

Around the World, once again, with Tony

Laurie Woolever, long-time assistant of globe-trotting chef, writer and maker of excellent television on travel, culture and food, is out with a long-planned travel guide of Anthony Bourdain's insights into what he loved most



Bourdain from his Japan and Hanoi episodes of Parts Unknown. PICS COURTESY/CNN

LAURIE WOOLEVER
PIC/STEVELEGATO



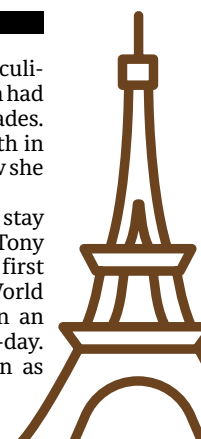
In 2016, Bourdain and Woolever worked as co-writers on the cookbook, *Appetites*. She speaks of Bourdain's offbeat ideas when it came to photographing the dishes in the book, many of which were taken from specific memories of his travels. This image was shot for the book by photographer Bobby Fisher. PIC COURTESY/ BOBBY FISHER

SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY

In the introduction to *World Travel: An Irreverent Guide* (Bloomsbury), Laurie Woolever recalls a meeting with Anthony Bourdain in his Manhattan apartment on a spring afternoon in 2018. "Tony chain-smoked and free-associated for over an hour," she writes, during a conversation which was meant to be the first of several brainstorming sessions the two were meant

to have on the places and culinary history that Bourdain had experienced over two decades. But, with his sudden death in June 2018, Woolever knew she had a lonely road ahead. "I tried very hard to stay true to the vision that Tony and I laid out during that first and only meeting about *World Travel*," says Woolever in an email interview with mid-day. "I used that conversation as

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a blueprint." Having first met him in 2002 and then worked with him on various projects over the years, Woolever had a good sense of his style of work. She explains how there were instances when she decided to drop a restaurant if it had shuttered, or included something, if she sensed that he had forgotten to mention it in that meeting. But how different is this final result from the book they had initially imagined? "I think the fundamental heart of the book remains the same."

She gave herself a few months to move slowly, until she had a chance to absorb the loss. The book was meant to include original essays by Bourdain. Writings by friends, colleagues and family now take their place.

The chapter on Paris, for instance, includes a piece by Bourdain's brother Christopher, where he writes wistfully about the siblings' first trip to France, their stay at the lavish Hôtel Le Royal Monceau and how they fell in love with jambon beurre (thin slices of fresh ham) that came with French butter on a crusty baguette, and the waffles sold out of street carts. The section on Chicago has musician and producer Steve Albini write about the hot dog and barbecue joints, the meat markets and vegan restaurants he would take Bourdain to if he were still around.

"There is a lot of Tony's voice in the book, taken from his writing for television and other remarks, that I think will be a happy comfort for those people who miss him and who loved reading and hearing what he had to say," says Woolever. Again in the Paris chapter, for instance, Bourdain's words, in bold type, nudge readers to set aside the familiar stereotypes about Paris and the French, and guides with characteristic frankness, and with a delicious expounding of the life of leisure that the city demands: "Most of us are lucky to see Paris once in a lifetime. Make the most of it by doing as little as possible. Walk a little, get lost a bit, eat, catch a breakfast buzz, have a nap, try and have sex if you can, just not with a mime. Eat again. Lounge around drinking coffee. Maybe read a book. Drink some wine, walk around a bit more, eat, repeat. See? It's easy."

His love for the French capital was also important in that it gave Woolever a point of entry into the book. It was the first section she wrote for *World*

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Anthony Bourdain
in *World Travel*

Travel. "This city held a special appeal to Tony," she says. "It was a place that awakened his earliest desire to be a chef, traveller, explorer and adventurer. Because I had the challenge of writing the text without Tony's input, I knew that Paris was a good place to start, to try and build my confidence for the process..." she explains.

In 2016, Woolever wrote a cookbook, *Appetites*, with Bourdain. She speaks of his offbeat ideas when it came to writing about and photographing the dishes in the book, many of which were taken from specific memories of his travels, and how they worked in his home kitchen to ensure that they were writing recipes that were the best expressions of the dishes.

Given the life of high adventure Bourdain led, we can't help but ask Woolever about some of the places they travelled to together during his shows, which sowed the seeds for this book. "I joined Tony and his crew in central Vietnam in 2014, and rode on the back of his scooter through the chaotic streets of the imperial city of Hue. We attended a Japanese-style bullfight at an arena in Okinawa, and we were pleased to see, while eating yakisoba, that the sport is far less violent than in the western world. We took a shinkansen [bullet train] across Japan, from Kazazawa to Tokyo, and were met at the door of the train by a driver, who skillfully led us through the chaos of Tokyo station and into a luxury car which took us to the formidable Park Hyatt Tokyo, with a breathtaking view of the city and a truly outstanding Japanese breakfast. We took another train, this one quite a bit slower, from Colombo, Sri Lanka to Jaffna, in the north, snacking on samosas and other short eats along the way, and later taking our car onto a tiny ferry, to cross an inlet and spend a day at the beach... Many of the above-mentioned locations are included in *World Travel*," she says.

Subramanian's family hails from the ancient city of Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu. Although she was born in Mumbai, she kept in touch with her roots through what her mother Saraswathi rustled up in the kitchen. "My siblings and I loved her vatha kulambu, a delicious and spicy gravy that's sambar in concentrated form. It's served to you when you are under the weather and goes well with hot steamed rice," says Subramanian.

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Jab murukku met Mumbai

Want to dedicate next Sunday's lunch to a traditional, pure vegetarian meal from the kitchens of Tirunelveli? A Chembur home chef has you covered



BISI BELE
BHAT WITH
FRITTERS

PRUTHA BHOSLE

A ROYAL recipe from Tamil Nadu combines nutritious rice flour and urad dal to make delightfully crispy twisties. Popularly known as murukku (sometimes murukulu), this is a deep fried snack that's savoury and crunchy. Thattai (flat disc) belongs to the same snack family. These delicious crackers are made using lentils, grains and spices, and come in a variety of flavours and texture. Meena Subramanian says it's her thattai and murukku that inspired the launch of Perima's Kitchen.

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Meena Subramanian



JACKFRUIT

TASTE TEST

Try Perima for the bisi bele bath

On a Sunday last month, this writer ordered sapad (whole meal) containing pal payasam (milk pudding with rice), bisi bele bath (flavourful rice cooked with tamarind juice, mixed vegetables and freshly ground spices), vendakkai pacchidi (crispy okra in yoghurt, seasoned with red chillies), beans usli (boiled beans mixed with steamed lentils, spiced with chillies), baby potato kara kari (baby potatoes roasted with freshly ground spices), rasam vadai (lentil dumplings dunked in tangy spiced rasam), avial (coconut and curd-based curry with mixed vegetables), spiced buttermilk, fritters, jackfruit, organic honey and banana chips. This spread came packed in eco-friendly containers to be served on freshly-picked banana leaves. For this writer, who was in post-COVID recovery, the healthy brunch arrived at the right time. Bisi bele bhat, which was mildly spicy, was our favourite and the payasam in that order. We found the gravies flavourful, and with the goodness of assorted veggies.



BANANA
WAFERS WITH
CHUTNEY

Tirunelveli during twice-a-year trips, and she says that's what makes all the difference to taste. She pounds fresh masala two days prior to opening her kitchen on Sunday mornings. Her recipes are all vegetarian, and she abstains from onion and garlic, too, except for the sambar. A full meal costs between ₹800 and ₹1,000.

Subramanian puts out a new menu every Monday on Instagram for customers to place early orders. "We don't have an à la carte menu; we only deliver whole meals," she says, adding that the bisi bele bath and avial are favourites with clients. "It's not even a year since I started, and I already have 2,000 followers on the page learning about and enjoying vegetarian Tamil food."

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