

# India's 2026 culinary playbook

Pico: Coco Sheridans

## Social media and digital discovery

Diners relying on social media to learn about new restaurants or seeking recommendations online has placed a premium on Instagram-worthy presentation, creative plating, and photo-friendly interiors. Digital trends don't just influence where people eat, but what they crave. Viral dishes and trends spread quickly through reels and short-form videos, fuelling demand for bold, shareable food moments.

**84%**  
diners rely on social media to learn about new restaurants

**86%**  
trust online recommendations and word of mouth when deciding where to eat

## Purpose-driven eating

Chefpreneur Shweta Sharma believes that the growing interest in healthy living will give way to a greater demand for wellness foods. From forward diets, Ayurvedic inspirations, and gut-friendly ingredients are moving from niche to mainstream. At the same time, sustainability has become a core value. "Little-to-no-waste and sustainable ingredients are a few choices which add to the eating experience and the environment. 2026 trends are all about choices that have long-lasting impact on food, health, and the world," adds Sharma. This drives interest in farm-to-table sourcing, regenerative agriculture, and eco-friendly practices.

Shikha Shah

**T**he world's dining habits are shifting in exciting and unexpected directions in 2026, with the food scene reflecting deeper shifts in how we eat, what we value, and why food matters beyond nourishment. "In 2026, food will move from indulgence to intention. Diners are seeking clarity — in sourcing, nutrition, and storytelling. Expect regional flavours expressed through modern techniques, protein-forward vegetarian plates, and comfort food refined rather than exaggerated. Fermentation, functional spices, and low-waste dishes will become mainstream. The future isn't about harder food, but smarter food — dishes that respect memory, health, and craftsmanship while still delivering quiet luxury on the plate," says chef Jyoti Surri.

## Culinary storytelling will matter as much as recipes

In 2026, experience-led dining is one of the strongest trends shaping the Indian culinary landscape. This goes beyond ambience to storytelling through food — open kitchens, chef interactions, themed menus, and live food stations that turn a meal into a multi-sensory event. "Every dish must carry cultural context and personal narrative. Menus will mention farmers, regions, and seasons; chefs and home cooks will revive ancestral recipes," reveals culinary expert Reetu Uday Kugaji.

## Rediscovering local and regional flavours

In 2026, Indian cuisine is embracing its diversity like never before. Whether it's forgotten grains, forgotten grains, or time-honoured spice blends, the emphasis is on authenticity and heritage. This trend aligns with India's growing culinary reputation on the global stage. "Regional cuisines are the highlight in 2026. People are noticing delicious options from Bihar or Chhattisgarh tribal food. Even the varied north east food is seeing interest," says chef Sharma.

**The future of food will not abandon the past. Ancient wisdom, regional knowledge, and grandmother's kitchens will inspire modern techniques and contemporary plates.**

— Chef Reetu Uday Kugaji

## Comfort food will get cleaner

People will crave nostalgia, but with better ingredients. "Traditional comfort dishes will be reimaged with less processing, better fats, natural sweeteners, and mindful portioning. For example, khichdi cooked with cold-pressed oils and heirloom rice, street food flavours recreated with less frying and cleaner fats, etc.," explains Kugaji.

## Minimal ingredient cooking will be in

Short ingredient lists, transparent sourcing, and honest cooking will matter more than complex plating. The focus will shift to ingredient integrity rather than excessive garnishing. "Less will truly become more in the kitchen. Think dishes built around three to five high-quality ingredients, recipes that highlight one seasonal produce, clean flavours without excessive sauces or garnishes, transparent sourcing becoming part of the menu narrative," says Kugaji.

## Forgotten ingredients will be celebrated

"Hyperlocal sourcing, forgotten grains, indigenous vegetables, and regional cooking techniques will be celebrated as premium in 2026. Eating seasonal food will be seen as conscious and cultured, not restrictive," says Kugaji. "What grows locally and now will be seen as premium and mindful. Some examples are menus changing every few weeks based on market availability, use of indigenous grains like kodo, kurd, and jawar, seasonal vegetables replacing imported produce and regional cooking techniques showcased as culinary craft," she adds.

## Tech and convenience will take centre stage

Technology is transforming the way we eat. From AI-driven menu personalisation to ultra-fast grocery and meal delivery services promising delivery in minutes rather than hours, convenience is being redefined. Meanwhile, AI-enabled tools are increasingly used behind the scenes for inventory management, menu innovation, and personalised recommendations — enhancing efficiency without sacrificing the human touch that defines Indian hospitality.

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Anantara, Shalini

