

## Exploring Sri Lankan cuisine through six iconic dishes

Sri Lanka, once Ceylon, has simmered in a rich stew of culinary influences since the Portuguese landed there in 1505. Nestled in Southeast Asia, the island absorbed flavours from its colonial rulers – the Portuguese, Dutch, and British. The most potent zing, however, came from its nearest neighbour, the state of Tamil Nadu in India. Despite this historical smorgasbord, Sri Lankan cuisine maintains a distinctive identity – traditional dishes slow-cooked over fire in earthen pots that reflect the island's commitment to fresh, local ingredients. Earthenware delicately amplifies the natural flavours of these ingredients, many of which are hyper-local and seasonal and come straight from backyard gardens or burgeoning organic farms.

On my recent travels through Sri Lanka's diverse provinces, I sampled several unusual regional dishes that offer unique perspective into the country's evolving cuisine.

### HOPPERS WITH KIRI HODI, COLOMBO

Rice flour hoppers – thin, bowl-shaped egg hoppers, and lacy stacks of string hoppers (appam and idiyappam to their Tamil cousins) are ubiquitous in Sri Lanka. These delicate crepes come alive when paired with seafood curry, a fiery crunch of pol sambol (coconut relish), or the nuanced heat of rich crab roe paste. It was in Colombo, at the Ports of Call restaurant at the Taj Samudra, where one can taste another delicious pairing – hoppers with kiri hodi (coconut milk curry).

"In our traditional coconut milk curry, each ingredient plays a vital role. Plump onions release their sweetness, fiery green chillies add a playful heat, and the Pandanus leaf is a secret layer of the tropics," says executive chef Samila Kumarsinghe. What truly steals the spotlight is the pol kiri – the first extract of coconut milk, which he describes as reminiscent of the creaminess of moonlight. "Enriched with uluhal (fenugreek seeds), cinnamon, and kaha kudu (turmeric), our kiri hodi boasts a colour that rivals the setting sun."

This curry gets its body from fenugreek, and the pandanus leaf (rampe) adds layers complex enough to make a spice rack blush. Throw in some fish or veggies, and



you have a hearty meal.  
**FRIED TILAPIA WITH BITTER GOURD SALAD, HABARANA**

In the heart of Habarana in Sri Lanka's Anuradhapura District, I tasted another iconic culinary pairing – crispy fried tilapia and bitter gourd salad. Ruwan and his family who run the Tree House Ambasewana Resort explained its preparation. "We marinate the fish for two hours in a mixture of rice flour, eggs, a hint of aniseed powder, a dash of chillies, powdered cloves for that exotic touch, turmeric for vibrancy, coriander for freshness, and just the slightest hint of peppery heat," he said.

Emphasising the significance of day's the catch, he added, "Tilapia, occasionally referred to as St. Peter's fish, holds a prime position as a staple catch in the waters of Habarana Lake."

The fish is fried in coconut oil in earthenware pots over a crackling wood fire. It is a textural masterpiece – crispy on the outside and oh-so-flaky on the inside. For the bitter gourd salad, bitter gourd is deseeded, sliced into rounds, fried over a wood fire, and combined with freshly chopped onions and tomatoes. It is finished with fresh lemon, and best eaten with kalu heenati (brown rice), sautéed white potatoes, aromatic Lankan chicken curry, pol sambol, beetroot salad, and crunchy pappadams.

### YOUNG JACKFRUIT CURRY AND TODDY, KANDY

In Kandy, nestled in Sri Lanka's central province, I sampled young jackfruit curry (polos curry) with Kalu Heenati brown rice

accompanied by the fresh nectar of tapped toddy. The jackfruit curry, reminiscent of a creamy risotto, was a labour of love, requiring almost two hours of dedicated preparation.

The freshness of ingredients is of paramount importance," says chef Tharaka Gunarathnawich of Mahaweli Reach Hotel, "which is why we use whole spices, and grind them just before cooking this curry." He heats coconut oil in an earthen pot, and the crackling sounds of mustard and fenugreek seeds fills our ears. He stirs gently, allowing the ingredients to come together. Finally, he adds in grated coconut, young jackfruit, its pre-boiled seeds, and lime juice, allowing it simmer until the curry achieves a tender, golden velvet texture.

Topped with crispy onions and fried curry leaves for a satisfying crunch, the dish is paired with rice, and a coconut milk-based white watakkka (pumpkin) curry. Meanwhile, a seasoned toddy tapper presents a glass of freshly tapped toddy with whole peppercorn and pickled shallots to complete the experience.

### BANANA BLOSSOM MELLUM AND BRINJAL MOJU, GAL OYA

In Sri Lanka's Eastern province, Wild Glamping Gal Oya has an inviting selection of unusual tribal flavours. In their rustic, grass-thatched restaurant, I tasted banana blossom, a leafy superfood revered in the region. Chef Chandan Kumaradasa shared that it was the morning's harvest from their farm. "The flower's centre is white, with a subtle bitterness and a texture reminiscent of bamboo shoots and palm hearts." To

temper the bitterness, he mixes the banana blossom with mellum (shredded vegetable), incorporating fresh coconut, shallots, curry leaves, garlic, green chillies, and spices. On the side was brinjal (wambata) moju, an eggplant pickle and creamy pumpkin prawns.

### SRI LANKAN MUD CRAB CURRY, NEGOMBO

For travellers using Colombo as their entryway to the country, Negombo, on the south coast of Sri Lanka, often marks their exit. Blessed with coastal proximity, this Dutch-inspired city brags an impressive display of seafood offerings. Among them, the mud crab curry is truly exquisite. The dish places utmost importance on the quality and freshness of its ingredients – mud crabs are picked on the same day and the curry is traditionally cooked in earthen utensils, enhancing its loamy flavours.

At Jetwing Blue Hotel, chef Kaushalya Batagoda took me through the recipe. "We begin toasting cumin seeds and black peppercorns to release their fragrant aroma. Next, grated coconut takes centre stage, sautéed until it achieves a beautiful golden brown colour," he says. In another pot, as he heats coconut oil, and adds mustard, fennel seeds, and some spices, he adds the coconut paste with mud crabs and allows it to simmer until tender. "We finish with coconut milk and tamarind pulp, an infusion of moringa leaves and lemon juice." The mud crab curry receives a garnishing of moringa leaves and is served hot with egg kothu—made from leftover parotta, sautéed vegetables, and scrambled eggs.

Sri Lankans, like most on the subcontinent, have a serious sweet tooth. Every meal ends with a comforting dessert. Buffalo curd with palm treacle is a favourite choice, but there is another gem called watalappan – a rich, creamy baked coconut custard infused with fragrant cardamom, and nutmeg, and sweetened with kitul jaggery. Brought to Sri Lanka by the Malays during the 18th century, under Dutch rule, watalappan has secured its spot as a beloved dessert on the island. Often garnished with nuts for added texture, the sweet holds a special place in the Muslim community of Sri Lanka, especially during Ramadan and Eid.

## Mini's Food Fundas NOT CAKES, BUT SAVOURY BAKES



**Mini Ribeiro**  
an independent food critic and columnist, will be acquainting readers with the latest food and beverage trends based on personal insights and experiences

**Sweets done, let's bake now. And no, not cakes yet, but comforting savoury fare - pies, tarts, quiche and more**

The aroma of freshly baked dishes fills the air in homes this season, as many of us bake a lot more. No, it's not just cakes and cookies, that I am talking about. Those can wait till December, but somehow savoury tarts, quiche and pies, even good ol' Mac n cheese, become regulars on several home menus.

Comfort food is all we seek post the celebrations of festivals and perhaps fatigue. Baked dishes are just that, fairly easier to put together and delicious. The air redolent with a slight crispness, beckons you to bake and spend time near the warm oven.

Baking options abound even in savoury items. One can unleash one's creativity and imagination, based on preferences and what is easily available. And yes, there are healthier versions too.

Housed inside a crisp tart shell, a quiche, is my go-to dish in this season. Mushrooms or chicken mince, spinach, cherry tomatoes and eggs, baked, make for a delectable robust meal. One can opt for a crustless quiche too, if the butter-laden base is not calling.

Quiche apart, if a protein-fix is what you're after, a Frittata with eggs, is a great choice. Tip in as many veggies you have at home, and enjoy a hearty, rustic meal.

Meats make for the best bakes, according to us, Carnivores. In Goa, we are all partial to our meaty Sausage rolls. Rustle

up a batch and you're set for a few meals, or even parties. The light flaky pastry with a dense, spicy filling, is hugely enticing.

A savoury cheesecake is a great choice too. A savoury twist on the classic, can have a gluten-free breadcrumb base, a cream cheese filling and topped with a vibrant medley of veggies, as you like them. I make it a point to include beetroots in this season. Sweet potatoes, roasted vegetables and sundried tomatoes, make for great toppings, offering a melange of flavours. Add ricotta or feta, and you have a winner at hand.

I once tried a slow-cooked aubergine in a tomato base, topped with cheese and then baked. The smooth texture and tart flavours, were the perfect pair. Of course, the cheese enhanced the dish, manifold.

Pull-apart breads, Focaccia, Stuffed buns, there's a lot one can do, if you're ready to go the bread route.

Savoury muffins are gaining popularity in India too, owing to their versatility and ease of baking. From feta to spinach, olives to paneer, broccoli to zucchini, one can add just about anything and bake muffins. These are handy for a meal with soup or even an evening snack.

A savoury bread pudding is a good bet. Mix caramelised onions, crushed garlic, pork sausages or bacon, veggies, cheese, bread and eggs, and one can relish a sumptuous dish, albeit indulgent.

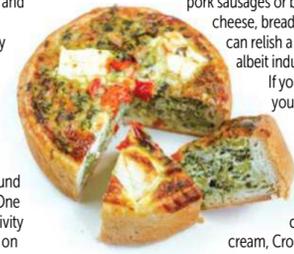
If you are not counting your calories and indulgence is on your mind, opt for, the all-time favourite, ham, cheese, bread and cream, Croque Monsieur.

I recall tasting a mouthwatering Salmon Wellington in London. Puff pastry encasing a tender salmon fillet and a filling of spinach, creamy cheese and fragrant herbs. The memory still lingers on my palate.

Pasta offers a plethora of baking options, as one can add several meats or even sea food, topped with cheese and bake, resulting in a satiating meal. Rice can be substituted with pasta too.

Personally, for me, baking is a stress-buster, makes me more mindful, alert as it calls for precision. I enjoy the entire experience. It calms me down.

So, a Mushroom and bell pepper crustless quiche, is my bake for tonight,



## Three key Asian flavour trends taking over the world

Global demand for Asian flavours and ingredients has grown significantly in recent years. Enter a cafe and you'll find matcha latte alongside coffee house classics. Likewise, miso, yuzu, teriyaki, tikka masala, bulgogi and kimchi are now familiar sights on menus and supermarket shelves outside of the region.

Asia's diverse culinary landscape is a product of the region's distinct cultures, ingredients and innovative cooking techniques. For example, Southeast Asian dishes are known for their bold flavours and aromatic ingredients like chili peppers, lemongrass, kaffir lime and fish sauce, while Indian cuisine is a complex blend of spices and herbs such as cumin, coriander, turmeric and cardamom.

Thanks to social media, increasing globalisation and accessibility, and successful cultural exports like Japanese anime and manga, Korean Wave, and Bollywood, consumer demand for all things Asian is surging. Innova marketing insights showed that two in three consumers are open



to trying new international food, with Asian cuisines ranking second most popular for meals (after the consumer's local cuisine).

### HEAT AND SMOKE FLAVOURS LEADING THE WAY

One of the prominent taste profiles driving the Asian fever are hot, spicy, and smoked flavours. Consumers are showing an affinity for heat, with FMCG Gurus reporting that 82% indicate they like hot and spicy flavours. These flavours are often associated with comforting, even happy, taste experiences while barbecue has always been part of Asia's DNA.

The 2024 Kerry Taste Charts show that smoked chilli, Korean spicy

chicken, Thai satay beef, sambal, Sichuan mala, tom yum, ghost chilli, Sriracha, gochujang, yuzu pepper and Chinese five spice are Asian flavours that continue to set appetites on fire.

An Innova Market Insights study supports this, showing a 4% increase in global launches of chili-flavoured packaged foods and beverages and a 5% rise in spice and seed flavours over the last five years.

As consumers become more well-travelled, they also become more discerning in taste and flavour. Manufacturers must be able to bring an authentic savoury taste experience to their products to give consumers the real deal. Product categories with the

most innovation are snacks, sauces and seasonings, ready meals and meal kits, and soups.

### WELLNESS TREND DRIVING DEMAND FOR JAPANESE AND KOREAN CUISINE

Consumers have always viewed Japanese and Korean food as healthy as both cuisines place great importance on freshness, simplicity, healthier cooking methods, and gut-friendly fermented foods such as miso and kimchi. Japan has the world's longest living people who attribute their high life expectancy in part to their diet.

Global demand for Japanese and Korean cuisine continues to rise. According to Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, there were around 187,000 Japanese restaurants outside of the country in 2023, a 20% increase from 2021, with US and Europe being the biggest markets outside of Asia.

Similarly, South Korea exported around US\$156 million worth of kimchi in 2023, up 10.5% from the year before. The

exports reached 92 countries with Japan, US, the Netherlands, Australia and UK making up the top five biggest markets.

While Japanese dishes like sushi, ramen, and udon have become menu staples, Kerry Taste Charts reveal that consumers are also taking interest in other ingredients such as sake (rice wine), rice vinegar, miso, kinako (roasted soybean flour), fermented tofu and matcha.

Miso is one of the early Japanese ingredients to gain popularity out of Asia, thanks to its versatility in providing rich umami flavours. Industry players can use stocks and broths to enhance the umami flavour profile of their products, while providing alternatives to the health-conscious consumer.

When it comes to beverages, sweet and fruity flavours continue to be the consumer's go-to soft drink flavours. Coming out of the region, Asian fruits such as yuzu, passionfruit,

kumquat, Fuji apple and longan are trending based on Kerry's Taste Charts. Botanicals like floral, spicy and minty flavours are also gaining popularity.

Yuzu appeared in various food and beverage applications including yuzu-flavoured beers. In fact, consumer demand for alcoholic beverages have surged in recent years due to the introduction of new and unique flavours. Future Market Insights predicts the global alcoholic flavours market to grow at 4.7% CAGR and hit US\$11.6 billion by 2033.

Who would have thought that consumers would welcome unique flavour pairings like yuzu beer miso-infused macarons? Asian flavours will continue to captivate global consumers

as new and exciting flavours continue to be created. Understanding the uniqueness, complexity, and nuances of these exotic flavours is crucial if brands want to stay ahead of the curve.

## Healing and Deliverance through Holy Eucharist at Velim

Healing and Deliverance Service through Holy Eucharist led by Fr Anthony Lopez and team is being held every first Wednesday of the Month at Velim.

The service begins with Rosary, Mass, Praise and Worship, Word of God and Eucharistic Adoration.

**Venue: St Rock Church, Tollecano, Velim**  
**Date: November 6**  
**Time: 5 pm to 8 pm**

## Herald Gaming Console

**Dilbert**

I CREATED A DATING APP FOR MATCHING GULLIBLE OPTIMISTS WITH THEIR ABUSERS.

I CALL THE APP "BAIT-AND-SWITCH."

WOW! A PRINCESS WHO IS ALSO A MODEL IS SENDING ME A MESSAGE!

**Garfield**

I HAVE BIG PLANS TODAY.

WHY IS THERE A GIANT CHEESEBALL IN THE LIVING ROOM?

BILLING PLANS.

**Wizard of id**

WE'VE BEEN OUT HERE FOR A WHILE...

**crossword 4681**

**ACROSS**

1- Preservative; 5- Mayberry kid; 9- Deal; 13- Deli sides; 15- Ladies of Spain; Abbr.; 16- Longfellow's bell town; 17- Backpack part; 18- Cooped (up); 19- Light gas; 20- Lawn material; 21- Tombstone name; 23- Oscar-winning Nashville tune; 25- Treater's words; 26- Separates metal from ore; 27- Third day of the week; 30- Shade at the beach?; 31- Tiffs; 32- Located; 37- Crown of the head; 38- Gaze intently; 40- Evergreen tree; 41- Surprised; 43- Actress Verdugo; 44- Dawn deity; 45- Chemical-free; 47- Continues a subscription; 50- Circle segments; 51- Small crustacean; 52- Low plant with many branches; 53- Part of TGI; 56- Protracted; 57- Cereal grain; 59- Door sign; 61- Ms. Adams; 62- Joint with a cap; 63- Adjust to zero; 64- Doe or fawn; 65- Sicilian peak; 66- A Chaplin;

**DOWN**

1- Flat sound; 2- Kind of sax; 3- Cooking fat; 4- Defunct airline; 5- Feathered fisher; 6- Get ready for surgery; 7- 007 creator Fleming; 8- Guess; 9- Discussion group; 10- Bothered; 11- Crucifix; 12- Very small; 14- Uses money; 22- Doctor's org.; 24- Course list; 25- Blender maker; 26- Agitate; 27- Dosage amts.; 28- \_\_\_ the crack of dawn; 29- I could \_\_\_ horse!

**32- Downcast; 33- Great grade; 34- A wedding cake may have three of these; 35- Sicilian resort; 36- Distribute cards; 38- Dawdler; 39- Dick Tracy's love; 42- Swarm; 43- One engraving; 45- Sickness at the stomach; 46- Horace's \_\_\_ Poetica; 47- \_\_\_ Island Red; 48- Tennessee Ford; 49- Chad neighbor; 51- Dog-powered snow vehicle; 52- Bingo call; 53- Wishing won't make \_\_\_; 54- Adolescent; 55- Mex. miss; 58- Picnic pest; 60- Prefix with classical;**

**solution 4680**

ABBA BOCA SEAMS  
TRAS ELAL ALLAT  
DABA SELL LAINE  
CAPITALIZATION  
RONERE  
WARSAW BARTAGRE  
ALLENBARAGRE  
HOTWITHSTANDING  
TEARS TRIS ADLAI  
SSS MANNEDSELS  
REP ELI  
UNDERSTANDABLE  
SCONE GLEE LARA  
TONES ISMS ANIS  
ASSET FOYT BEES

**sudoku 4681**

2	1			3				
			4	2		3		
		3		8	5	2		
4	6			2				
	9					8		
		2			1		4	
	6	8	1		7			
	3		7	6				
			8				4	9

**Instructions for Sudoku**

9 x 9 letter: To solve a Sudoku puzzle, every number from 1 to 9 must appear in each of the nine vertical columns, in each of the nine horizontal rows and in each of the nine boxes

**solution 4680**

3	9	6	8	1	7	4	5	2
2	1	8	4	9	5	6	3	7
5	7	4	3	2	6	9	1	8
8	2	9	6	5	4	1	7	3
6	3	1	2	7	9	5	8	4
7	4	5	1	8	3	2	9	6
4	5	3	9	6	8	7	2	1
1	6	7	5	3	2	8	4	9
9	8	2	7	4	1	3	6	5