

South Asia – India



- The Indus Valley civilization, one of the oldest in the world, goes back at least 5,000 years.
- South Asia is sometimes called a subcontinent and includes India as well as Pakistan and Bangladesh. Of these countries, India is the largest.
- There are many languages spoken in India. Hindi is the national language and is spoken by 30% of the people. English is used for much of the national, political and commercial communication. There are many other languages and dialects throughout the subcontinent. The names of some of are Bengali, Telugu, Tamil, Urdu, and Gujarati.
- India is a land of startling contrasts. There are deserts, mountains, and jungles.
- Most Indians are Hindus. They eat no beef and often are rigid vegetarians. Their food and recipes reflect their religious beliefs.
- Most of Pakistan's people are Muslims. About 12% of India's population is Muslim.

Food in India

- Indian cookery varies widely from region to region and even from one cook to another. Some best known traditional dishes have many variations.
- Many dishes are meatless in keeping with the Hindu religious customs.
- The vegetarian cuisine relies on a variety of dry beans, lentils, or split peas as a protein source. These are called "dal" or "pulses."
- A variety of fruits and vegetables appear daily. Favorites include mangoes, potatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, papaya and onions.
- Rice is a staple grain although whole wheat flour is used especially to make a simple fried bread called a "pur".
- Spices are the trademark of dishes from this region. Important spices include coriander, cardamom, cumin, ginger, garlic, cinnamon, saffron, and red chilies. Far back in history, it was the spices of this region that drew explorers and traders.
- The term "curry" really refers to specific recipes, not the seasoning used. In India, this seasoning mixture is made special for each individual recipe. Curry powder is strictly a packaged item for western cooks.

- Tea is the most important beverage served in India. It is served sweetened with milk.
- In India, the elaborate combinations of fresh seasonings are called “masalas”.
- Often milk is made into yogurt. The yogurt provides a “cooling” taste when eaten with the spicy dishes in meals.
- Fish and seafood are used in some regions.

Recipes

“Raytas” are refreshing yogurt mixtures frequently served with Indian meals. A “rayta” is like a salad. It provides a cooling contrast to the main highly seasoned dishes of a meal. Its base is always yogurt, mixed with fruits, vegetables, and seasonings.

Recipe: Cucumber and Tomato Rayta



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