



EAT *Sip* **TRIP**



Photo courtesy of Nikhil Merchant.

7 innovative ways Indian chefs are adding chai to their menus

By **Joanna Lobo** | October 26, 2017 1:30 pm

We Indians have always loved our chai. In Mumbai, during the monsoon, it is common to find people gathered around a *tapri* (a small shed), sipping on

steaming glasses of masala chai – the ubiquitous drink made by boiling black tea and milk with a variety of spices like cardamom, cinnamon, cloves and peppercorns.

Chai is a part of every Indian's daily life, and as such, has moved beyond being just a beverage. Chefs and bartenders are finding innovative ways to add this traditional flavor to their contemporary menus, through salads, popsicles, ice cream and even cocktails. Tea is used to add color to the popular Punjabi dish, *chhole*; the 'masala' adds a spicy kick to everything from craft beer to ice cream, and you can even find molecular gastronomic versions of India's favorite drink.

Here are a few of the most innovative ways Mumbai chefs are bringing Chai to diners' palates:

Masala Chai Cake



Photo courtesy of Rutvika Charegaonkar.

Baker Rutvika Charegaonkar makes a **masala chai cake** to cater to her family's obsession with the drink. "While making the tea, I add fresh lemongrass and *tulsi* (basil) and make a strong, tart brew, without sugar and milk. The frosting has basil seeds and flowers straight from the plant. It gives the cake a very refreshing taste – something familiar and yet decadent," she says.

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Chai Waffle



Photo courtesy of Le 15 Café.

Pablo Naranjo Aguilar, head chef of **Le 15 Café** serves a decadent chai waffle, which has white chocolate and black tea sauce, candied hazelnuts, lemongrass and cardamom foam topped with cinnamon macaron shells. The Cordon Bleu-trained chef says, “Chai is already consumed with some sort of biscuit, so I had

the idea of having it as a sweet waffle.”

“For me, chai describes the Indian palate,” Aguilar says. “It’s tea, which everyone in the world drinks, but here it is served with spices. It is sweet, milky, full of fragrance and aromas, and as simple and complex as it sounds, the flavors and spice mix changes from region to region. For me it’s just like magic.”

Chai Caramelized Marzipan



Photo courtesy of Thea Tammeleht.

Mumbai-based Estonian patissier Thea Tammeleht creates fun, Indian-flavored marzipan sweets using handpicked mamra almonds. Her version featuring chai has organic sugar with a hint of fresh spices and is **finished in rich Belgian chocolate**.

Masala Chai Nightcap



Photo courtesy of Nikhil Merchant.

Restaurateur and food journalist Nikhil Merchant's **Bedtime Masala Chai-High** is his answer to the Irish coffee.

"India has an after-dinner culture that includes coffee or tea. My Bedtime Cocktails are for people who don't want to binge drink but still want that post-dinner drink," Merchant says.

Merchant starts off by making the same decoction for chai – boiling *hari chai ki patti* (green tea leaves), ginger and cardamom, adding tea leaves to the stock and letting it brew. For the final step, instead of adding the usual milk or cream, he puts in Bailey Irish Cream and either sugar, syrup or honey. This is served cold or warm, in chai glasses. "It tastes like Thai tea with an Indian kick. There is a

delicious underlying spice kick from the ginger, the sweetness of cardamom, the grassiness of the *chai patti* and the acrid dryness of the Indian chai, with Baileys giving it zing, sweetness and creaminess,” he says.

Another more potent variation on this uses bourbon and condensed milk.

Chai Ice Cream



Photo courtesy of Bina Doshi.

A common tea ritual is dunking Parle G biscuits into piping hot chai. Chef Bina Doshi, founder of **Bina's Ice Cream**, has taken this ritual to ice cream. Her Chai Biskoot is a dark and creamy ice cream with the flavor of the biscuit mixed in with the masala and milk of the chai. Doshi hand churns her ice cream in a wooden sancha, using ice and salt. She stirs the milk with the required

ingredients until it turns into ice cream. The result is a dessert free of preservatives, artificial flavoring or added fat or cream.

Tea chhole





Photo courtesy of Mitesh Rangras.

Chhole is a semi-dry Indian dish made with chickpeas or chana. Many families add in tea leaves to give the chickpeas that characteristic dark shade. Sometimes, the chhole is soaked overnight in a tea liquor mixture for extra color.

“My mother makes a bouquet garni (a bundle of herbs) by tying together cinnamon, cloves, black tea and black cardamom in a Muslin cloth,” says chef Mitesh Rangras. “She boils the chana for about 40 odd minutes with the bundle – it can be easily removed. It gives great flavor and color to the chhole.”

Masala chai beer



Photo courtesy of Barking Deer Brewpub .

The **Barking Deer Brewpub** has a masala chai-spiked ale on tap. The Monsoon Special Brown Ale is brewed with real tea, cardamom, ginger, cinnamon and clove. Founder Gregory Kroitzsh wanted people to replace their cup of chai – a rainy day staple – with a mug of chai beer.



Asian food, beer, Chai, India, Indian food, Tea, International Cuisine, Kitchen, Pantry