



## A TASTE OF GUJARAT

The Indian state is renowned for its colourful vegetarian cuisine. Vina Patel shares the highlights

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### SMART TRAVELLER

#### THE INGREDIENT

*Dhana-jeera* is a homemade spice mixture made of roasted coriander and cumin seeds, blended into a masala powder. It creates an intense aroma: the coriander seeds impart a citrusy-sweet flavour, while the cumin seeds add a light hint of smokiness. It's the secret ingredient of Gujarati cooking.

LEFT: Khandvi, a popular savoury snack made with chickpea flour

#### MUST-TRY DISHES

##### KHANDVI

These bright-yellow rolls get their colour from the chickpea flour with which they're made. They're bursting with flavour thanks to the addition of mustard seeds, sesame seeds, shredded coconut and coriander.

##### PATRA

This classic dish contains leafy vegetables with a spicy chickpea flour batter. It can be served steamed with oil, deep-fried or stir-fried with sesame and mustard seeds.

##### BATATA NA BHAJIYA

You'll find food stalls serving these potato fritters all over Gujarat. The potatoes are dipped in batter, then deep-fried until they turn golden-brown and form a crispy outer layer. They're served piping-hot with slices of red onion, a splash of lime juice, some salt and red chili powder.

I grew up in Gujarat, a state in western India, as the youngest of five children. As we were a large family, plenty of people gathered to prepare feasts, and I was blessed that the women in our immediate family were all fantastic cooks.

Across India, whenever anyone takes a bite of food, they taste the flavour of Gujarat. That flavour comes from the salt: almost 80% of Indian sea salt is produced in this one state. Gujaratis are also famous for their sweet tooth, and home cooks almost always sprinkle a spoonful of sugar or pop a small ball of jaggery (a type of cane sugar) into savoury dishes. Dhal served in Gujarati homes typically has a sweetish-spicy taste.

While there are some communities in the state that eat meat, the majority of Gujaratis are vegetarian. We have to thank the rich history of vegetarian cooking for informing the modern recipes of today. Plant-based diets are common in the state because of the influence of Jainism. Jains can't consume anything that's the result of injuring or killing another living thing, which means no meat or other animal products (including gelatine and

eggs). Even root vegetables are forbidden, as their removal from the ground is considered an act of killing another living thing. While Gujarati cuisine is informed by Jainism, our vegetarian diet tends to be slightly more relaxed. We take advantage of the abundance of locally grown vegetables, and our modern diets include dairy (notably ghee, cheese and yoghurt) and root vegetables. The cuisine is unlike any other in India.

Our traditional, spiced snacks form what's known as farsans, which are enjoyed all over the country. In India, farsans are as much a tradition as eating tapas in Spain or meze in Greece, where small plates form a larger spread. Many of the plant-based dishes use gluten-free chickpea flour; others are steamed, meaning they're light and irresistible. Two quintessential farsans are *khandvi* (melt-in-the-mouth rolls made with chickpea flour and buttermilk) and *nylon khaman* (yellow sponge made with chickpea flour).

This is an edited extract from *From Gujarat with Love*, by Vina Patel, published by Pavilion Books (£20).

IMAGE: JONATHAN LOVERKIN