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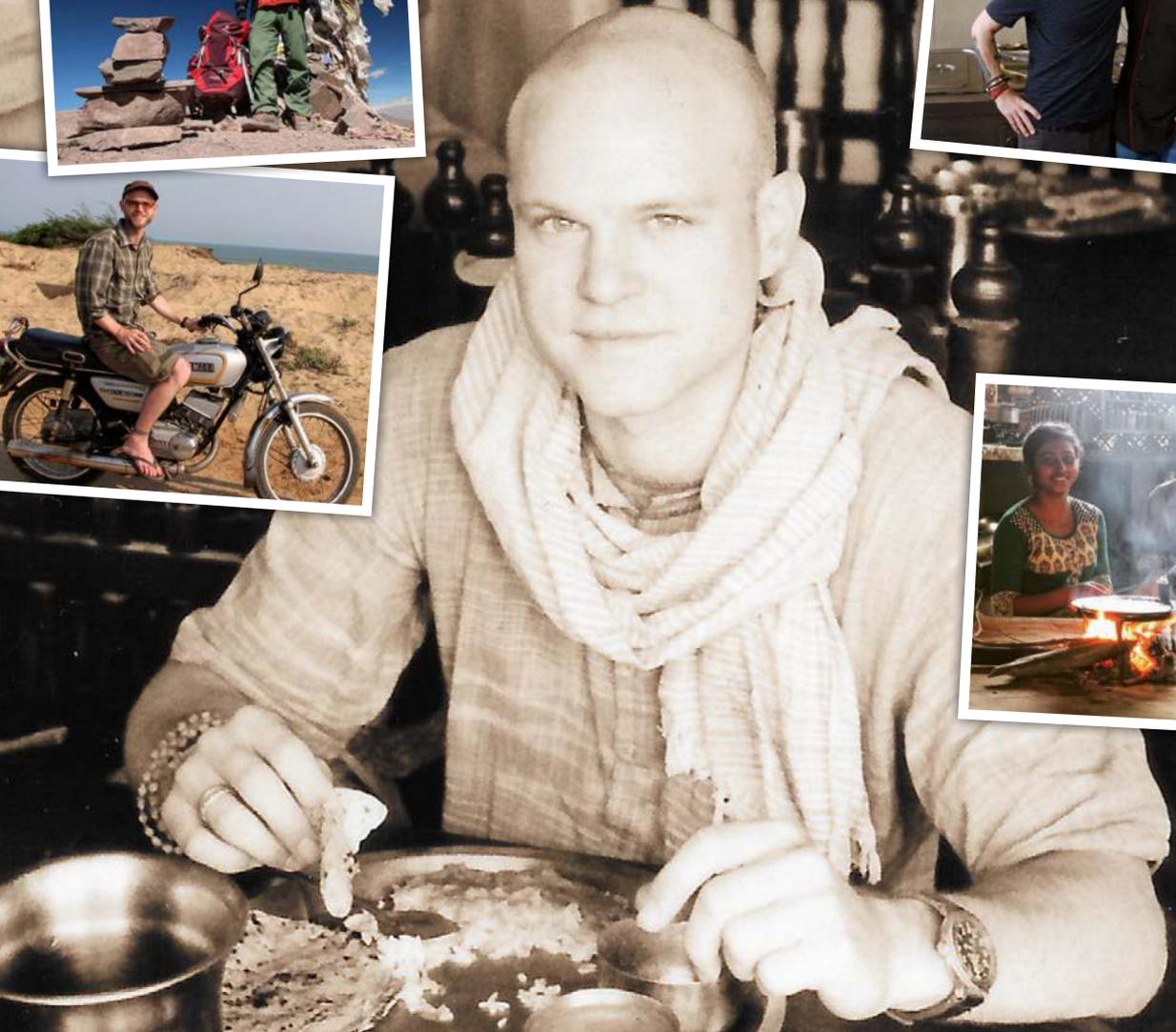
THE LOTUS AND THE ARTICHOKE



INDIA

A CULINARY LOVE STORY WITH OVER 90 VEGAN RECIPES

Justin P. Moore





PAKISTAN

NEPAL

BHUTAN

BANGLADESH

INDIA

SRI LANKA

SRINAGAR
LEH
Markha Valley TREK
JAMMU
DHARAMSALA

AMRITSAR
VASHISHT

RISHIKESH

DELHI

JAISALMER

JODHPUR

JAIPUR

VRINDAVAN

AGRA

PUSHKAR

UDAIPUR

AHMEDABAD

POKHARA

Annapurna Circuit TREK

KATHMANDU

GANGTOK + RUMTEK

DARJEELING + Singalila TREK

SILIGURI

MAJULI

GUWAHATI

VARANASI

BODHGAYA

KOLKATA

KONARK + PURI

JALGAON

AMRAVATI

NAGPUR

MUMBAI

ELLORA

AJANTA

AURANGABAD

SEVAGRAM

PUNE

GOA

HAMPI

GOKARNA

UDUPI

MANGALORE

TIRUMALA

TIRUVAN-NAMALAI

MYSORE

OOTY

PONDICHERY

CHENNAI

MAMALLAPURAM

KOCHI

ALLEPEY

VARKALA

TRICHY

MADURAI

2001	
2006	
2009	
2010	
2010-11	
2016	
2017	



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अमरावती.





sherpa

About this Cookbook

The Lotus and the Artichoke – INDIA is a culinary love story based on decades of adventures in my own kitchens, experiments with collections of cookbooks, visits to hundreds of restaurants, treats from thousands of sweet shops and street food carts, and countless meals with families, in cities, towns, and villages of the Indian subcontinent – and all over the world.

When I was fifteen, I decided to become a vegetarian– for environmental, health, and ethical reasons. Around that time, the school art club took a trip to Washington, DC. I met Hare Krishna devotees, who gave me a simple Indian cookbook, and told me about Govinda’s, a vegetarian restaurant in Philadelphia, not far from the family home in the New Jersey suburbs. As I was learning how to cook, making meals for family and friends, my fascination with Indian philosophy and culture was forming. Ideals of non-violence guided my transition to vegan. My love for Indian food grew.

After years of anticipation, and strengthening myself with backpacking travels to Europe, China, East Africa, and Southeast Asia, I finally booked a one-way flight to India in early 2001. I left my career as a graphic designer in Boston, put my things in storage, and spent the next four months exploring, treasuring, and tasting the subcontinent. I have been back seven times since. Of the over 50 countries that I have been fortunate enough to experience, India remains my absolute favorite.

But it turns out there is more to the story and my connection to India, as my mother recently revealed to me: I didn’t find India as a teenager as I always believed. India was given to me when I was a small child. Before my memories really begin, we lived in Atlanta. My mother went back to work when I was almost two years old. She would drop me off in the morning with Ranjana, a traditional Hindu housewife married to one of my father’s graduate school colleagues at Georgia Tech. My mother’s eyes welled with tears when she fetched me each afternoon– I smelled richly of curry and incense. I was chubby and blissful from gorging on vegetarian Indian food and decadent sweets which Ranjana had been cooking all day. And I didn’t want to leave.

After the success of my first travel-inspired cookbook, **The Lotus and the Artichoke – Vegan Recipes from World Adventures**, I was determined to write another book. India was the obvious choice, but as with my first India trip, I wasn’t quite ready to prove my love. In the next three years, I spent months in Mexico, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia, creating new cookbooks dedicated to each country. I toured with the books, doing cooking shows, culinary classes, and dinner parties. Finally I felt ready for the India project. I returned to India twice to explore the final regions waiting for me: primarily Kashmir, Ladakh, Sikkim, and Assam.

Just like love, and India itself, Indian cooking can definitely be intense and overwhelming– and doesn’t always reveal itself immediately. Trying to make sense of it is entertaining, but foolish. Understanding comes with acceptance and experience. True appreciation comes from abandoning your expectations and just letting go. It’s fun from the start, but depth comes from devotion.

These reflections and recipes are inspired by my eight trips to India and a life-long love of Indian food. I share with you now my deepest love for a country and most beloved world cuisine.

Embrace and enjoy,

Justin P. Moore
November 2017
Berlin, Germany



Adventures in INDIA

Moscow–Delhi 02/2001

The pilot's voice crackled over the airplane's speakers. He spoke two sentences in Russian and the fully packed airplane's passengers starting moaning and swearing. It couldn't be good news. Just before his announcement in English, the wings shuddered briefly, an overhead compartment popped open, and a bag fell into the aisle with a dramatic thump.

"We do not have fuel to fly to Delhi. We land in Dubai." What the hell? India was determined to make everything tricky from the start. A year earlier a friend had flown 12 hours to India. Immigration didn't like his paperwork, so they put him on the next flight back to New York. His first visit to India, which he'd been looking forward to for years, was just to the Delhi airport. Give up! India makes the plans!

Thankfully, a few hours later, India let me in. The early morning air was cool, and the sky dark. The taxi driver weaved exaggeratedly around potholes on rough streets and past shanty towns. The windows were open to the night. I knew the calm was a tease. Before packing my bags and booking a one way flight to Delhi, I'd read countless books and travelers' stories about India. Even my tattered secondhand Lonely Planet INDIA promised a deceptive early morning arrival to the chaos and heat of the country.

I was prepared. Well, I thought so. You're never prepared for India. I'd backpacked to a dozen cities in Europe, navigated China with a phrasebook, went overland from Bangkok to Siem Reap to Hanoi, seen the lights go out in Nairobi and the sun rise in the Serengeti. I'd driven America coast to coast on a motorcycle, spent childhood on a military research island in the Pacific, survived the New Jersey suburbs, and lived in a loft in Boston's infamous "Combat Zone". Seriously, how hard could India be?

"First time India, Sir?" asked the driver as he lit a beedie, taking both hands off the wheel as we careened through an entirely unlit intersection passing into Pahar Ganj, the dusty neighborhood bordering on the intimidatingly chaotic New Delhi train station. I was quick: "Second time India." It wasn't true, and I felt guilty immediately, but I hoped he was less likely to –literally– take me for a ride. "Hotel name?" I told him the name. "Very sorry, Sir. Hare Rama Guesthouse not possible. Fire. All gone! POOF!" he said, blowing out smoke in a thin stream. "You want best hotel? My uncle. Very best!" I said no thanks, and asked him to go to Hare Rama. He wobbled his head from side to side, "No problem."

It was like reading a script I knew from the travelers' tales. Next he'd ask about my job. Or salary. He'd already asked for my Country and Good Name. Then it came: "Job, Sir?" I told him I was an artist. In the weeks to come I'd start answering the standard questions with more creativity. Which is to say, I wasn't yet a lonely flight instructor from Cape Cod, Austrian opera singer, or divorced ice cream truck driver from Brooklyn. "You like India food, Sir?" I told him I loved Indian food. The honesty felt good. "Veg? Non-Veg?" he asked. "Pure-Veg" I replied. He flashed a wide smile in the rear view mirror which was hanging on by a twist of wire and a faded Ganesh sticker. "Oh very good, Sir! Too good!"

The car pulled over where a skinny alley traced back from the road. I could see the guesthouse sign, and a desk clerk eyeing the taxi and opening an oversized Guest Registration Book. Two cows were chewing simultaneously on a single treat they'd pulled from a rubbish heap. In a few hours, beggar moms in bright, flowing saris would be stretching out slim, hungry fingers. Chai would be boiling in battered aluminum vessels at wooden street carts. Young Kashmiri men with hypnotic green eyes would be hunting edgy backpackers with lurid tales of houseboats and matchless hospitality.

Until then, my most cliché-true travel experience was at the legendary Hofbräuhaus in Munich, Germany, watching men in Lederhosen dance to horn-honking accordion-accompanied Bavarian ballads in a scene straight from a travel documentary. India was fixing to beat that by a long shot. Every day in India is a carnival of caricatures and surprises.

The clerk's worn-out sandals slapped his heels as we climbed the stairs to the top floor. He fumbled open an old, square, metal padlock, and swung the door open. The room had no windows, was painted bright baby blue, and was one hand wider than the bed. But in that moment it was my favorite hotel room ever. I gave the boy ten rupees, said thanks, and fell asleep with my clothes still on. I woke up feeling euphoric. I had made it! The adventure was unfolding. It was time for my first meal. In India.

Pushkar (Rajasthan) 03/2001

When the marching band and electric parade of motorized, extravagantly decorated carts rounded the corner approaching us, the Bhaang Shake I'd had after lunch was taking effect. Adam and I were sitting at a tiny roadside eatery in the heart of Pushkar, the mostly blue, auspicious and certainly delicious vegetarian city in Rajasthan. The stainless steel meal trays evidenced traces of Aloo Gobi, Dal Fry, and a few greasy crumbs from fried Parathas. Adam was staring at an empty lassi glass. I played with a stringy piece of mango hopelessly lodged between two of my front teeth. "What?" he said.

"Parade is coming. Feeling good?" repeated the waiter, now placing two Fresh Lime Sodas on our table. A waxy napkin square took flight and fluttered to the ground. I watched condensation droplets slide down the frosty glass in front of me, forming a ring of water at the base. I looked up and the band was right in front of the restaurant. A massive electric generator – used to power the megaphone amplifiers, ragged speakers, and dangling strings of light bulbs that stretched down the block – was belching dark diesel clouds into all the storefronts. I felt the curious eyes of thirty moustachioed men with booming white plastic tubas looking at me as I lifted the straw to my lips. Their red turbans swayed as they marched further, the echoes of this surreal wheeled festival reverberating off all the walls. Had I imagined the tuba player who stopped playing for a moment, smiled at me and mouthed the words: "What Country?"

"More food?" asked the boy. "No thank you. Bill please." By time the hand-written note arrived, the parade had vanished from sight and was just a muffled, rumble of generators and horns somewhere in the distance. We sat there for another hour, or maybe it was just ten minutes, laughing about what we'd witnessed. Laughing about how random and fantastic things just happened all the time. Like meeting other travelers and being best friends for a day or two. The next day Adam went south, maybe to Mumbai. I went west, into the roasting desert, towards Jaisalmer.

Jodhpur (Rajasthan) 03/2001

I was pleased to feel the road under my feet. It had been a bumpy six hour ride from Ajmer, at least two hours longer than expected because of a hundred stops to exchange bus passengers. The musical soundtrack that had been playing most of the ride was still ringing in my ears. "My backpack?" I asked the driver, again. He pointed to a pile of bags on the street being unloaded from the roof of the vehicle by a boy who looked to be 12. He grunted the Hindi word for luggage, twice, as if to make up for not answering immediately before.

Approaching the pile, I quickly saw that my red and black traveling backpack was definitely not there. The bus started to drive away and reality was setting in. I was a million miles from home, three weeks into my first trip to India, and all of my gear for the next few months was gone. And my only connection to the disappeared collection was belching diesel fumes and quickly speeding off on the wrong side of the street with oncoming cars curving around him. I ran after the bus. My flip-flops smacked so loudly I feared I'd have a blow-out any second.

He drove through an intersection, honking his horn HERE-I-COME! A pakora vendor jumped out of the way. A cycle rickshaw quickly turned as I blew past. The bus honked through the second junction, and then an idling auto-rickshaw stood in my way. I jumped in the backseat. "Follow the bus!" I pleaded, pointing to the vehicle quickly departing. The driver roared off with a force that surprised me. He held the handlebars with both hands; This was serious business. I then noticed he was barefoot, and the brake pedal had been replaced by a welded bike pedal with yellow stripe reflectors on the side.



At the fifth or sixth intersection, the bus miraculously stopped at a traffic signal. I leapt from the rickshaw, slipping a few bills into the hand of the driver who was clearly disappointed our dramatic pursuit was so brief. I struggled through a narrow gap between several old fashioned sedans and climbed up into the bus. The driver glanced at me as if I'd been there the whole time. I shouted the word for luggage in Hindi, and wiped sweat from my forehead with my forearm. The driver glanced at me again and pointed calmly at the seat cushion next to the oversized gearshift lever. I sat down and attempted to catch my breath.

He continued on his route, driving through the downtown, dropping off and picking up passengers. A few more times I asked in simple English and Hindi, Where Is Bag? Each time he just drove on in silence. Then he pulled into a small lot. There was a taxi parked in front of a storefront with a sign announcing TAJ TRAVEL - LUXRY DELUX BUS.

The taxi driver was leaning against his car, staring contentedly into space. We met eyes and he smiled. He swung open the back door and lifted up a large red and black bag. Wherever it was unloaded, or whatever happened, he had found it and knew where I would eventually end my search to find it. He tapped it with his palm and said "Your bag, Sir." I wrapped my arms around him and we laughed.

Ahmedabad (Gujurat) 03/2001

The rickshaw driver pulled over and signalled me to get out. The sound of a motorcycle sputtered from down the street. He slowed as he passed, and waved to me. The motorcycle had a sidecar which was empty. I handed the driver 40 rupees and he drove off. I would find the house from here on my own.

The motorcycle turned around and drove back towards me. I waved the driver over. "Namaste! Can I go for a ride?" "Why not?" he said, and handed me a helmet that was probably older than me. I put it on and climbed into the sidecar. He turned the throttle and we drove off, leaving a cloud of dust. Neither of us spoke. We just drove and enjoyed the breeze, buzzing along narrow alleys and paths.

After going up and down streets at seeming random, he pulled up to a house around the corner from where I'd gotten out of the rickshaw and met him. The front door opened. A familiar figure stepped out. "Justin! So you met my brother, Arjun. Come in, dinner's almost ready."

I'd met his sister and half the family at a downtown vegetarian restaurant the previous night. As I was finishing my dessert, she introduced herself and insisted I visit their home the next day for dinner. "Why not?" I'd said. Dinner was fantastic. Arjun drove me back to the Natraj Hotel and said goodbye.

Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) 04/2001

Thousand year old stone structures glowed in the morning's fuzzy, amber light. Sunlight scattered and reflected across the Ganges river. Each paddle of the oar splashed water into the small wooden dingy. Boys leapt from the ghat's edge into the murky water, their heads breaching the surface seconds later, water streaming in arcs from their mouths like fountains. Smoke rose in the air from funeral pyres on the banks. A cricket ball landed in a heap of smoldering firewood, just missing the skeleton in the tired flames. The priest paused his chanting and glanced at the three family members. He dislodged the ball with a stick, and a boy in a ragged heavy metal t-shirt picked it up and retreated to his friends, stepping carefully around a bored cow with soot-black lips and a broken horn.

"If you die here, you never die again." said the boatman. "People coming here from all of India. To die. Best place to die. Also best place for fire. Go to heaven. No more birth." I'd read about how families gather their rupees together and send bodies across the country on special Varanasi trains where the cremation crew pick them up. Several men carrying a ramshackle wooden stretcher on their shoulders emerged from a passage. They carried the body, wrapped in bright, colorful fabric past piles of firewood and to the edge of the holy river. As we paddled slowly onward in the morning mist, I watched as the priest now lit the pyre and the flames engulfed the body.



Dumre (Nepal) 05/2001

Javi and I were the only foreigners on the bus, unmistakable with our trekking gear and backpacks, not to mention blond hair and fair faces. The other passengers were on their way to various towns and villages between Kathmandu and Besisahar, a starting point for the three week Annapurna Circuit trek encircling some of the world's highest peaks. But the fully-loaded, ramshackle bus didn't make it to Besisahar that day, because it almost slid off a mountain curve near Dumre.

Buses in India and Nepal are an exhilarating experience anywhere. Add mountains and things get downright terrifying. Bad roads, no guardrails, landslides, herds of yak, lunatic drivers, and foul weather are the things you don't think about. I sat at the back of the bus, my thoughts on a mountaineer's story of mighty Annapurna. Rain misted in through the windows and speckled the pages of my paperback.

A horn blared ahead, then our horn blasted out. Everyone lunged forward as brakes screeched and tires dug through wet gravel. Our driver swerved out towards the road's perilous edge and the oncoming car curved inward, narrowly missing us. The bus slid towards the cliff, the driver frantically trying to turn back into the curve and stay on the road. Our front right wheel slipped from the road and the bus dropped with a crunching noise and tilted towards the valley far below, just as we came to a stop. The driver jumped out the door. Passengers started climbing out open windows to escape.

Javi and I pushed our backpacks out the window, dropped them onto the dirt road, and then carefully shuffled down the aisle and off the bus, looking back at the vehicle leaning off the curve. Nervous chatter surrounded us. We strapped on our bags and started the trek a couple miles earlier than expected. It felt glorious to be alive, to hear the trail beneath my boots, and to know I wouldn't be on a bus for another three weeks.

Udupi (Karnataka) 02/2006

"This is original Masala Dosa!" the waiter said. He placed the metal tray in front of me and coconut chutney splashed from its steel bowl dribbling onto the rolled pancake which extended off both sides of the plate. Steam rose from the bowl of sambar. Potato and cauliflower chunks floated like islands in a sea of red lentil stew. I tore off pieces of the crispy crêpe with my fingers and scooped up a bit of bright yellow mashed potatoes. I dunked it in the sambar, then the chutney, and took it in my mouth. I repeated this ritual, each bite a firework blast of South Indian flavors. As I was about to dunk another, Dallas appeared in the entry of the eatery. Adjusting his beige safari hat, and pushing a brown curl of bangs behind his ear, he lowered himself into the chair across the booth.

"Whoa. I think I'm hungry," he said. My traveling companion hadn't eaten much for the last three days—since Hampi. A street food snack during our motorbike tours of the ancient temples had hit him hard. I was spared. In fact, I'd been eating almost non-stop, but more discreetly since he began hallucinating and suffered a long night and next day crawling from the bedroom to the bathroom and back.

"This place literally invented the Masala Dosa. I need another. What about you?" I said, waving my soup-stained fingers to the waiter. We ordered two more dosas, and a plate of idly as well.

Varanasi-Kolkata 02/2009

Villagers were milling about in a settlement sprawling from the megacity Kolkata. The early morning West Bengal sky was red and hazy, but that might have been the old train windows. I climbed down from the upper bunk and sat next to Julia. She rolled towards me, waking up. The other bunks were empty, but an old pair of battered sneakers on the floor bounced to the rhythm of the train. I reached for my own shoes— but couldn't find them. I looked under the bunks and in the aisle. They were gone.

I examined the mystery shoes on the floor. They were exactly my size.

"Chai-Chai-Chai-Chai-Chai!" sang a voice getting closer. I waved at the man. He tipped a kettle and filled two small paper cups with boiling tea. The aroma of ginger, cardamom, and cinnamon was divine.



Vrindavan 03/2009

"You've got the wrong cookies," the boy said. I scowled at the monkey perched up on a tree branch. He was chewing on my glasses and shot me an even nastier look. "He likes chocolate only," he said. He stepped off the cycle rickshaw. I looked at the opened package of plain biscuits in my hand. I'd already thrown three up to the simian thief, only to have him catch and pop them in his mouth, sneer, and then continue nibbling on my spectacles.

The rickshaw boy was there when the monkey came bounding down the trail behind me, leapt on my shoulder, and snatched my glasses right off my face. I ran – barefoot, as I was on my sunrise walk with the pilgrims around the holy town of 5000 temples. The monkey sprang onto an ancient wall and scurried on all fours, my glasses in his mouth, often looking back at me. He ran across the metal roof of a chai shop and wandered out on a long branch of a megalithic tree. The biscuits had been the suggestion of the shopkeeper.

The boy rattled something to the shopkeeper and a package of simple chocolate biscuits appeared on the counter. The boy protested, waving his hands and wobbling his head. The man replaced the package with another. This one promised FULL HOUSE and showed dark brown discs sandwiching a thick layer of dark, creamy chocolate.

I handed the man two coins and the boy ripped open the pack. Immediately the monkey turned to face us. His tail curled around the branch and he withdrew my glasses from his mouth. He watched the boy take out a cookie and followed it with his eyes as it sailed in a smooth arc. The monkey's long fingers shot out and he caught the prize. He threw it in his mouth, and with the other hand tossed my glasses down to me. I slipped them in my pocket and gave the remaining cookies to the boy before walking on. A peacock wailed.

Bombay-Goa 02/2010

Just three weeks before I'd given my notice at my full-time job as an art director at an international walking tour company. For two years, I'd managed a team designing maps of European cities, but I was hungry for something new. I quit and bought two tickets to Mumbai for a short adventure down the Karnatakan and Keralan coast.

Julia and I were on the night train to Goa. We hoped to connect in the morning with a train to Gokarna. It was well past midnight and I was tired and feeling the jetlag. Instead of waiting until the next day, we'd booked the last available bunk, which was big enough for two to sit, or one to sleep. It was currently Julia's turn. I was walking up and down the aisle, observing the innovative sleeping positions and bodily configurations of the Sleeper coaches' overnight residents. Three men were curled up like spoons sharing a skinny blue vinyl berth. Two more shared the floor, stretched out on Indian Railways blankets, snoring in tandem next to an impressive pile of sandals and shoes.

A figure emerged from the shadows and ducked around an arm hanging awkwardly from an upper bunk. "Have you seen the TTE?" asked the young fellow. His Bollywood face seemed out of place in second class. No, I hadn't seen the Train Ticket Examiner. Pankaj introduced himself with a firm handshake. His father had just opened an international school in Maharashtra. Pankaj was on the road to meet job applicants. "Do you know any art teachers?" he asked. I laughed and told him I'd studied art and had worked with schools in New York and Berlin. "But did you ever think about living and working in India?" I nodded and looked down at my naked, tattooed forearms, cut-off army shorts, and two dollar flip-flops. It was the most honest interview outfit ever.

I scurried through the carriages of hibernating passengers until I found Julia. I wiggled her elbow and her eyes opened. "Hey. I think I know what's next!" I said. The train left the foliage of the forest and began clicking noisily across an old, iron bridge.



H.B YOUNG SHOWKAT

Amravati (Maharashtra) 04/2011

For the past year, I had been invited to homes for meals at least twice a week. It began with the school director and his family. Then the teachers. Followed by parents of students. And the neighbors. Soon my neighbors' friends and relatives wanted to cook for me, too. Everyone was anxious to impress me with their family's culinary mastery: Sindhi! Gujarati! Maharashtrian! Rajasthani! Hyderabadi! Awadhi!

Living in a city of 600,000 people, I was the only foreigner. I was the alien celebrity.

Vaishu lived at the corner of the main street and mine, where she ran a chai shop. Her husband pushed a vegetable cart in the evening. She often surprised me at home with tiffins of hot food, singing my name from the front gate. Sometimes she'd bring a friend. Everyone was curious for my reaction to new dishes. "He likes Pav Bhaji! Aloo Dum and Bindhi, too! He makes Poha for breakfast! Last time we made Dhokla. Let's show him Pani Puri! Or a Maharashtrian thali?"

She drove through the streets of Amravati as I held on the back of her motorbike. We pulled into a yard and parked next to several scooters and another motorbike. We removed our shoes and entered the house. Voices whispered in the kitchen; A few more neighbors came in. Vaishu introduced me, and I was directed to a floor mat adorned with many steaming dishes around a large, glistening steel plate. I sat down cross-legged on the floor.

A dozen pairs of eyes fixed on me. Eleven of them were new to me. Dinner for one was served.

Jammu-Srinagar (Kashmir) 09/2016

I pushed through the crowd of anxious taxi drivers crowding the exit of Jammu Central Railway Station and walked to a man sitting patiently in a black and yellow auto rickshaw at the edge of the lot.

"Srinagar Jeep?" I asked him. He pointed to the back seat and I climbed in. We pattered on to the main road and sped past early morning fruit carts and sleeping beggars. After a few minutes we parked next to a small crowd of eager passengers loading their baggage on the roof of a boxy Land Rover. Three monks sat in the back and two young guys slid over on the middle seat so I could get in. We set off on a 12 hour drive through the mountain landscape to the capitol.

"Bad time to go to Kashmir." said the man next to me, The country-wide shutdown had intensified in the last few days. "But Srinagar everything open and good." Everything in Srinagar was not open, nor good, but I did have an incredible visit. Some hours into the drive the road was blocked, not by herds of animals as before, but by an inexplicable traffic jam. After idling for twenty minutes, the driver got out and chatted with drivers up ahead. He walked back to the car and got in. "Truck drove off mountain. Rolled down. Three dead." Eventually we could drive, and we approached the fatal curve. A trail of splintered trees and debris led steeply down the valley to a shattered construction vehicle.

We got to Srinagar in the evening. The situation in the city was no more normal or less tense than anywhere else in Kashmir. Separatist demonstrations erupted through the land and the police and army locked down the region. Curfews were declared, and in a bizarre protest, Kashmiris declared a total strike. All schools, shops, restaurants, and hotels were closed. Armed soldiers stood on street corners and walked across roofs. It was eerie. As the jeep from Jammu arrived at the town square and taxi stand, Nazeer spotted me and dashed to the car.

"Please stay with my family on our houseboat. No guests for months. Pay anything you want." Usually I pass on offers from strangers, and avoid those that rush to me, anxious to take me away. He continued, "We will cook for you. You can have anything you need. Any room you want. As long as you want." It was a cherished travel moment where I felt warmth and trust, and I opened up. "Sure, let's go. My name is Justin. I love Kashmiri food. I'm writing a cookbook. I'd love to stay with your family."

He lifted my bag into the rickshaw and said, "Do you like Bengan Bhartha? My wife makes the best."



Guwahati (Assam) 05/2017

The auto rickshaw came to a stop at the base of the hill. I thanked the driver and then started up the steep incline, past the vendors and tea stalls, towards the Kamakhya temple. I was half an hour outside of Guwahati, and a thousand years in the past. Some years before I read about this ancient temple in a novel by Paul Theroux, and was determined to see it. The dome was coming into view. I climbed the last few steps before the concrete slabs leveled out and the stone structure stood imposing before me. A massive line of pilgrims stretched and wound like a serpent. The final fifty meters of the queue stood packed together under a roofed, fenced corridor. It was like a long cage.

Eleven years earlier I had waited hours in such a queue to see the shrine and ancient Vishnu idol in Tirumala. It wasn't the first time I would be joining pilgrims from all over India for a glimpse of God. Patience delivers all things. India demands patience. In Tirumala, thousands of devotees formed lines funneled into gigantic tiled rooms where hasty barbers sat on stools with buckets of water, soap, and straight razors. To show your devotion, you must sacrifice your hair. The barbers shaved heads smooth and squeaky clean in under three minutes. Men and boys showed little fear. They sat before the barbers and went bald. A splash of powder on their naked scalps, and they were up and on the way. The young women struggled the most. Sobbing, but often giggling, they sat and watched their long, precious, charcoal locks fall in wet clumps to the tiled floor. Their faces tensed as the barber slid his blade over their heads transforming their look for months to come. Before joining the masochistic lines to the shrine, the bald pilgrims chose hats from hundreds of vendors with carts and little shops. On outstretched blankets, children were lured by wind-up robots, gigantic plastic airplanes, and motorized model police motorcycles.

After signing a declaration of submission to Vishnu, and a long wait in the caged queue, I was granted ten seconds before the dark lord Venkateswara. Then a bouncer priest pushed me and my neighbors with one thug shove right out the sanctuary exit, each of us nearly stumbling over the extension cords and wood scraps of several barefoot carpenters hanging from homemade ladders, power sawing big timber beams for some kind of temple renovation work. We guests were then treated to cardamom spiced sweet balls as big as a fist: the legendary Tirupati Ladoos.

Back to the present, I was walking toward the VIP ticket counter. A chai vendor on the square had told me the queue was ten hours and pilgrims had been waiting since four in the morning. "VIP ticket. 1000 rupees, only 2 hours standing," he suggested. Excellent plan. Soon I had my ticket and was sitting in a large waiting room. A boy carried a basket of lotus flowers through the crowd. He held them out to me. The robust, pink petals fluttered in the breeze of the ceiling fan. I took a flower and tucked a folded bill into the basket. After some time, a gate opened. We were led to a long, fenced hallway and another security check. But this time there were no devotional signatures. Or sacrificial haircuts.

After another hour, the line crept into the cool, inner sanctum of the 16th century temple to the goddess Kali. Put simply, this temple is dedicated to and worships the divine mother's most private parts. I was in an organized mob of emotional devotees, many of whom had waited half a day to enter the shrine. We inched forward, the line curving along the humid walls of the temple, and then into roped lanes. The air was heavy with burning incense and oil lamp smoke flowing in offering from various small coves carved in the walls and columns. The middle-aged man in front of me had been chanting increasingly louder since we came into the interior. A woman lay outstretched in prayer on the floor ahead.

Finally I reached the inner chamber. Oil lamps and candles cast warm light and flickering shadows on the stone walls. I was in front of the ancient deity. The priest swung his arm and bowed slightly in presentation, "Ask her for anything." I placed the lotus on the altar and said, "I just came to say thanks."



Gobi Pakora

batter-fried cauliflower street food favorite

serves 2 to 3 / time 40 min

2 cups (250 g) cauliflower chopped in small florets

3/4 cup (85 g) chickpea flour

2 Tbs rice flour

1/2 tsp baking powder

1/2 tsp ajwain seeds *optional*

1 tsp coriander ground

1/2 tsp cumin ground

1/2 tsp black pepper ground

1/4 tsp turmeric ground

1/4 tsp asafoetida (hing) powder

1 tsp sea salt

1/3 cup (80 ml) water more as needed

1 Tbs lemon juice

vegetable oil for deep frying

1. Soak chopped **cauliflower** in a covered pot of hot water, 10 min. Drain well.
2. Combine **chickpea flour**, **rice flour**, **baking powder**, **ajwain seeds** (if using), ground **coriander**, **cumin**, **black pepper**, **turmeric**, **asafoetida**, and **salt** in a large mixing bowl. Add **water** and **lemon juice**. Whisk with a fork until mostly smooth. Fold in and coat cauliflower florets. Mix well, adding slightly more water or chickpea flour if needed for a sticky, slightly thick batter.
3. Heat **oil** about 2 in (5 cm) deep in small pot on medium high heat. Oil is hot enough when a small drop of batter sizzles and comes to surface immediately.
4. Carefully add 4 to 6 battered cauliflower pieces to hot oil. Fry until golden brown, turning occasionally, 3–4 min. If they turn brown immediately or oil is smoking, reduce heat. If they don't sizzle and darken within 2 min, increase heat slightly. Using a slotted spoon, drain and transfer pakoras to a plate lined with paper towels or dish towel. Continue for all pakoras.
5. Serve with chutney of your choice.

Variations:

Other vegetables: Substitute chopped potatoes, carrots, or broccoli. Adjust cooking time as needed so vegetables are tender (but not overcooked) prior to batter-frying.



Mutter Paneer

green peas & tomatoes with tofu cubes

serves 2 to 3 / time 40 min

9 oz (250 g) Tofu Paneer (page 96)
2 cups (240 g) green peas
2 medium (180 g) tomatoes or **12–15 cherry tomatoes** chopped
1 medium (80 g) onion chopped
2 cloves garlic finely chopped
1/2 in (1 cm) fresh ginger finely chopped
1 red or green chili finely chopped *optional*

2 Tbs vegetable oil
1 tsp black mustard seeds
5–6 curry leaves
1 tsp cumin ground
1 tsp coriander ground
1/2 tsp Garam Masala (page 32)
1/2 tsp fenugreek seeds ground
1/2 tsp turmeric ground
1/4 tsp asafoetida (hing) powder *optional*
1/4 cup (60 ml) water more as needed
1 Tbs lemon juice or **lime juice**
1 tsp sugar or **agave syrup**
3/4 tsp sea salt
fresh coriander leaves chopped, for garnish

1. Fry **Tofu Paneer** (page 96) in a large pot or wok. Drain cubes and transfer to a bowl or plate.
2. Heat 2 Tbs **oil** in a large pot or wok on medium high heat. (You can use the same pot and remaining oil from the tofu paneer.)
3. Add **mustard seeds**. After they start to pop (20–30 sec), add chopped **onion, garlic, ginger, chili** (if using), **curry leaves**, ground **cumin, coriander, garam masala, fenugreek, turmeric**, and **asafoetida**. Fry, stirring constantly, until onions became to brown, 2–3 min.
4. Add chopped **tomatoes**. Mix well. Fry until tomatoes begin to fall apart, 6–10 min. Gradually stir in **water** as needed.
5. Stir in **peas** and return to simmer. Cook, stirring regularly, until peas begin to soften and fade in color, 2–3 min.
6. Add fried **tofu cubes, sugar, lemon (or lime) juice**, and **salt**. Continue to cook on medium, stirring frequently, 2–3 min. Cover and remove from heat.
7. Garnish with fresh chopped **coriander leaves**. Serve with rice, roti, or naan.

Variations:

Vedic: Replace onion and garlic with one small tomato.



Rava Dosa

quick semolina rice crêpe

makes 4 / time 30 min +

1/2 cup (80 g) semolina
3 Tbs (30 g) rice flour
2 Tbs (20 g) chickpea flour
1 Tbs sugar
1/4 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp salt
1 cup (240 ml) warm water
2 Tbs vegetable oil

1. Combine **semolina, rice flour, chickpea flour, sugar, baking powder,** and **salt** in a mixing bowl. Gradually stir in **water** and whisk until smooth. Cover and set aside 20–30 min.
2. Heat a large frying pan on medium high heat. If not using non-stick or well-seasoned cookware, first rub a few drops of **oil** on the surface of the pan with a paper towel.
3. Pour about 1/3 cup batter on the surface and turn and tilt the pan to spread evenly into a circular crêpe. Drizzle about 1 tsp **oil** around the edges.
4. After bubbles form all over the surface of the crêpe (2–3 min) gently lift up edges with a spatula and check to see that it is firm and the under side is deep golden brown. Flip and cook another 2–3 min. Transfer to a plate and keep covered. Repeat for other dosas.
5. Serve immediately with Sambar (page 130) and Coconut Chutney (page 131).

Variations:

Rava Masala Dosa: Serve with masala potato filling (page 109). **Sweet Dosa:** Add 1 Tbs coconut oil and another 2 Tbs sugar to batter. Serve with chopped fresh fruit, margarine, and jam.



Shahi Bengan

roasted stuffed aubergine & tomato tamarind curry

serves 4 / time 60 min

2 medium (450 g) aubergines (eggplants)
3 medium (280 g) potatoes
1 medium (80 g) carrot peeled, chopped
2/3 cup (80 g) green peas
small bunch coriander leaves chopped
3 Tbs golden raisins
1 Tbs cashews crumbled
2 Tbs chickpea flour
2 Tbs sesame seeds ground

1/2 tsp cumin ground
1/2 tsp red chili powder or **paprika** ground
1/2 tsp amchoor powder
1/2 tsp Garam Masala (page 32)
1/4 tsp turmeric ground
3 Tbs soy yogurt or **coconut yogurt**
or **3 Tbs water**
2 tsp lime juice
1/2 tsp sea salt

1. Slice **aubergines** in half lengthwise through the stem and bottom. With a sharp knife, carve out a pit in each half. Chop eggplant insides and set aside. Rub halves generously with salt and let sit 10 min. Rinse and dry.
2. Cover **potatoes** with water in a medium pot. Bring to boil. Cook potatoes until soft, 20–25 min. Rinse in cold water, remove and discard peels. In a large bowl, mash potatoes with a fork.
3. Add half of chopped **carrots**, half of **green peas**, half of **coriander leaves**, 2 Tbs **raisins**, **cashews**, **chickpea flour**, ground **sesame seeds**, **cumin**, **red chili powder** (or **paprika**), **amchoor**, **garam masala**, **turmeric**, **soy** (or **coconut**) **yogurt** (or **water**), **lime juice**, and **salt**. Combine well.
4. Preheat oven to 425°F / 220°C / level 7.
5. Rub aubergine halves with oil. Pack with potato filling. Bake until aubergine is thoroughly roasted and lightly charred, and stuffing is golden brown, 30–45 min.

3 medium (250 g) tomatoes chopped
1 medium red onion chopped
2 cloves garlic finely chopped
3/4 in (2 cm) fresh ginger finely chopped
2 Tbs vegetable oil
1/2 tsp Garam Masala (page 32)
1/2 tsp coriander ground

1/2 tsp black pepper ground
1/2 tsp turmeric ground
1/4 tsp asafoetida (hing) powder
1 Tbs lime juice
1 tsp tamarind paste
2 tsp coconut sugar or **brown sugar**
1 1/4 cup (300 ml) water

1. Heat **oil** in a large pot or wok on medium high heat. Add chopped **onion**, **garlic**, **ginger**, ground **coriander**, **black pepper**, **turmeric**, and **asafoetida** (hing). Fry, mixing constantly until richly aromatic and onions begin to soften, 2–3 min.
2. Add chopped **tomatoes**, **aubergines**, and remaining **carrots**. Reduce heat to medium. Fry, stirring regularly until tomatoes start to fall apart, 5–7 min.
3. Stir in **lime juice**, **tamarind paste**, **sugar**, and **water**, gradually. Bring to simmer. Reduce to low heat. Simmer and reduce, stirring frequently, another 5–10 min.
4. Add remaining **peas**, **raisins**, chopped **coriander leaves**, and any remaining potato filling. Mix well. Cook another 2–3 min, stirring often. Remove from heat. Cover.
5. Arranged baked aubergine on plates or bowls. Top with tomato tamarind curry. Serve with rice.



Berry Halava

semolina dessert

serves 4 / time 30 min

1/2 cup (65 g) blueberries and/or **raspberries**
1 2/3 cup (400 ml) water
3/4 in (2 cm) fresh ginger chopped
2 cinnamon sticks or **2/3 tsp cinnamon** ground
4 cardamom pods or **1/2 tsp cardamom** ground
4 cloves (whole)
1 tsp lemon zest

1/3 cup (80 g) margarine or **1/4 cup (60 ml) coconut oil**
2/3 cup (115 g) semolina
2/3 cup (135 g) sugar

1. Bring **water** to boil in a small pot. Add chopped **ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves,** and **lemon zest**. Simmer on low heat for 8 min.
2. Heat a frying pan or wok on medium low heat. Add **margarine** or **coconut oil**. Gradually pour and mix in **semolina**, constantly stirring with a wooden spatula to coat all grains. Continue to stir until golden brown and all liquid is absorbed, 8–10 min.
3. Pour spice water through a strainer into grains and mix well. Discard spices. Stir in **sugar**. Add **berries**. Simmer on low, stirring frequently, until liquid is absorbed and halava sticks together and is fluffy, another 5–7 min. Turn off heat.
4. Cover and let sit 10–15 min before serving.