

Street food: Delhi style

The coronavirus pandemic and lockdown have deprived us of so much, but it's often the simpler things that one has missed – something as uncomplicated as eating street food, for example, says **Christine Pemberton**.





From its very name, street food implies eating outdoors, usually standing on the street with a bunch of strangers, eating local food, so it's hardly surprising that this particular activity took a hit over these pandemic-y months.

But as the future looks less bleak, with vaccines on the horizon, it's time to remember one of the simple joys of life. So how about we revisit Delhi's enticing food stalls, as we all hope for a speedy return to the way things used to be ... wandering the city at will, eating on the go. The simple pleasures of life indeed!

One of the joys of living in a city like Delhi is the easily available street food and the sheer variety of what's on offer. It is by definition cheap and cheerful and, especially in the winter, it is almost obligatory to head off to Old Delhi and eat its famed street food.

In Old Delhi you wander through narrow, crazily-busy little lanes, shopping at teeny shops, buying trinkets and beads and buttons and a myriad other lovely stuff. And naturally, you eat as you go. Kebabs and pakoras and *chaat* and *jalebis* ... mouth-watering food on-the-go and now you're all seriously hungry just thinking about them, aren't you?

So, let's take a wander down memory lane, shall we, imagining we're in the crowded, noisy, jam-packed streets of Old Delhi. We've shopped, and now we need a snack.

How about a paratha? This ubiquitous flat bread can be eaten plain or (much more deliciously) stuffed with potatoes, or cauliflower, or radish, or eggs, or *keema* (mince). Paratha are such an Old Delhi favourite that there is even a street named after it. Seriously!

Head to Paratha wali Gali where you can take your pick from any number of stalls selling – yes, you've guessed, paratha.

Another uber-popular Delhi street food snack is *chaat*, a savoury dish that has as many variations as fans. In its basic form it is a combination of a crunchy carb base – puffed rice or a *papdi* cracker, for example. Then come other crunchy ingredients, such as spicy pieces of potato or fried, spicy chickpeas. Add yet more vegetables – usually raw onions, raw tomatoes and boiled potato. Then comes the sauce, which can also vary according to region and taste but tamarind chutney is a firm Delhi



1. *Daulat ki chaat* involves lots of milk and cream topped with *kesar* (saffron), *khoya* (dried milk) and nuts.
2. The sweet crunchy spiral-shaped *jalebi*, also sold in Indian shops (*mithai*).
3. *Momos* are dumplings made from flour with savoury vegetable stuffings served with red spicy watery *momos* chutney.
4. *Pakor*s, made of gram flour, onions and spices and deep fried.
5. *Reshmi* kebab with minced meat and coriander is shallow-fried in a wide pan.
6. Crunchy balls of *gol gappas*, cracked open on top and stuffed with a spicy mix of boiled potato cubes, chickpeas, coriander and sweet chutney.





favourite. Finally, top all this off with some *chaat* masala – and your little bowl of *chaat* is ready. Tasty, distinctly more-ish and packing a punch.

Another firm favourite which has similar ingredients to *chaat* is what Delhi-walas call *gol gappas* – this popular snack is known by other names across the country, and its preparation might vary a little accordingly. The north Indian version is a crunchy ball of wheat flour, which is cracked open on top and stuffed with a spicy mix of boiled potato cubes, chickpeas, coriander and sweet chutney. The *Gol Gappa Wala* then dips it in chilled tamarind flavoured water and serves you.

One *gol gappa*. Each one is prepared in front of you!

And that is what makes it such a perfect street food, since they are made one at a time, so you can eat as many (or as few) as you like. You watch it being made, pop it into your mouth in one go, and by the time you have swallowed it, the *Gol Gappa Wala* has prepared your next one. The queue of people wait patiently for you to finish, as you addictively pop yet another one in your mouth.

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If you're still hungry – don't forget that even more Old Delhi shopping and exploring has given you an appetite – then you can try *chole bhature*, a popular Punjabi dish and a staple of Delhi street food. *Chole bhature* is spicy chickpeas which are served with crisp fried bread. You can often find it on north Indian breakfast menus, but nothing beats standing in a crowded alley way and eating a small serving, to refuel you for yet more Old Delhi adventures.

Kebabs, *laddoos*, *momos* (oh yes, north India has totally adopted this traditional north eastern and Tibetan snack as its own) are also on our street food menu today – and for the meat eaters, there are two very popular kebabs that have to be tried. *Reshmi kebab*, made with minced meat and coriander, and the famed *galouti* Kebab, a melt-in-your-mouth spicy minced-meat kebab that is shallow-fried in a wide pan. Legend has it that the *galouti* kebab was created for a toothless old *Nawab* of Lucknow (*galouti* means melt) which makes it even tastier, as you savour formerly royal food on a busy street.

Remember our *chaat* snack from earlier?

The word *chaat* crops up again, in a typical winter snack in Delhi called *Shakarkandi chaat*. *Shakarkandi*, or sweet potatoes, are steamed or roasted, then cubed and served hot with a generous sprinkle of *chaat* masala, a dash of lime and a bit of star fruit for that extra tang. Itinerant vendors carry all the materials around with them to make the snack on a tray, displayed so you can see everything. The tray is set down, the sweet potato is cubed and garnished, and you eat it piping hot, on the spot.

Even in the ranks of street food, which is known to be simple, uncomplicated fare, not too pricey, and easily available to all, there is – inevitably – a star.

A stand-out star.

The undisputed queen of street food.

Presenting *Daulat ki chaat*.

Daulat ki chaat can only be described as a confection and, in the annals of Delhi food, it is an almost mythical dish. This delicate dessert involves lots of milk and cream, and (if legend is to be believed) it must be made on a full moon night. Now if that isn't romantic, I don't know what is.

Nowadays you really only find *daulat ki chaat* in Old Delhi, and it is only available for a short time in the mornings – you'll see why in a moment.

Making *Daulat ki chaat* is a laborious process, with hours of churning milk, before the froth is separated from the milk and the cream. It is stored and refrigerated, and



7. *Shakarkandi chaat* or sweet potatoes are steamed or roasted, cubed and garnished.
8. The ubiquitous flat bread – *paratha* is an Old Delhi favourite.
9. The ball shaped *laddoos* primarily made of gram flour, ghee (or butter or oil) and sugar.

has to be kept cool when being sold. There are stories of the itinerant *Daulat-ki-chaat*-vendors staying firmly on the shady side of the street while hawking their wares, keeping their delicate goods out of the sun which is why you'll rarely find it for sale in the afternoon, when the sun is up.

This light-as-air dish is topped with *kesar* (saffron), *khoya* (dried milk) and nuts. Delicious. Traditionally *daulat ki chaat* is only available between Diwali and Holi, the two big festivals that book-end of the north Indian winter, which is logical, given its fragility.

For this dessert alone, it is oh-so-worth a trip to crowded Old Delhi. 🇮🇳



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