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Trends of exotic food consumption in Puducherry

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Abstract

People of Puducherry are multi-national and multi-ethnic by nature and have a cosmopolitan culture but still they have a strong hold to the native tradition of the region. A survey was conducted to know the availability of exotic food in Puducherry and the trends of consumption of exotic foods by people of Puducherry. It was found that Vietnamese, Chinese, European/Continental, Arabian and Malaysian cuisines were being offered in various restaurants. Of the 26 restaurants surveyed, 69 percent were multi cuisine restaurants. Exotic food items like Shawarma, Alfaham, Barbecue chicken, Crunchy chicken cheese balls, Chicken cordon bleu, Chicken lollipop, Dragon chicken were the fast moving dishes. Calamari, Pastas, Chicken milanese, Xtasi pizzas, Thai chicken curry, Helena cheese burger were the trending dishes. Greater awareness of global cuisines combined with a larger disposable income leads many consumers to seek experiential eating or fine dining which has increased the consumption of exotic foods in Puducherry.

Keywords: Exotic foods, multi cuisine, Chinese cuisine, Arabian cuisine, European cuisine

Introduction

Exotic foods are generally foods that are not native to one's country. The Union Territory of Puducherry is one of the most popular tourist destinations in South India. People of Puducherry are multi-national and multi-ethnic by nature and thus have a cosmopolitan culture but still they have a strong hold to the native tradition of the region. Puducherry was a French outpost until the late 20th Century. That is the main reason why we can find the cuisine of Puducherry consists of a mixture of Tamil and French influence. The French are really passionate about their food and their cooking style. Though initially they had only their colony set up in Puducherry, they slowly passed on their own legacy in the form of their different variety of cuisines ^[1]. In Puducherry cuisine, minimal spices are used. The most common spices such as Cardamom and Cloves are not used in the powdered form while cooking ^[2]. The French cuisine has a lot of influence within Puducherry. Multiple French restaurants are located in the area, including bakeries, cafes, seafood restaurants and traditional French restaurants. There was also much cross-pollination between Puducherry and South Asia and Vietnam (both were under French control) as people travelled between these two locations for business, for administration and as part of the armed forces ^[3]. The locals have, however modified the same with a lavish use of Indian spices. This resulted in a unique Puducherrian touch to the dishes. Cuisines from the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala exert their influences, and numerous restaurants offer Chettinad, Udipi and Hyderabadi specialties. Food aficionados can also enjoy Italian, Arabian and Chinese food here. Dishes from Punjabi as well as North-eastern cuisine make an appearance in several menus ^[4]. The experiences range from luxurious fine dining to quick street food, with the ambience as varied as the cost. With this background, this paper aims to explore the desire and availability of variety of exotic foods in Puducherry.

Materials and methods

The study was conducted in 26 restaurants of Puducherry. The chief of each restaurant were interviewed using a pre structured questionnaire. Responses related to type of cuisine offered, fast moving dishes and famous/trending dishes in each restaurant were recorded. Data were entered into MS Excel database, exported, and analyzed using SPSS Version 20.0 (Armonk, NY: IBM Corp).

Results and Discussion

Puducherry restaurants were classified based on the number of cuisines offered by them as shown in figure 1. Out of the 26 restaurant considered for the study, 8 restaurants offered only Indian cuisine (31%), 12 restaurants offered two cuisines (46%), 3 restaurants offered three cuisines (11%), 2 restaurants offered four cuisines (8%) and 1 restaurant offered five cuisines (4%). It was observed that most of the restaurants were multi cuisine. The main reason for this may be to attract tourists to visit Puducherry from different parts of the world and westernization among the local people.

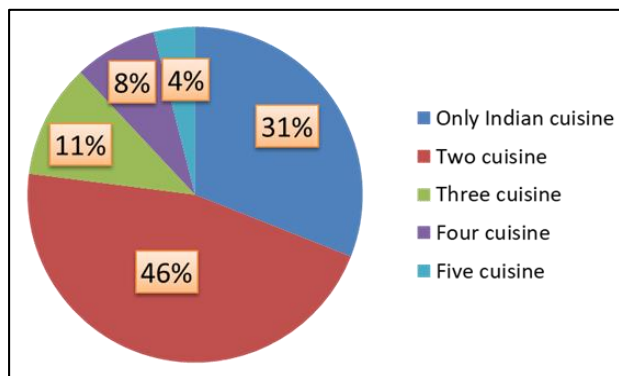


Fig 1: Types of restaurants

Various types of cuisines such as Chinese, Arabian, French, Italian, Singaporean, Vietnamese, Thai and Malaysian cuisines were being offered as shown in figure 2. This indicates the diversity of global cuisines among the Puducherry restaurants and the food preferences of local residents. Greater awareness of global cuisines combined with a larger disposable income is leading many consumers to seek experiential eating or fine dining. Similar findings were described by Kumar R *et al.*, (2019) [5].

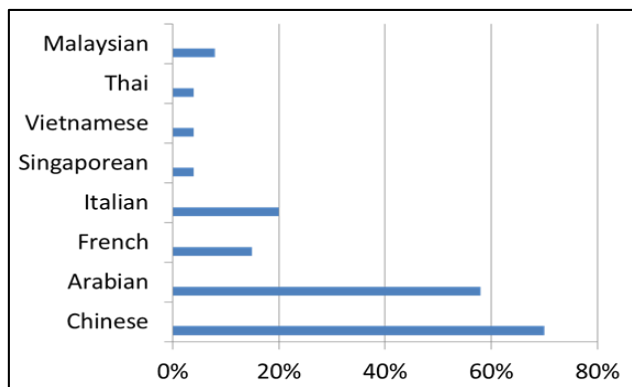


Fig 2: Types of cuisines

It was observed that many of the exotic food items sold were modified by adding spices to suit Indian taste buds but it was also observed that authentic exotic food was also served in many restaurants due to the presence of foreign population in the study area. Though there were many dishes served, only a few were fast moving and popular/trending among the people in respective cuisine as listed in table 1 and 2 respectively.

Table 1: Fast moving dishes in Puducherry restaurants

| Cuisine | Fast moving dishes |
|----------------------|---|
| Arabian | Shawarma, Alfaham chicken |
| European/Continental | Crunchy chicken cheese balls, Chicken carbon bleu |
| Chinese | Chicken lollipop, Dragon chicken |

Table 2: Trending dishes in Puducherry restaurants

| Cuisine | Trending dishes |
|----------|------------------------------------|
| Italian | Calamari, Pastas |
| French | Chicken Milanese, Wood fried pizza |
| Thai | Thai chicken curry |
| American | Helena cheese burger |

In addition to the above mentioned dishes, some of the unusual foods such as Baby shark curry, Snail fry, Pigeon fry, Rabbit fry, Suvarotti (Goat spleen) and Tala kari (Goat head) were also served in some of the restaurants. Chinese and Arabian cuisines were found most popular. The study showed that Shawarma was the most preferred exotic food in 69 percent of the restaurants in Puducherry. Further it was found that all the restaurants were employing a single chef for preparing all kinds of cuisines which may reduce the authenticity of the respective cuisines. Chinese food served here is altered according to Indian people's imagination and expectation. Therefore, it could be considered as a new cuisine, the Indian-Chinese cuisine, which is neither Indian cuisine nor Chinese cuisine. This is in line with the findings of Sankar A *et al.*, (2017) [6].



Shawarma

Wood fried pizza

The idea of online food delivery is quickly spreading among the people of Puducherry due to the increase in the number of the working population and their hectic work-life culture. Restaurants are coming up with innovative ideas every day to provide better customer satisfaction and retain customers in the long run which has resulted in a massive competition between online food delivery apps and particular restaurants providing free home delivery services. People find this service as convenient, time saving, variety of menu availability, easy payment and discounts. Similar findings were reported by Saxena A (2019) [7].

Conclusion

Changing food preferences, evolving food habits, dual-income households, increasing health awareness, more dining-out options, and rising aspirations are contributing to bring a tectonic shift to the food plate, especially in urban households. This exploration of food outside of the conventional gamut is not only leading to the increase in the demand for foreign cuisine but also the exotic ingredients, where people are ready to play around with foreign recipes at home too. Consumption of thoroughly cooked unfamiliar species such as snails should be recommended rather than raw, live or undercooked snails which may lead to many parasitic infections as snails act as intermediate host for a number of parasites. More people of Puducherry are travelling abroad, which has increased their awareness about global cuisines. Engaging specialist chefs for each cuisine separately will enhance the authenticity of the cuisines served. The Puducherry Tourism Department has been conducting an

annual food festival, generally in July, to celebrate and showcase the diversity of the cuisines available in the city. It is an excellent opportunity to sample a vast majority of the food experience on offer which also plays a major role in changing the taste preference of Puducherry people.

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