

Indian Cuisine – A Kosher Guide by Region

Kosher in the Most Vegetarian Country on Earth

India is one of the easiest countries in the world for kosher eating—if you stick to vegetarian food. A massive percentage of the country is **strictly vegetarian or vegan**, often for religious reasons. This affects how food is labeled, cooked, and served—especially in restaurants and hotels.

- ✓ **Across India, it's standard to mark all dishes “veg” or “non-veg.”**
- ✓ In most restaurants and hotels, you'll see clear signage at buffets or on menus.
- ✓ Staff are usually aware and careful—you can ask and get clear answers.

This guide walks through the **regional cuisines of India** and how to eat kosher in each.

● **North India (Delhi, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, etc.)**

Style: Creamy, wheat-heavy, spiced but not overly hot; lots of paneer and lentils.

Kosher-Friendly Dishes:

- **Chana Masala** (Spiced chickpeas)
- **Rajma** (Kidney bean curry)
- **Dal Tadka or Dal Makhani** (Yellow or black lentils)
- **Aloo Gobi** (Potato & cauliflower)
- **Baingan Bharta** (Smoked mashed eggplant)
- **Paneer Dishes** – Often fine; ask if rennet-free
- **Vegetable Biryani** – Ask if broth is vegetarian
- **Chapati / Roti / Paratha** – Usually flour and water

Halachic Notes:

- **Ghee** (clarified butter) is fine.
- **Paneer** – Often made with vegetarian rennet in India; ask to be sure.

- **Shared fryer oil** – Ask if strict.

● **South India (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh)**

Style: Rice-based, coconut-rich, spicier than the north; fermented batters, light soups, and tropical vegetables.

Kosher-Friendly Dishes:

- **Idli & Dosa** – Fermented rice and lentil pancakes
- **Sambar** – Lentil-vegetable stew
- **Rasam** – Spicy tamarind broth
- **Upma** – Savory semolina porridge
- **Vegetable Curries with Coconut Milk**

Halachic Notes:

- **Coconut oil and coconut milk** – Fine.
- **Asafoetida (Hing)** – Fine.
- **Ask about frying oil** if strict.

● **West India (Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa)**

Gujarati Cuisine:

- Largely vegetarian, lightly spiced, often sweet-savory.
- Thali meals with rice, dal, vegetables, yogurt, and pickles.

Maharashtrian Cuisine:

- Spicy and diverse, includes both veg and non-veg options.
- Many lentil and vegetable dishes.

Goan Cuisine:

- Known for fish and seafood dishes, but many Goan recipes use kosher fish like kingfish, sardines, and mackerel.
- Kosher options may be possible if you verify the fish and preparation.
- Vegetarian Goan curries and rice dishes are also common.

Kosher-Friendly Dishes:

- **Thepla** (Spiced flatbread)
- **Kadhi** (Yogurt-based curry)
- **Shaak** (Dry vegetable curry)
- **Vegetarian Thali** – Confirm veg-only if it's a mixed restaurant

Halachic Notes:

- **Shared oil** – Ask if strict.
- **Kosher fish** – May be available if verified.

East India (Bengal, Odisha, Assam)

Style: Homey, vegetable-based dishes; strong use of mustard seeds, eggplant, potatoes, and greens.

Kosher-Friendly Dishes:

- **Aloo Posto** (Potatoes with poppy seeds)
- **Shukto** (Mild mixed vegetable stew)
- **Luchi with Cholar Dal** (Fried flatbread with lentils)

Halachic Notes:

- Vegetarian options are common—ask clearly.
- Labeling and food awareness apply here as well.

Drinks

- **Chai (Tea with milk and spices)** – Fine.
- **Lassi (Yogurt drink)** – Fine.
- **Water, soda, juice** – All fine.
- **Buttermilk** – Fine.
- **Alcohol** – Most local beer, whiskey, and gin are fine. Avoid wine unless labeled kosher.

Note: Even if small amounts of wine are cooked into dishes, they are normally **batel** and not a halachic issue unless central to the dish.

Halachic Notes

- **Bishul Akum** – Usually not a concern with vegetarian curries and lentils, especially in commercial settings. I would not worry about Bishul Akum at all in India in commercial settings, like hotels and restaurants.
- **Ghee** – Pure dairy fat, not a problem.
- **Hing (asafoetida)** – not a problem.
- **All cheeses** – Ask about rennet, but most Indian brands are vegetarian. Ask if the cheese is vegetarian (although they may look at you strangely. Remember Indians/Hindus consider the cows holy).
- **Pas Palter** – Breads, Pastries, and Pastas etc... are all fine, as they're commercially produced.
- **Toleh B'nemanim** – You can ask and rely on answers. Indian food culture takes veg status seriously.

IN **BON APPÉTIT, INDIAN-STYLE:** The most common Indian expression before a meal is simply:

“Please eat” – *Khaaiye* (खाइए) or *Kha lijiye* (खा लीजिए)

It's polite, welcoming, and said with a smile.