



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *World Food Through the Eyes of London Restaurants*! I hope you are not hungry, or this might be a painful read.

This project is different from all other kinds of gastronomy guides you have ever read. Here there are no Michelin stars or restaurants that will have you selling your most prized possessions just so you can afford to visit them. The aim is to show the diversity of gastronomy in London and introduce you, the reader, to specific world cuisines, their history, main ingredients and dishes, and influences. In a city that has so much diversity and quality to offer, it is an atrocity to limit ourselves to tasteless chains with overpriced food. Because while some chains turn out to be of good quality, they are rarely authentic and provide a misleading window of observation into different cultures.

How to read this project:

This project visits a country from each continent and brings you back not only a review from an authentic restaurant but also a feature article to accustom you to the country's gastronomic history. In this way, start by reading the feature article to better understand the review and the dishes mentioned.

What to take away from this project:

Challenge yourself and find different places to eat. If the prospects of not knowing what you should eat scare you, start by doing some research and then lend yourself to the adventure. You don't have to leave London to travel around the world.



Afghan

GASTRONOMY

*"When you're wounded and left on
Afghanistan's plains,
And the women come out to cut up what
remains,
Jest roll to your rifle and blow out your
brains
An' go to your Gawd like a soldier..."*
Rudyard Kipling

You, like me before this project, might have a somewhat damaged view of Afghanistan, tinted by its decades of war and portrayal in the western media, but that is about to change! Despite the tortured political history, Afghan people are said to be one of the friendliest nations in the world and their food is worth talking about. To understand Afghanistan's culinary influences, it is vital to look at the country's geographical context. Located in North Asia, Afghanistan borders Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, Pakistan and Iran, and was, for centuries, the place where important trade routes between India, China, the Middle East and Europe converged. All of this has influenced the Afghan food we can find today.

Out of all the geographical influences, Afghan gastronomy is more heavily influenced by the Persian (Iran) and Indian cuisines where it adopted the custom of cooking with *sabzi* - spinach or green herbs - and chillies, respectively. However, the Afghan gastronomy still has its own particularities such as the hearty and fatty dishes to help face the harsh winters or the liberal use of dried fruit and nuts. Something particular to Afghan food, and contrary to the gastronomies that surround it, is the moderate use of spice. Afghans prefer their food not to be hot and pungent but a blend between spiciness and good taste.

Bread is an important part of the Afghan meal and is often used as a scoop when meals are eaten using the hands. There are two types of traditional bread, *lawash* - a large round and flat bread - and a naan-style bread with a distinctive groovy texture and sprinkled with a variety of seeds. Another side dish that is immensely popular in Afghanistan is rice, which can be prepared as *chalaus* - fluffy white rice - or as the base for other traditional dishes such as *Kabuli Pilau* - slow-cooked meat under a dome of gently spiced rice, lentils, raisins, carrots and nuts. When it comes to meat, lamb and chicken are the most popular choices and are usually minced or marinated for long periods of time to make them tender. A common way to cook these meats is to make *korma*, curry with a base of fried onion, garlic, spices and yoghurt. This last ingredient, yoghurt, is more important to Afghan gastronomy than one might think, and it is used by Afghans in the same way as Italians use cheese - as a dressing, topping, side, you name it! Moving on to sweeter things, the *Baghlava* (Baklava) is one of the most popular desserts in Afghanistan. The sweet and nut-rich snack is made of layers of flaky filo pastry and filled with chopped nuts. The pastry parcels are then sweetened and held together by syrup or honey.

Food is extremely important to Afghan life, and Afghans welcome everyone to eat in their homes, even at short notice. There are dishes for specific circumstances, such as the *Qaabuli Pallow* - a lamb, rice and nuts dish - which is served at weddings or big family gatherings, or the *Leeti* - a sweet soup made with turmeric, cardamom, ginger and nuts -, given to breastfeeding mothers for its high nutritional value. Food is considered symbolic in Afghanistan, and stepping on a piece of bread, for example, is considered sinful. But most importantly, Afghans want to see their guests leave their homes happy and with a full stomach.

It is all of these Afghan particularities, together with the vast number of culinary influences, which has prompted the rich and varied cuisine that has survived centuries of war, invasion and internal upheaval.