

MASALA AND SPICE & ALL THINGS NICE

Food fundi **Ishay Govender-Ypma** has just published a book of curry recipes gathered from the length and breadth of South Africa. It's laden with stories too – tales about the origins of local curries and spice-centric dishes. Here she reveals some of what she gleaned while writing it.

There is no single curry that can be deemed 'South African'. We have a wide variety defined by cultural and religious groups, not to mention the regions where these people first arrived. Naturally, migration patterns influenced how people moved, taking their foods (and spices) with them.

Our curries are as diverse as our people. Four of the archetypal curries one should try are the Cape Malay curries (made with chicken, prawn, beans or lamb); Durban curry (mutton, crab, chicken and a variety of vegetables); the ikasi (township) curries made mainly with beef or chicken; and the Pakistani and Bangladeshi curries that have appeared in Gauteng, made by immigrant cooks running the kitchens around Oriental Plaza in Joburg, as well as stalls across the northern provinces. →



Aside from its food focus, *Curry: Stories and recipes from across South Africa* reveals Ishay Govender-Ypma's interest in cultural anthropology, so it's packed with intimate and fascinating nuggets about our wonderful culinary history. It's published by Human & Rousseau. @IshayGovender, ishaygovender.com

I grew up in KwaZulu-Natal, feasting on an abundance of curries – spicy, fiery, ambrosial and fragrant. Green mango, green banana, jackfruit, tripe, kidneys, trotters – I've had a version of almost everything curried or highly spiced. The aim of this book was to create a community showcase of cooks who are adored and respected countrywide, and to share a slice of their lives through their stories. I reconnected with places I hadn't been to in years – like Bloemfontein, where I studied – and some I'd never before set foot in, like Bethal and Calvinia.

And I learnt so much about curry from the people I met and interviewed, including the fact that both the origin of the term 'curry' and the subsequent emergence of curry powder as a convenient spice mixture are thoroughly British inventions.

Interestingly, 'curry powder' is sometimes used to denote 'masala' by cooks in Indian communities in KwaZulu-Natal. But, actually, curry powder is not masala. Curry powder has a large turmeric component, while masala in the traditional

sense is a mix containing ground, dried chillies. Garam masala is a blend that has ground, roasted cumin, coriander and stick and seed spices, but no chilli. This is something that's often discernible from the colour of the curry. Masala typically results in a darker red or brown curry.

Many outsiders assume that Cape Malay curries are mild, sweet and laden with fruit like dried apricots. This, I gather, is because most old cooking books were written from an outsider's perspective. While there are certain dishes that contain raisins or dried fruit, a curry eaten in the home of a Cape Malay person is usually spicy. And these curries usually contain a little more turmeric than a Durban curry.

And, of course, I was able to dig deep to find out what it is that really makes a Durban curry so unique. The cooks and experts I interviewed have narrowed it down to the level of spiciness (it's hot!); the colour (it's red or brown – not yellow); the addition of soft-melting potatoes;

and (if it's old school) the oil. Durban curry is traditionally known for its comforting, if excessive, oil slick. ■



CURRY'S BEST BETS

I've recently been in Durban, revisiting all my favourite bunny chow joints – **Hollywoodbets** in Springfield makes the best broad-bean bunny, in my opinion. Sure, it's a betting joint, but they're used to serving diners who have no interest in the odds, and they also have the Bunny Bar for takeaways.

I love the fish and the crab and prawn curries at **Impulse by the Sea** in Tinley Manor, where Shamen Reddi is the perfect host.

For vegetarian curries that have been modernised but retain full flavour, **Simply Divine Vegetarian** in Blairgowrie, Joburg, is another favourite – Prashilla Singh's vegetable butter korma is scrumptious.

For a taste of several different types of curry, the magnificent buffet at **Ocean Terrace** at The Oyster Box in Umhlanga is a great way to treat the family. It's splendid value too.