

PAN INDIAN COOKERY TOUR

Dosa – Uttapam - Idli

This is an all-purpose batter made from fermented rice and lentils suitable for making Dosa, Uttapam and Idli. One finds variations of this batter throughout India, but it originates from South India. A Dosa is a crispy wafer like pancake often served stuffed with spiced potatoes and accompanied by a coconut chutney and sambar. An Uttapam is a thicker spongier version of a Dosa, often topped with sliced onions and tomatoes. Idli are steamed dumplings made from the same batter. These dishes are gluten free and the combination of rice and lentils make them a good source of protein and complex carbohydrate.

3 cups long grain rice

1 cup skinless split urad dal (skinless black lentils)

½ tsp fenugreek seeds

Salt to taste

1. Soak the rice and urad & fenugreek separately overnight or for 6 – 8 hours
2. Once soaked, drain the water from both and start by blending the dal and fenugreek in a food processor to a semi - smooth paste, adding a little water at a time until you have a thick paste.
3. Separately blend the rice in the same way
4. When both mixtures are ground, place both into a large mixing bowl and add enough water to form a batter. The consistency of the batter should be like thick yoghurt
5. Put the batter aside in a warm (30°C), dark place, covered with a cloth, for 8 - 12 hours to ferment. When it has developed some bubbles and a slightly sour smell, it is ready to use. Add salt to taste and thin down with water to a workable consistency

Idli: You want your batter quite stiff, like spongy thick cream. Idli are usually steamed in special steamers with round or oval moulds into which one spoons the batter before steaming. If you don't have an Idli mould and steamer then oil a conventional steamer and spoon 2 cm of the batter onto the steamer. Smooth down and steam for 10 minutes. Cut up into diamond shapes before serving.

Uttapam: You want your batter looser than for Idli, more like thick pouring cream. Heat a non-stick large frying pan over a medium heat. Oil this well and ladle or pour about 4 tbsp of batter into the centre of the pan. Using the back of the spoon, smooth this out to cover 2/3rds of the pan. Top this with sliced onions, chopped tomatoes, chopped green chilli and chopped coriander. Pour over a little more oil and cook for about 2 minutes or until golden underneath. Flip over and cook for a further minute on the other side.

Dosa: Thin out the batter to the consistency of single cream. Heat a large, flat non-stick pan to a medium-high heat and brush with a light coating of oil. Pour about 75ml of batter or 2/3rds of a soup ladle, gently into the centre of the pan. Using the rounded end of the ladle spread the batter in a sweeping, circular motion to form a pancake of 25 cm diameter. Drizzle extra oil all over the surface of the dosa and also around its edges. Little holes will appear as the batter cooks. When the upper surface is no longer wet or runny, the Dosa is done. Cool the pan a little before starting the next one.

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Sambar

This is one of the most popular dishes in South Indian cuisine. It is a peppery lentil and vegetable soup with a tamarind twang. It's often made with the delicious vegetable known as Drumstick, the giant seed pod of the Maringa tree, and served with fermented rice dishes such as Dosa & Idli. You can find good readymade sambar powder in most south Asian shops. Making your own involved roasting and grinding 5tbsp of Thoor and Channa dals with 1tbsp each of roasted black pepper, coriander & fenugreek seeds.

1 cup tuvar dal - pigeon pea lentils, red lentils work fine as well
2 cups of chopped mixed vegetables – drumstick or okra, carrots, French beans, squash etc.
1 large onion, finely chopped
2 good size tomatoes, chopped
1 tbsp tamarind syrup
1 to 2 tbsp sambar powder
½ tsp red chilli powder
½ tsp turmeric
a pinch of asafoetida/hing
cooking oil
salt to taste

2 to 3 dry red chillies
1 tsp mustard seeds
a pinch or two of asafoetida / hing
12 to 15 curry leaves

Method

1. First wash and drain the lentils. Mix with 3 times the volume of water, plus the turmeric and cook until soft and mushy.
2. In a separate pot, heat 1 tbsp of oil and stir fry your onions for a few minutes until they start to soften. Then add the vegetables and tomatoes and keep cooking for about five minutes more. Add the lentils, 3 cups of water, salt, chilli and a pinch of hing and bring to a slow simmer. Cook and stir regularly for 20 minutes then add the sambar powder & tamarind and simmer for 10 minutes on a low heat.
3. To finish, make a tarka or tempering – heat 1 tbsp of oil and add the mustard seeds, when they start to pop add the red chilli and hing, followed by the curry leaves. Cook this hot and fast for 30 seconds then pour the whole tempering over the sambar. Cover and serve after 10 minutes

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Coconut Chutney

- 1 tbsp sunflower or coconut oil
- 4 tbsp freshly grated coconut or 2 tbsp desiccated coconut soaked in warm water
- 2 small green chillies, finely chopped
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 6 curry leaves

Method:

1. Heat the oil in a pan over a medium heat and add the mustard seeds followed shortly by the curry leaves, the chilli and then the coconut.
2. Cook gently for a few minutes and season to taste.

Tamarind Chutney

- 1 cup dried tamarind or 1/3 cup ready to use tamarind pulp
- 2 tbsp brown sugar or jaggery
- 2 cups water
- ½ tsp. red chilli powder
- ½ tsp. cumin powder
- ½ tsp ginger powder
- 1/4 tsp. salt

Method:

1. If using dried tamarind, place the tamarind in a bowl and soak in warm water for a few minutes, then drain and press through a mesh or sieve until you are left with a sticky pulp.
2. Place the pulp into a pan with the water and jaggery and heat, then add the chilli, cumin, ginger and salt, whisk and cook on a lower temperature until the chutney thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon. Will store for several weeks in the fridge.

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Bhel Puri

Bhel Puri is a popular street food snack found across India, but the Mumbai chaat wallhas claim it as their own. It is essentially a puffed rice salad mixed with seasonal vegetables and dressed with a lime and a tangy tamarind sauce. Prep the parts in advance, but assemble just before serving or it goes soggy!

2 cups puffed rice
¼ red onion, very finely chopped
1 large tomato, finely chopped
½ cucumber, diced
Juice of one lime
250 ml yoghurt
2 tsp homemade masala or a shop bought chaat masala powder
2 green chillies, deseeded and finely chopped
4 tbsp fresh coriander, chopped

Method:

1. For home made masala powder, dry roast 3 tsp cumin seeds, 1 tsp coriander seeds and 2 dried red chillies. Cool and grind together with a little salt to a fine powder.
2. To make up Bhel Puri, prep the salad ingredients and just before serving, toss the puffed rice with the chopped vegetables, chillies, coriander and masala powder.
3. Dress this with lime juice, mix well and top with a spoon of yoghurt, a spoon of tamarind chutney and more chopped coriander

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Pav Bhaji

This is one of the most popular Maharashtrian street foods and a good vender will have hungry punters queuing around the block. Essentially it is a butter rich potato curry served on a bun with chopped raw onions. The amount of butter may seem excessive so adjust it to suit your taste and waist . . .

2 cups potatoes, boiled and mashed
1 cup cauliflower, finely chopped
½ cup frozen peas
1 large onion, chopped
2 green peppers finely chopped
1 tbsp chopped garlic
1 tbsp chopped ginger
2 chopped birds eye chillies
2 cups chopped tomatoes
½ tsp turmeric powder
½ tsp chilli powder
1 ½ tbsp pav bhaji masala
4 tbsp butter
salt

For the pav bhaji masala

1 small black cardamoms
2 tbsp coriander seeds
1 tbsp Cumin (jeera)
2 tsp black pepper corn
¼ tsp. fennel seeds
3 red dry chillies
2 inch cinnamon
4 cloves
1 tbsp amchur powder (dry mango powder)

Gently roast all the ingredients and grind to a powder

For serving

1 large sized red or pink onion, chopped
1 tbsp chopped coriander
8 soft white buns
4 tbsp butter

Method

Boil the potatoes and mash with a little salt and 1 tbsp butter. Steam the cauliflower and peas until cooked but firm.

Heat 3 tbsp butter in a large pan, add the onion and capsicum and sauté for 2 minutes. Then add the chilli, ginger and garlic and sauté till the onion softens.

Add the tomatoes and simmer till the oil separates then add the turmeric powder, chilli powder, pav bhaji masala and 1tsp salt and cook for 2 to 3 minutes.

Add the boiled vegetables and potatoes and mash thoroughly using a potato masher, adding ½ cup of water if required.

For the pav

Slice each bun into 2 horizontally. Apply a little butter to each side and grill on the open side. Top one half of the bun with bhaji, chopped onions and top and coriander.

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Bhindi sabzi

A delicious dish made with spiced okra or ladies fingers. Its cooked all over India, but this version comes from Gujarat

500g okra, washed, thoroughly dried, ends removed and quartered lengthways

2 tbsp oil

1 tsp cumin seeds

½ tsp turmeric

½ tsp red chilli powder

2 tsp ground coriander

1 tsp ground cumin

1 onion, diced

1 tbsp ginger, minced

2 cloves of garlic, sliced

1 green chilli sliced

2 tomatoes, finely diced

Juice of one lime

Salt

Method

1. Heat a large pan over moderate heat. Add oil and when hot, add cumin seeds then onion and cook gently for 5 minutes. Add ginger and garlic, cooking another 2 minutes then make a well in the centre, add a little more oil and fry the chilli powder, ground cumin, and coriander briefly to release their flavour.
2. Add tomatoes and cook until the oil separated from the mass then add the okra salt and a few tablespoons of water. Cook on a higher temperature for 3 minutes then lower the heat, cover and cook for 12-15 minutes or until okra is tender. Taste and adjust salt as needed.
3. Finish with fresh lime juice

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Methi Dal

This is a dal made from protein rich channa dal – yellow split peas. You can also use split mung dal for a quicker cooking lighter dish. The spicing is relatively mild but the addition of fresh fenugreek adds a deep musky flavour which is quintessentially Indian. If you prefer your dal hotter, add more chilli and ginger.

Serves 4 -6

250g channa dal (yellow split peas) - soak these in 3 times the water for 8 hours.

1 medium onion, chopped

6 cloves of garlic

1 small bunch fresh fenugreek or 1 tbsp dried fenugreek

2 tsp turmeric

2 tsp cumin powder

1 tsp coriander powder

salt

2 tbsp sunflower oil

½ tbsp grated ginger

1 fresh green chilli, chopped

Fresh coriander

Method:

1. Heat 1tbsp of oil in a saucepan and fry the onions for 5 minutes.
2. Add the garlic, cumin, coriander and turmeric and gently fry for a minute more before adding the channa dal and 3 times the volume of water.
3. Bring the pan to the boil then reduce the heat and simmer for 15 – 25 minutes until the lentils are soft. Add salt to taste
4. Heat the remaining oil in a separate frying pan and add the ginger and chopped chilli. Cook for about 1 minute then add this to the lentils, season and garnish with fresh coriander.

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Chilli Paneer

This hot and rich dish is a great example of the quirky fusion food now found across northern India. It is actually a Mughal dish similar to jalfrezi, but seasoned with soy sauce. Paneer is a hard mild flavored cheese. It is quite robust and fries without melting.

250g paneer, cut into cubes
1 large onion, chopped
1 red and 1 green pepper, de-seeded and sliced
3 tbsp gee or sunflower oil
4 tbsp tomato puree
2-3 green chilies, as per taste
3-4 cloves garlic
1 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp sugar

1. Heat 2 tbsp oil in a medium size wok or pan on medium to high heat. Add the onions and fry until they soften then add the add peppers, garlic and green chili, and stir-fry for 2 to 3 minutes.
2. In a separate pan, sauté cubed paneer in 1 tbsp oil, on medium to high heat .Once the paneer is light gold/brown in color, take it out on a paper towel to drain excess oil.
3. Add the paneer, tomato puree, sugar, 4 tbsp water and soy sauce to the peppers and cook gently for 5 minutes
4. Garnish with fresh coriander and toasted broken cashews.

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Chapatti

Chapattis or Roti are traditional flatbreads from India. They are quick and easy to make because they contain no yeast and therefore require no time to rise. To make 4 large or 8 small chapatti

125g whole-wheat flour

125g white flour

175ml water

½ tsp fine salt

Method:

1. Mix flour, water and a pinch of salt to form a loose workable dough. Add more water if the dough feels too stiff.
2. Knead for 2 minutes and divide into 4 or 8 equal balls.
3. Set aside for a short while to allow the gluten to relax.
4. Heat a heavy bottomed pan or skillet over a medium heat. Roll out the dough to form thin disks of 30cm or 15cm diameter.
5. Slap the breads onto the pan and allow to cook for 30 seconds.
6. Turn the bread over and with a folded cloth or oven glove, push the bread down slightly. This helps the bread to inflate and form a pocket. Press these pockets down to distribute the inner steam and keep moving the bread so that it doesn't burn.
7. After a short time, (1 min), turn the bread again and allow to finish cooking, (30 seconds)
8. Place the cooked breads between clean cloths and keep warm.

Variations:

- If you'd like extra taste to your flatbreads, try adding a tbsp of sesame seeds or a tsp of onion or nigella seeds. Chopped up fresh coriander and garlic are also good additions.
- For a heavier, flaky chapatti, add two tbsp of vegetable oil or melted butter or gee to the mixture. Roll out the dough to form a disk and then imagine you are making a paper fan: fold over an 1/8th of the disk one way and then back on itself the other way. Continue this until the dough is folded 8 times in concertina pattern. Roll this up like a Swiss roll and then follow steps 4 – 8
- Yeasted chapattis are also delicious and keep better than the simple ones. Add half a tsp of ready yeast to your dough and allow this to rise for about 4 hours. Divide into equal portions, roll into tight balls and allow these to rise for a further 10 minutes before you roll them out and cook as per basic instructions.

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Chaas

Chaas is a spiced buttermilk dish from Gujarat. It is often served with a meal as a digestive. The chilli is optional, but as with most Gujarati dishes, it is quintessential.

500g plain yoghurt or buttermilk

500ml water

1 tsp cumin seeds

3 dried red chilli

10 curry leaves

1 tbsp oil

1 tbsp finely chopped coriander

Method:

Mix the yoghurt and water together and chill.

Heat the oil and add the cumin, chilli and curry leaves. Cook briefly until the seeds pop and then whisk into the yoghurt.

Serve with chopped coriander.