

Eat the streets: Discovering Mumbai's best street food



Chaat ingredients at a street-side stall

Mumbai is a dizzying, dazzling metropolis, a city that never tires and never sleeps. If you've ever wondered what keeps this Indian megacity going, you'll find the answer in its buzzing streets, filled with a thousand hawkers dishing out cheap eats. Locals always find time to pause at rickety carts in narrow by-lanes for a street-food treat or a glass of 'cutting chai' (the city's famous half-measure of tea) helping a million-strong workforce get on with their day.

Born out of necessity, the city's legendary street food has its origins in its now vanished mills and factories, where multitudes of workers needed quick, inexpensive meals on the go. The streets of Mumbai still burst into life each morning like a rhythmical orchestra as a legion of mobile chefs engage in a daily ritual of chopping, spicing, grilling and frying that goes on late into the night.

As you roam the streets, seek out delicacies such as poori bhaji, a flaky deep fried breakfast pastry served with spicy potato curry, or dabeli, mashed potato with a mouth-watering topping of grapes, spiced peanuts, onions and garlic chutney, sandwiched in a grilled bun. Here are our top picks of the tantalizing street-food on offer in Mumbai.

Chaat your mouth

Chaat - a word derived from the Hindi term chaatna meaning 'to

lick' - is Mumbai's most famous street-food goody. Every nook and corner of the city has its own chaat vendors, serving up spicy, crispy and tangy eats to eager crowds of locals. Favorite chaat ingredients include sev (crunchy fried noodles), pulses, potato patties, onions, coriander and chillies, seasoned with the spice mix known as chaat masala. To indulge in the best Mumbai chaats, head to the crowded khau gallis (food lanes) around Churchgate Station, Ghatkopar station or Bandra's Carter Road. Also seek out the bhelpuri - Mumbai-style chaat with crispy bhel noodles, puffed rice and tamarind chutney - served at Girgaum Chowpatty and Juhu Beach.

The snack that defines Mumbai

Like an Indian version of a veggie burger, vada pav or vada pao is Mumbai's most beloved native dish. A deep-fried potato dumpling stuffed into a bun with a generous portion of spicy green chillies and garlic chutney, vada pav is what urban legends are made of. The story goes that in the early 1970s, a street-food vendor at Dadar station concocted the snack in a moment of inspiration and it was seized on by a local political movement as a symbol of Marathi pride, ensuring enduring popularity. Politics aside, you can still taste the original vada pav, served by the same family for forty years at the iconic Vaidyas' stall, situated on platform 1 of