

FROM THE SEA TO THE CITY

The distinct taste of Goa can be found in Mumbai, and it's worth seeking out, says Joanna Lobo



IMAGE: GETTY



The fish cutlets beckoned. Coated crisply with *rava* (semolina), they lay stacked on a small plate in a glass cupboard. And I really wanted them. At the counter, I conveyed this to the owner, an old man who didn't look pleased that I interrupted his quiet time. His response is brief: "Those aren't for sale — they're for our lunch." I leave C D'Souza, stunned.

I'm standing in a lane in South Mumbai, outside a small restaurant that's very popular with Goans. A restaurant with food so good, they keep some aside for themselves.

I'm Goan. Goa is a small state on the western coast of India, a favorite tourist destination, popular for its good food, affordable alcohol, beautiful landscapes, culture, and its relaxed vibe. Its food is unique in that it marries 450 years of Portuguese colonization with local food customs. The Portuguese brought in chili, mangoes, tomatoes and cashews; introduced the cooking of pork and beef, breadmaking and preservation techniques, as well as a new method of making sweets. Goans added those chilis to their dishes, replaced the wine used to preserve dishes with toddy vinegar, and mastered the art of making bread to the point that Goans in other parts of the country are nicknamed 'pao' (bread). Goan food can broadly be categorized into 'Catholic' — heavily influenced by the Portuguese, and 'Hindu' — with a focus on seasonal produce and excluding meat and alcohol.

I moved to Mumbai in 2008 for work, becoming a Bomoicar (the colloquial term

for a Bombay Goan). As a journalist writing about food, I set out to find a taste of my actual home in my adopted home.

In the late 19th and 20th centuries, Goan Portuguese citizens started arriving in Bombay seeking work. They came to study, to work on ships, to serve as cooks in European households, to work as secretaries, or help in bakeries and shops. They settled in places that had pre-existing Catholic communities like Mazagaon, Dhobi Talao, and Marine Lines in South Bombay. They created their own safe havens: *kudds* — residential clubs where men were offered accommodation and food. These areas saw the birth of many Goan restaurants.

Old-timers speak fondly of City Kitchen started by the late football player, Sacru Menezes. In the book *Bomoicar*, there's a mention of other Goan places: Gourdots, Carmello Caterers, Tosa's, and Venice Caterers, known for its beef and pork dishes. The Jer Mahal Building, home to many *kudds*, once also had tiny rooms serving fish-curry-rice. Luckily for me, some of these places still soldier on, allowing me to map my own Goan food trail in Mumbai.

These are spots that haven't changed their food or decor in decades. They're known to a select few Goans, or people who've lived in Mumbai long enough to be aware of its older restaurants. They've survived despite the shortage of customers, the rise of food delivery apps, and the rising cost of living in India's financial capital. They've stayed strong while the world around them has changed.

TOP RESTAURANTS



Pedro

Serves modern interpretations of Goan food. With a relaxed yet classy vibe, it's one of the few places serving *poe*, best had with their *choriz* butter.

Fresh Catch

This relaxed spot has old English songs playing in the background. The fish dishes are excellent, especially crabmeat butter garlic.

Sushegad Gomantak

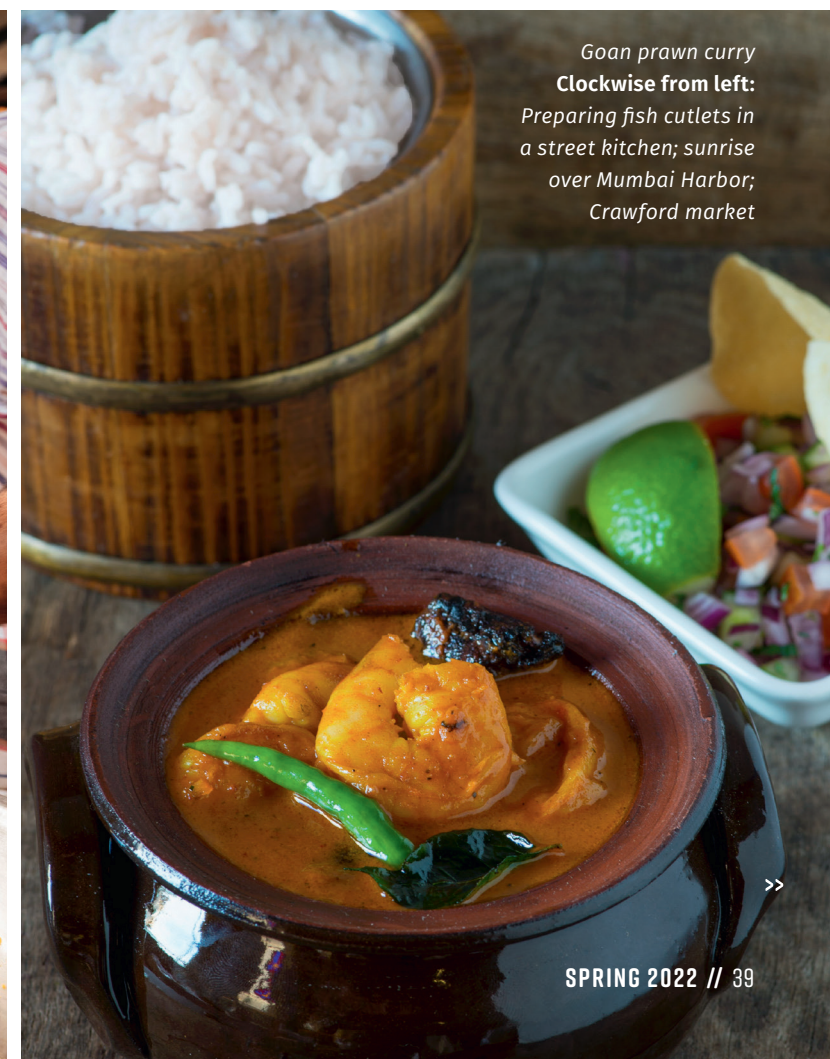
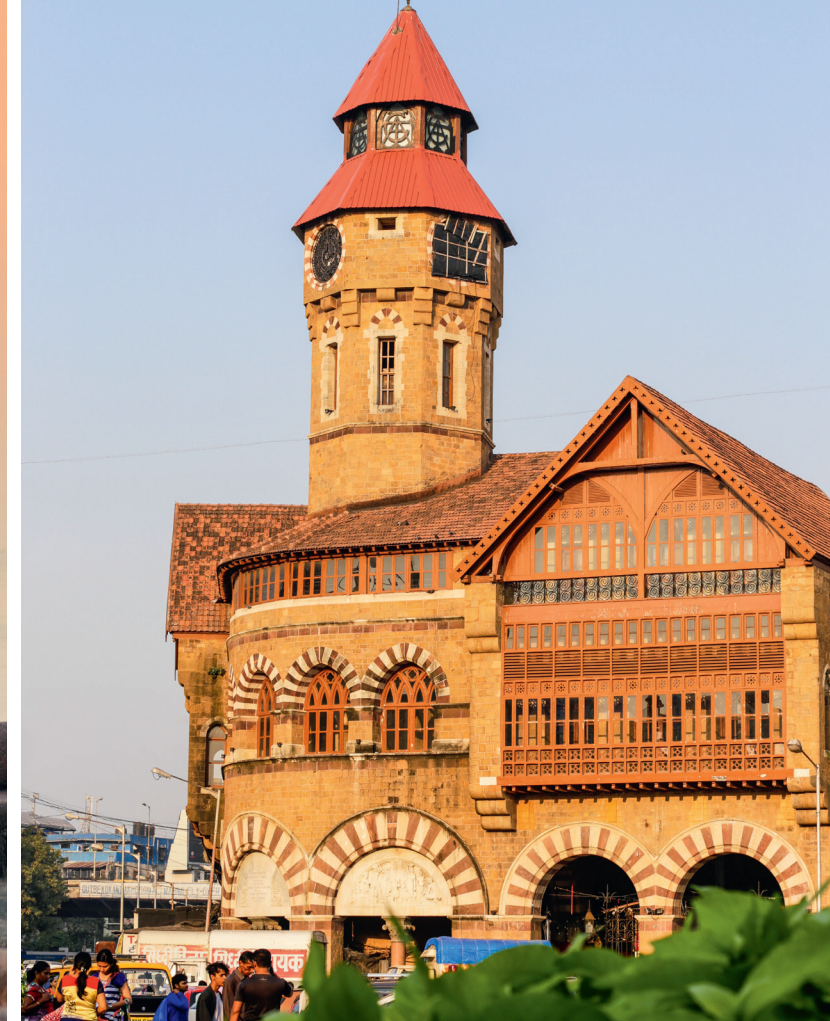
This hole-in-the-wall place offers Goan Hindu-style dishes, and is good for all things fish, which are fried, served *sukke* or dry, or in a curry.

Goa Portuguesa

Serves Goan, Portuguese and Continental food. The menu has Goan Hindu and Catholic dishes and there's often live music.

New Martin

Serves Goan-style Continental fare including steaks. It tends to be heavier on spices than typical Goan food. The beef chili fry and steak is popular.



Goan prawn curry
Clockwise from left:
Preparing fish cutlets in
a street kitchen; sunrise
over Mumbai Harbor;
Crawford market

IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; STOCKFOOD



Ambotik, a Goan fish curry
 Clockwise from left: Thali;
 Bandra Worli Sea Link

My first true taste of Goan Catholic food was at Snow Flake Restaurant, near Jer Mahal. Once a bakery selling cakes and ice cream, it was converted into a laid-back restaurant offering beef, pork and fish. Time moves slowly in this place, with its black chairs, marble-top tables and old photos of Bombay. The restaurant's tongue roast is legendary and hasn't changed in the decade since I first tried it: tender, spicy and loaded with onions and potatoes. Close to Snow Flake is another old-timer, Castle Hotel. It once served beef and pork dishes, but now its focus has turned to fish, which it serves in a thali, fried or in curries.

In Colaba, there are two Goan restaurants that compete for attention. The winner is New Martin, easily the most popular old Goan restaurant in Mumbai. The owners aren't Goan but the food is familiar: Goan Continental fare, like steak with potatoes, crumbly fish cutlets served with stew, a spicy beef chili fry and, for those seeking nostalgia, custard. Around the corner from them is Gables, which offers free wi-fi, old magazines and English music. Under a faux tiled roof, I've eaten prawn curries, chicken puffs and sausage *pulao* (a one-pot rice dish), with a sleeping cat for company.

Another cluster of Goan restaurants can be found in Mahim, which was one of the seven islands that made up the city. It was my first home after moving to Mumbai, and there I found shops selling masalas, and cold meat, dried *bombil* (lizardfish) and pickles sourced from Goa. There, I found a place that reminded me of the thali joints

// SNOW FLAKE RESTAURANT'S TONGUE ROAST IS LEGENDARY

back home. Sushegad Gomantak is a true hole-in-the-wall, run by a mother-son duo. The cooking is Goan Hindu style and fish has been their mainstay, served *sukhe* (dry), in a coconut curry, or fried — coated with a batter of rice flour and rava. I became such a frequent visitor that the owners would comment on my absence. I gorged on their *xinaneo* (mussels) fry, prawn cutlets, *mori ambotik* (shark in a tangy spicy gravy), *bangda uddamethi* (a mackerel curry with *urad dal* and *methi* seeds) and fish thalis. Nearby was the slightly upscale Fresh Catch, which emphasised its name with a life-size pelican carrying a fish in its mouth at the entrance. Here, Francis Fernandes also served fish: crabmeat smothered in butter garlic sauce, a seafood *pulao* packed with five kinds of fish, and *recheado bangda* (spicy, fried mackerel).

In the next suburb, Bandra, is a place that's known today for its *sungta maria* (prawns on toast) and its Monday night karaoke. Meldan D'Cunha started Soul Fry 27 years back because "there were no Goan restaurants in these suburbs." Back then, it was known for launching many a career at

// 4 TO TRY

1 Can't stop thinking about: tongue roast

Goan Catholics enjoy their offal. Tongue, in particular, is either salted and cured or marinated with spices and then cooked as a 'roast' — marinated in a paste of spices, onions, ginger, garlic and lime juice or vinegar, and then cooked.

2 Easiest to recreate at home: recheado fish fry

Recheado is a stuffing, a spicy red one which gets its flavor from red chilis and vinegar. It's a paste that's easily available: just open a packet, stuff in a fish like mackerel or squid, and fry.

3 Traditional dish: sorpotel

A pork stew that once was the epitome of nose-to-tail cooking: it contained pig liver, brain and offal and was thickened with the blood. Today, it's made without offal or blood, but is still a comforting dish, typically eaten with *sannas*.

4 Street food dish: roce/ras omelette

This delicious egg dish is a common street food snack, enjoyed for being cheap and filling. A chicken curry, or *ras*, is poured over an omelette (sometimes made with onions, chilis and tomatoes) and served with *pao*.

IMAGES: GETTY; STOCKFOOD; AWL IMAGES



Left: Street kitchen selling fried snacks

its live music and jazz nights. Bandra was my home for two years and it reminded me of Goa the most: the old homes, the crosses and chapels, the shopkeepers who ask you why you aren't at church on a Sunday morning, and bakeries serving the ubiquitous *pao*: rolls stuffed with *choris* (Goan sausage) or beef, patties or puffs hiding minced chicken or beef in their folds, and pan rolls. I've even found families here selling *sannas* (steamed rice cakes made with toddy, a fermented coconut vinegar), or *brinjal* pickle or *balchao* (spicy prawns in gravy) from the front of their homes.

In Orlem, another Catholic suburb further north, I befriended the owner of a butcher and general store opposite the church. A post-Sunday Mass ritual for me and other Catholics was to flock there to pick up meat and puffs. In Orlem, I had my first taste of the Goan street snack *ros* omelette (an omelette paired with a coconut-rich chicken curry) at a restaurant serving Mangalorean and Goan food, aptly named Mangoes.

During the decade I lived in Mumbai, I saw the launch and closure of Goan

restaurants, some upscale and serving reimagined Goan food, others offering home-cooked fare. The newest kid on the Goan block is O Pedro, which opened in 2017 promising reimagined Goan food. I'm a purist, but my first visit surprised me. Its veal tongue prosciutto — cured and slivered slices of the offal — was delicious. On subsequent visits, I enjoyed *rissois* (crescent shaped pastries stuffed with crab, *kismoor* — a salad of raw papaya and dried shrimp) and sourdough-ish *poe* with *choris* butter. Although I still think some of the food is fancy, my fondest memory there involves learning how to make Goan *poe*.

Today, the Goan food experience still lingers in pockets of Mumbai, particularly in the largely Catholic suburbs of Orlem, Bandra, Vakola, Kalina, Vasai and Borivali. It's kept alive by small bakeries, home chefs, food carts, butcher shops and tiny stalls selling familiar tastes of home.

A few months ago I toured my favourite restaurants. Little had changed. Time slowed down at Snow Flake, where I ate tongue roast. C D'Souza was shut for repairs. The next time, I may get some fish cutlets. □

// ESSENTIALS



When to go: Mumbai is known for its pleasant winter (with the mercury hitting a balmy 60F at times), which lasts from November to mid February.

Currency: Rupees. \$1 = 76 INR

Language: Most places accept credit/debit cards, and Google Pay.

Getting around: There are local trains and buses, autorickshaws and taxis that run by meter, and ride sharing services like Ola and Uber.



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