet or superfood dishes across the menu starters, mains, desserts. This way, we can highlight their versatility and health benefits without overloading the menu, giving guests a balanced and enjoyable experience."

Gaurav Anand disclosed, "Restaurants worldwide are integrating superfoods such as turmeric, quinoa, mushrooms and super grains into their menus. These ingredients feature prominently in health-forward and wellness-oriented offerings. Although exact figures vary, menu mentions of superfoods are steadily increasing, reflecting strong consumer demand.

"The number of dishes featuring superfoods on a hotel or restaurant menu typically varies by concept and positioning. At Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park, as well as other wellness-driven or contemporary global dining outlets, anywhere between 10–20% of the menu may highlight superfood ingredients–from salads, smoothies and breakfast bowls to mains infused with grains, seeds and spices. Superfoods are integrated seamlessly across categories, allowing guests to enjoy nutrient-rich, flavourful options as part of a balanced dining experience.



Shivani Sharma

"On average, premium restaurants and hotels incorporate 2–5 superfood-based dishes per menu cycle, though this number varies based on theme, concept and consumer demand. Seasonal and wellness-focused menus often highlight them more prominently. Examples of superfoods being used by hotels are:

Millets (used in breads, porridges and salads),

Turmeric (golden lattes and immunity shots),

Moringa (teas, soups and garnishes),

Fermented foods (*idli, dosa, kanji* and probiotic yogurts),

Seeds and nuts (chia puddings and flaxseed crackers)."

Zorawar Kalra claims, "Superfoods are being used in Indian restaurants as health-conscious urban diners are demanding it. Casual dining cafés are serving quinoa bowls, chia seed puddings, avocado toast with moringa, kombucha on their menus while fine dining restaurants chefs are using Indian superfoods in creative forms–like millet risotto, *amla chutney* with meats or turmeric cocktails or mocktails."

He adds, "Indians are moving towards consuming more berries, avocado, tofu, tempeh and salmon etc."

He categorises the number of superfood dishes served in different types of eateries thus:

• Healthy Food Concept Cafés: 30–40% of menu items.

• Mainstream Casual Dining: 5–10%, usually as add-ons (quinoa, seeds, kombucha, millet bowls etc).

• Fine Dining Restaurants: Superfoods are often used without being marketed as such (e.g., black rice biryani, red rice risotto, kokum sorbet etc).

He affirms that superfoods are popular globally. He informs:

• Turmeric lattes (*"haldi doodh"*) have become a global wellness trend.

• Millets were showcased at G20 dinners, and are now seen on menus in the US, Europe and the Middle East.

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• *Moringa, amla, ghee,* jaggery and Ayurvedic herbs are gaining popularity in global wellness and health-food markets.

India is increasingly being seen as a source country for authentic, clean superfoods."

Rajeev Ranjan avers, "Superfoods are being increasingly featured in restaurant and hotel menus across India. Chefs are incorporating ingredients like quinoa, avocado, turmeric and *moringa* into dishes to meet guest demand for wellness-oriented meals. The demand is due to the benefits of these superfoods, which can be summed up as:

• Antioxidants: Combat free radicals and reduce aging

• Anti-inflammatory: Turmeric, ginger and berries help reduce chronic inflammation

• Heart Health: Omega-3-rich foods like salmon and walnuts

• Gut Health: Fermented foods like yogurt and kombucha support digestion

• Immunity: *Amla*, garlic and leafy greens boost immune function "

He continues, "In wellness-focused hotels, 5–10 dishes on the menu may feature superfoods. These include breakfast bowls, smoothies, salads and fusion entrees."

He cites some of the key factors for the growing popularity of superfoods in hotels as:

Rising health awareness and demand for clean-label foods

• Government campaigns promoting indigenous grains like millets

• Influence of Ayurveda and traditional wellness

• Social media and influencer culture

• Urbanisation and exposure to global food trends

He further added, "Indian superfood, like





Chef Ishijyot Surri

moringa, turmeric, *amla*, *makhana* and *ashwagandha* are gaining global traction. *Makhana* exports reached 25,130 metric tons in 2023–24, with major markets in the US, Canada and Australia."

Ishijyot Surri affirms, "Many restaurants are adapting Indian foods, especially indigenous ingredients that are less commonly spoken about from the superfoods context, into their menus. This push is encouraging the discovery of new ingredients, new techniques and opening up a world of nutritional gains among conscious consumers."

He further informs, "The usage of superfoods is being championed by hotels across India: ITC and Marriott are focusing on millet breads, Taj Palace focused on millets at the G20, Westin with their SuperFoodsRx menus. I love the way Oberoi Hotels infuse immunity foods in luxury dining."

He continues, "As a practitioner, I see two advantages:

• Nutrition: They are full of antioxidants, probiotics and fibre and immunity boosters.

• Emotional: Guests feel like they are making a good decision for their body. It is that feeling of empowerment that makes eating an experience.

The three reasons for their popularity I've seen firsthand are:

• Guests want healthier indulgence post-pandemic.

• Millets are trendy because hotels want to project sustainability.

• Global awareness has been created about millets even by the Government of India. The UN declared 2023 as the international year of Millets which was a huge boost."

Fermented Superfoods

It may be mentioned that fermented superfoods are also being used extensively in almost all traditional diets across the globe. In India, they are experiencing a significant surge driven by increased health consciousness, a focus on gut health and a renewed interest in traditional culinary practices. Fermented superfoods are believed to be rich in antioxidants, minerals, vitamins and other necessary nutrients. They can contribute to preventing chronic diseases, enhancing the immune system, increasing energy and improving overall well-being.

While fermented foods have always been an integral part of the Indian diet (e.g., *idli, dosa, dahi*), there is a growing trend of also adopting global ferments like kombucha, kefir and kimchi.

According to IMARC Group the India fermented superfoods market which was $ 1.18 billion in 2024 is expected to reach $ 2.61 billion in 2033, exhibiting a CAGR of 9.20% during 2025-2033.

Anuraag Narsingani disclosed, "At JW Marriott New Delhi Aerocity, fermented superfoods like kombucha, kimchi, kefir, sauerkraut and miso are gaining traction. Guests appreciate their probiotic benefits and depth of flavour. These ingredients are being creatively woven into beverages, dressings and marinades, blending global wellness trends with our hotel's refined culinary sensibilities.

"The challenge lies in balancing nutrition with indulgence. Superfoods can alter texture or taste, so our chefs experiment with different techniques to retain authentic flavour. The goal is mindful dining that feels luxurious, not restrictive, merging health with culinary delight."

He continues, "In our hotel one sees millets, *moringa*, seaweed and fermented foods emerging as the next big trends. Millets resonate with India's heritage and sustainability, while seaweed and fermented ingredients like kefir and kimchi reflect global wellness movements–uniting nutrition, flavour, and conscious dining across cuisines."

Gaurav Anand states, "India has a rich heritage of fermented superfoods–curd (yogurt), *idli, dosa, dhokla, kanji*, pickles, and *panitenga* (fermented mustard seed from Assam). The fermented superfoods

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market is growing at a rapid pace.

Key trends driving this growth include:

• Increasing awareness of probiotics and gut health, motivating consumers to seek out fermented foods rich in beneficial bacteria.

• A growing demand for ready-to-eat fermented products, meeting the needs of modern, fast-paced lifestyles.

• Commercialisation of regional and traditional fermented recipes, supported by scientific research and innovation.

These strategic insights underscore the expanding role of fermented superfoods in India's evolving food ecosystem—rooted in tradition, yet powered by modern health and convenience trends."

Shivani Sharma says, "India's superfoods – *Kanji*, a beverage made with fermented black carrots and beetroot – offer digestive benefits. *Khorisa* (an Assamese food made from fermented bamboo shoots) and *Hawaijar* (a Manipuri food made from fermented soyabean) are becoming popular for their gut-friendly benefits. These regional foods are rapidly catching favour with Indian consumers, who have already been introduced to imports such as kimchi and kombucha."

Dwipen Goswami discloses, "Fermented superfoods improve gut health, digestion, and immunity. Fermented millets, fermented turmeric and *moringa* beverages, probiotic yogurts and *kanji* kombucha concepts are often seen in modern cafes. Yogurt-based parfaits, miso butter millet bowls and kombucha mocktails are becoming a part of regular menus due to their natural wellness benefits."

He further informed, "At Vivanta Goa Panaji, we have incorporated superfood-based beverages into our buffet and à la carte menu. Our Qmin menu, as well as our all-day dining restaurant, Mynt menu, offers special wellness and superfood choices for our guests. Berry smoothies and Quinoa bowls are among the popular options."

Ishijyot Surri declares, "India has a strong market for super ferments with products like *dahi*, *chaas*, *kanji*, and fermented rice from Bengal, *idli*, and *dosa*. I also use modern ferments like kombucha and chutneys inspired by miso. Ferments are gut-friendly, on-trend and India has a huge untapped market. "

Rajeev Ranjan says, "Some of India's



Chef Dwipen Goswami

fermented superfoods are:

• Yogurt, kefir, buttermilk

• *Idli, dosa, dhokla*

• *Kanji*, kombucha, pickles

He adds, "The reasons for their popularity are because they are probiotic-rich foods, urban convenience, and traditional recipes like Panitenga from Assam."

Superfoods' Superpower

The global superfoods market size, according to Grand View Research, was estimated at $ 193.26 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach $ 276.48 billion by 2030, growing at a CAGR of 6.1% from 2025 to 2030.

In a world where wellness and health-consciousness have taken centre stage, the term "superfood" has become a buzzword in dietary conversations. With India being a major producer of superfoods can it become a superfoods' superpower?

Vilas Dhankute opines, "To make India a superfoods superpower, we need a few key steps. First, boost millet production and R&D to improve seed quality and supply chains. Chefs and restaurants can drive culinary innovation by creating millet-based gourmet dishes. At the same time, expanding exports and developing value-added products like packaged foods and fermented items will grow the market. Educating consumers about the health, taste, and sustainability benefits is crucial."

Zorawar Kalra declares, "To become a superpower we have to follow the under mentioned steps:

• Leverage heritage: Showcase traditional Indian grains, herbs, and ferments (millets, *amla*, *moringa*, turmeric, *kanji)* as global wellness icons.

• Build global supply chains: Standardise processing and packaging to meet export quality standards.

• Promote Through Cuisine: Encourage Indian chefs and restaurants abroad to spotlight Indian superfoods on menus.

• Policy Support: Government campaigns (like for millets) can be replicated for fermented foods and Ayurveda-linked ingredients.

• Innovation + Storytelling: Create modern formats (smoothies, energy bars, kombuchas) while highlighting their Indian origins."

Gaurav Anand states, "India has the biodiversity, agricultural capacity and traditional knowledge to lead the global superfoods revolution. By combining scientific validation, robust supply chains, farmer empowermen, and modern branding, India can transform native crops like millets, *turmeric*, *moringa*, and *amla* into globally recognised wellness staples. Hotels and restaurants, as live showcases of these ingredients, play a vital role in building awareness. With the global superfoods market poised for rapid growth, India is well-positioned to claim leadership while boosting farmer incomes and export revenues."

Shivani Sharma believes, "Concerted efforts by government bodies, entrepreneurs, chefs and consumers can bring homegrown superfoods into everyday conversations and every kitchen. Recent efforts to popularise millets have been met with heartening responses by global consumers. A broader push can mobilise other Indian superfoods and put them on the global gourmet map."

Ishijyot Surri believes that we should turn hotels into laboratories. He asserts, "Restaurant innovation can inspire the adoption of retail friendly versions of foods like *moringa*, turmeric, millets and jackfruit."

He affirms, "Brand them with quality and India can make "*Shree Anna*" as well-known as avocado or quinoa."

Conclusion

Health and well-being are becoming vital elements today, particularly for the younger generation. This is bringing superfoods, which were used in India decades ago, into focus. They are becoming globally popular. An increasing market for superfoods could make India a big exporter of these products which were popular in India ages ago. ■

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Beyond Tech & AI - 'Human Connect' Is The Heartbeat In Culinary Voyage !



By Sharmila Chand

Technology has undoubtedly enhanced operations and made tasks seamless but it can never replace that smile of the chef which sets the tone of the diners' experience. A warm welcome, a story around the food and chef's narrative creates an everlasting impression.

We talk to food and beverage experts who share their thoughts on the subject.

Personal Touch is Irreplaceable

Sagar Kulkarni, Director of Food & Beverage, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden

Technology can enhance convenience, but hospitality is still about human connection....

"Technology undoubtedly streamlines culinary operations, from inventory management to precision cooking, but it cannot replicate the warmth of human connection that defines true hospitality.

At Sheraton Grand Pune, we believe guests don't just come for the food; they come for experiences crafted by passionate chefs and attentive teams. A personalised menu recommendation, a chef's story behind a dish, or genuine hospitality shown by our associates creates emotional connections that no algorithm can achieve. While tech enhances efficiency and consistency, it's the human touch, the conversation, the intuitive understanding of guest preferences that transforms a meal into a memorable experience and builds lasting relationships that bring guests back time and again."



"We should absolutely use AI and other technologies to support the business, manage operations, and improve our efficiency. But we must never let it replace the genuine human connections that form the foundation of our industry"
Gaurav Bansal, Head Chef, ibis Styles Mysuru

Gaurav Bansal, Head Chef, ibis Styles Mysuru

"Technology has certainly transformed how we operate, streamlining everything from digital menus and online reservations to sophisticated kitchen order systems, but the core of hospitality isn't just efficiency; it's about the personal touch.

No AI or robot can truly replicate the basic essence of our business, which is genuine human connection. A warm, sincere greeting when a guest arrives, an intuitive understanding of their preferences, or a simple gesture of empathy when something isn't quite right are things that machines simply cannot deliver. In the food and beverage world, this is the critical difference between just serving a meal and creating a memorable dining experience."

Andrea Pauro, Founder, Eatinc Food and Beverage Pvt Ltd (Andrea's & Amici)

"Technology helps us operate efficiently, but hospitality has always been – and will always be – about people. At Andrea's Eatery, we use tech to make processes faster and more reliable, but the warmth

still comes from our team. You can automate reservations, payments and ratings, but true feedback – how the food made someone feel, whether the flavours suited their taste or allergies – comes only through personal connection.

That interaction between guest and team is irreplaceable. It allows us to customise, adjust and create moments that no system can replicate. Guests might forget how quickly their bill was processed, but they'll always remember the conversation, the smile and the attention they received."

Human Interaction Surpasses Technology Intervention

Sagar Kulkarni, Director of Food & Beverage, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden

"At Sheraton Grand Pune, we have witnessed countless instances where human intuition surpasses technology. During our in-house chef pop-ups, guests don't just want information about dishes, they crave stories, cooking styles and personal recommendations that only our chefs can provide. When a guest mentions a celebration, our team proactively arranges surprises that no algorithm could predict. Recently, an associate noticed a guest's hesitation over the menu and offered a customised tasting portion, turning uncertainty into delight.

Technology can't read body language, sense emotional needs or make spontaneous gestures of care. Our associates remembers returning guests' preferences, adapts to mood changes, and creates personalised moments that build loyalty beyond any loyalty program points."

Gaurav Bansal, Head Chef, ibis Styles Mysuru

"From my own daily experience, the human touch consistently proves superior in the moments that matter most. In service recovery, for example, when a food delay or an error occurs, a sincere, face to face apology from a manager or staff member can genuinely calm a guest and restore their confidence. This is often helped by a small complimentary dish as a gesture of goodwill. An automated apology message from an app simply doesn't have the same impact because it lacks that crucial element of empathy and personal accountability. This also applies to guest celebrations. For special occasions, our goal is to create a "WOW" moment. Our F&B team will personally decorate a table, I might create a special dish out of the menu, and all of our staff will engage with the guests to make them feel truly celebrated. Technology cannot plan or execute this kind of heartfelt, personalised celebration that comes from a desire to make people happy."

Finding the Right Balance is Key!

Guidelines to maintain a balance for successful business

Sagar Kulkarni, Director of Food & Beverage, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden

• Use Technology to Empower, Not Replace: Implement systems that handle repetitive tasks- reservations, billing,



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inventory, freeing associates to focus on meaningful guest interactions and personalised service.

• Train Teams in Emotional Intelligence: While investing in tech, equally prioritise training associates in active listening, empathy and reading guest cues to create authentic connections technology cannot replicate.

• Personalise Through Data, Deliver Through People: Leverage technology to gather guest preferences and history, but let human teams use these insights to craft thoughtful, spontaneous gestures that feel genuine, not automated.

• Create Tech-Free Touchpoints: Designate moments such as welcome greetings, chef interactions, farewell notes, where human connection takes center stage, ensuring guests experience warmth beyond digital convenience.

Gaurav Bansal, Head Chef, ibis Styles Mysuru

"First, we must define clear roles. This means using technology for transactional tasks like reservations, ordering, inventory and payment processing. We must reserve our human staff for what they do best which is service, care, personal recommendations and guest interaction.

We need to empower our staff with technology. We should train teams to use technology as a tool that enhances their ability to serve, not as a barrier. Staff should be masters of the system but also trained to know exactly when to set the tablet aside and provide focused, personal attention.

It is important to seek human feedback. While digital feedback forms are useful for data, we must make it a priority to gather in person feedback. Encouraging guests to share their dining experience directly with a manager, or even the chef, provides nuances and insights that a star rating will always miss. This helps us improve the experience, not just the process.

Finally, technology should support while people decide. Technology should support, not replace, staff decisions. For example, a system can track inventory or suggest menu pairings, but the final decision on handling a complex dietary request must be made by a trained staff member who understands the guest's situation."



"Technology makes us efficient, but human connection makes us memorable - it's about letting them complement each other. At Andrea's, that's our balance: efficiency behind the scenes, warmth upfront."
Andrea Pauro, Founder - Eatinc Food and Beverage Pvt. Ltd. (Andrea's & Amici)

According to Andrea Pauro : Founder of Andrea's & Amici

• Use technology for convenience, not connection. Automate what saves time – like POS systems or kitchen coordination – but keep the guest experience human.

• Train teams as you train systems. Technology learns from data; people learn from experience. Our staff is trained to read emotions, understand preferences, and make real-time decisions.

• Let data inform, not dictate. We use digital feedback tools – NPS scores, online reviews, reports – as indicators, not absolutes. The final understanding comes from what our team observes and hears in person.

• Empower your people. Encourage your staff to step beyond the script when needed – to connect, to empathise, to make a moment special. That's where real hospitality lives.



"While tech enhances efficiency and consistency, it's the human touch, the conversation, the intuitive understanding of guest preferences that transforms a meal into a memorable experience and builds lasting relationships that bring guests back time and again"
Sagar Kulkarni, Director of Food & Beverage, Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden

To Conclude

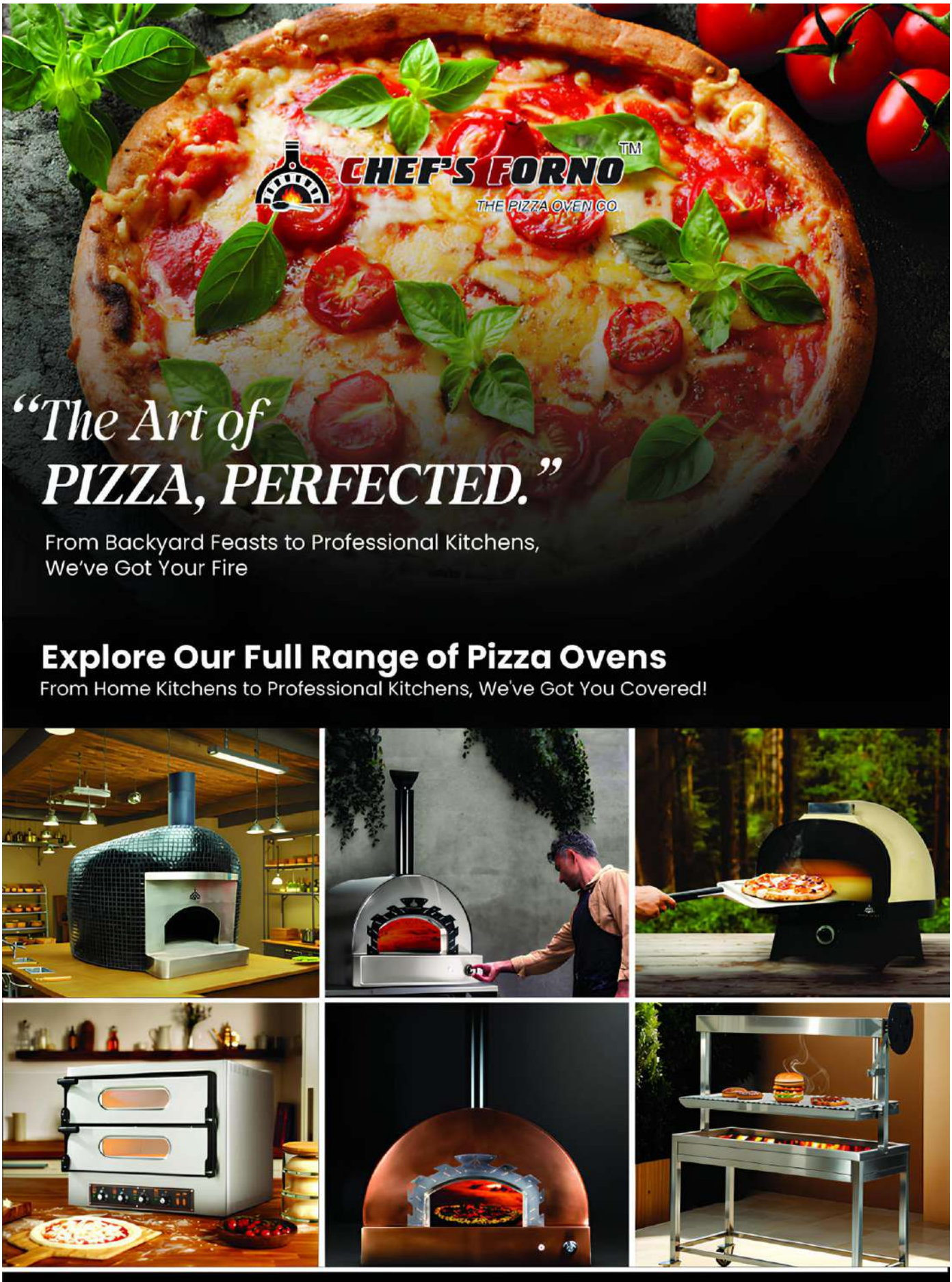
In the age of advancing technology and AI, the essential human connection in culinary operations remains irreplaceable.

As Sagar Kulkarni, sums up,

"While automation enhances efficiency and consistency, it cannot replicate empathy, intuition and the genuine care only humans offer. This human touch drives loyalty and distinguishes exceptional service beyond standardised processes, proving that despite digital progress, culinary operations will always rely on the warmth and creativity that define human engagement in the kitchen and beyond.

At our hotel, personalising the guest experience is key to standing out. We nurture connections through human touches like moment-printed mugs and mouse pads as departure gifts, alongside the chef's special Puneri Masala, leaving lasting impressions. Our commitment to customisation extends to dietary preferences, including gluten-free and lactose-intolerant options, ensuring every guest's unique needs are met with care. This blend of thoughtful gestures with tailored culinary offerings creates memorable stays and reflects our dedication to making every visit distinctive and warmly personal."

"The future of hospitality isn't about choosing between the two – it's about letting them complement each other. Systems should save time so teams can spend that time with guests," signs off Andrea. ■



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Burratta with Curry Leaves Pesto

India's Cheese Revolution: From Dairies to Dining Destinies

By Harsha Masand

Cheese in India has evolved from being a quiet supporting act to becoming one of the most dynamic categories shaping the country's culinary and business identity. Once confined to imported gourmet trays and continental restaurant menus, it has now emerged as a force driving menu innovation, profitability and consumer engagement across the food and hospitality industry.

For years, Indian kitchens knew cheese primarily as paneer or a processed slice in a sandwich. Today, the same kitchens and the discerning consumers they serve have embraced burrata, brie, gouda, feta and a new generation of artisanal Indian cheeses that rival their global counterparts in taste, texture, and storytelling.

This transformation reflects more than changing palates it signifies the rise of a more informed, aspirational, and globally aware Indian diner. Urban consumers are demanding authenticity and craftsmanship; chefs are experimenting with bold crossovers; and suppliers are reimagining logistics to meet rising expectations. Cheese has moved from being a luxury ingredient to becoming a cultural and economic barometer of India's food evolution.



Chef Salil Fadnis

Chef Salil Fadnis, General Manager, Sahara Star, Mumbai, captures this change succinctly: "Shelf life is the only factor that cannot be changed."

His words summarise the new philosophy of Indian dining one that values process as much as product, provenance as much as price highlighting that "Cheeses are natural products, a process one cannot interfere in. Logistics, availability and price can be managed. You pay the price for anything you know the value of. And if it's a premium product and you pay a premium price, you'll always cherish it."

In many ways, the evolution of cheese mirrors India's broader food story rooted in tradition, shaped by innovation and defined by experience. What began as a peripheral ingredient has become a symbol of refinement, a benchmark for creativity, and a bridge connecting regional dairies to national dreams. That journey–from evolution to significance–sets the stage for understanding why cheese matters so deeply to India's changing culinary landscape.

Cheese as Philosophy

To understand cheese's ascent, one must see it as more than food, it's a business philosophy. In a marketplace defined by innovation and differentiation, cheese has become a tool for storytelling, identity and profitability.

Few ingredients bring together sensory pleasure, nutrition, and emotion the way cheese does. Its ability to create indulgence, texture, and comfort makes it indispensable across cuisines, from pizzas and pastas to Indian kebabs and desserts.

Kazi Abdul Wahab, Director of Food and Beverage at The Duke's Retreat, Khandala, observes, "Cheese has shifted from being support to being a hero ingredient on the plate." He explains further, "Cheese is integral because it works both as a flavour enhancer and a texture builder. It balances spice, adds depth and creates indulgence without overpowering. It's a medium of creativity, much like spices in Indian food. Burrata with Tempered Tomatoes & Curry Leaf Pesto lets cheese play the hero with an Indian accent, while Cheddar Pav Bhaji Fondue adds richness to a traditional street food classic."

As cheese takes on a central role, it not only redefines menus but also impacts consumer psychology. Cheese signals luxury, comfort and modernity, qualities Indian diners increasingly seek in their experiences. A well-made cheese dish can elevate the perception of an entire brand, allowing operators to command higher price points while building stronger consumer loyalty.

India's premium cheese segment, estimated to grow at over 20% annually, demonstrates how deeply it has penetrated the value chain. From sourcing to presentation, cheese drives



"Cheese is integral because it works both as a flavour enhancer and a texture builder. It balances spice, adds depth, and creates indulgence without overpowering. It's a medium of creativity, much like spices in Indian food."
— Kazi Abdul Wahab, Director of Food and Beverage, The Duke's Retreat, Khandala





Chef Bikrant Singh

consistency, creativity and emotional connection. The market's expansion parallels larger socio-economic trends, rising disposable income, an expanding QSR and bakery network, and growing awareness of global dining formats.

More importantly, cheese today has grown beyond being a commodity, it is culture. It connects geographies, bridges traditional and modern techniques and transforms local milk into global-standard creations. Homegrown brands are reinterpreting craftsmanship with confidence, turning regional products into national icons. Cheese, once borrowed from the West, now reflects the spirit of an India that learns globally but creates locally.

India's Cheese Renaissance: From Tradition to Transformation

India's cheese journey is as diverse as its geography. While the world celebrates over 1,800 varieties, India now produces more than 40 distinct artisanal kinds, each rooted in terroir and storytelling.

From the smoky *Kalari* of Jammu & Kashmir to the chewy *Churpi* of Sikkim and the fiery *Kanthari* cheese of Kerala, regional identity has become the cornerstone of innovation.

Entrepreneurs like Manoj Agarwal, Founder of churpi.in, are leading this revival of traditional forms. "We follow the age-old Himalayan recipe of making *Churpi* using pure cow and yak milk sourced from local farmers in the Darjeeling and Sikkim region," he says. "Each batch is crafted with minimal processing, no additives and strict quality checks to preserve natural taste and nutrition."

This revival isn't just culinary, it's economic. Once limited to local communities, small producers now access national markets through e-commerce and improved cold-chain logistics. A decade ago, only trekkers knew Himalayan *Churpi*; today, it sits proudly in urban gourmet stores.

Microbiologist Monisha Indulekha, Founder of Moonrocket Cheese Company, describes this evolution, "When we decide what to make, we look at the roots of cheese-making traditions around the world and how those can be reimagined for Indian palates. Consumers in India are mindful and adventurous. That's why creations like our Queso *Kanthari* and our *Halloumi* or *Belper Knolle* have been





Monisha Indulekha

so well received. People are no longer just buying cheese they're looking for handcrafted experiences."

For distributors and chefs, this diversity represents a new sourcing advantage. Restaurants no longer depend solely on imports they collaborate with Indian producers for freshness, cost-efficiency, and customisation.

Beyond commerce, there's a deeper narrative: India is building an ecosystem of dairy entrepreneurship. Farmers, artisans, chefs and distributors are coming together to create a network that celebrates both innovation and identity. This is not merely a story of expansion it is one of rediscovery, where ancient dairy wisdom meets modern ambition and local products find global pride.

As consumers mature, so do their perceptions of quality. The Indian diner, once partial to imported cheese, now celebrates local artistry. This marks a cultural and economic milestone, Indian-made cheese no longer competes on price, but on identity.

Europe, with its PDO-protected Parmesan and Brie, defined cheese for centuries. But India, the world's largest milk producer, is rewriting the rules. Its strength lies in adaptation, not imitation.

Anu Bakhshi, General Manager–Commercial at LOTS Wholesale Solutions, expresses her thoughts:

"In terms of quality, Indian artisanal cheeses are at par; in terms of taste, they're more versatile for the Indian palate. With elevating lifestyles and gourmet trends, our goal is to bring Indian

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cheese to the world map."

Indian cheese makers now blend global techniques with local creativity. From feta aged in Himalayan salt caves to burrata made with Indian buffalo milk, each creation tells a story of region and reinvention. Economically, this transformation supports five-star hotels, gourmet retailers and e-commerce networks, creating livelihoods while reducing import dependency.

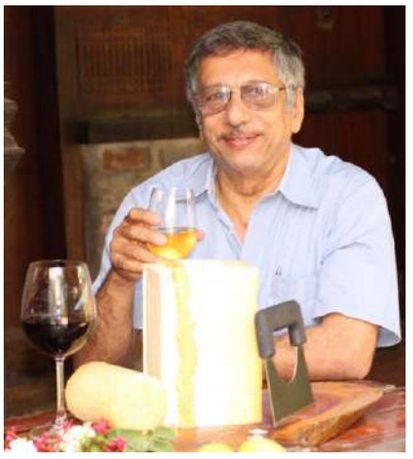
The value chain has shifted from quantity to quality, from milk to meaning where craftsmanship and commerce meet in a shared pursuit of excellence.

Farm to Fork: The Quiet Cheese Revolution

If one movement defines India's cheese revolution, it's the farm-to-fork model—bridging the gap between producer and consumer through transparency, sustainability and traceability.

Across India, boutique dairies and small-scale producers are collaborating with hotels and distributors to build ethical, traceable supply chains that emphasize origin and integrity. This model benefits everyone: producers gain visibility and fair margins; chefs receive consistent, authentic ingredients and consumers connect emotionally with provenance.

"Because we work in small, flexible batches, we can respond quickly adjusting flavour, texture or packaging where it makes sense," says Sohrab Chinoy of ABC Farms, Pune. "By keeping operations small and family-run, we stay focused on quality, traceability and environmental care."



Sohrab Chinoy

Local sourcing also yields strong business dividends: shorter supply chains reduce costs, enhance freshness and lower carbon footprints key priorities for hospitality brands investing in ESG and sustainability goals.

As technology infuses tradition, cold-chain optimisation, AI-led microbial monitoring and humidity-controlled storage are becoming the new normal. The result is a supply chain that's both efficient and emotionally resonant, a hallmark of modern luxury dining.

Innovation, Technique & Scaling: Where Science Meets Soul

Behind every wheel of cheese lies an intersection of craftsmanship and commerce. Today's producers are pairing traditional fermentation with precision technology to achieve consistency at scale.

Chef Bikrant Singh of Sangam Farms explains, "Consumers want natural, preservative-free, probiotic-rich options. Cheese is more than food—it's a value chain."

This mindset defines India's cheese entrepreneurship rooted in authenticity, driven by innovation. Cooperative cold storage, shared ageing facilities and AI-led fermentation are helping small producers scale sustainably while maintaining integrity.

Cheese, once a kitchen staple, has evolved into a lifestyle marker synonymous with aspiration, health, and craftsmanship. Its rise parallels India's transformation from an agrarian to an innovation-led food economy.



Churpi

Conclusion: The Business of Belief

Cheese has become the new measure of India's culinary maturity and business confidence. It represents the fusion of craft, culture and commerce, where patience becomes value and provenance becomes brand equity.

From the Himalayas to Kerala's backwaters, India's cheese makers are building a circular economy founded on transparency and trust. As industry veterans often say, cheese "adds depth" not just to dishes, but to the very ecosystem that sustains them.

India's cheese story is not about imitation; it's about reinvention a nation transforming milk into meaning, dairy into design, and craftsmanship into commerce.

In today's hospitality landscape, cheese doesn't just complement a dish it defines a business, a belief and a new India ready to taste its own potential. ■



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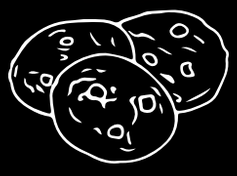


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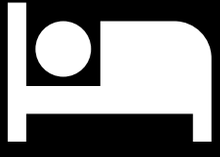
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Transforming Global Kitchens with Innovation, Leadership and Passion

By Rajat Taneja

With over two decades of experience across world-renowned brands such as Marriott International, Hilton Hotels, Hyaat and Taj Group of Hotels, Chef Sunil Gangwal has established himself as a culinary innovator and strategic leader. His expertise spans pre-opening leadership, menu design and team development, crafting signature dining experiences that blend authenticity with global sophistication.

Now based in the United States, Chef Gangwal continues to redefine culinary excellence through his creative leadership, sustainability focus and ability to build world-class F&B programs from the ground up. His vision bridges traditional Indian artistry with modern international techniques, a hallmark of his globally respected career.

What is your approach when building a new culinary operation from scratch?

Every new project begins with clarity of vision. I start by understanding the brand philosophy and target audience, which shapes the entire culinary identity. From menu design to kitchen layout, every element must reflect creativity balanced with operational efficiency.

Building a strong team is equally vital. I emphasise training, ownership and purpose – ensuring each chef connects emotionally with the cuisine. My goal is to create an ecosystem that is efficient, consistent and capable of delivering excellence from the very first service.

How do you balance creativity with profitability?

True creativity lies in intelligent innovation. I encourage my team to see food cost not as a limitation but as a creative parameter. Smart sourcing, seasonal ingredients and waste reduction allow us to craft dishes that are exciting yet sustainable. Creativity attracts guests; profitability ensures longevity. The perfect balance between both defines a successful culinary operation.

The food industry changes quickly. How do you stay ahead?

I stay connected with global culinary movements through research, travel and collaborations. Understanding guest behavior is equally important – knowing what they value and how preferences evolve. I don't chase trends; I reinterpret them through my own philosophy, ensuring they align with



authenticity and brand character. Continuous learning and adaptability are essential to staying relevant.

What is your leadership style in high-pressure environments?

My leadership is rooted in clarity, empowerment and empathy. I lead by example, calm under pressure, focused on teamwork over hierarchy. Training and mentorship are central to my approach. A true leader doesn't just manage; he develops other leaders. When the team feels supported and inspired, pressure transforms into high performance.

What excites you most about your current role in the U.S. and your future plans?

The U.S. has given me a platform to present authentic Indian flavours to a global audience while learning from diverse culinary cultures. I'm excited about creating cross-cultural experiences that merge Indian craftsmanship with global techniques. Moving forward, I aim to expand into consulting, brand collaborations with top Culinary Institutes of America and mentorship, shaping the next generation of chefs and redefining modern global dining.

What advice would you give to aspiring chefs?

Be passionate, patient and persistent. Master the basics before chasing trends. Respect every ingredient and every mentor. Great chefs think beyond recipes, they understand culture, balance and sustainability. Stay curious; a great chef is always a lifelong student and the most important Keep your basics always clear.

What has been the most rewarding moment in your career?

Seeing young chefs I've trained grow into successful professionals is deeply fulfilling. Equally rewarding is representing Indian cuisine internationally and witnessing guests embrace its depth and diversity. True success is measured not by titles but by the impact we leave on people and the culinary world.

Culinary Vision and Legacy

Chef Sunil Gangwal's journey embodies innovation, discipline and global perspective. His leadership continues to inspire emerging chefs and influence hospitality brands worldwide. Whether designing new dining concepts or mentoring future talent, Chef Gangwal stands as an ambassador of modern Indian gastronomy. His mission remains clear, to bridge tradition and innovation while shaping a sustainable, globally inspired culinary future.

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Festive Fervour in Restaurants

From timeless culinary classics, story-telling to spirited festive twists, restaurants create delightful vibes

By Gita Hari

With the onset of Indian festivals, restaurants across India organise menus that draw together comfort, creativity and celebration. Live melodies fill the air, and thoughtfully crafted festive drinks invite guests to raise a toast to the season, with engaging and absorbing elements thrown in for good measure.

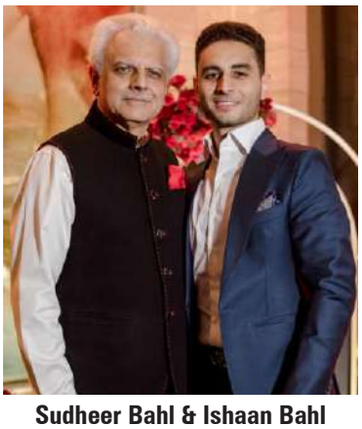
Thali Eateries

Presently, people enjoy dining out on occasions for good food, innovative beverages, folklore, unique events and absorbing activities. This has become a part of contemporary celebrations in a space that balances playful sophistication with traditional practices. Places like Maharaja Bhog, Shree Thakker Bhojanalay, Golden Star and other thali restaurants serve traditional fare. Khandani Rajdhani serves in gleaming thalis placed on rich textile, rimmed with marigold flowers and rose petals, lit *diyas*, welcoming guests with *arti* and *tilak*. While some offer *dandiya* sticks as take-away to female guests during Navratri, some others present floral tributes or *mithai* parcels for Diwali, with live folk music where vintage décor sets the tone for celebratory meals.

Regional Cuisine Restaurants

As the city comes alive with lights, colours and festive cheer, it brings along the best ideas to indulge in time-honoured culinary experiences. TAT, the coastal-cuisine restaurant in Vikhroli, Mumbai, helmed by Chef Sudhir Pai, makes it a point to celebrate all Hindu festivals. Bangla *geet* playing in the background and guests greeted in true Indian style with *tilak*, TAT's Durga Pujo thali was well received by all those who relished the region's delicacies like *bhaja*, *poshto*, *Luchi*, *cholar dal*, *ilish shorshe*, *doi maach*, *nolengurer sondesh*, *mishti doi* and more. Their Onam *sadhya* with its ethnic décor, jasmine mala for women, authentic Kerala cuisine and *chenda melam* beats was noteworthy.

From intimate dinners to lively gatherings, warm lighting, vibrant art, with a welcoming atmosphere, restaurants make it an ideal spot for all generations to come together over festive food and drinks. Some restaurants have hampers designed to make your celebrations meaningful while giving back to the community. For instance, Café Joy located in New Town Rajarhat, Kolkata offered The Ajambari Tales, a women-led initiative celebrating the artistry of indigenous women from the hills of Bengal. A festive gifting collection that blends tradition, sustainability and empowerment.



Sudheer Bahl & Ishaan Bahl

This season, discerning guests loved father-son duo - Sudheer Bahl and Ishaan Bahl's iconic Khyber restaurant in Kala Ghoda, Mumbai, which served meal steeped in history, flavour and artistry. This North-West Frontier restaurant continues to charm diners with its Mughlai richness, intimate alcoves and walls adorned with original works by masters like M.F. Husain and Anjolie Ela Menon. And since every celebration merits a sweet finale, Khyber's *mithai* selection was pure nostalgia served on a plate. From the golden, syrup-soaked *gulab jamun* and creamy, slow-cooked *rabdi*, to the delicately flavoured *rasmalai* and aromatic *firni*, each dessert is a nod to timeless Indian indulgence. Whether as a toast to Diwali lights, festive cheer or simply good company, Khyber's timeless art, and soulful cuisine promise a feast that is as unforgettable as the city itself.

Kalpaney restaurant lured Bengalurites to its warm, quiet ambience with wooden textures, soft lighting and subtle artwork. Because food was fully vegetarian, every guest could indulge freely. They came up with zero-proof drink menu, in harmony with Preeti Prema, a floral sparkling take on *Mohobbat ka Sharbat*, and *Imli ka Khajur*, serving as jubilant, non-alcoholic companions to the festive meal. The chaat options stood out for their playful spirit and triggered sentimental emotions. *Makhana* Corn Chaat, Fruit *Kachori Chaat* studded with mixed fruit pearls, and *Muradabadi Dal Chaat* featuring *dal moth* were reminiscent of olden days. "For me, food is memory. With Kalpaney, the idea was to hold on to that and to take flavours we've all grown up with and reimagine them in a way that still feels close to home. Especially during the festive season, we wanted every dish to feel joyful, rooted and just different enough to make you smile and remind



Chef Sudhir Pai



Chef Sombir Chaudary



Chef Balaji Balachander

you of festivities with family," says Chef Sombir Chaudary.

Multi-cuisine Places Too Join in

KOA restaurant in Mumbai went a step ahead making food, fate and festive magic collide. Their Diwali *jalsa* was a one-of-a-kind experience where destiny was served on a plate and every bite felt as if it's written in the stars. Guests walked into a space where festive lights sparkled, and the air hummed the celebratory spirit with anticipation. The Cosmic Table, KOA's interactive tarot-inspired dining experience put fate amid your festive spread. On arrival, guests had to draw their tarot card and let it decide their food, drink and dessert for the evening. Each card unveiled a story, a flavour and a mood crafted to match your cosmic energy. As the night unfolded, guests surrendered to the rhythm of Diwali *jalsa* where personalised tarot readings, signature cocktails and electrifying beats turned dinner into destiny. It was an evening that celebrated the spirit of Diwali with a twist: mystical, modern and irresistibly fun.

Saltt Restaurant and Bar in Karjat offered the sweetness of tradition through an exclusive festive dessert menu in collaboration with P·TAL - a brand that celebrates India's living legacy of handcrafted metalware. The desserts were served in exquisite handcrafted brass and copperware vessels that hold not just food, but stories, rituals and intention. Chef Balaji Balachander says, "Every piece is crafted by India's UNESCO-listed artisans, bringing alive an age-old rhythm of metal being shaped by hand - the same rhythm that once echoed in traditional Indian kitchens. From decadent *halwas* to redefined *mithais*, each creation served in these vessels was evocative while offering a touch of contemporary flair."

With a strategic and creative approach to surpass others, restaurants bring more to the table by way of thematic décor, fun activities, a special festive menu, which help boost their footfalls and subsequently their cash registers!





BANNG, Bandra: When Bangkok's Bold Pulse Meets Mumbai's Evolving Appetite

By Harsha Masand

In a city constantly craving newness, where culinary experiences must do more than just please the palate, BANNG, Bandra, emerges as a confident statement a restaurant that understands both the rhythm of Mumbai's modern diner and the rising appetite for globally inspired, high-energy dining concepts.

Conceptualised by Two-Michelin-starred Chef Garima Arora and restaurateur Riyaaz Amlani, BANNG represents the meeting point of Bangkok's unfiltered nightlife spirit and Mumbai's cosmopolitan curiosity. It's less a traditional restaurant and more a layered brand experience one that captures the electric pulse of two global cities while offering Indian diners an education in refined Thai sensibility.

"Mumbai is where my journey began, so bringing BANNG here is deeply personal, a homecoming in the truest sense," says Chef Garima Arora. "The city is electric, layered and endlessly inspiring, just like Bangkok. With BANNG, we hope to create a space that brings the vibrancy of Thai culture, the depth of the country's culinary heritage and my own creative lens together in a way that speaks to Mumbai's energy and openness."



"Mumbai is where my journey began, so bringing this experience here is deeply personal, a homecoming in the truest sense,"

- Chef Garima Arora, Co - Founder, BANNG, Mumbai

Flavours that Perform: The First Notes, the Fire and the Flow

BANNG's culinary direction thrives on what can only be described as controlled exuberance. The opening act a medley of small plates and grills sets the stage for an experience that blurs the lines between comfort and experimentation.

The Tom Kha Pani Puri perfectly embodies the restaurant's crossover DNA crisp puris stuffed with white oyster mushrooms and herbs, filled with chilled coconut broth that blends Indian familiarity with Thai finesse. The Avocado Som Tum, chilled with fruits and toasted peanuts, brings colour, texture and brightness to the table a refreshing interpretation of Thai salad that is both approachable and elevated.

Then comes the Isaan Smashed Potato, made with potatoes and tossed in mint,

coriander, basil, and shallots a surprising harmony of sour and savoury. On the grills, the Eggplant, glazed in peanut and mala spice sauce, delivers smoke and spice in equal measure, while the Tomatoes on Vine unfold gradually under a Tom Yum glaze, with creamy tamarind candy notes that linger and evolve.

It's an experience that moves like music high notes, warmth, and slow builds of flavour. And that energy carries through seamlessly to the BANNG Bar; the brands lower level that doubles as its personality centre.

Helmed by Attapon De-Silva, Bangkok's renowned Potion Master, the bar mirrors the food's creative range with cocktails that sit across moods Fresh & Fizzy, Moody & Boozy, and Umami & Yummy. The White Lotus Martini (gin, turmeric-infused Lillet Blanc, and garlic brine) underline the bar's depth, while Kung Fu Pandan – a zero-proof blend of pandan, lime, cucumber, and coconut jelly shows how the beverage program celebrates inclusivity without compromise.

This opening sequence from appetisers to cocktails establishes what BANNG truly sells: not just food, but energy in motion. A



dynamic experience that appeals to the urban consumer seeking both story and stimulation.

Where Comfort Finds Craft — The Main Course and the Sweet Afterthought

As the meal deepens, the narrative transitions from playfulness to poise. The Morning Glory, light and soupy, opens the mains with restraint and freshness. The Royal Green Curry, tracing its heritage to the household of King Rama VI, represents Thai authenticity refined for Indian sensibilities aromatic, creamy, and layered without being heavy-handed.

Then there's the restaurant's undeniable highlight 'The OG BANNG'ing Crab Omelet ' a crisp-edged, cloud-soft creation filled with crab, caramelised onions, and a sweet-sour-spicy dressing that delivers technical precision with crowd-pleasing appeal. The Turmeric Fried Rice, grilled in banana leaves and scented with coconut, complements the omelet and curry perfectly, proving that even the simplest elements at BANNG are composed with intent.

"Lately, my world has been Thai food," shares Head Chef Manav Khanna. "I follow restaurants and chefs who are innovating within this space, constantly exploring how to push the boundaries of traditional flavours while staying authentic. I also think about how I can integrate these ideas into Indian dining sensibilities."

Khanna's approach defines the kitchen's balance authenticity expressed through innovation, designed for a diner

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"Mumbai is an ever-evolving city with a dynamic appetite for global experiences."

Riyaaz Amlani, Co-Founder, BANNG, Founder and Managing Director of Impresario Entertainment & Hospitality Pvt. Ltd.

who understands global palates but values familiar comfort.

The sweetness that follows keeps that same ethos alive. The Sago Nom Sod, made with caramelised milk, tapioca pearls and grass jelly, feels nostalgic yet polished, while the Lod Chong Bingsu milk snow topped with coconut cream, pandan noodles and sweet coconut sauce is crafted for the new-age diner who views dessert as a sensory finale, not an afterthought.

Together, the mains and desserts frame as a restaurant that knows how to entertain and educate simultaneously inviting the diner into a cultural conversation through flavour rather than formality.

Design as Experience: A Dual-World Atmosphere

BANNG's ambience is an extension of its culinary storytelling two spaces, two moods, one unified rhythm. The lower floor bar is a textural ode to Bangkok's street vibrancy, defined by warm terracotta tones, handcrafted metalwork and ambient lighting that shifts from dusk to midnight. The atmosphere is social, tactile and deliberately unpolished a contemporary echo of Thai street bars reimagined for Mumbai's sophisticated crowd.

Upstairs, the dining area transforms that vibrancy into elegance. Deep amber lighting, structured silhouettes and sculptural shadows create an atmosphere of immersive warmth. It's a space that celebrates design not as ornamentation but as functionality lighting that flatters food, acoustics that carry conversation, and textures that invite tactile connection.

The interiors complement the brand's positioning perfectly: upscale yet accessible, sensory yet strategic. Every design choice feels made for longevity the kind that translates equally well to a Thursday dinner as it does to a Sunday night feature on social media.

The Flavour Philosophy: Bold, Honest, Alive

At the core of BANNG's flavour narrative lies its signature Nam Pik Nam Pla a chilli-fish sauce that encapsulates everything the restaurant stands for. Sharp, bright and fearless, it defines how the kitchen views balance as something that should thrill as much as it soothes.

"Mumbai is an ever-evolving city with a dynamic appetite for global experiences," notes Riyaaz Amlani, Founder and Managing Director of Impresario Entertainment & Hospitality Pvt. Ltd. "In many ways, it mirrors Bangkok, two vibrant cities with their own unique energies, but at the same time, so much in common when it comes to culture, flavours and innovation. Every aspect of this space, from the flavours to the interiors, has been crafted to honour both cities. On the offering is Mumbai's taste with Bangkok's spirit of being bold and unapologetically exciting."

It's that boldness tempered by expertise that makes BANNG relevant to India's modern hospitality narrative. It embodies the industry's shift toward immersive, multi-sensory concepts that blend food, design and mood to create brand identity.





"I follow restaurants and chefs who are innovating within this space, constantly exploring how to push the boundaries of traditional flavours while staying authentic. I also think about how I can integrate these ideas into Indian dining sensibilities."

- Head Chef Manav Khanna, BANNG, Mumbai

The Verdict: A Benchmark for Experiential Dining

For the Indian F&B industry, BANNG represents more than a new opening; it marks the maturing of a dining category – where the line between bar, restaurant, and experience blurs intentionally. Its ability to merge Bangkok's energy with Mumbai's aesthetic precision offers a model for how international culinary languages can be localised without losing authenticity.

The synergy between Garima Arora's creative discipline, Riyaaz Amlani's brand foresight and Manav Khanna's grounded execution is evident not just in the food but in the flow of the entire evening from how the cocktails mirror the menu's tempo to how the lighting guides the diner's mood.

It is not a replication of Bangkok in Mumbai it's a translation, tailored for a market that values both familiarity and flair. It's proof that Indian diners today don't just want to eat well; they want to feel a story unfold around them.

And in that sense, BANNG doesn't just bring Bangkok to Bandra, it brings a new chapter to India's ever-evolving story of experiential dining. ■

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"Lead with Empathy, Deliver with Consistency and Innovate with Passion"

Vineet Kapoor, Hotel Manager, The LaLiT New Delhi

By Sharmila Chand



Vineet Kapoor is a hospitality professional who has spent over 20 years shaping how guests experience food, service and culture in India's luxury hotels. As Hotel Manager at The LaLiT New Delhi, he curates experiences that go far beyond operations—his expertise lies in translating a hotel's identity into memorable dining journeys and heartfelt service.

Food & Beverage has been the cornerstone of his career. Vineet's strength lies in designing restaurant concepts that stand out, from celebrating pan-Indian traditions at Baluchi to presenting refined Asian flavours at OKO, to championing plant-based dining through La Petite Café. He brings together menu engineering, brand storytelling and service design to create outlets that feel distinctive yet inclusive. For him, a successful F&B space is one that not only delights the palate but also leaves an emotional imprint.

His expertise also extends to service innovation—he was instrumental in introducing Butler Service within The LaLiT group, a concept that combines old-world luxury with modern personalisation. He is deeply invested in guest satisfaction and believes in constantly evolving experiences, whether through sustainable sourcing, wellness-driven dining, or creating immersive events.

Vineet's philosophy is simple yet powerful: hospitality is about people. He is passionate about mentoring the next generation of hoteliers, teaching them that empathy, respect and creativity are as important as business results. For him, food and service are not just functions of a hotel—they are storytelling tools that connect cultures, celebrate diversity and create lasting memories.

In an exclusive interview he talks about his work philosophy, his journey and more....

What is the USP of your F&B outlets?

Diversity under one roof. From Baluchi with its pan-Indian flavours to OKO, our signature Pan-Asian restaurant, each outlet has a distinct identity. The 24/7 Restaurant & Bar caters round the clock, while La Petite Café offers mindful, plant-based dining. Every outlet is designed as an experience in itself and reflects our philosophy of care and inclusivity.

What are the key trends you are focusing on in your F&B spaces?

Sustainability, local sourcing, plant-forward menus and wellness-driven dining. Guests increasingly seek authenticity, so we celebrate regional Indian recipes alongside contemporary global dishes. We also bring alive experiential dining with storytelling, artisanal beverages and immersive events.

What works best to retain a good F&B team, according to you?

Recognition, growth opportunities and respect. When team members feel valued and supported, they remain motivated. Leading by example and fostering a positive work culture are vital to retaining talent.

How has your journey been in hospitality so far?

Immensely rewarding. Hospitality challenges you daily but also gives the joy of touching lives. Each role has expanded my learning and made me a more empathetic and versatile professional.

What are your dreams to be fulfilled?

To see Indian F&B concepts recognised on the global stage and to mentor the next generation of leaders who carry forward our values of inclusivity, care and innovation.

What is your working philosophy?

Lead with empathy, deliver with consistency and innovate with passion–balancing people, process and product to achieve excellence.

Anything else you would like to say?

Hospitality is a people-first business–for both guests and teams. The more we humanise experiences, the more memorable they become.

Lastly, how do you define yourself?

A passionate hotelier, a constant learner, and a people-oriented leader who thrives on creating experiences that matter.

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RATIONAL's iVario Pro - Powering Modern Professional Kitchens

The hospitality industry continues to face a widening shortage of skilled workers. Apprentices entering the field are fewer, many professionals shifted during the pandemic for jobs with better hours, yet guests expectations for exceptional food and service remains unchanged. Balancing these demands requires transformation in kitchen design and equipment.

While employees value team building, fair pay and flexible schedules, modern equipment is equally vital for attractive working conditions. "In industry catering, appliances can be 20 years old, making work difficult," says Vishal Raman, Managing Director, RATIONAL India. Younger workers, in particular, seek digitalisation and automation.



RATIONAL's iVario Pro addreses these challenges by replacing multiple traditional appliances like fryers, boiling pans and pressure cookers, automating routine tasks. Its intelligent functions reduce stress by monitoring cooking, preventing burning or boiling over and ensuring consistent results. Features such as AutoLift deliver perfectly cooked pasta and vegetables without constant supervision.

Available in large and compact models, iVario fits both catering and as well as restaurant kitchens, saving space, energy, and time–up to four times faster while using 40% less energy. ConnectedCooking adds further appeal, enabling remote monitoring, recipe transfers and automatic updates. As Raman summarises, "There's no better proof of an attractive workplace than chefs watching their kitchen on a smartphone instead of a thriller at night."

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Its aerodynamic design and front overhang maximise air capture efficiency, maintaining a clean and comfortable workspace. Chefmate Exhaust Hoods are manufactured in compensating models, with optional features such as water-wash and UV purification systems for enhanced hygiene and reduced maintenance. Built in compliance with international safety and ventilation standards like NFPA,UL, SMACNA, ASTM, & NSF, Chefmate Exhaust Hoods integrates both functionality and reliability. Its design prioritises performance, hygiene and energy efficiency, making it an ideal solution for commercial kitchens in hotels, restaurants and catering establishments seeking durable and compliant ventilation equipment.

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