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Goan Cuisine
Preserving the Authenticity

Express Food & Hospitality spoke to chefs of leading hotel brands in Goa to get their insights on cultures that have influenced this regional cuisine and how its authenticity can be preserved
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As a centuries-old Portuguese colony, Goa was a melting pot for numerous cultures and this reflects in its diverse, but cohesive cuisine. However, in spite of its flavoursome delicacies and its fusion appeal, the chef community in Goa feels that Goan cuisine has not received its due recognition. Express Food & Hospitality spoke to chefs of leading hotel brands in Goa to get their insights on cultures that have influenced this regional cuisine and how its authenticity can be preserved.

By Akshay Nayak

Goan food history is uniquely complex, involving various influences and adaptation through decades of changing colonial powers and their trade routes to India. When the Portuguese settled in Goa, they became the single most important influence on the local cultures and cuisine. The Goan vindaloo, for instance, is said to be an adaptation of the Portuguese dish carvo de chão de alhos (literally translating to meat in garlic and wine marinade). The Goan began making vindaloo with local ingredients, replacing wine vinegar with coconut vinegar. This is just one example of the many paths Goan cuisine has traversed.

The Portuguese influence

The Portuguese influence can be traced to 1498 when Portuguese explorer Vasco Da Gama came to Goa. Chef Vinayak Raudodkar, executive chef, Lemon Tree Amarante Beach Resort informs, “The Portuguese started trading with India and brought with them an assortment of goods, including vegetables and spices like potatoes, chillies, tomatoes, cashew nuts, passion fruit and more. They also brought bread, vinegar and various types and cuts of meat. The local cuisine and recipes were transformed, leading to the changing food habits and lifestyle of local Indians. New dishes were introduced, like pork vindaloo and prawn balchao, which have now become staples. Pijandal, a stew made of black beans, is similarly believed to have been brought to Goa from Brazil. Balchao, a pickle-like concoction of typically Goan ingredients such as vinegar, chillies, tomatoes and shrimp, is believed to have evolved from the bharde, a dish made of fermented fish, prawns or sardines which was probably native to either Malaysia, Indonesia or Burma.”

“Every Goan dish has four important elements: sweetness, sourness, spice and salt. Hindu Goan cuisine can be quite different from Christian Goan cuisine, but it still contains these elements, and makes use of tamarind and kokum, while Christians use vinasgar to get a tangy savour,” said Chef Anurag Singh Bainula, executive chef, The LaLiT Golf & Spa Resort Goa.

Interestingly, baking fresh bread three times a day is the biggest influence of the Portuguese on the local cuisine, says Chef Santosh Sharma, chef consultant, Modern Hospitality: “Unlike the rest of India where flat bread is made at home, most meals even in Goan homes are accompanied with fresh ‘Paco/Pole/Unde’ (leavened bread) bought just before the meal from local ‘Fodar’ (baker). They also come around selling warm bread in villages or areas on a cycle with a horn to announce their arrival!” he adds. Goan cuisine predominantly also included a lot of seafood in its preparations, which gradually with the influence of Portugese, was either alternatively switched to use other meats.
"Every Goan dish has four important elements—sweetness, sourness, spice and salt."

**CHEF ANURAG SINGH BAINOLA**

Executive chef
The Lalit, IT Golf & Resort, Goa

like pork and beef, or the seafood curries were seasoned with spices brought to Goa by the Portuguese. Chef Arun Vato, executive chef, Hard Rock Hotel Goa, shares, "When we talk about fun-loving Goans, we definitely cannot miss mentioning about "xitt-kodi", i.e. fish curry. Goans love their "xitt-kodi", in fact, they enjoy all kinds of seafood preparations, many of which have been influenced by the Portuguese." The chili pepper, a popular spice used in Goan cooking, was also introduced by the Portuguese and today has become increasingly popular in the Goan kitchen. Although various culinary styles and cooking techniques were adapted from different communities across the globe, some of the Goan dishes like vindaloo, feljondo, balchao, and cuñal have been customised to suit the local palate using readily available ingredients. To cite an example, the Portuguese used wine and garlic to prepare vindaloo while Goans replaced it with palm vinegar. Similarly, cashew was brought into Goa by the Portuguese and is today the key ingredient in Goa's most popular drink 'feni.' Chef Susil Kumar Mammag, sous chef, Keys Select Resort, Goa cited the example of galinha (pangas) piri-piri, a grilled bush dish from Mozambique, which has transformed drastically ever since it was introduced in Goa. "Today, it is known as galinha cuñal (chicken cañal) and is a fried dish instead of the original grilled version," he says.

Chef KJ Mangowarane, executive chef, Radisson Blu Resort Goa Cavelossim Beach, points out that one of the USPs of Goan cuisine is the destination's shoreline providing the state with good quality of fish such as mackerel, lady fish, etc. which can be used for preparing various dishes. According to Chef Vikas Vichare, executive chef, W Goa, "Goan cuisine traditionally was majorly vegetarian and was restricted to seafood and fish but with the colonisation by the Portuguese, beef and pork were introduced. Also Goa being located in the tropics, the food has a lot of spices and intense flavours with abundant use of coconut to mellow it down and give a subtle balance to the dish."

**Traditional ingredients and cooking method influences**

Many regions within India have been influenced by various cultures. However, Goa is one of the few areas that heavily western influences. Chef David Ansted, executive chef, Grand Hyatt Goa. "Goa is the perfect amalgamation of traditional heritage, with modern influences and thought. Goa’s dense forests and climatic conditions make it an appropriate location for spice plantation. The spices grown here are black pepper,
cardamom, nutmeg, vanilla, cinnamon, cloves, chilies, coriander, cashew, etc. All the spice forms use organic methods of cultivation, wherein the ingredients provide a delicious aroma and flavour to the dish,” says Chef Bandodkar.

Rich in organic agricultural diversity, Goa also has a few hidden gems which can only be available during particular seasons such as, ka-rugt rice which is a variety of paddy that grows tall to fight against water logging. It is a natural crop that does not need fertilisers and thrives only on natural manure, informs Chef Mangeshwaran. Some of the significant traditional ingredients prominent in Goan cuisine are xefal (telpal), koxom (goranica indica), binda, and coconut. “The extensive use of coconut and fresh vinegar in cooking; the calculated uses of spices in every dish to create a delicious meal, is what grabs eyeballs towards this cuisine. Secondly, the use of koxom to give colour and nutrients to the dish are the main USPs for Goan cuisine,” said Chef Luis about the distinctive ingredients used across a wide range of Goan dishes. Chef Balans also voices similar views saying, “USP of Goan cuisine lies in its usage of fresh ingredients like chillies, vinegar, fresh seafood and fresh vegetables making it very popular.” Highlighting his point, Chef Yuta says that the freshness of spices; the distinct flavours of food can best be experienced in Goa’s traditional style of cooking using local ingredients like coconut, rice, kokum, vinegar, jogger, tamarind, toddy, jojela, galma (dried baby shrimps) and local produce. Reiterating this, Chef Mangaim says that due to the abundance of chillies, cashews, and coconuts, there is a lot of culinary recipes that one can curate which are highly appreciated by the gaonites. “However, apart from extensive use of coconuts and cashews, dried varieties of red chillies and preserved meats are also broadly used to add a distinct flavour,” he adds. Furthermore, the popularity of cooking the traditional way, in clay pots placed over a wood fire which is seen in the rural areas of Goa, is greatly appreciated by the chefs too, who feel traditional cooking methods provide unique tastes and aromas. “Earlier, spices were ground by hand, and a majority of the food was slow cooked in mud Anna – all techniques used to further draw out the intrinsic aromas and flavours of the varied ingredients. Breads were made out of fresh toddy instead of yeast, making them lighter, airier and fluffier,” reminisces Chef Bandodkar. Chef Ansted and Chef Balans agree that although modern cooking methods have taken over, many Goan households still make use of traditional cooking methods, like cooking in a clay pot on a wood fire, using a varna (grinding stone) to grind spices, a dantos (hand mill) for grinding seeds, and brass utensils for cooking desserts. Regardless of the cooking method used, the freshness of spices is fundamental, and is achieved by pounding the spices with muscle power and patience, they feel. Chef Carmelino Luis, chef de cuisine, Novotel Goa, "The calculated uses of spices in every dish to create a delicious meal is what grabs eyeballs in this cuisine.”

CHIEF CARMELINO LUIS
Chef de cuisine, Novotel Goa, Dona Sylvia Beach Resort

Goan cuisine itself is a fine example of the confluence of cultural diversity, and mix of new & age-old recipes”

CHIEF VINAYAK BANDODKAR
Executive Chef, Lemon Tree Amarante Beach Resort

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“Unknown to most people, Goans have a vast repertoire of vegetarian dishes”

CHEF SUNIT SHARMA
Chef consultant, Modern Hospitality

“Future of Goan cuisine will be bright as it is ever evolving in terms of its rich culinary heritage”

CHEF KS MANGESWARAN
Sr executive sous chef, Radisson Blu Resort Goa Calangute Beach

Dona Sylvia Resort Hotel, adds, “Traditionally, Goans used to cook their meals over burning coconut collic fiber (husk), the smoked flavour of which, gave a distinctive taste to the food. Traditional Goan cooking was previously done in clay utensils, which gave the food an earthy flavour. The food was served with ladles made with coconut shell and then was served on human (plantain) leaves.”

Preservation and way ahead

Having mentioned of the uniqueness about Goan cuisine, which has a historic trail of colonial cultural influences, engaging traditional cooking methods, and the numerous health benefits secured in traditional ingredients, when we quoted the chefs about the current perception of Goan cuisine, they provided us with mixed views for which, some of them mentioned that the cuisine is slightly subject to modern influences as per personal likings of the guests, while the others said that the travellers are experience-driven and prefer having authentic Goan dishes when travelling to Goa. Chef Ansted feels that Goan food is changing slowly to suit the tastes and preferences of the traveller, especially of people who cannot take too spicy food or are allergic to coconut. He also believes that even though the delicacies might be preserved, different regions within the state have their own dynamics with respect to a particular dish. “Today you will find variations of the popular chicken xacat, a well-known Goan dish, that could be served with a variety of vegetables or even served as a snack with some rice. However, the basics remain; there are many homes that follow the authentic recipe to the letter, but it’s essential to understand that even in terms of authenticity, a chicken xacat can be prepared differently even in two different traditional homes. Just as the state is divided by talukas for geographical reasons, food also resonates from these talukas. South Goa will have a different twist to the popular xacat – beef broad as compared to North Goa,” he adds. Chef Vaity opines, “I think each preparation is unique and has its own charm to attract the discerning foodie. While there are certain local dishes like arroz, suma-rachi, surpatel, capeal, sausage pulao, which have tickled the taste buds of many globetrotters, the element of spice has not been very appealing for some. While the well-marinated rendha bangda and spicy omlet would grab the eyeballs of locals and domestic tourists, it would certainly not chock the list for international travellers.” Chef Munganu agrees that the changing dietary habits of the locals and the availability of global cuisines in the region does pose a challenge. But, on the contrary, he is also positive about preserving the authenticity of Goan cuisine. He says, “With the increase in travellers seeking more authentic experiences and discovering the tradition of a particular destination, we are able to cater to their needs with our classic Goan cook ups.” Adding to this, Chef Vicbhere
COVER STORY

reiterates that authenticity is the way ahead to preserve and promote Goan cuisine. He adds, “Goan cuisine is currently in the limelight as new regional cuisines are the trending cuisines and the masses are keen to discover and indulge in authentic and regional specialities.” However, he also points out that the cuisine needs to be worked upon especially the presentation part to keep in pace with the global culinary trends and evolution. Calling out to fellow chefs in Goa to preserve the authenticity of Goan cuisine and promote it on a global level, Chef Vats says, “Firstly, I would say, do away with the fancy utensils and pull out the earthenware and clay pots; avoid the “ready-made” and pre-packed masalas and get going with pounding your own spices; glorify the Goan poi and innovate ways to promote the local bread; maintain your own kitchen garden with local fruits and vegetables as home-grown produce gives a unique sense of joy and satisfaction; prepare jams and pickles from local produce and never stop the process of experimentation. It feels great to see so many restaurants and hotels incorporating items like sausage nanas, chicken kedgeree skewers, sausage pizza, pani puri with fish and the likes on the menu. The future of Goan cuisine is indeed promising and I believe that, it requires the ‘essence of Goa’ to stay alive.” Chef Luis opines that Goan cuisine can be promoted on a larger platform by supporting the old restaurants and small eateries which still serve authentic Goan food like the chef Fernando’s Nostalgia Restaurant in Raia, Salcete which is his personal favourite. “Samarachi kodi (dry shrimp curry) is my signature Goan dish. It gets its name from samarad – a circular wooden vessel containing eight small bowls to store each of the spices essential in Goan cooking. In olden days a new bride was presented with a samarad by her parents when she went to her husband’s house. This gift would help her to easily place the spices. But this dish has been lost with time which is why we have revived it,” he adds. Chef Rainella suggests, “The new generation of chefs should learn about the roots of the cuisine and also should present the dishes in a much more attractive way that suits the current day well-travelled and experienced diner; social media forums should highlight the richness and varieties of items to indulge in; one should record the culinary skills, recipes and techniques that are passed on from one generation to another as a lot of recipes were lost in ancient time since they were never documented; the chefs should also make the cuisine much simpler for people on-the-go, and lastly promoting local farmers and fishermen will plug the sustainability aspect as well.” Lokuvia, Chef Mangewar says, “The main focus has to be on preservation which can come through awareness in societies, passing on traditional recipes to younger generations and also official documentation.” Highlighting the efforts taken by him at Lemon Tree Ambarita Beach Resort Goa to promote Goan culture, Chef Randhokar says, “Whilst the government is taking all possible measures to promote tourism and food in Goa, as a hotel we also try to promote Goan cuisine by introducing new local dishes to the menu; conversing with our guests on the nutritional value of Goan food and ensuring that during any of our festivals or gala dinners, Goan food is a highlight of the spread.” Showcasing authentic Goan food to tourists and spreading the traditional dishes of Goa by way of competitions and festivals will also promote Goan cuisine around the world. Chef Sharmas suggests, “Many Goans who work (especially as chefs) around the world and on cruise ships can be the ambassadors of Goan cuisine.”

“Preserving authenticity is the way ahead to preserve and promote the Goan cuisine”

CHEF VIKAS VICHARE
Executive chef,
W Goa

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“The future of Goan cuisine is indeed promising and I believe that it requires the “essence of Goa” to stay alive”

CHEF ARUN VATS
Executive chef,
Hard Rock Hotel Goa