

STREETS TO SAVOUR

From *dosa* to *dabeli* and *pakoda* to *puliyogere*, the Silicon Valley of India relishes pan-Indian flavours, writes **Ramya Srinivasan**

Once hailed as the Garden City and a haven for retirees, Bengaluru is now officially the Silicon Valley of India. It is interesting to observe that about 50 per cent of the city's migrant population belongs to the highly educated segment. While the old-timers are trying to make sense of all the influx as they continue to hold on to their heritage and linguistic integrity,

newcomers are busy creating their own identity as they seep into the culture of this charming city. Other than the allure of the monsoonal rains, the single most unifying factor amongst Bangaloreans is their fetish for lip-smacking food. Little wonder then, that cosy cafés and bistros are mushrooming all over the city. Eating has become more about the experience than just the food. However, the eclectic crowd of the city has kept the vibrant street food culture alive and kicking.

As we begin a gastronomical trip around Bengaluru, the first chain of stalls—nothing less than a phenomenon here—that catches our attention is the '99 variety *dosa*' stalls across the city, brazenly announcing that this is the *dosa* capital of the country. At first sight, it is just an ordinary road stall hosted on a mobile cart, but the varieties are simply staggering and you will see some fine examples of fusion cuisine. Around 6 pm, this *dosa* cart is mobbed with verbal orders flying in the air. Some pedestrians stop by just to partake in the visual experience of the making of the *dosa*. The batter is laid out quickly in a thin circular spread and then a base of tomato or red chilli-based chutney is applied on it along with dollops of butter. The toppings could range from the usual potato or onion to a mixture of mushroom, capsicum, corn, *paneer*, cheese, peas, cauliflower...you name it. *Palak dosa* with a *masala* twist is among their bestsellers. You can even sample a *hakka* noodles *dosa*—noodles blended with vegetables, soy and Indian chutney and laid out carefully on the *dosa* before the final fold—if you are adventurous enough. Forget those calories and watch the intermittent sprinkling of oil on the *dosa* in significant amounts, intelligently done by poking holes on the oil sachet and squeezing it. Now, pop a piece of the *dosa* in your mouth and wait for that flavour burst to hit you!

A must-stop in Bengaluru for fans of street food is 'Food Street' in V V Puram. A walk down this street is a great way to sample the different options the city provides. It has everything you are looking for and more in one destination. The best way to enjoy your outing here is to go with a big group of friends so you can grab a bite off everyone's plate.

If you enter Food Street at 5.30 pm, you would hardly suspect that the place will be teeming with crowds in another hour. This is prep time for the stall owners—they're busy preparing their dough, cutting vegetables, heating up oil in massive *kadhai*.

The first tiny stall to the left boasts a huge bowl of hot *samosa* under a nondescript umbrella; to



Photographs by Ramya Srinivasan



Matka rabdi
served chilled



The ubiquitous
fruit juice
counter in
Bengaluru



Swirls of jalebi
drawn on hot oil



One of the '99
variety dosa'
available on the
streets



Opposite page:
Food Street
at dusk



balance your taste buds, the stall owner serves up delicious *phirni*. Next in line is Shri Vasavi Chatnis; in this stall, the men are busy with three huge frying pans of hot oil—spicy baby corn *pakoda* in the first, crispy *kodubale* (rice flour dough and yoghurt mixed to make savoury rings) in the second; and swirls of *jalebi* in the third. For a more wholesome meal, you can try the tangy lemon rice or spicy *puliyogere* (tamarind rice).

Piping hot fluffy *idli* and Mysore *masala dosa* are favourites on Food Street but if you're keen to try an authentic Karnataka dish, go for an *akki roti*. Made of rice flour instead of wheat, it is a Karnataka staple and can keep you satiated for hours. It's accompanied by aubergine-based gravy; the flavours work in perfect sync. You can go North Indian with the zesty *tawa pulao*, *parantha* or extra-soft *roomali roti*. And if you dare, try the pasta roll, where pasta is cooked, marinated and stuffed in a traditional *kathi* roll or bread *pakoda*, crunchy outside and soft inside, sandwiched with layers of mashed potato, peas, *paneer* and strands of carrot.

Bengaluru is currently in the grips of *chaat* mania and there's plenty at Food Street. At Dev Sagar, which serves Mumbai-style *chaat*, including *vada pav* and *dabeli*, the *dahi samosa chaat* is a winner. With liberal sprinkling of coriander, strips of red beet and even a handful of pomegranate, the tangy and sweet flavours mix well.

Now, for dessert, and the options available in this small stretch of road are mind-boggling: hot *jamun* and *jalebi* or chilled *rasmalai* and *rabdi* in earthen pots; cold *badaam* milk; *gulkand* ice-cream (a crowd favourite); mango or *kesar kulfi*. For the health-conscious, there is the juice counter, a common sight in Bengaluru. Nothing quite like a glass of musk melon juice to beat the summer heat!

Indeed, Bengaluru's food culture continues to expand to accommodate the tastes of people from different parts of the country—and world—who have made this city their home. Take, for instance, 100 Feet Road in Indira Nagar, which is home to countless restaurants serving up Thai, Lebanese, Indian, Chinese, Mexican, Italian, Mediterranean, Japanese and several other cuisines. Despite the fine dining experiences on offer, though, the enticement of street food refuses to wane. In almost every major part of the city, whether it is Jayanagar, BTM or Koramangala, there are culinary trails that will take you to that particular stall with the best aromatic tea or the softest corn cobs. Just keep your eyes and ears open, and your nose alert for that special whiff!

