

# Is London The Top City In The World For This Cuisine? These Chefs Say Yes

London may have thousands of Indian restaurants but it also has something else — exquisite dining experiences earning Michelin stars. Here's what to know about the evolving Indian fine dining scene.

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The dining room at Quilon in London.

At Pukka Bar, the front lounge of Chutney Mary, a bartender in a navy waistcoat sets a stemmed glass on the marble, the drink glowing copper under a coffered ceiling. Plush blue velvet chairs and sofas line the tiled floor, facing a long, metal-fronted counter stacked with bottles. A few steps beyond, the dining room opens in a sweep of white tablecloths, brass accents and large canvases, very much central London, very much money.

Chutney Mary first opened in Chelsea in 1990 and moved to St James's in 2015, carrying its fine-dining Indian brief across town. The menu runs through dishes like crab soup, tandoor-grilled meats, and biryani.



Interior of Chutney Mary in London.  
MW EAT RESTAURANTS

London has lived with Indian food for generations, but in the last two decades it has become one of the main stages for Indian dining at the highest level. Indian and British Indian communities number in the millions across the UK, and thousands of restaurants trade under the broad “Indian” banner, from family curry houses to dining rooms with tasting menus and serious wine lists.

Western guides, Michelin among them, now award stars to a handful of these kitchens. The tension sits in how inspectors measure the food, and what that recognition is drawing in, and arguably taking away, from the cuisine’s home country.

To unpack what “Indian” means in that context, Camellia Panjabi—group director of MW Eat, the company behind Chutney Mary, Amaya, Veeraswamy and the Masala Zone restaurants—starts with the sheer scale of India.



Camellia Panjabi, head chef, culinary director, and author behind London's most beloved Indian restaurants.  
MW EAT RESTAURANTS

Her restaurants remind diners that India is as large and varied as Western Europe, with regional cuisines as distinct as any in France or Spain. In practice, though, everything from Punjabi grills to Goan coconut curries gets filed under one label abroad. As she puts it, India is “a land of many cuisines, any and all known as Indian cuisine – while there is no such concept of ‘European cuisine’.”

Her London restaurants are built on that internal diversity. Opened in 2004, Amaya in Belgravia is a dark, theatrical room oriented around a long open kitchen. Two years later it received a Michelin star, which it has held ever since. Panjabi describes it as “contemporary in décor and style,” and says it “showcases the best of grilled and barbecued food from all over India, in a show kitchen open to guest viewing.”



King Scallops served on the shell at Amaya.  
MW EAT RESTAURANTS

Seafood is “inspired by the west coast of India,” lamb draws on Lucknow, and chicken is “cooked in a tandoor ovens as best done in Punjab.” Grilled vegetables such as sweet potato and corn cob take their cue from popular street foods, with marinades built from flavours across the country. Amaya also serves what she calls “the finest version of biryani – a rice and meat preparation popular all over India.”

Chutney Mary takes a slightly different approach. It does not have a star but is recommended in the Michelin Guide. The bar and dining room follow the grammar of a classic fine-dining room, with a front cocktail lounge, spacious chairs and artworks at every sight line, but the kitchen travels across several regions.

“It’s a fine dining restaurant with oomph and style, which takes popular Indian dishes from the whole of India and presents them with tastes intact, but served with playful intonations.” The restaurant sits on one level so, in her words, “the chemistry of diners is great.”



Dishes served in bowls at Quilon, defying the compact, tweezer food norms of most Michelin restaurants these days.  
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Across town near Westminster, Quilon, opened in 1999, focuses on a narrower band of geography. Chef Sriram Aylur has led the kitchen for 26 years, and the restaurant has held a Michelin star since 2008.

Quilon reflects the food of southwest coastal India, especially Goa and Kerala. “We have a lot of traditional dishes and then meals that are inspired by the coast,” says Aylur.

A signature black cod, marinated in spices like tamarind and then roasted, shows Aylur’s point of view. It’s “what I call progressive cooking, using both traditional and progressive ingredients, without losing the ethos and sensibility of the southwest coast,” he says.



The elegant white tablecloth experience at Quilon belies the complexity and joy of the food itself.  
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None of these restaurants started life as museum pieces or bids for a star. “Fine dining is what the restaurant has evolved to be,” Aylur says. His priority is that guests “enjoy and be relaxed,” and feel able to ask about ingredients such as banana stem and drumstick leaves.

At Amaya, the small-plate format existed from day one. “Amaya was designed to enable diners to choose about eight dishes, so it was, in a way, a tasting menu approach,” Panjabi says. “Though for those who don’t want to undertake this process [of selection], it has always had a tasting menu too.”

The way those dishes land on the table has had influence beyond Belgravia. Panjabi credits Amaya with introducing “morselisation” of presentation: most dishes come presented as four bites on a plate so a table of four could experience one piece of each dish in order to enjoy seven or eight or more courses. “This approach has become popular all over the world for many Asian cuisines,” she says. It is both a practical way to share and a reflection of how extended families might order in India.



Chef Sriram Aylur of Quilon.

At Quilon, change has been more incremental. Aylur links the main shift to the restaurant's growing reach rather than directly to its Michelin star. "The only thing that has changed is our tasting menu," he says. "We have had so many people travel to us from all over the world over the last 10-12 years, which has made our tasting menus more specialised to include seafood options and vegetarian options."

For him, tasting menus suit "traditional dining culture in India to try lots of different things throughout the meal," with smaller portions and more dishes.

Some lines, however, are firm. "We use a mix of both. For example, if we are serving a curry, it is in a bowl, and that is how it should traditionally be served," he says. "We don't create dishes to plate, we create dishes that can be plated. Some traditional dishes wouldn't work to be served in our restaurant, so we do not mess around with those," he adds.

What unites these restaurants isn't a single style or format so much as a shared location. For Aylur, London is a market that has been offering all kinds of cuisines from all parts of the world for a very long time. "It is a very mature market," he says.

The step-change in ambition and diversity that happened in the UK 25 to 30 years ago, he says, has only started to happen in Indian cities in the last decade.



The festive color palette and communal dining table at Amaya strikes a different tone than the usual Michelin dining spots.

Panjabi is blunter. London, she argues, has a dining public willing to back restaurants that are “unconventional,” while in India many regulars prefer long-held favourites. Young diners at home, she notes, are more likely to see American, Italian or Japanese food as aspirational than to choose the cuisine they grew up with.

That imbalance feeds directly into how Indian food is seen and valued. For decades, Michelin’s inspectors were steeped in European cooking. As high-end Asian restaurants appeared in Western capitals, Panjabi points out that “the same Michelin inspectors continued to assess them without having the understanding, travel experience in Asia, or appreciation of how Asian cuisines emphasise different values in their food.”

In Western kitchens, she says, more weight sits on the texture of the protein, with relatively straightforward sauces. Indian cooking, by contrast, builds a “bouquet of spices” with souring agents, sweetness, fat and texture, and those calibrations often fall outside familiar language for inspectors.

Menu structure makes their job harder. “The Michelin Guide criteria has not progressed, in my opinion, as it should,” says Panjabi. “Menus of Indian restaurants tend to be larger than those in Western restaurants. It’s difficult to assess Indian restaurants simply by tasting a couple of main courses.”

In her view, that leads to inconsistency. “Some of the Indian restaurants they award stars to seem strange, and others very worthy get ignored,” she says. “So it’s a bit of a hit and miss really.”



Quilon is known for its fine wine list, with expertly matched glasses and bottles for the intense flavors of the food.

Aylur traces the problem back to its origin. “When Michelin first started, it was always hinged to Western cuisine,” he says. Over time, he has watched Michelin’s attitude shift, with Indian and other non-European cuisines gaining far more recognition in the UK and, more gradually, in Europe. In his view, the guide now tracks the market more closely than it once did.

The push and pull extends beyond plates and into ownership and ambition. In 2025, MW Eat was acquired by Canadian holding company Fairfax Financial largely on the strength of its brands. The deal shifts the restaurants from family ownership into a portfolio of scalable concepts, signalling that high-end and casual Indian dining developed in London is now seen as exportable intellectual property.



The vegetable platter at Chutney Mary.

Today, the sharpest expression of that confidence remains at the table. At Chutney Mary, guests step out of Pukka Bar and into a room where servers pour soup at the table, carry skewers straight from the grill, and lift the lid from a biryani to release a rush of steam beside naan, lentils and raita. At Amaya, scallops arrive in their shells, lamb chops land four to a plate, and skewers cross the pass at a steady cadence. At Quilon, curries sit in bowls beside rice and breads, even when the meal follows a tasting-menu structure.

Together, these restaurants show what Indian cuisine in England looks like when it is given space, capital, and attention at the highest level, and much of that evolution has been happening in London rather than in India itself.

*Quilon, 41 Buckingham Gate, London*

*Amaya, Off Lowndes St, London*

*Chutney Mary, 73 St James's St, London*