

The sandstone-and-marble Amber Fort, an 11th-century Rajasthani citadel.

Simply Indian

RECIPES FROM ROYAL RAJASTHAN

WHILE RESEARCHING A NEW CULINARY TOUR, FOOD GUIDE EXTRAORDINAIRE PEGGY MARKEL VISITS PALACES AND HOME KITCHENS TO LEARN THE TRADITIONS AND TECHNIQUES OF NORTHERN INDIAN COOKING—AND COMES AWAY WITH A BUNCH OF SENSATIONAL RECIPES.

by jen murphy food photographs by kana okada



*“Princess Victoria Black”
plate by Herend.*

Yogurt-Marinated Lamb Kebabs

FROM SHAHPURA BAGH

The majority of Indians are vegetarian. But Rajasthani royals loved hunting, and their cooks would have used venison for these fabulous kebabs, marinating the meat in yogurt to mellow the gamey flavor (recipe, p. 102). Peggy Markel learned the recipe at Shahpura Bagh, a royal summer residence transformed into a country guesthouse.

JNDIA OVERWHELMS THE SENSES,” PEGGY MARKEL SAYS. “THE SOUNDS OF HORNS, HINDI, TRUCKS AND BOLLYWOOD MUSIC. THE SMELLS OF DIESEL, CUMIN, FRIED GHEE AND INCENSE. AS FOR THE FLAVORS AND COOKING, IT’S LIKE LEARNING ANOTHER LANGUAGE.” MARKEL, WHO OWNS AN ESTEEMED TOUR COMPANY CALLED PEGGY MARKEL’S CULINARY

Adventures, is in the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan researching the itinerary for a new 12-day trip she’ll launch in October. She has been leading excellent culinary tours of Italy since 1991, the same year she became one of the first Americans to found a cooking school in Tuscany. In 2001, she added a trip to Morocco. India is her latest obsession, and her track record suggests this will be an extraordinary tour.

Unlike Markel, most travelers go to Rajasthan not for the food but the architecture. The state is famous for palaces and forts that were once home to maharajas, India’s great kings. In the second half of the 20th century, descendants of the Rajputs, the ruling clan that rose to power in the seventh century, converted many forts, palaces and family estates into opulent hotels. Markel’s group will stay at four such properties, as well as a luxurious tented camp, and will also visit family homes in small villages—learning about food everywhere they go.

Rajasthan’s cuisine deserves that kind of attention. Most of the state is in the Great Indian Desert, and the climate strongly influences the food. “In this arid climate, people had to create a diet from a base of grains like millet and barley, beans, spices and yogurt,” says Markel. Food is simple, in palaces as well as ordinary homes. “Wood fire is the common denominator between rich and poor,” Markel says. “Even royal cooks prepare food in terra-cotta pots settled on hot coals.”

Markel had a chance to learn about wood-fire cooking at Shahpura Bagh, a royal summer residence turned six-suite guesthouse in the countryside between the cities of Jaipur and Udaipur. Owner Shatrujeet Singh told how his grandfather mortgaged the family’s private property and jewels to build artificial lakes to provide water for the surrounding villages. Singh took Markel on a jeep tour on and around his family’s 45-acre estate, passing women in bright saris balancing silver water jugs on their heads as they walked towards a well powered by two white oxen.

Back at the guesthouse, Markel was surprised to see meat on the menu, roasted in fiery tandoor ovens. “Indians are mostly vegetarian, but the Rajputs had a passion for hunting,” explained Mota Khar, the family cook, as he prepared lamb kebabs in a spicy yogurt marinade (recipe, p. 102). “When they weren’t fighting, they were off roaming the hills for wild game.” The Rajputs would have hunted venison for this dish.

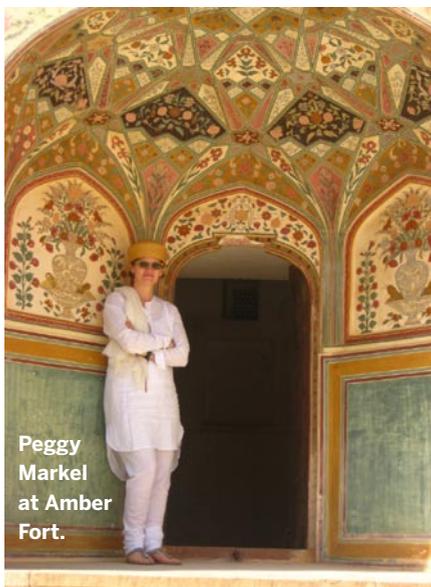
After leaving Shahpura Bagh, Markel traveled by boat to the Taj Lake Palace in Udaipur. The 263-year-old white-marble hotel, on a four-acre island in Lake Pichola, appears to be floating. Turbaned butlers, some descended from a long line of palace servants, ushered Markel to a room with brocade paneling, antique ivory-inlaid chairs and a silk-canopied feather bed.

In the palace kitchen, Markel got a lesson in seafood by watching one of the chefs prepare pomfret, a white fish similar to flounder. The chef stuffed the fish with mint and cilantro—a modern touch—before searing it on a slab of marble set over, yes, a wood fire (recipe, p. 100).

The trip ended northeast of Udaipur at Devi Garh, an 18th-century fort-palace of yellow sandstone that’s now a modern, bohemian-chic, 39-suite hotel. The chef, Manish Upadhyay, showed Markel several cooking techniques—steaming, deep and shallow frying, tandoori—then taught her to prepare a popular Rajasthani snack called *makkai pudina ki tikki*, crispy fried corn fritters with a chile-mint sauce (recipe, p. 98). “Corn is one of the most extensively cultivated crops in Rajasthan,” he explained.

At dinner in Devi Garh, Markel sampled the *thali*—a traditional selection of rice, dal (stewed lentils), vegetables and chapati (griddled bread)—while a waiter poured her a Viognier from Indian producer Chateau Indage. Did she feel like a student? No: “I felt like a maharaja queen.”

Peggy Markel’s Rajasthan tour will take place October 3–15; from \$12,350 per person; peggymarkel.com.



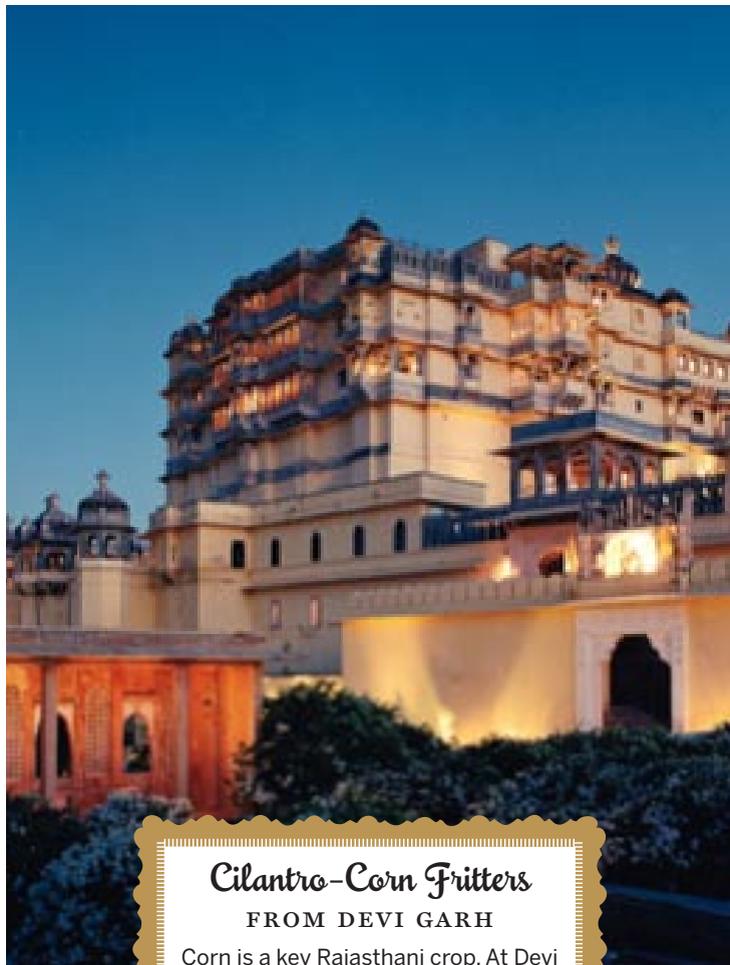
Peggy Markel at Amber Fort.



Saffron Lassi

FROM THE IMPERIAL HOTEL

En route to Rajasthan, Markel stopped in New Delhi, where she stayed at the 1930s, Victorian-style Imperial and learned how to make this luxe yogurt shake (recipe, p. 102).



Cilantro-Corn Fritters

FROM DEVI GARH

Corn is a key Rajasthani crop. At Devi Garh, an 18th-century fort-palace turned hotel, the chef showed Markel how to make delectable corn fritters with chile-mint sauce (recipe, p. 98).



*"Ruby Red Full Lace" plate
by Royal Copenhagen.*

Cilantro-Flecked Corn Fritters with Chile-Mint Sauce

ACTIVE: 40 MIN; TOTAL: 1 HR

MAKES SIXTEEN 2-INCH FRITTERS
These slightly sweet fritters from Devi Garh palace are deliciously flecked with cilantro leaves and held together simply by the starch in the corn. A dusting of flour just before they're pan-fried gives them a light, crisp crust. For a richer flavor, cook the fritters in unsalted butter instead of vegetable oil.

- 4 medium ears of corn, shucked, or 2½ cups frozen corn**
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, plus more for pan-frying**
- 1½ tablespoons minced fresh ginger**
- 3 garlic cloves, minced**
- 2 tablespoons whole cilantro leaves**
- Salt and freshly ground pepper**
- 1 packed cup mint leaves**
- 1 serrano chile, seeded and minced**
- ¼ cup water**
- All-purpose flour, for dusting**
- Chat masala (optional), for sprinkling (see box, p. 100)**

1. In a large saucepan of boiling salted water, cook the ears of corn over moderately high heat just until tender, about 4 minutes. Drain and, when cool enough to handle, cut the kernels off the cobs; you should have 2½ cups. If you're using frozen corn, boil it for 2 minutes, then drain.
2. In a medium skillet, heat the 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil. Add the ginger and two-thirds of the garlic and cook over moderate heat, stirring, until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add the corn and cook, stirring, for 2 minutes. Transfer to a food processor and puree. Scrape into a bowl. Stir in the cilantro and season with salt and pepper. Form into 2-inch patties and refrigerate for at least 20 minutes.
3. Preheat the oven to 350°. In a mini food processor, combine the mint leaves, chile, water and the remaining garlic and process to a coarse puree. Season with salt.
4. In a large, nonstick skillet, heat ¼ inch of oil until shimmering. Dust the fritters with flour and tap off the excess. Add half

of the fritters to the skillet and cook over moderately high heat until browned and crisp, about 2 minutes per side. Drain the fritters on paper towels. Transfer to a baking sheet and keep warm in the oven while you fry the remaining fritters. Arrange the fritters on a platter. Sprinkle with *chaat masala*, top with a small dollop of the chile-mint sauce and serve right away.

MAKE AHEAD The uncooked corn patties and chile-mint sauce can be covered and refrigerated overnight.

Spinach Simmered in Yogurt

 **TOTAL: 25 MIN**
4 SERVINGS

At Bedla House, a homestay in Udaipur, husband-and-wife owners Vijay and Soban Singh Bedla invite guests into their kitchen to watch them cook. Peggy Markel loved the way Soban grabbed spices without stopping to measure quantities, adding just the right amount of coriander and turmeric to this wonderfully rich spinach dish simmered in yogurt.

- 1 pound baby spinach, rinsed**
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- 3 garlic cloves, minced**
- 2 small dried red chiles**
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander**
- 1 teaspoon turmeric**
- 1 cup plain whole-milk yogurt**

Salt

1. Heat a large skillet. Add one-third of the baby spinach and cook over moderately high heat, stirring, until wilted. Transfer the spinach to a colander. Repeat with the remaining spinach in 2 batches. Press all of the excess water out of the spinach and coarsely chop it.
2. Heat the vegetable oil in the same skillet. Add the minced garlic and chiles and cook over moderate heat until fragrant, 2 minutes. Add the ground coriander and turmeric and cook, stirring, until fragrant, 1 minute. Add the chopped spinach and yogurt and cook over low heat, stirring, until the yogurt just begins to separate, 3 minutes. Season with salt and serve.

SERVE WITH Steamed basmati rice.

MAKE AHEAD The cooked spinach can be covered and refrigerated overnight. Reheat gently before serving.

Stewed Okra and Tomatoes

 **TOTAL: 25 MIN**
4 SERVINGS

Markel saw okra (which is known in India as ladyfingers) at markets all over Rajasthan. To add complexity to a simple stewed okra-and-tomato dish, Soban Singh showed Markel how to cook whole cumin seeds, turmeric and chile powders in oil before adding the vegetables to bring out the spices' depth of flavor.

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced**
- 1 teaspoon pure chile powder, such as ancho**
- Pinch of cayenne pepper**
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds**
- 1 teaspoon turmeric**
- 1 pound okra, stemmed and sliced ½ inch thick**
- 2 medium tomatoes, coarsely chopped**
- ½ cup water**
- Salt**

1. In a medium skillet, heat the vegetable oil. Add the minced garlic and sliced red onion and cook over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until fragrant, about 3 minutes. Add the chile powder, cayenne pepper, cumin seeds and turmeric and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 2 minutes.
2. Add the okra and cook for 2 minutes, tossing. Add the tomatoes and cook over high heat until they release their juices, about 1 minute. Add the water, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the okra is just tender, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and serve.

SERVE WITH Steamed basmati rice.

MAKE AHEAD The stewed okra can be covered and refrigerated overnight. Reheat gently before serving.

Stewed Okra & Tomatoes with Spinach Simmered in Yogurt

FROM BEDLA HOUSE

In between lessons in palace kitchens, Markel stopped at an Indian homestay in the city of Udaipur. In their two-burner kitchen, husband and wife Vijay and Soban Singh Bedla showed her how to make vegetarian dishes like okra stewed with tomatoes and spinach simmered in yogurt. "Even without sharing a language, I could understand the gestures of cooking," Markel says.



"Elements" dish by Royal Copenhagen (holding okra); fabric by Elizabeth Benefield.



The Taj Lake Palace hotel is reachable only by boat.

Herb-Stuffed Flounder with Frizzled Mint and Ginger

TOTAL: 50 MIN

4 SERVINGS

Most fish prepared in India is stewed or cooked quickly in the tandoor, but this dish from the Taj Lake Palace is seared, making it decidedly more modern. A fragrant herb blend is stuffed into each fish and blended into a yogurt-enriched cream sauce. Then the dish is finished elegantly with crisp frizzled mint leaves and strips of ginger.

- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 serrano chile, seeded and minced
- ½ cup chopped cilantro
- ¼ cup chopped mint, plus 24 mint leaves

Salt and freshly ground pepper

Four 6- to 8-ounce flounder fillets

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons plain whole-milk yogurt, drained
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil, plus more for pan frying

One 2-inch piece of fresh ginger, peeled and cut into very thin strips

All-purpose flour, for dredging

1. Preheat the oven to 300°. In a bowl, combine the garlic, serrano chile, cilantro and chopped mint. Season generously with salt and pepper. Cut a shallow 3-by-1½-inch pocket in the wide side of each flounder fillet. Spoon 1 teaspoon of the herb mixture into each pocket.
2. In a small saucepan, heat the olive oil. Add the cream, yogurt and the remaining herb mixture and simmer over moderate heat until slightly thickened, about 3 minutes. Remove from the heat.
3. In a large skillet, heat the 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil. Add the ginger in a single layer and cook over moderately high heat until browned and crisp, about 30 seconds. Tilt the skillet and transfer the ginger to a plate using a slotted spoon. Add the mint leaves to the skillet and cook until crisp, about 10 seconds. Add the mint to the ginger.

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Indian INGREDIENTS

CHAT MASALA is a spice blend often sprinkled onto snacks known as *chats* (or *chaats*). Tangy (from *amchoor*, a powder made from dried green mangoes), spicy (from chile powder) and herbacious (from dried mint), *chat masala* is generally added to dishes at the end of cooking.

The blend also includes tongue-numbing *ajwain* seeds and pungent *asafoetida*, a funky, garliclike plant resin.

GARAM MASALA translates as “warm spice.” The blend varies but generally includes sweet spices like cloves, cinnamon, cardamom, nutmeg and mace, along with earthy cumin and citrusy coriander. It’s easy to make at home, but store-bought versions are convenient and delicious.

GHEE, also known as clarified butter, is made by heating butter very slowly to separate the golden fat from the water and milk solids. It is prized for its high smoking point and rich flavor.

MILLET is a staple of the traditional Rajasthan diet because it grows well in the dry desert climate. The grain can be ground into flour or cooked whole. It is usually eaten in place of rice. —*Kristin Donnelly*



Herb-Stuffed Flounder with Frizzled Mint and Ginger

FROM TAJ LAKE PALACE

Udaipur's white-marble Taj Lake Palace hotel is on a four-acre island, so fish dominates the modernized menu. Markel watched one cook stuff pomfret (a flounderlike fish) with mint and cilantro, sear it on a marble slab over a wood fire, then prepare a luscious yogurt-cream sauce.

*Turquoise "Elephant Shantih"
plate by Jacqueline Cambata; white
"Prosperity" plate by Mottahedeh.*

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4. In the same skillet, heat $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of vegetable oil. Season the flounder with salt and pepper. Dredge 2 fillets in flour and shake off the excess. Fry the flounder over moderately high heat until golden brown, 3 minutes per side. Transfer to a large rimmed baking sheet and repeat with the remaining flounder fillets. Transfer the baking sheet to the oven to keep the fish warm.

5. Reheat the herbed cream sauce and season with salt. Spoon the sauce onto plates and set the flounder fillets on top. Scatter the fried ginger and mint over the fish and serve right away.

WINE Generally speaking, lighter fish go best with lighter-bodied white wines, like Sauvignon Blanc, which is typically made without the enriching influence of oak barrels. South Africa has become a go-to source for great Sauvignon, like the flinty 2007 Neil Ellis Sincerely or the lemon-edged 2007 Sauvignon Republic Stellenbosch.

Yogurt-Marinated Lamb Kebabs With Lemon Butter

ACTIVE: 25 MIN; TOTAL: 45 MIN PLUS OVERNIGHT MARINATING

4 TO 6 SERVINGS

At Shahpura Bagh, a luxurious guesthouse in the Rajasthani countryside, lamb is marinated in yogurt to make it exceptionally tender, then given an extra burst of tangy flavor with a basting of lemon butter just before serving.

2 cups plain whole-milk yogurt

1½ cups water

2 pounds trimmed boneless leg of lamb, cut into 1½-inch cubes

1½ teaspoons pure chile powder, such as ancho

1 teaspoon turmeric

1 large garlic clove, minced

½ teaspoon cayenne pepper

kosher salt

Six 1-by-2-inch strips of lemon peel

3 tablespoons ghee (see box, p. 000) or unsalted butter, melted

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

1. In a large bowl, whisk 1 cup of the yogurt with the water. Add the lamb cubes, toss to coat and refrigerate overnight.

2. Light a grill. Drain the lamb and pat dry with paper towels. In a large bowl, whisk the remaining 1 cup of yogurt with the chile powder, turmeric, garlic, cayenne and 1 teaspoon of salt. Add the lamb, toss to coat and let stand for 10 to 20 minutes.

3. On each of 6 metal skewers, thread a piece of lemon peel. Thread the lamb cubes on the skewers and season with salt. In a small bowl, combine the melted butter with the lemon juice.

4. Grill the skewers over moderately high heat, turning, until starting to char all over, about 3 minutes. Continue to grill, turning and basting with the butter and lemon juice, until medium-rare, about 4 minutes longer. Serve the lamb on or off the skewers.

SERVE WITH Basmati rice.

WINE These tangy and intensely flavorful kebabs need a red wine that can stand up to their robust flavor, such as a red from France's Southern Rhône, which is a classic accompaniment for lamb. The Côtes-du-Rhône is the largest appellation in that region, producing affordable and juicy wines such as the earthy 2006 La Ferme de Gicon and the berry-rich 2006 Chapoutier Belleruche.

Saffron Lassi

ACTIVE: 10 MIN; TOTAL: 1 HR 10 MIN

MAKES 2 DRINKS

Lassi are ubiquitous in India; the shakes, made with yogurt or buttermilk, can be sweet or salty. The Victorian-style Imperial Hotel in India's capital, New Delhi, where Markel stopped on her way to Rajasthan, has an extensive list of traditional Indian drinks, like this lightly sweet lassi elegantly flavored with saffron.

Large pinch of saffron threads

3 tablespoons water

2 tablespoons sugar

1½ cups plain whole-milk yogurt

1. Crumble the saffron into 1 tablespoon of the water and let stand for 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, in a small, microwave-safe bowl, combine the remaining 2 tablespoons of water with the sugar and microwave for about 1 minute, until the sugar is dissolved. Transfer the bowl to the freezer until the syrup is cold.

3. In a bowl, whisk the yogurt with the saffron water and sugar syrup. Refrigerate, whisking a few times, until cold and brightly colored, about 1 hour. Pour into medium glasses and serve.

Lemony, Spiced, Grill-Roasted Quail

TOTAL: 50 MIN PLUS 4 HR MARINATING

6 SERVINGS

At the Samode palace, a 400-year-old palace-turned-hotel north of Jaipur in the Aravalli hills, chef Krishna Kumar shared his secret for especially tender quail: Marinate the bird first in lemon juice and hot paprika, then in a mixture of yogurt, ginger and the spice blend garam masala. Cooking the quail on a grill pan then popping it in a Western-style oven gives it a nicely smoky flavor similar to the kind created by a tandoori oven.

12 whole quail, necks and wing tips removed

¼ cup fresh lemon juice, plus lemon wedges, for serving

Salt

1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon hot paprika

1 cup whole-milk yogurt

¼ cup coarsely chopped fresh ginger

4 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped

1 tablespoon unsweetened toasted wheat germ

1 teaspoon garam masala (see box, p. 100)

2 tablespoons vegetable oil, plus more for grilling

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

1 head of romaine, cut into bite-size pieces

½ small red onion, thinly sliced

1. Using a sharp knife, make a $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-deep slash in each breast half and thigh of each quail. Transfer the quail to a large rimmed baking sheet and drizzle with 2 tablespoons of the lemon juice; rub to coat thoroughly. Season the quail with salt and sprinkle with 2 teaspoons of the hot paprika over the quail; rub the seasonings into the slashes. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour.

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2. In a mini food processor, combine the yogurt, ginger, garlic, wheat germ, garam masala, the 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil, 1 tablespoon of lemon juice and remaining 2 teaspoons of paprika and process until smooth. Coat the quail with the marinade, cover and refrigerate for 3 hours.

3. Preheat the oven to 400°. Heat a large grill pan and coat it with vegetable oil. Grill 4 quail at a time over moderately high heat until nicely charred all over, 5 minutes total. Transfer the quail to a large rimmed baking sheet. Repeat with the remaining quail.

4. Transfer the quail to the oven and roast for about 12 minutes, until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the breasts reads 130° for medium-rare.

5. In a large bowl, combine the remaining 1 tablespoon of lemon juice with the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Add the romaine and red onion and toss. Mound the salad on plates and top with the quail. Serve, passing lemon wedges at the table.

WINE Even farm-raised quail has a gamey intensity that makes it more suitable for red wine than white. Pour a good Pinot Noir with these Indian-spiced birds—Pinot's own gaminess complements quail perfectly. Oregon Pinots tend to be spicier and earthier than California ones; consider the vanilla-scented 2007 Castle Rock Willamette Valley or the bright, lively 2006 Benton Lane Oregon.

Spiced Millet Stew with Onions

ACTIVE: 20 MIN; TOTAL: 1 HR

4 SERVINGS

Rice, a staple in much of India, doesn't grow in the desert climate of Rajasthan, so people eat millet instead, cooking the grains in buttermilk or yogurt instead of water. At Chhatra Sagar, a luxury camp near the city of Amjer where guests stay in beautiful hand-stitched tents, Markel discovered this millet stew at a morning cooking class. Vibrantly flavored with spices and chiles, the dish has the texture of pleasantly grainy mashed potatoes and is a great accompaniment to Rajasthan's tandoori meats.

- 1 cup millet (6 ounces)
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- ½ teaspoon cumin seeds
- 3 medium onions, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 3 cups water
- 1 cup plain whole-milk yogurt
- 2 teaspoons ground coriander
- ½ teaspoon turmeric
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper

kosher salt

- 1 serrano or other green chile, seeded and minced

- 1 tablespoon chopped cilantro

1. In a large skillet, toast the millet over high heat, shaking the pan often, until slightly darkened, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a large plate to cool.

2. In a large saucepan, heat the vegetable oil. Add the cumin seeds and toast over high heat, shaking the pan, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the onions and cook over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until browned, about 20 minutes. Add the garlic and cook over moderate heat, stirring, until fragrant, about 3 minutes.

3. Add the toasted millet and the water and bring to a boil. Cover and simmer over low heat, stirring, until the millet is just tender, 20 minutes. Stir in the yogurt, coriander, turmeric, crushed red pepper and 1 teaspoon of salt and cook, stirring, until the yogurt is thickened slightly, 4 minutes. Remove from the heat and season with salt. Transfer to a bowl, top with the minced green chile and cilantro and serve right away.

Three-Lentil Dal

ACTIVE: 20 MIN; TOTAL: 1 HR 45 MIN

6 SERVINGS

Dal, the Indian name for lentils, is also the word used to describe stewy Indian lentil dishes. This simple dal, from the Taj Lake Palace hotel, is finished with a cumin-and-coriander scented oil. The mix of lentils—earthy split peas, nutty *toor dal* (pigeon peas are a good substitute) and creamy red lentils—add complexity to this simple dish.

- ¾ cup yellow split peas (4 ounces)

- ¾ cup *toor dal* (dried split pigeon peas) (4 ounces)

- ¾ cup dried red lentils (4 ounces)

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil

- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds

- 1 medium onion, cut into ½-inch dice

- 2 garlic cloves, minced

- 1 teaspoon ground coriander

- ½ teaspoon turmeric

- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

- 1 large tomato, cut into ½-inch dice

Salt

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter

- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro

1. In a medium enameled cast-iron casserole, cover the yellow split peas, *toor dal* and red lentils with 1½ inches of water. Bring to a boil and simmer over low heat, stirring occasionally, until the red lentils and *toor dal* break down and the split yellow peas are tender, about 1 hour and 15 minutes.

2. In a large skillet, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the cumin seeds and cook over moderate heat until they darken, 1 minute. Add the onion and garlic and cook, stirring, until golden brown, 6 minutes. Add the coriander, turmeric and cayenne and cook, stirring a few times, until fragrant, 2 minutes. Add the tomato and cook until softened, 3 minutes. Scrape the mixture into the dal and simmer over low heat, stirring occasionally, until the flavors are blended, 3 minutes. Season with salt. Stir in the butter and cilantro and serve.

MAKE AHEAD The dal without the butter and cilantro can be refrigerated for up to 3 days. Reheat gently, adding water as necessary if the dal is too thick.

Butter-Basted, Broiled Chicken Skewers

TOTAL: 40 MIN PLUS 3 HR MARINATING

6 SERVINGS

Even at the Taj Lake Palace, chefs prepare much of the food over an open fire, just as cooks do in home kitchens. These terrific chicken skewers come straight out of the tandoori oven; to re-create the intense heat, cook the kebabs under the broiler. Basting the kebabs with butter keeps them moist; sprinkling them with the spice blend *chaat masala* gives them a fabulous hot,

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sweet and sour kick.

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 small onion, thinly sliced

1 cup cottage cheese

2 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped

**2 tablespoons coarsely chopped
fresh ginger**

**2 tablespoons freshly squeezed
lemon juice**

1½ teaspoons ground coriander

**1 teaspoon garam masala
(see box, p. 100)**

1 teaspoon kosher salt

¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

**3 pounds skinless boneless
chicken breasts, cut into
1½-inch pieces**

**2 tablespoons ghee (see box,
p. 100) or unsalted butter, melted**

Chat masala, for sprinkling

(see box, p. 100)

**2 tablespoons coarsely chopped
cilantro**

1. In a small skillet, heat the vegetable oil. Add the onion and cook over moderately low heat, stirring occasionally, until browned, about 12 minutes. Transfer to a mini food processor. Add the cottage cheese, garlic, ginger, lemon juice, coriander, garam masala, salt and cayenne and process until smooth.

2. In a large bowl, toss the chicken with the cottage cheese mixture. Cover and refrigerate for 3 hours.

3. Preheat the broiler. Thread the chicken pieces onto 6 long metal skewers. Place the skewers on a large baking sheet and brush generously with the ghee. Broil 3 inches from the heat, turning and basting twice with ghee, until richly browned and cooked through, about 7 minutes.

4. Transfer the skewers to a platter. Sprinkle generously with *chat masala*, garnish with the cilantro and serve right away.

WINE The tangy *chat masala* sprinkled on these skewers towards the end of cooking gives them a zesty quality they wouldn't otherwise possess, a nice match with the citrusy intensity of dry Australian Rieslings. One of the best regions there is the Claire Valley, north of Adelaide. Look for the mineral 2007 Kilikanoon Mort's Block or the

limey 2007 Leasingham Magnus. ●