

Flavours of Benares

By

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Abstract

Varanasi, among the oldest continuously inhabited cities on Earth, is a place where spirituality and flavor intertwine. Famous for its sacred essence, the city is also a wonderland for anyone who loves to eat. Its twisting lanes hum with life—oil crackling in pans, the scent of roasting spices drifting through the air, and people crowding around tiny stalls for breakfast. In Varanasi, food is not just about taste—it is about emotion, tradition, and connection. Every dish tells a tale of faith and heritage. From the spicy kachori sabzi that wakes up the senses to the cloud-like malaiyo enjoyed only in winter, every mouthful feels like stepping into the city's history.

Keywords

Varanasi, Streetfood, Chaat, Malaiyyo, Paan

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Mornings in Varanasi start before sunrise. After offering prayers at the ghats, locals head to their favorite vendors—many of whom have inherited their recipes and skills from generations past. Each plate they serve is prepared with patience, pride, and care. Visitors quickly learn that eating here is an experience in itself. It's about more than just food—it's about sharing space, stories, and laughter with strangers who feel like friends. Across every lane and corner, Varanasi celebrates life through its food—simple, soulful, and eternal.

What Makes Street Food the Soul of Varanasi?

The street food in Varanasi reveals a vibrant blend of taste, aroma, and age-old food traditions passed down through generations. As one walks through its bustling lanes and colorful markets, an array of flavors narrates the city's rich history and cultural diversity. From sizzling street-side snacks to wholesome traditional thalis and indulgent sweets, Varanasi offers a culinary journey that delights the senses and lingers in memory.

At the heart of this ancient city—where faith and tradition intertwine—food serves as a reflection of its enduring heritage. In Varanasi, every meal becomes more than sustenance; it is a celebration of culture, history, and the warm hospitality that defines its people. Let's go through all these dishes in detail:

Tamatar Chaat- The Tangy Taste Of Benares

Among a variety of chaat dishes available in Varanasi, tamatar (tomato) chaat is the most unique and unmissable for gastronomes. It is made of a thick and spicy tomato gravy topped with tiny fried Bengal-gram bits, coriander, masalas, a tablespoon of Ghee and sugar syrup. A melange of spices and chaat masala make this dish drool-worthy. Each bite leads to an explosion of flavours in the mouth, with layer after layer of flavours bursting forth. This dish as a rule is rich and lip-smackingly good in Banaras, and is best washed-down with a Kulhad chai (tea in an earthen container) from one of the road-side stalls.



Image 1: Tamatar Chaat

Kachori-Sabzi- The Breakfast Delight

No morning in Varanasi truly begins without a plate of steaming hot kachoris paired with spicy sabzi. As dawn breaks, the streets come alive with the rich aroma of golden kachoris sizzling in ghee. Stuffed with seasoned lentils or peas, these crispy delights are served alongside a tangy, flavorful potato curry that awakens every sense. Each bite brings a satisfying crunch followed by a burst of spice and warmth. For many locals, the meal feels incomplete without a swirl of sweet jalebi on the side — the perfect balance of spice and sweetness to start the day.



Image 2: Kachori-Sabzi

Chana Dahi-Vada- Cool, Velvety And Refreshing

Varanasi's chana dahi vada is made with fresh cottage cheese balls soaked in chilled, sweetened curd. It's a lighter and sweeter version of the traditional dahi vada, Topped with masala, tamarind chutney, and a sprinkle of roasted cumin, the dish has a smooth, melt-in-the-mouth texture that offers instant relief after spicy food. It's perfect for afternoons when the city's heat rises and you want something cooling.



Image 3: Chana Dahi-Vada

Litti Chokha: A True Taste Of Varanasi's Rustic Food Culture

Litti is round wheat flour balls stuffed with roasted gram flour and spices, while chokha is a mashed vegetable preparation usually made from roasted eggplant, tomatoes, and spices. The smoky flavours of the chokha and the earthy taste of litti make this dish a must-try. It's often served with a dollop of ghee (clarified butter) for added richness. Litti chokha is both hearty and wholesome, often enjoyed by workers and travellers alike.



Image 4: Litti Chokha

Banarasi Dahi Golgappe – A Smooth-And-Crisp Indulgence

Varanasi brings its own inventive flair to the traditional golgappa. Here, the puris aren't dunked in spicy water. Instead, they're generously packed with sweet yogurt, tangy tamarind chutney, and a sprinkle of chaat masala. The crisp outer shell paired with the velvety filling creates a flavour harmony that's equal parts sweet and tangy. It's a beloved treat among locals, who often wrap up their evening strolls with a plate or two. Light, refreshing, and delightfully experimental, this version is perfect for anyone who enjoys playful twists on classic street food.



Image 5: Banarasi Dahi Golgappe

Malaiyyo: The Whipped Wonder of Benares

Malaiyyo is one of Varanasi's most cherished winter treats, celebrated for its airy texture and delicate flavour. Available only during the colder months, this seasonal speciality is crafted from hand-whipped milk froth infused with saffron and cardamom, creating a sweet, fragrant cloud-like dessert. Locals claim that the finest malaiyyo is found in the winding lanes near the Vishwanath Temple. Savouring a bowl of it while watching the serene Ganga Aarti at Dashashwamedh Ghat is an experience that stays long after the moment has passed.

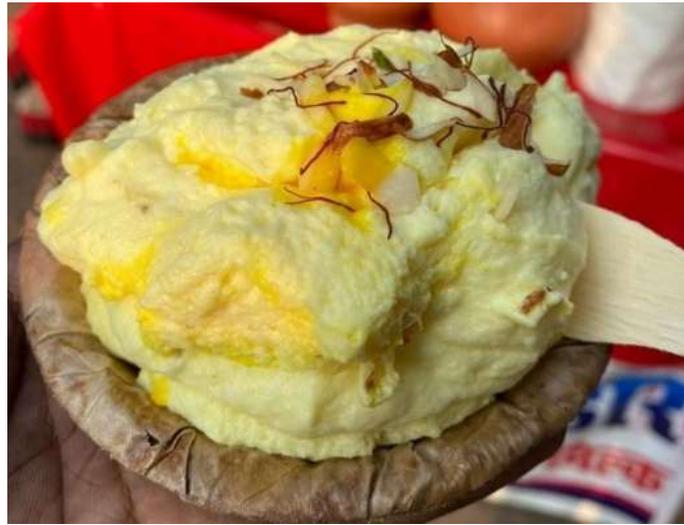


Image 6: Malaiyyo

Blue Lassi Shop: Varanasi's Timeless Sip of Heritage

This shop on Dashashwamedh road offers over 90 lassi varieties, each a testament to its commitment to creating the perfect blend of flavours. From classic options like strawberry and chocolate to unique combinations such as banana with coconut and strawberry-pomegranate, the choices are as diverse as they are delicious. The hand-churned lassi served at Blue Lassi is prepared with care, using fresh fruits, nuts, and traditional methods. The natural tanginess of the yoghurt is enhanced with saffron, cumin seeds, pistachios, or cashew nuts, resulting in a mouth-watering experience that leaves a lasting impression.



Image 7: Blue Lassi

Banarasi Paan – Varanasi’s Iconic After-Meal Treat

No food journey in Varanasi feels complete without paan. It’s more than a simple mouth freshener—it reflects the city’s culture, warmth, and hospitality. Banarasi paan is prepared using betel leaf, gulkand, fennel seeds, and a secret blend of ingredients that changes from shop to shop. Chewing paan after a meal is a cherished local habit that has been followed for generations. It’s also offered to guests as a sign of respect. With its sweetness and refreshing taste, paan leaves a lingering memory of Banaras long after you’ve gone.



Image 8: Banarasi Paan

Together, these unique dishes capture the essence of Benares—its heritage, hospitality, and timeless charm—making every food experience truly unforgettable.

About the Author

Dr. Gitika Verma is an Endodontist by profession who loves to fiddle with her imagination. Penning stories on the lives of women interests her a lot. Through her writings she wants to create awareness on women related issues and break gender taboos and stereotypes. A mother of two, she’s also a fitness enthusiast and has run several marathons all over India.

