

TRY IT NOW

# Indo-Chinese cuisine

Born in Kolkata, this fusion of Asian flavours is starting to go mainstream in the UK

## The basics

Despite being one of the most popular cuisines in India, Indo- or Desi-Chinese food has only started making an impact in the UK in recent years. Its origins lie in the Tangra Chinatown of old Calcutta (now Kolkata), where, more than 100 years ago, Hakka Chinese immigrants combined ingredients and techniques from their home country with Indian spices and flavours. These fusion dishes grew in popularity, spreading across India to cities such as Mumbai, where Nelson Wang's China Garden restaurant is said to have invented many dishes that have become Indo-Chinese classics.

Its characteristics can be hard to pin down, but generally, the Indian influence can be seen in ingredients such as coriander, okra, turmeric and ginger, while Chinese staples such as noodles, soy sauce and Szechuan peppers are also key. Dishes are usually cooked in the wok, and while there's liberal use of chilli, it's by no means ultra-spicy. Vegetarian dishes are plentiful, again owing to the Indian influence.

There aren't many chefs cooking solely Indo-Chinese food in the UK, but if the cuisine has a central figure here, it's Steven Lee. Having learnt his trade at Mumbai's China Garden, Lee moved to London and opened Hakkaland in Harrow in 2016. Since then, he's helped to drive the popularity of Indo-Chinese food, winning Best Fusion Restaurant at

the British Chinese Food Awards 2017, and Best Pan Asian Restaurant at the Asian Curry Awards 2018.

## Where to try it

Lee's Hakkaland is perhaps the best-known Indo-Chinese restaurant in the UK, but there's a growing number of others scattered around the outskirts of London. Restaurants such as Bombay Wok in Harrow and Bombay Chow in Hammersmith offer menus of Desi-Chinese favourites.

In Manchester and Leeds, Indian Tiffin Room has a broad menu of Indian street food, including Indo-Chinese classics like lollipop chicken and gobi Manchurian. But perhaps the biggest sign of it becoming more mainstream is the opening of Fatt Pundit in Soho, in central London, earlier this year. As well as the central location bringing the cuisine to a whole new audience, the menu features modern dishes such as rabbit wontons, showing off the versatility of Indo-Chinese cuisine.

## At home

If you want to cook Indo-Chinese cuisine yourself, online resources are your best bet. The Times of India has recipes for classics like chicken Manchurian and vegetarian Hakka noodles, and there are also excellent YouTube videos of dishes such as chilli paneer and crispy okra being prepared at Hakkaland. *Joel Porter*

## WHAT TO EAT

### Chicken Manchurian

Chicken in a thick sauce of ginger, garlic, chillies, soy sauce, corn starch – and ketchup.

### Chilli paneer

Chunks of fresh paneer, hot and crisp from the wok, and flavoured with heaps of chilli, soy sauce and vinegar.

### Hakka noodles

Wok-fried noodles with chilli, soy sauce and veg such as peppers and spring onions.

### Lollipop chicken

One of the most popular Indo-Chinese starters; crispy fried wings coated in soy and chilli, served with a Szechuan dipping sauce.

IMAGE: FATT PUNDIT