

TAMIL NADU CUISINE

INTRODUCTION

Tamil Nadu is famous for its deep belief that serving food to others is a service to humanity, as is common in many regions of India. The region has a rich cuisine involving both traditional vegetarian, as well as non-vegetarian dishes. Tamil cuisine was developed by Tamilians many centuries ago in Southern India. It is characterized by the use of rice, legumes and lentils, its distinct aroma and flavour achieved by the blending of spices including curry leaves, tamarind, coriander, ginger, garlic, chilli, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, cumin, nutmeg, coconut and rosewater.

REGIONAL CUISINE

Over a period of time, each geographical area where Tamils have lived has developed its own distinct variant of the common dishes in addition to dishes native to itself. The four divisions of ancient *Tamilakam* are the primary means of dividing Tamil cuisine.

- The ***Chettinad region comprising Karaikudi and adjoining areas*** is known for both traditional vegetarian dishes like idiyappam, uthappam, paal paniyaram and non-vegetarian dishes made primarily using chicken. Chettinad cuisine has gained popularity in non-Tamil speaking areas as well.
- ***Madurai, Tirunelveli and the other southern districts of Tamil Nadu*** are known for non-vegetarian food made of mutton, chicken and fish. Paratha made with maida or all-purpose flour, and loosely similar to the north Indian wheat flour-based Paratha, is served at food outlets in Tamil Nadu, especially in districts like Madurai, Virudhunagar, Tuticorin, Tirunelveli and the adjoining areas. Madurai has its own unique foods such as jigarthanda, muttaiparotta (minced parotta and scrambled egg), paruthipal (made of cottonseeds), Karidosai (dosai with mutton stuffing) & ennaidosai (dosai with lots of oil) which are rarely found in other parts of Tamil Nadu.
- ***Nanjilnadu (Kanyakumari district) region*** is famous for its fish curry since the region is surrounded by the three great water bodies of Asia: (Indian ocean, Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal). Fish forms an integral part of life. Owing to its unique cultural affinity and the availability of coconut, coconut oil forms a base for almost all the preparations of the region.
- ***The western Kongunadu region*** has specialities like Santhakai/Sandhavai (a noodle like item of rice), Oputtu (a sweet tasting pizza-like dish that is dry outside with a sweet stuffing), and kola urundai (meatballs), Thengai Paal (sweet hot milk made of jaggery, coconut and cotton seeds), Ulundu Kali (Sweet made out of Jaggery, Gingely Oil and Black Gram), Ragi puttumavu, Arisi Puttumavu, Vazhaipoo Poriyal, Kambu Paniyaram, Ragi Pakoda, Thengai Parpi, Kadalai Urundai, Ellu Urundai, Pori Urundai. The natural crops of this region forms the main ingredients in this Kongunadu cuisine

Ceylon Tamil cuisine, bears similarities to Tamil Nadu cuisine but also has many unique vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. It features dishes such as (steamed rice cake) and *idiyappam or sevai*, (known in other parts of the world as string hoppers).

Eating-out in its capital city Chennai, is a great experience and provides a glimpse of the unique lifestyle of the city. Chennai is known for its cuisine, brought to the city by people who have migrated from different parts of Tamil Nadu. Chennai has a large collection of restaurants, some of them are unique 'Speciality Restaurants,' which serve 'Indian Cuisine' with an ambience to match, while most others cater South Indian tiffin and meals, at very reasonable prices.

COOKING EQUIPMENTS

- **EYYA CHOMBU:** It is a vessel made from lead to impart the right flavour to rasam
- **KAL CHATTI:** It is a stoneware used for preparing tempering
- **KUZIAPPA CHATTI:** It is normally made of heavy bronze. It is circular in shape and has shallow depressions resembling a cup. The leftover sour dosa batter is poured inside it and cooked.
- **THENKUZAL NAAZHI:** This equipment is used for making crisp lentil fritters called *murukkus*. It can also be used to press the rice dough to make vermicelli.
- **DOSA THIRUPPI:** A flat slicer that is used for spreading oil on the dosa and also for scraping dosa off the hot plate or tawa.
- **ADDAIKAL:** it is a thicker tawa than the dosa tawa usually used for cooking addai and hence the name.
- **IDLI PANAI:** This vessel is used for making idlis, as many as 40-50 idlis can be made together depending on the number of plates used.
- **THURUVAMMAI:** It is an equipment, used both as a coconut scraper and as a vegetable chopper. This is used in some households to cut fish or meat.
- **URULI:** It is a very heavy pot that is used for cooking. Sambhar, vegetables and meat are usually cooked using the vessel. They come in a range of sizes depending on the quantity of food to be cooked. This is a very beneficial vessel because the food cooked in this vessel remains hot for a long time.

FEATURES OF THE CUISINE

- *Coconut oil* is used as the medium of cooking. Gingelly oil or sesame seed oil is used for finishing some dishes.
- *Rice* is the staple food of Tamil Nadu. *Parboiled rice* is eaten for its high nutritive value and this dominates in all the dishes starting from appetizers to desserts. They eat Rice (staple diet) with sambar, dhal, kootu, vegetable curry, papad, buttermilk. Black rice (*Kavunaris*) is used commonly in Chettinad cuisine to prepare sweet puddings.
- *Arhar dal, urad dal and chana dal* are the commonly used lentils.
- Rice is usually combined with the lentils to make various dishes like idlis, dosas, vadas, uttapams. These are usually *fermented* for easy digestion as well as development of the typical sour flavour.
- *Coconut, tamarind and asafoetida* are a must for almost all vegetarian recipes.
- Tamil people use a variety of ingredients like ginger, garlic, pepper, nutmeg, tamarind, chilly, cumin, cardamom, coconut, *Marathi mokku* (capers), Stone flower (*kalpasi*), Fresh neem flower (*Veepam poo*) and curry leaves to give aroma and superb taste to their foods.
- Food is generally more towards the *spicy* (due to the use of crushed black pepper, red and green chillies) and *sour side* (which is due to fermentation and also due to the extensive use of tamarind).
- Curd also finds a common use in the cuisine and is utilised to balance the hotness which results due to the use of spices.
- *Coconut chutney and sambar* invariably form a part of most of the Tamil dishes. *Mulaga podi* (a powdered mix of several dried lentils with oil or ghee) is also served at times.
- Use of various *seafoods and chicken* is also common.
- A major feature of Tamil Nadu cuisine is the wide varieties of *Tiffin items*. They are served in the evening as a snack and a few tiffin items also feature in the breakfast. *Dishes like idli, sevai, upma, pongal, uttapam, dosai, puttu, aval, chapathi, adai, Vadai.*
- Filter coffee is the main beverage along with this tiffin.

Tamil feast - Virundhu Sappadu

During a **Virundhu Sappadu**, the feasty meal, the guests sit on a mat and the meal is served on a banana leaf which is spread in front of the guests. Traditionally, the banana leaf is laid so that the leaf tip is pointed left.

The dishes are served in a particular order, and each dish has its own specific spot on the leaf. Everyone starts together and ends the meal together.

The top half of the banana leaf is for the side dishes and the bottom part is for the main dish. Payasam, Kesari, Sweet Pongal or any Dessert also occupies a portion of the bottom part. The top left includes a pinch of salt, a dash of pickle and a spoon of salad, a spoon of pachadi. In the middle of the leaf there may be a banana chips, potato chips and fried papads and a vadai. The top right hand corner is reserved for spicy foods including a wide array of curries and gravies. Dry and wet curries are placed one after the other. They are called poriyal and koothu. A minimum of three curries are served in a feast.

Traditionally, sweets are eaten first. Sambar rice is eaten first with a spoon of ghee. This is followed by Kuzhambu and then Rasam. Finally rice with curd or buttermilk is eaten at the end of the meal. In the end, the meal is complete with a banana.

The style of service and the items offered in **Virundhu Sappadu** has got regional variations too.

A TAMIL MEAL DESIGN

Breakfast or tiffin includes *idli* (steamed rice cakes), *dosai* (a pancake made from a batter of rice and lentils crisp fried on a pan), *vada* (deep fried doughnuts made from a batter of lentils), *pongol* (a mash of rice and lentils boiled together and seasoned with ghee, cashew nuts, pepper and cumin seed), *uppuma* (cooked semolina seasoned in oil with mustard, pepper, cumin seed and dry lentils.)

There are several variations of the dishes mentioned above which are eaten with *coconut chutney*, *sambar* (seasoned lentil broth) and *mulaga podi* (a powdered mix of several dried lentils eaten with oil).

Lunch or meals consists of cooked rice served with an array of vegetable dishes, sambar, chutneys, rasam (a hot broth made with tamarind juice and pepper) and curd (yogurt - *Moru/Thayir*). For a non-vegetarian lunch, curries or dishes cooked with mutton, chicken or fish is included. The meal is incomplete without crisp papads or appalam. After finishing their meal, they like to have payasam.

For *dinner*, Tamilians eat uthappam, dosa, idli or simply rice kanji (gruel). They also have milk before going to bed.

FILTER COFFEE OF TAMIL NADU - A NOTE

The making of the famous filter coffee is traditional, where coffee beans are first roasted and then ground. The powder is then added into a filter and boiling hot water is added to it, to prepare the decoction. The decoction is then added to milk with sugar. The drink is poured from one container to another in rapid succession to make an ideal frothy cup of filter coffee. It is also known as **meter kapee** as it is poured from a small steel glass into a bowl (katori) and vice versa from almost a distance of a meter to make it frothy.

SOME SPECIALITY ITEMS OF THE CUISINE:

KOLAMBHU: *Kolambhu* or *kozhambu* is a thin stew of vegetables with spices. It can also be of various types. The most common type is *moar kolambhu*, where buttermilk is used as the base and thickened with a paste of rice and lentils to make it into a spicy stew with vegetables inside.

DOSA / DOSAI: These are made from rice and urad dal and the batter is fermented. This fermented batter is cooked on a large tawa in shape of pancakes. They are filled with various types of fillings. The various types of dosa found here includes the following:

- i. *Kal dosa:* This dosa is made from the same batter made with rice and urad dal, the only difference is the consistency of this batter is thick and is cooked on a thick iron pans to resemble the an uttapam.
- ii. *Adai:* This batter is made by grinding soaked parboiled rice, red gram, Bengal gram and black gram. Both red and green chillies are used to make the *adai* spicy. Although it is prepared like any other dosa, it must be spread slightly thicker than the regular dosa. A hole is created in the centre and a few table spoons of oil are poured inside the hole. The *adai* is cooked on both sides.
- iii. *Rava dosa:* the dosa batter is made by combining semolina with rice flour and spiced with grated ginger and green chillies. The batter is really thin and is sprinkled over a large tawa to prepare a crisp rava dosa.

IDLI: Idlis made in South India are of various kinds and each has its own traditional ways. The process of cooking is however common for all which is steaming. The most common one is made with urad dal and parboiled rice. The batter is made by grinding both separately and leaving it overnight to ferment. The next day it is steamed in the idli vessel. A few examples of different idlis include: a) *Rava idli:* it is made by using semolina, cashewnuts and yoghurt. b) *Vermicelli idli:* the base is same as that of Rava idli but fried vermicelli is added to the batter and then the idlis are prepared.

PAYASAM: It is a sweet preparation and various kinds of payasam are eaten on various festive occasions. Few common payasams are as follows:

- i) *Pal payasam:* this payasam is made with rice and milk and is made similar to a kheer.
- ii) *Parupu payasam:* this is made by cooking lentils in milk and jiggery.
- iii) *Aval payasam:* This payasam is made by cooking flaked rice with jiggery and milk.

PACHADI: These can be regarded as South Indian raitas. A variety of ingredients such as grated carrots, deep fried sliced okra, roasted and mashed brinjals etc are mixed along with smooth thick curd to prepare *pachadi*. These are served tempered with curry leaves, mustard, urad dal, and whole red chillies. The ingredient used with the curd can be sauted or deep fat fried before being added to it.

KOOTTU: There are many varieties of koottu. It is usually made by boiling green gram along with bite size pieces of vegetables and also fruits such as jackfruit and raw bananas. It is flavoured with turmeric and red chillies. Grated coconut and rice paste are used for thickening the koottu. It is usually finished with coconut oil.

VADAI: This can be termed as a fritter. Various kinds of vadai are prepared under Tamil cuisine. A few of the common vadais are as follows:

- i) Ulundhu vada: It is prepared by making a coarse paste of soaked urad dal and combining the same with chopped onion, green chillies, coriander, and asafoetida. This paste is then shaped as roundels and a hole is made in the centre using wet hands. These are then deep fat fried in hot oil until crisp.
- ii) Kola vadai: Flaked rice is soaked in water and then squeezed out. It is kneaded into a dough and combined with grated coconut, green chillies and ginger. They are rolled into small balls and then into half in thick slices. Each slice is shallow fried until crisp and then served.

THENKUZALS AND MURUKKU: These are commonly eaten snacks prepared on many festive occasions and marriages. Various kinds of *thenkuzals* are popularly made in Tamil Nadu. Rice flour and lentil flour are kneaded along with ghee and spices and pressed through a perforated die of a *thenkuzal* press into hot oil. They are fried until crisp. *Murukku* is even crispier and is pressed through a circular die of thenkuzal press in circular motions.

CHETTINAD CUISINE FOLLOWS.....

IHM
Notes
Site

CHETTINAD CUISINE:

Chettinad is a region of the Sivaganga district of southern Tamil Nadu. Karaikudi is known as the capital of Chettinad, which includes Karaikudi and 74 other villages. Chettinad is the homeland of the Nattukottai Chettiars (Nagarathar), a prosperous banking and business community, many of whose members migrated to South and Southeast Asia, particularly Ceylon and Burma, in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The people of Chettinad speak Tamil. Chettinad is one of the driest regions of south India.

Culinary delicacies:

Chettinad is known for its culinary delicacies. Chettinad food, now is one of the many reasons why people get to know Chettinad. Chettinad food is essentially spicy, with a standard full meal consisting of cooked dhal, eggplant (brinjal) curry, drumstick, sambar, ghee for flavouring rice, and sweetmeats like payasam and paal paniyaram.

The classical "kara kozhambu" is widely regarded as the best tasting south indian sambar. Chettinad cuisine hails from the deep southern region of Tamil Nadu. Chettinad cuisine is far from the bland cuisine of traditional Tamilian Brahmins—it is one of the spiciest, oiliest and most aromatic in India. The dishes are hot and pungent with fresh ground masalas.

Although the Chettiars are well known for their delicious vegetarian preparations, their repertoire of food items is famous and includes all manner of fish, fowl and meats. They also use carefully preserved sun-dried legumes and berries that the Chettiar ladies make into curries. They also use a variety of sun dried meats reflecting the dry environment of the region. Oil and spices are liberally used in cooking and most dishes have generous amounts of peppercorn, cinnamon, bay leaves, cardamom, fenugreek, saunf, nutmeg, green and red chillies, marathi mokku, anasipoo, kalpasi, patthar ke phool etc. Tamarind is also used in this cuisine.

The meat is restricted to fish, prawn, lobster, crab, chicken and mutton. Chettiars do not eat beef and pork. Most of the dishes are eaten with rice and rice based accompaniments such as dosais, appams, iddiappams, adais and idlis.

Some of the popular dishes in Chettinad menu are

- Varuval -- a dry dish fried with onions and spices (chicken, fish or vegetables sautéed),
- Poriyal – a curry
- Kuzambu --which has the ingredients stewed in a gravy of coconut milk and spices.
- Chicken chettinad

In the same range, one can include the numerous pickles, powders, specially roasted and ground spices, dry snacks, papads, appalam and vada.

Numerous shops now sell pre-packed snacks like murukkus (small spirals of fried rice dough), chips, thattai, masala vada and so on.

The Chettinad people through their mercantile contacts with Burma, learnt to prepare a type of rice pudding made with sticky red rice. *Kavunarisi* – a black rice is also used to prepare desserts.

A circular logo with a light blue double-line border. Inside the circle, the text "IAHM Notes Site" is written in a light blue, cursive font, centered and stacked vertically.

IAHM
Notes
Site