

MOVEABLE FEAST



From an early age, Kirti Dayani began appreciating the varied nature of Indian cuisine in her hometown of Mumbai. For the past 16 years, she has been conducting her Indian culinary courses here in Singapore.

Through her culinary workshops, Kirti shares her love of Indian cuisine and culture with her students, who are both locals and expatriates.

She started out in Singapore when a good friend asked her to step in and take over a workshop. There's been no looking back since. Kirti says her workshops give her "lots of opportunities to meet people from all walks of life".

Kirti says the general misconception of Indian cuisine is that it is "too spicy, too oily and most often associated with the Northern, *tandoori* food. However, India has over 30 states and union territories, each with a distinct culture and regional cuisine, so Indian food actually offers a great deal of variety. Within India itself, the simple *lentil* curry has been adapted over and over again to accommodate diverse regional preferences, so that Gujarati *lentil* curry, for example, tastes distinctly different from the Sindhi or Punjabi version. Indian cuisine has also been able to assimilate the flavours of other cultures, so you have Indo-Chinese cuisine which includes zesty Manchurian dishes".

An affable person, Kirti, who's in her 40s, enthuses about her experimentation with Indian cuisine. Always mindful of keeping her dishes healthy, she substitutes *ghee* with vegetable oils and has incorporated soy into her recipes so that even lactose-intolerant people can enjoy Indian dishes. She is especially proud of her latest recipe, a soy-based yoghurt!

Over *masala* tea and *pakodas* (Indian vegetable fritters), Kirti says she always tells her students to improvise and make do with whatever ingredients are available. For example, certain Goan dishes require the use of cashew vinegar, which may not be readily available; in this case, local vinegar, will do. She adds, "the secret to mastering Indian cuisine lies in the art of combining spices. Spices should enhance, not overwhelm, and with a little practice, one can indeed master this art."

innovative Indian

Text and photos by Jaswinder Kaur Gill